



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

Tuesday, 24 October 2006.

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*Dé Máirt, 24 Deireadh Fómhair 2006.
Tuesday, 24 October 2006.*

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

*Paidir.
Prayer.*

Ceisteanna — Questions.

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings.

1. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Taoiseach the costs which have accrued to his Department in respect of the MacEntee commission of investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28203/06]

2. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Taoiseach when he next expects to receive a report from the MacEntee inquiry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28204/06]

3. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach the position in regard to the MacEntee commission of investigation into aspects of the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombings; if he is satisfied that the new deadline of 31 October 2006 for completion of the final report will be met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28368/06]

4. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he has received the report from Mr. Patrick MacEntee SC regarding the Garda investigation

of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 1974; the action to be taken in view of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28461/06]

5. **Mr. J. Higgins** asked the Taoiseach when he expects to receive the final report of the commission of investigation into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 1974. [29233/06]

6. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the progress of the investigation into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30639/06]

7. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on recent contacts with the British Government regarding the Dublin and Monaghan bombings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30640/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 7, inclusive, together.

In accordance with the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights, which considered the Barron report on the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, the Government appointed Mr.

[The Taoiseach.]

Patrick MacEntee SC as sole member of a commission of investigation to examine specific matters relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 1974, including aspects of the Garda investigation and missing documentation. The appointment was made on 26 April 2005. The amount spent by the commission of investigation to date is €1,822,266, of which €1,155,223 has been spent on legal costs, with the balance of €667,043 going towards the cost of support staff and the administrative cost of the offices of the commission. These costs are well below those associated with a tribunal of inquiry.

I have granted five extensions to the timeframe for the completion of the report from the original date of 14 November 2005. The most recent extension was until 31 October 2006. I have published the five interim reports provided by Mr. MacEntee as required by the legislation and placed copies in the Oireachtas Library.

Yesterday, Mr. MacEntee met officials from my Department, at his request, to discuss administrative arrangements for the completion of his work and publication of the report. In the course of that meeting, he indicated he is likely to seek a further extension. The period of that extension is not yet known. However, he indicated it may be up to six weeks. Both he and I are conscious of the importance, if at all possible, of the report being available while the House is sitting. I expect to receive a formal written request for an extension and a further interim report later this week. I will know the full reasons for the requested extension at that time.

I understand that Mr. MacEntee has completed his investigations and that this further period is required to deal with the final arrangements which the commission is obliged to comply with under the Commissions of Investigation Act. Subject to formal consideration of the matter when I receive a written request and further interim report I am minded to grant that extension once it has been requested. As with all previous interim reports, I will bring it to the attention of the Government and then publish it.

I acknowledge that waiting a further period before the final report is available is difficult for the victims and survivors of these terrible atrocities. Nonetheless, I believe they will agree on the importance of Mr. MacEntee being allowed sufficient time to properly consider and deal with the conclusion of the work of the commission.

I acknowledge the work which Mr. MacEntee has done to date. I am not, of course, in a position to comment on his ongoing work as he is independent.

The Government has been using all appropriate means in its efforts to ensure co-operation from the British Government on this matter. I have raised it with the Prime Minister on a number of occasions and it is frequently raised by senior officials in their contacts. It is clear from his earlier interim reports that Mr. MacEntee has

received some co-operation from the British Government and I welcome that development.

Mr. Kenny: On the last occasion the Taoiseach answered questions on this subject, we were happy to agree to an extension and it is obvious that Mr. MacEntee has his own reasons for this. Will the Taoiseach indicate why on the last occasion when an extension was sought and granted, that was expected to be the end of the procedure? Has some other issue arisen? Has there been some difficulty in acquiring answers to questions or information which necessitates a further extension now sought by Mr. MacEntee? It is a very important report and we would like to see it concluded in as full a form as possible.

Have the victims and the groups associated with the victims been notified or are they being notified that there will be a further extension required? When that is over and when the report has been agreed by Cabinet, will the Taoiseach ensure a sufficient lead-in time for the victims and the organisations supporting them to have the report and its findings before it is made public?

The Taoiseach: I undertake to do so, as has been the case with all such reports. I will consult the representatives of the victims' groups and ensure they receive the report in due time. I am not privy to precisely what Mr. MacEntee will report on. I understand from my officials who met him yesterday that his investigative work is completed. He has received quite a lot of co-operation and has followed a lot of new lines. The information available to my officials is limited but he seems to have moved in both aspects of the report. His mission consisted of two issues: to examine the issue of policing and the missing files and equally important, to examine the issues of various people seen in different locations and the various leads that resulted from Mr. Justice Barron's report. I am informed by British sources and by the Secretary of State that there has been quite an engagement on these issues. It is probable there are many legal issues to do with how these matters are dealt with but this is a matter for Mr. MacEntee.

I also know, as I told the House many months ago, he is anxious, for his own reasons, to get this finished. He is not interested in extensions of other work from the committee to do with other cases. He wants to see this work through but is not interested in continuing on to other aspects of the Barron reports. He is working on this mainly on his own but with a small team. I was advised this morning that he will seek a further extension and I am due to receive that letter in the next few days.

Mr. Rabbitte: Arising from what the Taoiseach has said, has he formed any view or did Mr. MacEntee communicate any view in terms of whether he is satisfied with the co-operation he received from the British authorities? The

Taoiseach referred in passing to the number of occasions he raised this matter directly with the British Prime Minister. Will he outline to the House, apart from the delicate issue of how the findings will be communicated to relatives and interested families, how he will purport that the report, when it comes to hand, will be put into the public domain? Am I correct in assuming that, while Mr. MacEntee may make findings of fact, in so far as he can establish them, he is precluded by the legislation from making recommendations? Is that the position?

The Taoiseach: It is my intention to publish the report as soon as possible after it is received. I am required by law to consider certain issues prior to publication. This is likely to involve legal advice from the Attorney General and I have to submit it to the Cabinet for publication. As in the case of other reports, the timescale involved between receipt and publication of reports is impossible to estimate because of the legal arguments that arise every time mainly about publishing names.

Mr. Rabbitte: It may not be published this year.

The Taoiseach: It depends on what is in the report and how Mr. MacEntee presents it, but I certainly wish to publish the report as quickly as possible because we have to put it into the committee. The House must be sitting when we publish the report. As I understand it, Mr. MacEntee can make recommendations. On the point I made about the British Government, I think there has been co-operation because Mr. MacEntee said the British side has been co-operating. How the information he has got can be legally used is the issue. There are a whole lot of intricacies involved but we will have to wait and see. In all these reports the difficulty arises when it comes to statements of fact and information. The use of names of people who are still alive, or their families, is the continual difficulty that arises.

Mr. Boyle: In light of what the Taoiseach said to Deputy Kenny, without pre-empting the letter he is due to receive from Mr. MacEntee, is it anticipated that the further extension will be towards the end of 2006 or beyond? Is there an indication of what the time period may be for the final phase of the work? On his reply to Deputy Rabbitte, there was a phrase in the last progress report where Mr. MacEntee talked about the disclosure of sensitive material to the commission for the purposes of the investigation from persons, agencies and entities and that that would involve careful consideration. Obviously this has an impact on the final report. At this stage has the Taoiseach an indication of the number of people who were involved in this process and how it might compromise the final report of the MacEntee commission?

This is the first such commission set up under the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 and

its first year of operation has run a cost of €1.73 million. As this is the first practical experience of this type of commission, does the Taoiseach have an opinion as to whether it compares favourably with other such entities? Does it represent appropriate value for money?

The Taoiseach: As regards timing, I know that Mr. MacEntee would like to wrap up this work on the important aspects that were referred to him. Obviously, he wants to bring it to a successful conclusion following the work of the Hamilton and Barron inquires as well as the work of the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights. He has done a lot of work and brought the inquiry to a stage beyond that dealt with by Hamilton and Barron. There are legal complexities in dealing with these important issues which date from a long time ago.

The costs involved are not large compared to other tribunals or commissions. In fairness, it is one of the most difficult inquiries because it is dealing with matters that occurred over 30 years ago. It has been trying to piece together data and seek information through the British Government system, so it is far more complex than the normal work of an inquiry would be.

Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Has the Taoiseach decided how the report will be dealt with when published? Will there be public hearings on the report? Will Mr. MacEntee be able to appear before a joint committee in order to respond to questions on the report? Has that matter been considered or will we have to wait until the report is published? Does the Taoiseach recall that the central demand of the survivors and the bereaved relatives of those who died in the Dublin and Monaghan bombings has always been for a statutory inquiry? Does he also recall that this House unanimously sought an inquiry by the British Government into the murder of Pat Finucane? In that regard, would the Taoiseach acknowledge that——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is moving away from the substance of these questions.

Aengus Ó Snodaigh: It is a related question. Does the Taoiseach acknowledge that the Government's proposals in the tribunals of inquiries Bill——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to stay within the confines of the seven questions before us.

Aengus Ó Snodaigh: ——would give new powers to Ministers to close down inquiries and censor reports such as the MacEntee commission's report? Hopefully, that will never happen but Ministers would have those powers in the future, which would undermine the demands from Justice for the Forgotten for full disclosure.

The Taoiseach: For many decades nothing happened on all of these matters. In recent years, however, we have worked through Mr. Justice Hamilton, Mr. Justice Barron, the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights and, currently, the Commissions of Investigation Act to obtain and make available as much detail as we can from the British system, the Northern Ireland Office and the Garda Síochána. As I have done with all these reports, it is my intention to place the MacEntee report in the Oireachtas Library and furnish a copy to the committee that has dealt with these matters for a number of years. It will be for the committee to see how these matters will be progressed. Given the holistic approach to this and other reports, we have succeeded in throwing more light on issues about which almost no factual information was in the public domain up to now. The Commissions of Investigation Act allows us to deal with such issues.

As regards the Finucane case, we have not changed our position; we continue to seek an inquiry by the British Government into that matter. The British legislation is different from ours because it allows a Minister to engage with, become directly involved in and limit information. Our Act does not do so.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

8. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Taoiseach the costs which have accrued to date to his Department in respect of the Moriarty tribunal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28205/06]

9. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach the cost incurred to date by his Department arising from the Moriarty tribunal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30874/06]

10. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach if he or his Department has received any recent communication from the Moriarty tribunal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30875/06]

11. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach if he has recently received communications from the Moriarty tribunal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33617/06]

12. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he or his Department have received communications from the Moriarty tribunal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34470/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 8 to 12, inclusive, together.

The total cost incurred by my Department in respect of the Moriarty tribunal from 1997 until 30 September 2006 is €25,232,028. This includes fees paid to counsel for the tribunal and administration costs incurred since its establishment.

The total payments made to the legal team were €19,310,119 by 30 September 2006.

The administration costs for the Moriarty tribunal, including counsel fees, are met from the Vote of the Department of the Taoiseach. Issues in this regard which may be raised occasionally by officers of the tribunal are dealt with in the normal course of business by my Department. From time to time, there have been requests by the tribunal for records and files and my Department has submitted these. It will continue to cooperate with the tribunal in making available any records sought. Normally, these requests are received by the Secretary General and assigned by him to the appropriate departmental official. All requests are dealt with on a highly confidential basis, as is required by the tribunal.

Mr. Kenny: I have to hand a reply to a recent parliamentary question which sets out some of the costs associated with tribunals, including €58 million for the ongoing Mahon tribunal, €26.2 million for the ongoing Morris tribunal, €25.2 million for the ongoing Moriarty tribunal and €10 million for the Barr tribunal. What is the position in respect of the ending of the Moriarty tribunal? Has an end date been projected? What scale of fees is being applied? Are the increased fees approved some time ago by the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform being paid?

In the midst of the recent controversy to which the Taoiseach was central, the Tánaiste stated: "some of the people there [in the Dáil] today will have a lot of answering to do in a couple of months' time when the second report of the Moriarty tribunal is published."

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry, Deputy, under Standing Order 56, we cannot discuss in this House the content of the tribunal, what may be in it or who is named in it.

Mr. Kenny: Did I discuss the content of the tribunal?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy was discussing comments which were made about persons at the tribunal.

Mr. Kenny: No, I did not discuss the content of the tribunal because I do not know it.

An Ceann Comhairle: However, the Deputy is quoting what somebody said about it.

Mr. P. McGrath: In the House by a Minister.

Mr. Kenny: This is the deputy leader of the Government.

Mr. Timmins: A question has been put down on the matter.

An Ceann Comhairle: However, this is not the subject of the question. It is important that we are clear on these questions.

Mr. Kenny: If the Ceann Comhairle will allow me to ask my question, I have been very careful in addressing——

An Ceann Comhairle: Standing Order 56 governs behaviour in this House and it applies to all Members.

Mr. Kenny: The Ceann Comhairle might address that to the Tánaiste when he comes in.

An Ceann Comhairle: It falls to the Ceann Comhairle to ensure that Standing Orders are respected.

Mr. Kenny: I always obey the rulings of the Ceann Comhairle and I was very careful in phrasing my question to the Taoiseach. This is a case in which the Tánaiste——

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

Mr. Kenny: It does arise. Question No. 10 inquires whether the Taoiseach or his Department has received any recent communication from the Moriarty tribunal and if he will make a statement on the matter. Let me put my question to the Taoiseach.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to first listen to the Chair. I remind Members that the Taoiseach replies to parliamentary questions on public affairs and matters of administration pertaining to his Department. He is not required or responsible to reply in respect of any interaction with a tribunal as an individual, as party leader or in his capacity as a member of a previous Government. In addition, under Standing Order 56, Members should not stray into the business of the tribunal.

Mr. Kenny: I agree with the Ceann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: Discussions on what any person might have said at the tribunal or what may arise from the tribunal in regard to any Member of this House are not appropriate.

Mr. Kenny: I agree with the Ceann Comhairle. I am not going to stray into that area. I am referring to the comments made by the Tánaiste outside the House with regard to the workings and content of the tribunal, that certain people in here will feel the heat when the tribunal's report is published. While I know nothing of this, obviously the deputy leader of the Government does. Has the Taoiseach received any communication from the Moriarty tribunal giving some indication that the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform knows the

report's contents, knows when it will be published and knows that persons in this House "will have a lot of answering to do"? The Moriarty tribunal has not yet produced a first or second report. I understand the Taoiseach has a very close, warm and friendly relationship with the Tánaiste. I know he does not read the files from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. However, I know that in the past the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform has been prone to removing some pages from departmental files containing certain information.

The Taoiseach: I will deal with the questions in so far as I can. The end date for the Moriarty tribunal is, for the applicability of proposed new costs structures to the existing tribunals or Moriarty tribunal, end 2007, because that was the date given back at that stage. As I reported to the House previously, there were to be two reports, one in autumn and one in January. That is still my information — I do not have any new information. I have no idea whatsoever and I have not been given any previews of the first report, not to mind the second report; I do not believe anybody else has either, for what it is worth.

Mr. P. McGrath: Was he bluffing?

The Taoiseach: On the other question, there were issues of fees for the other tribunals. The Morris tribunal date was the end of October 2007 and the Mahon tribunal was 31 March 2007. The Bill provides for the making of regulations that will apply the new schedule of fees to these tribunals. I believe that covers the Deputy's question.

Mr. Rabbitte: The Taoiseach has said that lawyers' fees in this particular tribunal total €19 million so far, with a total cost to the State of approximately €25 million. Has anybody in the Department, who is in contact with the tribunal, done any calculation of what is likely to be coming down the tracks in terms of costs? Is anybody making a stab at third-party costs? When the Taoiseach states that the cost is €25 million, it is sometimes misunderstood that that is the total cost. Deputy Kenny made passing reference to the costs of other tribunals and again the figure is taken to refer to total costs. However, I understand it is only the cost to the State to date, the cost of State's counsel etc. Has anybody tried to calculate the possible position?

I revert to my Question No. 10, with which the Taoiseach failed to deal in his opening reply. In his latter reply to Deputy Kenny is he stating that he has received no communication from the Moriarty tribunal about a first or second report? The implication of what the Tánaiste said was that, as a named person, the Taoiseach might well have got sight of a concluded or about to be concluded report and that the Tánaiste caught sight of it. I do not know how the Tánaiste would like

[Mr. Rabbitte.]

to be compared to the Minister of State, Deputy Treacy. They are of similar age, height—

Mr. P. McGrath: Looks.

Mr. Rabbitte: —and, in my view, ability etc. However, could it be that the Tánaiste was bluffing? I ask the Taoiseach to clarify this point, because for obvious reasons it is important that we should know.

The Taoiseach: On the first question, to the end of August 2006, the total cost to the Exchequer of completed and sitting tribunals of inquiry and other public inquiries was €263,836,000. Of this, €188,907,000 was in respect of legal costs and €74,929,000 related to other costs. The figure for legal costs includes €75,444,000 in respect of third party legal costs awarded to date. The Deputy is correct in assuming that is only the figure awarded. We do not have an estimation of what could be the total cost.

On the tribunals of inquiry and public inquiries sitting at present, the total cost to the end of August 2006 is €167,169,000, of which €104,323,000 is in respect of legal costs. Of this sum, €11,611,000 relates to third party legal costs. The latter figure serves to answer the Deputy's question. At the end, there would obviously be a substantial claim of third party costs.

On the second question, I have no idea about the substance of the first or second Moriarty reports. Obviously some of the issues that might relate to my Department in the normal way would involve consultation, but they are very limited issues and do not shed light on the substance of the broad issues of the reports. I frankly have absolutely no idea what would be in those reports.

Mr. Rabbitte: Having regard to the import of the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform going around muttering darkly about the conclusions of a Moriarty report, would it not be even-handed that Mr. Justice Moriarty should require him to appear before him?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not a matter for this House to decide what the sole member should do in any tribunal.

Mr. Rabbitte: Would there not be a lot of common sense in—

An Ceann Comhairle: We are straying away from the questions before us.

Mr. Rabbitte: —bringing the Minister, Deputy McDowell, before the Moriarty tribunal—

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not a matter for this House.

Mr. Rabbitte: —to justify his allegation?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not a matter for this House and does not arise out of these questions.

Mr. Rabbitte: It does not arise. I will accept the Chair's ruling.

Mr. Boyle: Three of the five questions before the Taoiseach on this matter deal with whether he has received communication recently from the Moriarty tribunal. I have not heard him respond to that question. I know he is a very busy man but he must have the opportunity to check his post from time to time. If he could answer the question directly, I would appreciate it, as would Deputy Sargent.

On the costs, the Government has made at least three attempts over the past two and a half years to reduce barristers' fees at the tribunals from the daily rate of €2,500 to €900. It was first mooted by the former Minister for Finance, now European Commissioner, in July 2004 and was abandoned by the Government in September 2004. The Taoiseach raised the matter again in September 2005 and said that if the tribunal had not completed its work by the end of June 2006, the reduced fees would apply, yet the Government, having requested a reduction for the third time, has, as of the start of July, maintained the existing fees for barristers at all the long-standing tribunals and that will remain the position until they complete their work.

Will the Taoiseach explain why the Government, having raised this issue on a number of occasions and sought to reduce the cost, which in the case of the Moriarty tribunal seems to amount to €19 million of a total of €25 million, has not pursued the matter? If the Government had achieved what it said it would achieve in July 2004, how much would have been saved in the two and a half years since then?

The Taoiseach: I thought I answered the first question on two occasions. We have had no information in the form of drafts or otherwise on the substance or substantial issues of the first or second Moriarty tribunal reports. There would be some limited issues in my Department and we would only have had reference to them. They would have been very minor. They would not have had anything to do with the substantive issues.

A number of years ago, when seven or eight tribunals were ongoing, the Minister for Finance and the Attorney General communicated with the chairs of all the tribunals about end dates, modules and all those issues. The dates which were agreed then were subsequently moved following consultation with the Attorney General and various Ministers with responsibility for cer-

tain matters. The end dates I have mentioned were the end of January 2007 for the Moriarty tribunal, the end of October 2007 for the Morris tribunal and the end of March 2007 for the Mahon tribunal. It was proposed that those new dates would apply.

It was also agreed that the set fee to be paid to a senior counsel would be based on the current annual salary of a High Court judge, plus 20% in respect of pension contributions, with related payments to be made to other legal staff, including barristers and solicitors. I will give details of the specific annual remuneration packages in 2005. Senior counsel received €221,708 per annum, or €1,008 per day. Junior counsel received €147,806 per annum, or €672 per day, which is two thirds of the senior counsel rate. Solicitors received €176,000 per annum, or €800 per day, for appearance or €100 per hour for work undertaken other than appearing at tribunals. I am advised that the new measures will drastically reduce the legal costs of new tribunals of inquiry and will reduce the costs of existing tribunals of inquiry from the future dates I have mentioned.

Mr. Rabbitte: The surplus will be gone.

Mr. Stagg: We will have to have a flag day for them.

The Taoiseach: The new rates represent less than 40% of the maximum current rates paid to tribunals of inquiry. They give an indication of the potential savings arising in the future.

Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I heard the Taoiseach mention annual remuneration packages. Has he been informed of a timescale for the conclusion of the Moriarty tribunal? Will several remuneration packages be needed before it is concluded? The Taoiseach stated previously that his party was awaiting the outcome of the Moriarty tribunal to find out what happened to some €500,000 that was allegedly donated to the party, but was never passed on. Is that still the case? Has the Taoiseach's party made any attempts to recover that money? Is it still acting on the advice that it cannot do so until the tribunal ends?

The Taoiseach: I have mentioned the dates. The relevant dates are the end of January 2007 for the Moriarty tribunal, the end of October 2007 for the Morris tribunal and the end of March for the Mahon tribunal. It is obvious that we will have to await the outcome of the tribunals before we can deal with other outstanding issues.

National Security Committee.

13. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Taoiseach when the interdepartmental group established to monitor the threat of a terrorist attack will next meet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28209/06]

14. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach the membership of the National Security Committee; the number of times it met since July 2006; the number of meetings planned for the remainder of 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28324/06]

15. **Mr. J. Higgins** asked the Taoiseach when the National Security Committee last met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29230/06]

16. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach when the National Security Committee last met; when the next meeting will be held; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30876/06]

17. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach the composition of the National Security Committee; when it last met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34118/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 13 to 17, inclusive, together.

As the work of the National Security Committee is confidential, it would not be appropriate for me to disclose information about the dates of its meetings and proceedings. The committee, which is chaired by the Secretary General to the Government, comprises representatives at the highest level from the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Defence and Foreign Affairs, and the Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces. It is concerned with ensuring the Government and I are advised of high level security issues and the responses to them, but not operational security matters. The committee will continue to meet as required. As well as attending meetings, the members of the committee liaise on an ongoing basis to monitor developments which might have national security implications, particularly in the international arena.

Mr. Kenny: It is obvious that yesterday's report that up to six Islamic terrorist cells were operating in Ireland in 2003 is quite disturbing. The groups in question were delivering financial and logistical support to terrorist groups abroad. We have raised this matter in the House on a number of occasions. If I recall correctly, the Taoiseach said on one occasion that members associated with al-Qaeda were being watched, or being kept under some sort of observation, here in Dublin. Was the Taoiseach or the Government given briefings on this matter by the US Government? If the Central Intelligence Agency, CIA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI, or homeland security representatives were aware of Islamic terrorist groups operating throughout the world they would have evidence relating to Ireland.

How did this information come into the public domain? Did it come to the Garda or Army via American security sources? When such infor-

[Mr. Kenny.]

mation is passed on to Government does the Garda, for instance, have control over whether it becomes declassified?

Can the Taoiseach assure the House, as far as he can, that there are no Islamic terrorist cells operating in the country? Does the Taoiseach have security information on such matters and is he satisfied that there are no such clandestine cells operating here, delivering logistical and financial support to international terrorist groups?

A Taliban commander on Sky News last night said his organisation intends to wreak havoc on the families of those in the West who had destroyed the families of Taliban members. Can the Taoiseach give some reassurance in this regard?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Kenny will recall that after the events of September 2001 I mentioned on a number of occasions that the Garda was involved in operational matters relating to a small number of suspects linked to al-Qaeda. This is what has emanated from these reports which suggest there were six units associated with Islamic terrorist organisations active here. These units were described as logistical and financial cells giving operational support.

It is the responsibility of embassies around the world to inquire and report on matters of interest to their authorities. I am aware of recent media coverage of the assessment report of 2003 by the US embassy in Dublin and this assessment was based on information, gleaned mainly from Garda sources, relating to Islamic terrorist organisations. I do not wish to comment on these reports but I understand the information was supplied by the Garda and recycled.

More importantly, the monitoring and investigation of any groups suspected of engaging in or associating with terrorism is an operational matter for the Garda. I am satisfied the Garda is vigilant in fully meeting this responsibility and has reported to us, from time to time, on small groups and individuals that are being monitored. Deputies will appreciate it is not possible to address in the House the methods and strategies employed by the security services in countering such risks. There is very close co-operation between agencies dealing with security matters and the necessary resources are supplied for this purpose. Much information is gained through Europol, Interpol and the international agencies.

Thankfully the units in Ireland linked with Islamic terrorist organisations are small in number; I would not like them to be associated in any way with the Islamic community in the country and I recognise that this has not been suggested. The Islamic community in Ireland has been very responsive and co-operative in dealing with such matters and the Government and security services are always confident of the support of the Irish Islamic community in its commitment to countering activities related to terrorism. The few

who are watched closely usually move into the international domain, though they do exist.

Mr. Rabbitte: Does the Taoiseach agree there is a certain irony in that this information was secured under American freedom of information legislation and it is not something that could happen in this jurisdiction? Accepting what the Taoiseach said about the responsibility demonstrated by the Muslim community, does the Garda believe these groups still operate here? Can the Taoiseach tell us anything about the current assessment of the risk, if any, posed as a consequence?

The Taoiseach: This report was presented in such a way as to suggest there were six units associated with Islamic terrorist organisations in operation. I did not see the full text of the documents, but one would think it referred to six active cells. However, on further reading one will find that it referred to people who showed operational support. It refers mainly to logistical and financial support and to a limited number of people who move around. This is not what the reports suggested. The manner in which this was reported and the response it got shows the danger of releasing such information.

As I understand it, a small number of people are closely watched and monitored. These are considered to be highly classified people that come and go from this country.

Priority Questions.

Higher Education Grants.

92. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason SSIA savings are taken into account in determining eligibility for the third level grant; if she has discussed this matter with the Department of Finance; if the relevant regulations will be changed in order to ensure that SSIA savings are not considered as part of the means test for third level grant eligibility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34441/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I assure the Deputy that the Government is determined to ensure that SSIA savers are treated fairly in the calculation of reckonable income under my Department's maintenance grant schemes. This is being achieved in two ways. First, income from SSIA's is being treated exactly the same as income from similar savings and investment products. Second, the reckonable income limits for student grants have been increased considerably in recent years.

Since SSIA's were introduced, the amount of income to be included in respect of them is the Government grant earned on the savings in the relevant tax year plus, in the case of savings

accounts, the gross interest earned in the relevant tax year, and, in the case of investment accounts, the investment profit earned in the relevant tax year. Investment losses sustained in the relevant tax year are deductible.

The same position has long applied to interest earned on other savings products, including deposit accounts, post office savings certificates, life assurance bonds, etc. The treatment of SSIA is therefore consistent with the traditional treatment of other similar investments over many years. The Department of Finance is aware of this approach to the assessment of income for eligibility for student support.

In applying for a grant for the 2006-07 academic year, only the relevant income earned, as outlined above, on the SSIA in 2005 must be declared. The maximum Government grant to any SSIA saver last year, as in any year of the SSIA scheme, was €762. As I have pointed out in response to previous queries and parliamentary questions, this has been the position since SSIA were introduced.

The Deputy will be pleased to know that income limits which apply when a person's eligibility for a grant is being assessed have increased significantly since SSIA were introduced. The 2003-04 academic year was the first year in which the full year SSIA income had to be included in applying for a grant, as the reference tax year for the purpose of grant assessment was 2002. For the 2003-04 academic year, the income limit for a family with four children was increased from €23,770 to €35,165 — an increase of almost 48%. The income limits have continued to rise each year, to the point where the limit for a family with four children this year is €41,055, an increase of almost 73% on the amount allowed in the 2002-03 academic year.

As these increases show, this Government has shown a clear determination to improve the grant system to ensure that students get as much support as possible. Not only have we increased the income limits significantly, we have also made other improvements to the grants system. We have introduced two new income thresholds to allow for 25% and 75% grants as well as the 50% and 100% rates. We have brought in a new top-up grant to target extra funding at those who need it most and we have increased grant payment rates. The maximum level of the ordinary maintenance grant available this year is €3,110, compared to €2,390 in 2002. The maximum level of the top-up grant in 2006-07 is €5,970, compared to €3,000 in 2001-02.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

This year, more than €228 million has been allocated for the third level student support schemes. As the Deputy will be aware, further improvements to the grant system are on the cards, with the development of the Student Sup-

port Bill and the introduction of payment deadlines to ensure students get their grants earlier.

Not only has the Government ensured that SSIA savers are treated fairly in the assessment of income for maintenance grant purposes, but we have made major improvements to the grant system overall. This is in line with our proven commitment to increase access to third level education and ensure the maximum level of support for those who need it most.

Ms Enright: Is the Minister aware that the Minister for Social and Family Affairs has been able to make changes for income from SSIA's? When the SSIA scheme was promoted by the Government, did it include in the terms and conditions the fact the reckonable income from it would be used when applying for a maintenance grant? If not, it is a matter for the Advertising Standards Authority. The terms and conditions should have made people aware of this.

I accept increases have been made in the maintenance grants but there have been greater increases in the costs of accommodation, travel and books. Does the Minister have a figure for the number of low income families who took out an SSIA expressly to fund college education for a child who have been affected by this decision? I have received complaints from several counties.

Ms Hanafin: I reiterate that the savings people put away themselves are not taken into account, only the Government grant and the interest earned on it. Given the Government contribution for a year for a saver who put away €254 per month, the maximum, came to €785, and that the income limit was increased by substantially more, there are very few, if any, students who should be eliminated from the scheme solely on the basis of their savings in the SSIA. The scheme that is in operation this year is identical to the scheme that has been in place since the SSIA started. From the first time it was introduced, the income limits were increased by up to 48%. Anyone who qualified for a grant last year should not be disqualified this year on the basis solely of income from the Government grant or the interest on his or her SSIA. The income limit increased by much more.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs calculates income differently because it takes into account all of the capital, including all of the savings, and then allows a capital disregard. The effect is the same and it has not changed anything when it comes to the treatment of the SSIA *vis-à-vis* other savings and life assurance bonds.

Ms Enright: There is a change. If a person is a few euro over €762, he will not get the grant. The Minister said possibly no one was affected but I have received complaints from people who are effected. Has the Minister asked the local authorities and the VECs how many students have been affected by this?

Ms Hanafin: If a student got a grant last year and did not get it this year, it is not solely on the basis of his SSIA; it cannot be because the income limits are far greater than the increase he would get on the basis of the SSIA. Also, a student would not lose a grant, but could fall to 75% or 50% of that grant instead.

Sexual Health and Relationships.

93. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on whether the sex education provided in schools is adequate for the pressures of modern life in the context of the recent report, Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34296/06]

Ms Hanafin: I too was interested in the findings in the report, Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships, launched by my colleague, the Minister for Health and Children.

The survey, unsurprisingly, highlighted major changes in sexual behaviour and attitudes in Ireland in recent decades. It also drew attention to challenges that must be faced from both a public health and an education point of view.

From my Department's perspective, the survey clearly highlighted the value of sex education. Of note is the finding that 18 to 24 year olds were the most likely of all the age groups to have received sex education and the most likely to use contraception.

As the Deputy will be aware, many positive developments in the teaching of relationships and sexuality education have taken place in recent years, and these have been further strengthened through making social, personal and health education a mandatory programme for junior cycle since September 2003. The impact of this would not have been reflected in the survey. RSE is now a core part of SPHE at primary and at junior cycle level. While a senior cycle SPHE course is currently being developed, all schools are already required to have an RSE programme at senior cycle.

At primary level, the SPHE programme covers areas such as taking care of my body, growing and changing, relating to others and safety and protection. At an age-appropriate stage, children learn about differences between the male and female body, the changes that occur at puberty and how the reproductive systems work. By the end of sixth class they are also expected to be able to understand sexual intercourse and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship.

The RSE support service provides information evenings for parents. These aim to inform parents about the RSE programme and to help them to communicate more effectively with their children about sex and relationships. The support service has also worked with the National Parents'

Council (Primary) to develop a six-week RSE parent training programme.

At second level, the RSE programme covers areas such as sexually transmitted infections, human fertility, family planning and sexual orientation.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

All schools are expected to teach all aspects of the RSE programme, regardless of their ethos. They are also required to draw up an RSE policy through a collaborative process of consultation with parents, teachers and members of the board of management.

Schools are supported in the implementation of RSE by the SPHE and RSE support services. They provide guidelines on policy development, curricula and teacher guidelines, information for parents, teaching resource materials and teacher training. Schools are also encouraged to use the resources produced by the Health Promotion Unit.

There have been many positive developments in the area of relationships and sexuality education in recent years. Nonetheless, this is an important and rigorous study and I have asked the RSE support service to consider its findings carefully.

Ms O'Sullivan: I accept there is sex education in schools but is it adequate considering the findings of this study? The average age for first sexual experience for Irish people is now 17 so we can assume most people are sexually active while they are still at school. Women who have sex before the age of 17 are 70% more likely to have an unplanned pregnancy and three times more likely to experience an abortion. Is what we are teaching adequate?

Deputy Fiona O'Malley suggested we remove VAT from condoms and she has a point, but we also need to arm young people with more knowledge and guidance, as well as with a piece of rubber, before we send them out into the world. Does the Minister agree that we must examine what is happening in schools in light of the findings of this survey?

Ms Hanafin: The Deputy referred to first sexual intercourse at an age lower than 17. This is also, worryingly, associated with high levels of regret, STIs and crisis pregnancy. The teaching of RSE is, therefore, a hugely important element in the education of young people. It is a requirement of all schools, regardless of their ethos, that they should teach RSE.

We are conscious that schools need support to do that. They are supported through our support services for SPHE, guidelines and policy development on curricula are given to them and information is provided for parents. Just like in other sensitive areas of education, every school must have a policy on teaching RSE so parents know

exactly what is being taught, teachers are comfortable and it is being done in the context of the whole school. Everyone has a responsibility.

The findings of this report indicate that because the number of young people between 18 and 24 who have received sex education is greater than older age groups, there is a recognition that it is happening, and the majority said it was helpful, which shows it is working. It must be kept under review. There are schools that do this not just within the context of relationship and sexuality education or the religious ethos of the school but through science from a biological perspective and special courses in transition year. The schools are tackling this but we will keep it under review.

Ms O'Sullivan: We live in an age where young people are bombarded with images on the Internet and in magazines. Would the Minister consider whether the message from schools is strong enough to counter the messages coming from the society young people must deal with now?

Ms Hanafin: The curriculum is strong given that it lists areas I have outlined. It is also taught in the context of responsibility in relationships, which is just as important as the biological facts. When we see the impact media and peer pressure have on young people, responsibility and respect must be brought to the fore. This course, like other courses, will be kept under review to ensure it meets the needs of our young people.

Schools Amalgamation.

94. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the action she proposes to take to address the failure to progress the proposed amalgamation of four secondary schools in Tuam; the reason the amalgamation has not progressed; the position on site selection and acquisition; the position on a schedule of accommodation; the timetable for the implementation of the amalgamation; and if she will take the action necessary to ensure this amalgamation and building project progresses. [34677/06]

Ms Hanafin: Decisions on amalgamations are, in the first instance, a matter for the respective patron and trustees of the schools concerned. An agreement was reached by the respective patrons in late 2000 to rationalise provision of post-primary provision in the Tuam area to establish a single boys' and single girls' school. The amalgamation in each case is dependent on the availability of suitable accommodation.

On the girls' school it is proposed to provide a new school on a new site. The Office of Public Works, which acts on behalf of my Department with regard to site acquisitions generally, is considering a number of site proposals with the intention of acquiring a suitable site to facilitate the development of a new school building. Due to the commercial sensitivities of the site acquisition process, the Deputy will appreciate I am not in a

position to comment further. On the boys' school the patron has offered to provide a site to accommodate the new school and is in discussions with the county council regarding the provision of services for the site.

I fully appreciate the sense of urgency felt by the schools and all those involved with them. In this regard it should be noted that the projects have been assigned a band 1 rating by my Department, which will positively influence the time-scale for delivery of the project. As soon as the site issue is finalised, the building projects required to deliver the appropriate accommodation will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

Mr. McHugh: Does the Minister recall a meeting she had with all Members of the Oireachtas from the Galway East constituency in 2004 to discuss this project? During the meeting, Members noted the seriousness of this issue and called for it to be addressed with urgency. Although the Minister expressed considerable interest at the time, no action has been taken in the intervening two years. She continually informs me that her officials are in discussion with the patron of the school and representatives of the local authority or that the property management section of the Office of Public Works is doing this, that or the other. Will she tell them to stop talking and do something practical in order that progress can be made on this project? The time for talking is over. Who is to blame for the lack of movement? Is it the Minister or her officials, because it is certainly not the school's board of management or its patron or staff?

Ms Hanafin: A school cannot be built until a site has been selected and the problem is there are no sites.

Mr. McHugh: There is a site.

Ms Hanafin: I am delighted to learn there is a site and that all the difficulties identified by the Office of Public Works and the local council have been addressed, but that is not the information available to the Department.

Mr. McHugh: The Minister has known for two years that sites are available.

Ms Hanafin: The Office of Public Works, which has worked on this matter for several years, identified various sites but technical problems arose with all of them to the extent that it had to place further advertisements seeking suitable sites for the girls' school.

Mr. McHugh: Why?

Ms Hanafin: The closing date for receipt of site proposals was 8 August 2006 and technical assessments of these sites are being carried out, all

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other sites having been proven to be unsuitable. It is not possible to progress with construction of the school unless a site is approved.

The patron has identified a site for the boys' school but servicing provisions must be agreed with the council before progress can be made. I understand both parties are discussing the issue and as soon as they reach agreement, I will be more than happy to progress with the building project. I cannot sort the technical problems which appear to exist with regard to the proposed sites.

Mr. McHugh: The Minister can sort out the matter if she instructs those concerned to stop talking and start doing practical work. The time for talking is over. A health and safety problem has arisen in one of the schools. In the event that this results in the injury or death of a member of staff or pupil, the Minister may not argue that she did not realise the gravity of the position. I have told her how serious the matter is and I ask her to allow both projects to proceed. If there is a difficulty regarding the girls' school, will she allow the boys' school to proceed separately?

Ms Hanafin: A larger health and safety issue would arise if an unsuitable site was used for a school building. The patron and council are in discussions regarding the boys' school. The Department wrote to the patron on 25 September, almost a month ago, seeking an update but has not received a reply. Perhaps the Deputy will contact the patron to ascertain the latest position.

The Department will be pleased to progress with the girls' school as soon as a suitable site is found. The closing date for receipt of proposed sites was 8 August. A second advertisement was placed because sites proposed following the previous one failed technical assessments. Further technical assessments are being carried out on the proposed sites received by the latest deadline.

I recognise that difficulties have arisen with the project and have indicated this to the schools and their patrons and boards of management. For this reason, the project has received a band 1 priority rating. The problem of site selection is not of the Department's making. As soon as it is resolved, I will be more than happy to progress the school project.

Mr. McHugh: If a site is found for one school, will the Minister allow construction to proceed?

Ms Hanafin: At the moment, we do not have a site for either school.

School Curriculum.

95. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of recommendations outstanding for implementation from the task force on the physical sciences; the reason

same have not been prioritised; the timescale for the implementation of these recommendations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34442/06]

Ms Hanafin: As the Deputy will be aware, the Government has prioritised improvements in science education at all levels, from primary school science to advanced fourth level research. Progress has been made in a wide range of areas in recent years. A new science curriculum has been introduced at primary level supported by a resource grant in December 2004 of €1,000 per school plus €10 per pupil. A revised, much more practically focused syllabus in junior certificate science was introduced in 2003 and examined for the first time in June 2006. Its introduction was supported by €16 million in grants to schools. Revised syllabi in leaving certificate physics, chemistry and biology have also been introduced in the past five years and supported by comprehensive in-service programmes for teachers. Additional equipment grants have been provided for schools, while laboratories continue to be refurbished as part of the ongoing schools building programme.

The Government has also provided €4 million for the discover science and engineering awareness programme to ensure a co-ordinated approach to promoting interest in science. It is engaged in a range of innovative activities, not only to improve interest in science among school children and the public but also to encourage young people to view science as a viable career option.

With regard to scientific research, Deputies will be aware that investment in the programme of research in third level institutions, PRTLTI, continues apace. Between this programme and the various grants to the research councils and other sources, €102.5 million was invested in research in third level institutions in 2005 under my Department's Vote.

The overall level of Government expenditure across all Departments on science, technology and innovation amounted to €658 million in 2005. With all the improvements that have been made in the area of science education in recent years, progress has been made on implementing 25 of the 34 proposals in the task force on the physical sciences which relate to the education sector.

As I have explained on previous occasions, one of the recommendations of the task force about which I am not convinced is that on laboratory assistants. As the Deputy will be aware, laboratory technicians have not been a universal feature of support for second level science teaching in other countries. There is no doubt that provision of technicians in this area would lead to demands for similar assistance across other areas of the curriculum where there is a strong practical component. While I remain to be convinced of the necessity for technicians, I will, nonetheless, keep the position under review.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

As the Deputy will be aware, the strategy for science, technology and innovation sets out a range of measures to further strengthen science teaching and learning and improve the uptake of senior cycle physics and chemistry. These include ensuring the project-based, hands-on investigative approach in place at junior cycle is extended to senior cycle, the appropriate type of assessment is used and emphasis is placed on the interdisciplinary nature of science in society.

Other aspects of the plan include reviewing the implementation of the primary science curriculum to ensure its effectiveness in stimulating interest and awareness in science at a very young age, strengthening teacher training in this area, reforming maths and leaving certificate physics and chemistry curricula, promoting science initiatives in transition year and providing information and brochures on science opportunities and careers, linking effectively with school guidance services. Taken together, the comprehensive set of measures provided for in the SSTI will build on the improvements made in recent years and ensure even greater support for science education.

Ms Enright: Is the Minister's primary concern that she may come under pressure from other subjects or is it, as it should be, the need to ensure a high uptake in science subjects? While I welcome investment in third and fourth level, to make this investment worthwhile we must also ensure the system functions correctly at primary and secondary level.

The Minister indicated she will keep the position under constant review. Is she prepared to make any commitments on laboratory technicians? Is she aware that certain schools have still not implemented the practical element of the junior certificate science syllabus because some of them do not have proper facilities, while others do not have sufficient time to complete the onerous task of setting up experiments? Does the Minister have plans to ensure all students take science to junior certificate level? Will she ensure all second level schools can offer the full complement of science subjects to leaving certificate level, which is not currently the position?

Ms Hanafin: I am not prepared to give a commitment on laboratory technicians. It is important to continue to invest in the curriculum, syllabus and science laboratories and in supporting and training teachers. Next spring, I expect to receive from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment proposals on assessment at senior level and other matters.

Changes to the primary school curriculum have been exciting and changes in the junior certificate science examination have been a major success.

Ms Enright: They are not being taught in all schools.

Ms Hanafin: As part of the summer works scheme last year and this year, the Department invested significant amounts in developing and expanding science laboratories. With the exception of schools that formed part of larger building projects, all schools that applied for funding to upgrade their laboratories received grants. I look forward to finding out which schools applied for funding for this year.

I have no intention of making science compulsory at junior certificate level because 86% of students already take science at junior certificate on a voluntary basis. This is an encouraging figure. Given that numbers are increasing because students want to study science, it is not necessary to introduce compulsion.

As the Deputy will be aware, schools have absolute discretion regarding the subjects they offer at leaving certificate level and which teachers they employ. There is one teacher at second level for every 13 students. It is a matter for schools at local level to determine how they want to offer science subjects.

Ms Enright: The Minister is putting her head in the sand. Some schools cannot offer all science subjects to leaving certificate level because of the number of teachers available to them. I am sure the Minister is sincere in wishing to see an improvement in the development of science, and resources are being allocated to ensure that. However, if students wish to take the subject but it is not available due to timetable problems, that must be addressed. The ultimate responsibility for addressing it lies with the Minister in terms of ensuring that the schools are adequately resourced and can offer the full complement of science subjects. If students cannot study science at second level, they certainly cannot attempt to catch up at third level.

Ms Hanafin: There is no reason that schools cannot offer science subjects. The fact that 86% of students are studying science at junior certificate level should encourage many more to study it to leaving certificate level. There is a teacher in every second level school for every 13 students and it is up to the local schools to decide, based on the demands of their students and the ability of their teachers, what subjects they will offer. At present, we are anxious to increase the number of students who are studying science subjects at leaving certificate level. A total of 14.4% are taking physics this year while 13.9% are taking chemistry. We aim to increase that to 20% through the science strategy. However, the take-up of biology at leaving certificate level is still quite high at 48.8%. The difficulty, however, is that even those who do well are not continuing the subjects at third level. That is where guidance is most important. I hope the fact that the

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Government is investing so heavily in the knowledge economy and in the future of industry in that sector will encourage students to do so.

Literacy Levels.

96. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the measures that will be put in place to improve literacy levels in disadvantaged areas in view of the failure to reach the target of halving the number of primary pupils with literacy difficulties by 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34297/06]

Ms Hanafin: This Government is committed to doing everything it can to improve literacy levels in disadvantaged areas. We are conscious of the fact that good levels of literacy and numeracy are fundamental prerequisites for full educational and social participation, and we are redoubling our efforts to promote these.

A key underlying principle of DEIS, the action plan for educational inclusion, is that of early intervention. It focuses on identifying and assisting children who are having difficulty with reading and writing at an early stage with the aim of preventing literacy difficulties from becoming entrenched. Children in DEIS schools that are identified as having major reading difficulties will be targeted early to benefit from intensive, individualised literacy tuition through the reading recovery programme. This programme, under which each child is — can be provided with 2.5 hours of extra reading tuition a week, has been extremely positively received since its introduction a few years ago. The number of schools participating in the programme has already been doubled from 66 in 2004 to 136 in 2006. Access to reading recovery is being rolled out to all the more than 330 urban primary schools participating in DEIS.

Children with writing difficulties in these schools will also be targeted for extra support through the roll-out of the first steps programme to all urban primary DEIS schools.

Taken together, the expansion of these two programmes, will significantly improve the service available to children with literacy difficulties in disadvantaged areas. These measures will also be augmented by other extra supports being put in place under DEIS, such as smaller classes at primary level, an expansion of the home school community liaison scheme, a new initiative on pre-service and in-service professional development for teachers and more school libraries at second level.

There will be a much greater focus on target setting and planning under DEIS to ensure that the substantial extra resources being provided will lead to better outcomes for children. As well as improving the supports we provide in our schools, initiatives that help parents with any literacy problems they may have themselves can

have a hugely positive effect on their children's achievement. For this reason, the establishment of a new family literacy project is also a key priority under the DEIS programme. The project will build on previous experience in this area and will be based on a partnership approach involving the VEC adult literacy services, home school community liaison teachers and the National Adult Literacy Agency.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

In this context, the Government has dramatically improved the level of provision for adult literacy training in recent years. Indeed, expenditure on adult literacy has increased more than twentyfold since we came into office, from €1 million in 1997 to €23 million in 2006. As a result of this dramatic increase in funding, we have been able to expand the number of people receiving adult literacy training, to the point where 35,000 people will receive a service in 2006.

I believe this unprecedented level of investment in adult literacy services will not only bring major benefits for the adults but will make a positive difference to their children's lives. Helping a parent to be able to read to their child could be one of the best things that we, as a Government, can do for both parent and child.

As I have outlined, not only has the Government done a great deal in recent years to improve the literacy levels of children and adults from disadvantaged areas but we are currently redoubling our efforts so that further progress can be made. I am confident that, taken together, the initiatives I have outlined will ensure a much greater level of support for children with literacy difficulties and that achievement will improve considerably as a result.

Ms O'Sullivan: The report last September of the Comptroller and Auditor General on educational disadvantage shows that from 1998 to 2004 the gap in literacy levels between children in disadvantaged schools and those in ordinary schools widened. Children in disadvantaged schools are, therefore, having greater difficulty with literacy. The Minister has introduced DEIS since then but one of the points made by the Comptroller and Auditor General referred to the need to monitor and measure to ensure the programmes are working. What does the Minister have in place to ensure that what is being put into the system will improve standards?

The weighted model was introduced at the same time as DEIS. The weighted model system is, in effect, removing with one hand what DEIS is providing with the other. Has the Minister evaluated the effect of the weighted model on the most disadvantaged schools and what these schools have lost as a result of providing special needs support on the basis of the number of students in the school rather than the need?

Ms Hanafin: The Comptroller and Auditor General, in his statement, welcomed DEIS and the fact that it will co-ordinate the resources and services that are available. Although this country has a high standard of literacy, there is no doubt that those at the bottom are not doing well. It is significant that in surveys carried out by the Department on literacy levels in disadvantaged schools the findings were very poor. At the same time, many of those children were in small classes of 15:1. Some of them were even as low as 11:1, yet the literacy levels were not good.

This only proves that the problem cannot be tackled in isolation within the classroom. It must be done in the context of supporting the family and through the targeted initiatives. With initiatives such as reading recovery, mathematics recovery, the first steps writing programme and the family literacy programme, we will tackle this in a holistic way, using all the expertise within and outside the schools.

The Deputy is correct to ask about targeting and getting results. One of the criteria for inclusion in the DEIS scheme was that schools had to sign up to planning and targeting.

Ms O'Sullivan: What about measuring?

Ms Hanafin: We have a team with that specific task. A national literacy tutor has been appointed to ensure that the targets are being met. When we are spending €640 million on disadvantage, we must ensure we are getting the best value for money and that we are targeting those children.

The general allocation model was bedded down before DEIS commenced. DEIS is only being implemented this year whereas the general allocation model was implemented last year.

Ms O'Sullivan: Schools lost teachers.

Ms Hanafin: Schools have not lost anything under the general allocation model.

Ms O'Sullivan: They have.

Ms Hanafin: For the first time every school in the country has an allocation of teachers to deal with children with learning difficulties. DEIS ensures that the schools get even more to add to what they already have.

Ms O'Sullivan: There are schools with high numbers of children with special needs who have lost teachers under the weighted model. Previously, they were allocated teachers on the basis of an assessed need but now teachers are allocated on the basis of the overall number of children in the school so they have lost. With regard to measuring, is there somebody who will report back to the Minister at a specified time on what progress has been made on literacy in disadvantaged schools? Is there a specific measurement target whereby the Minister can

assess the progress being made and whether the programmes are working?

Ms Hanafin: With regard to literacy and numeracy, a new advisory service has been established. A deputy national co-ordinator has been appointed as well as five additional *cuiditheoirí* tutors to deal with literacy and numeracy throughout the country. The schools have already signed up so it is compulsory that they do standardised testing. The results of those tests must be made available.

Other Questions.

Higher Education Grants.

97. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will abolish the inclusion of SSIA interest in assessing income for qualification of third level grants in accordance with the spirit of the scheme when it was first announced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34128/06]

Ms Hanafin: Income from SSIA's is being treated exactly the same as income from similar savings and investment products for the purposes of assessing eligibility for a maintenance grant. This has been the case since SSIA's were introduced.

The amount of income to be included in SSIA's is the Government grant earned on the savings in the relevant tax year — in the case of savings accounts, the gross interest earned in the relevant tax year, and, in the case of investment accounts, the investment profit earned in the relevant tax year. Investment losses are deductible. The same position has long applied to interest earned on other savings products, including deposit accounts, post office savings certificates, life assurance bonds and so forth. The treatment of SSIA's is therefore consistent with the traditional treatment of other similar investments over many years. In applying for a grant for the 2006-07 academic year, only the relevant income earned, as outlined above, on the SSIA in 2005 had to be declared.

With regard to how much impact income from an SSIA could have in determining whether a person would qualify for a grant, the reckonable income limits for student grants have been increased considerably in recent years. In the 2003-04 academic year, the income limit for a family with four children was increased from €23,770 to €35,165, an increase of nearly 48%. However, the maximum amount a SSIA saver could have received by way of Government contribution to their SSIA in any one year is €762. Only the amount of the Government contribution, and any savings interest or investment profit earned in one year, is taken into account in

[Ms Hanafin.]

assessments of eligibility for a maintenance grant. The income limits have continued to rise each year, to the point where the limit for a family with four children this year is €41,055.

We have also introduced two new income thresholds to allow for 25% and 75% grants as well as the 50% and 100% rates, as well as the new top-up grant to target extra funding at those who need it most. The maximum level of ordinary maintenance grant available this year is €3,110 compared to €2,390 in 2002. The maximum level of the top-up grant is €5,970 compared to €3,000 in 2001-02.

This year, over €228 million has been allocated for the third level student support schemes. Further improvements to the system are being developed at present to ensure that not only is it a well resourced one but that it is also customer friendly.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

To return to the issue of how SSIA income is treated for maintenance grant purposes, the Deputy can be assured that SSIA income is being treated the same as income from similar savings products and that the income limits have been increased substantially in recent years. The SSIA's are being treated the same way this year as they have each year since they were introduced.

Ms O'Sullivan: I return to the points raised by Deputy Enright which were not fully addressed by the Minister. For example, the Deputy stated that the Minister for Social and Family Affairs is in a position to make allowances in respect of his Department. When this scheme was announced, people were informed about its importance and about the fact that they would receive additional money from the Government. They were never told that it would affect their grants. Is it not somewhat mean to deal with them in this way? Would the Minister not open her heart, ignore the income people earned from their SSIA's and go with the spirit of the scheme and ensure that higher education grants will not be affected? It is fine to say that people will not be affected because the limits have been increased this year. That is similar, however, to saying that if one obtains an increase in one's pension in the budget, local authorities should be allowed to claw it back in rents. This is about the spirit of the scheme and a degree of generosity.

Ms Hanafin: The important point is that the limits increased in each year by far more than what any saver would have accrued via his or her SSIA and the interest attaching thereto. Last year, the limit was €33,890 for the 100% maintenance grant. This year, it is €35,485. If one is only receiving €785 plus some interest, the limit increase far outweighs what one would have received from one's SSIA.

For social welfare purposes, there are no special means testing provisions relating to SSIA's. The latter are treated in the same way as other savings and investments, such as money deposited in An Post savings accounts or shares. It would have been very unfair to penalise those saving with An Post or a credit union or putting money away each month under another system——

Ms O'Sullivan: The Government encouraged them to invest in SSIA's in addition to their other savings.

Ms Hanafin: ——and not take into account the money people earned from SSIA's. It is not the money saved that is being taken into account; it is only the grants and interest received. Income limits were increased generously over last year — they have been increased in every year, particularly the first, since the SSIA scheme was put in place — and students should not feel in any way penalised in respect of the money they have gained.

Ms O'Sullivan: I understand what the Minister is saying but the point I am making is that when the scheme was introduced, the spirit of it appeared to be that one would gain the full benefit of the proportion of the money the Government was to provide. In my view, it is mean to claw it back in this way. The Minister is generally a generous woman.

Mr. Gogarty: Approximately 18 months ago, before the media began to take an interest in this matter, I highlighted the fact that, for example, lone parents' SSIA earnings were being calculated in advance of when their interest accrued and certainly prior to the end of the scheme. The levels relating to when they would qualify for grants were applied before these people actually received or could access their money. That was cruel and unjust. Does the Minister plan to reverse what happened in this regard?

Ms Hanafin: There is no difference in the reckonable income this year compared to that which applied last year or the year before.

Ms Enright: We raised the matter at that stage.

Ms Hanafin: The only money that has been taken into account is the interest raised in that previous year.

Mr. Gogarty: These people have not yet earned the money; they cannot access it.

Ms Hanafin: However, it is income and it is there to be taken into account.

Pupil Teacher Ratio.

98. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Edu-

cation and Science the way she proposes to respond to the 200,000 plus parents demanding that the Government implement the promised reduction in class sizes in primary schools contained in the programme for Government in 2002. [34145/06]

120. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science the steps she is taking to reduce class sizes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33720/06]

Ms Hanafin: I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 120 together.

The parental representations to which Deputy Crowe's question refers were given to me in the form of a petition by the INTO. In response to that petition, I wrote to all schools pointing out the huge progress that has been made in providing extra staff to our primary schools in recent years.

As the Deputies will be aware, there are now, compared to 2002, no less than 4,000 extra teachers in our primary schools. Furthermore, there are almost 7,000 more primary teachers than there were in 1997. This represents the largest increase in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. The average class size in our primary schools is 24 and there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level, including resource teachers.

The number of children in large classes has been significantly reduced. When the Government entered office, there were more than 52,000 children in classes of 35 and over — five times the number that there were in the last school year. There were also more than 1,900 children in classes of 40 and over, compared to just over 200 in the last school year.

While I appreciate the need to make further progress in reducing class size, it should be acknowledged just how much has been achieved. In recent years, priority has rightly been given to providing extra support for children with special needs, those from disadvantaged areas and those that need help with English. Special education provision in particular has undergone a level of expansion the extent of which nobody could have predicted a few years ago, and this was only right. If we had put all 4,000 of the teachers hired since 2002 into classroom teaching, our average class size would be a lot smaller than it is now. However, we would have done a great disservice to those children who need extra help the most. I am sure the Deputies will accept that we have taken the correct approach.

Now that children with special needs are finally getting the support they deserve, we are providing extra teachers this year and next specifically to reduce class sizes, through a reduction in the mainstream staffing schedule. This has meant that, whereas all primary schools were staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 29 children in the 2005-06 school year,

in the current year the number is 28. Schools with only one or two teachers have much lower staffing ratios than that, with two teachers for just 12 pupils in some cases. The general rule, however, is that there should be at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children in the school. Next year, we are committed to hiring even more extra teachers in order to reduce this to a general rule of at least one teacher for every 27 children.

We also acted this year to specifically address the needs of growing schools by making it easier to qualify for developing school posts. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned for the 2006-07 school year, compared to 170 in 2005-06. This change specifically addressed the needs of schools that are seeing large increases in their enrolments year on year.

Significant progress has, therefore, been made by the Government in reducing class size, in providing extra support for children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas and in addressing the specific needs of schools in developing areas. Nonetheless, I assure the Deputies that we will continue to prioritise further improvements in school staffing going forward. I also assure them that we will also continue our focus on measures to improve the quality of education in our primary schools to ensure that increased resources lead to better outcomes for our children.

Mr. Crowe: Everyone accepts that progress has been made but the Minister must accept that there is overcrowding in many classrooms. The figures in my possession indicate that 111,000 primary school pupils are in classes of 30 or more. This means that more than one in four of the State's 442,000 primary school students are in such classes. Does the Minister agree that this is unfair on students and on their teachers? In many cases, this is not conducive to learning, it contributes to indiscipline and it hampers the ability of teachers to teach and students to learn. Does the Minister agree that it is imperative that small class sizes must be maintained from early years right through children's education because this would prove beneficial? When does she propose to reduce class sizes to the 20:1 ratio promised by the Government?

Ms Hanafin: As already stated in respect of a previous question, there is no correlation between small classes and higher standards. Reports indicate that this is the case in respect of literacy and maths. Notwithstanding that and in light of the integration of children with special needs and the greater needs that exist in disadvantaged areas, I recognise the importance of reducing class sizes. Approximately 500 teachers were appointed this year with the aim of reducing the class size schedule and there is a commitment to reduce it further next year.

If classes are very large in particular schools, it is because such schools have made local agree-

[Ms Hanafin.]

ments to divide classes in a certain way. I have studied the figures and monitored schools which chose to put in place small classes at one level and those with over 30 students at another level. There seems to be some objection, particularly in urban areas, to teaching split classes. More than half of our schools have mixed grade classes. This system has worked extraordinarily well for generations but schools in urban areas refuse to put it in place and opt for larger classes in some years and smaller classes in others.

On the general allocation, there is a teacher for every 28 pupils. I refer here only to mainstream classroom teachers and am not referring to resource teachers, etc, of which there is one for every 17 students. Next year, the general allocation will be reduced to one for every 27 pupils.

Ms Enright: The Minister indicated that there are just over 200 children in classes of 40 or more. The figure for the past year was 287. A total of 1,792 pupils — the highest in the country — in Cork county are in classes of between 35 and 39. I do not believe that the argument that schools opt to have lower numbers in particular years is always fair. It is not the case in every instance.

Over a year ago, the Minister spoke about the number of teachers provided to schools with non-national students and she said she hoped to make some progress. Has any progress been made? This is a key difficulty for some schools in which there is a significant number of non-national children. There have also been problems with children changing schools during term time as their families have moved, with schools in Newbridge being the most recent example. Has the Minister any ideas to address that problem?

Ms Hanafin: The figure of 287 referred to two schools that shared one number, so the real figure is 206. However, there should not be any child in a class of that size. When we checked with those schools, in most cases the school was awaiting accommodation under the building programme.

We have made progress on the issue of non-national students, especially in the allocation of extra teachers as well as in providing training supports for teachers. There is a problem with children moving school during term time. I really wish that parents who are choosing to move house within term time would make arrangements for their children to be in a school at the beginning of the school term. It is entirely unacceptable, in the educational interests of their children, that they would have checked out the colour scheme in the bathroom of their new house but would not have found out if a place was available for their child within a school. The Department, local schools, patrons of schools and boards of management cannot predict what kind of family will move into a particular house in a particular estate. This is causing pressures and we

will respond to those pressures as quickly as possible. However, I ask that local communities do not object to the temporary accommodation provided to facilitate these children. We need to provide the spaces for them. If parents are moving house during term time, they must make sure that they have made arrangements for their children's education.

Mr. F. McGrath: Is the Minister aware of the widespread anger among parents and teachers about class sizes? Does she support the campaign by the INTO on this issue? The Minister can blame parents and the housing situation, but there is no excuse not to have proper class sizes in schools, with all the money in the State. Will the Minister continue to prioritise this issue? The programme for Government committed to a pupil teacher ratio of 20:1. Parents and teachers need answers to these questions because they are very important. The Cabinet is fast asleep on this issue. Will she put pressure on members of the Cabinet to do something in the budget about class sizes?

Ms O'Sullivan: I accept the point the Minister made when she said that parents should make provision when they are moving. However, I saw the television clip involving two school principals in Newbridge. They said that they have been demanding more capacity for their pupils for years, so the issue is not just about parents failing to make provision for their child a month before they move. Has the Minister plans to improve the situation to enable the Department to intervene early enough to provide schools and classrooms for children so that they are there when the houses are built?

Ms C. Murphy: I remember when the development plan for Kildare was being carried out and the land was being rezoned. The point was made that the schools would not be in place at the appropriate time. That was predicted several years ago and that is exactly what has happened. Does the Minister accept that there is a different need in areas that are rapidly developing? Students showing up during term time is only a symptom of that. There is a lack of provision in the rapidly expanding areas.

Dr. Cowley: The Department must surely have made provisions for situations like this. The Minister is now in her job for quite some time and she should have outlined by now what needs to be done in places like Newbridge.

Ms Hanafin: The provision of schools in developing areas is a matter of concern for the Department. That is why we have carried out studies on developing areas. Long-term and short-term plans have prioritised schools in developing areas to try to ensure that places are made available. If the Deputies look at the

schools that are currently being built in those areas, they will see that families that move from one school to another during term are causing a big problem to both schools.

If any Member of the House wishes to tell me that we should have reduced class size before we dealt with children with special needs, before we targeted disadvantaged or before we aimed for integration of children—

Mr. F. McGrath: We have moved on.

Ms Hanafin: —with language difficulties, then I am happy to defend the fact that more than 4,000 extra teachers went into our primary schools to deal with those priorities.

Mr. F. McGrath: We do not disagree with that.

Ms Hanafin: Government is about priority and our prioritisation is directed towards those who need it most. Those who needed it most were special needs children, disadvantaged children and children with language difficulties.

Literacy Levels.

99. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a television literacy series (details supplied) is to be continued; if there are other mass media measures planned to widen access to second-chance education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34117/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): An information and tuition programme on adult literacy called “Read Write Now” was televised by RTE 1 in five series over the period 2000-05. In 2006, the National Adult Literacy Agency devised a new two-year multimedia literacy project, entitled “The Really Useful Guide to Words and Numbers”. An element of this project is a TV series of that name, which is currently being shown once a week on RTE 1, at 1 p.m. on Sundays, with a repeat just after midnight on Tuesday. The series began in September 2006 and will run to April 2007. It is accompanied by a learner workbook, a free telephone helpline and a website. The website includes printable sheets from the workbook, additional on-line activities and the entire video clip of each programme 24 hours after broadcast.

When the transmission of the present series has been completed next April, its impact will be evaluated. The most appropriate next steps will be considered in light of the results of the evaluation. The series is being funded mainly by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, with contributions from my Department and RTE. The cost of the project in total is estimated at €2.6 million.

The Government has shown an unprecedented commitment to improving adult literacy provision. We have increased expenditure on adult

literacy programmes from €1 million in 1997 to €23 million in 2006. As a result of this dramatic increase in funding, we have been able to expand the number of people receiving adult literacy training to the point where 35,000 people will receive a service in 2006. Referral networks have been developed by the VECs to ensure that the people who need them most are made aware of the adult literacy and basic education services available. The referral system involves collaboration with other agencies catering for potential literacy students, such as FÁS, employment offices, welfare and community groups and schools.

A number of joint literacy initiatives have been developed between FÁS, the VECs, the National Adult Literacy Agency and employers. A workplace literacy programme has been introduced in all local authority areas for outdoor workers. While the Department of Education and Science has the primary role in adult literacy and numeracy issues, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has a shared responsibility with regard to literacy and numeracy training in the workplace.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

My Department is committed to working with other partners to ensure that the needs of adults with low levels of literacy continue to receive the highest priority in the future. We are determined to use a variety of avenues to reach people who need an adult literacy service, and the use of specially designed TV programmes is one part of this approach.

Ms O’Sullivan: The National Adult Literacy Agency has stated that only 7% of those with literacy difficulties are actually participating in literacy programmes. I acknowledge the good work that has been done on adult literacy, but there is a need to expand it to include more people. The programme is broadcast at 1 p.m. on Sunday and at midnight on Tuesday. Are there any plans to broadcast adult literacy programmes at more accessible times for the public?

Many of us are members of the all-party committee which produced a report that suggested a need to quadruple the spending on adult literacy in the period up to 2013. There were members on that committee from the Government parties. Does the Minister agree that such expansion is needed in order to reach people who really need adult literacy?

Miss de Valera: I agree we must get the message across about these programmes to those who wish to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Through research, we found the most effective way has been through the use of television. The “Read Write Now” series was a tremendous success considering the number of people who tuned in to watch it. With help from the Broad-

[Miss de Valera.]

casting Commission of Ireland and working with NALA, more than €2.6 million has been put aside for the new multimedia approach over the next two years.

I take the point that the transmission times of these programmes might seem a little odd but the ratings for the “Really Useful Guide” have been extremely encouraging thus far. It is not just a case of watching the programme at the actual broadcast times because video clips and workbooks are available.

Ms Enright: My question refers to the question I asked the Minister about primary schools. A submission will be made to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science that a number of adult non-nationals are taking places on adult literacy classes. Whereas they are completely literate in their own language, they need English language classes to be provided for them. Has the Minister of State any mechanism in mind to provide for people who need literacy classes can avail of them and those who need English language classes will have that facility afforded to them?

Miss de Valera: I certainly recognise the differentiation between those two groups. It is a question of language acquisition as opposed to literacy as we mean it. A number of schemes are in place to help those coming to our shores who might not have English as a mother tongue. I refer to the point made by Deputy O’Sullivan. The national development plan committed €93.5 million to the service in the period 2000 to 2006. The expenditure over this period has exceeded the NDP commitment and will reach €123 million by the end of 2006. We are very mindful that further investment is needed in the area of literacy. It is a Government priority and the progress to date should be acknowledged.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

100. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on whether her Department has failed to invest sufficiently in second level education as reflected in Ireland’s position at 29th out of 30 countries in the OECD league table by GDP and 24th by GNP and that, notwithstanding investment in special needs and international students, the vast majority of second level students here have not seen a reduction in class sizes; if she will commit to providing 1,000 additional second level teachers in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter.
[34240/06]

Ms Hanafin: I am pleased to inform the House that funding for second level education has improved significantly since 2003, the financial year indicated in the OECD report referred to by the Deputy.

Spending by my Department on second level education increased by 17% between 2003 and 2005. In 2005, €2.7 billion was spent on second-level education, up from €2.3 billion in 2003 and €1.25 billion in 1997. These increases have allowed major progress to be made both in the staffing and in the day-to-day funding of our schools.

With regard to funding, the standard capitation rate increased from €266 per pupil in 2003 to €298 per pupil from 1 January last. In addition, the support services grant for secondary schools has been increased from €127 per pupil in 2003 to €159 per pupil from January last. This *per capita* grant is in addition to a range of equalisation grants of up to some €15,500 per school per annum that were also approved for voluntary secondary schools. A secondary school with 500 students will this year gain €270,000 for general expenses and support services.

Significant improvements have also been made in the staffing of our second level schools in recent years. With the creation of over 2,000 additional posts and the retention of over 2,100 posts which would otherwise have been lost due to the fall in enrolments, there is now one teacher for every 13 students at second level.

This increase in staffing has dramatically improved the support available to children with special needs at second level. Indeed, there are now over 1,800 teachers working specifically with students with special needs in our second level schools — up from only about 200 such teachers in 1998. In addition, there are more than 500 learning support teachers and more than 1,300 special needs assistants in our second level schools.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

The number of language support teachers at second level catering for pupils for whom English is a second language has also grown significantly from just over 100 teachers in the 2001-02 school year to nearly 350 such teachers in the current school year.

Guidance provision has also been improved, with an additional 100 guidance posts allocated in the 2005-06 school year. The additional posts included provision for a further improvement in the allocation of guidance hours for post-primary schools participating in the DEIS programme. There are currently a total of 683 whole-time equivalent posts allocated for guidance in post-primary schools.

With regard to class size as referred to by the Deputy, it is significant to note that at lower second level, Irish schools had the fifth lowest average class size in 2004 among OECD countries. Ireland’s average class size was 19.8 compared to the OECD average of 23.8. Class size will vary between subjects and levels and schools are given discretion as to how they use their teaching staff.

Major improvements have been made in both the funding and the staffing of our second level schools in recent years. I assure the Deputy that I will continue to prioritise further progress in both these areas.

Mr. Gogarty: No more than the Minister's commitment in An Agreed Programme for Government to reduce class sizes in primary schools, will she admit that she has failed with regard to educational investment at second level? Will she acknowledge she is using this special needs and language support argument as a hoary old chestnut? The reality is she is not spending enough on education and as a result, 30,000 second level students are in classes of more than 30 students. Will she also acknowledge that although there has been an increase in the past number of years, we are still in the bottom half of OECD spending? Ireland was ranked 29th out of 30 countries using GDP figures and 24th out of 30 OECD countries using GNP figures. Will the Minister acknowledge this is a shame in terms of educational investment?

Ms Hanafin: How dare the Deputy from the Green Party refer to children with special needs as "a hoary old chestnut". How dare the Green Party—

Mr. Gogarty: I am suggesting we should be investing in both.

Ms Hanafin: —refer to investment in those children—

Mr. Gogarty: The Minister should not be telling me—

Ms Hanafin: —as "a hoary old chestnut". This Government has done more than anybody to improve the status of the—

Mr. Gogarty: It is a case of dealing with mainstream students and special needs students and the Minister has failed the mainstream students. It is not a case of "either, or". The Minister should not use that chestnut in this House with me.

The Taoiseach: It is the chestnut season.

Written Answers follow Adjournment Debate.

Adjournment Debate Matters.

Acting Chairman (Mr. McCormack): 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 Costello — that the Minister take steps to prevent the placing of advertisements in the Border region for the sale of illegal fireworks in Northern Ireland; (2) Deputy Neville — the refurbishment of the

Glenma Estate at Croom, County Limerick; (3) Deputy Naughten — the need for the Minister to provide sufficient funds to Clontuskert national school, County Roscommon for its school building project; (4) Deputy Kirk — that the Minister resolve to reopen Dunleer railway station, County Louth; (5) Deputy Crawford — that the Minister give a full explanation on her decision to implement the Teamwork report in Monaghan General Hospital; (6) Deputy Devins — the matter of a new school for Dromore West national school, County Sligo; (7) Deputy Curran — the recent agreement entered into by the Reception and Integration Agency to provide asylum accommodation at Towers Hotel, Clondalkin; (8) Deputy Michael Moynihan — that the Minister take steps to ensure that Greencore honours Labour Court recommendations; (9) Deputy Sherlock — the measures the Government plans to take to ensure that Greencore workers rights to redundancy terms are upheld; (10) Deputies Crowe and O'Connor — the concerns of local residents, commuters and bus drivers in the Tallaght area with regard to the recent incident on a bus; (11) Deputy O'Sullivan — the need for the Minister to provide secure funding for the Bluebell ABA school for children with autism in Limerick; (12) Deputy Sexton — that the Minister outline his plans to source water for the greater Dublin area from Lough Ree or *via* desalination of sea water; and (13) Deputy Cowley — the discontent among farmers and their families over the introduction of water charges on farms.

The matters raised by Deputies Costello, Crowe and O'Connor, Crawford and Devins have been selected for discussion.

Leaders' Questions.

Mr. Kenny: I notice the former Tánaiste is as far away from the current Tánaiste as she can get. There is no need for comment.

I wish to ask the Taoiseach about the recent announcement by the Government and the Minister for Transport of what is the biggest infrastructural project in the history of the State, the metro north to Swords which will go from St. Stephen's Green to Dublin Airport in 17 minutes with 15 stops.

The credibility of the Minister, Deputy Cullen, with regard to delivery, has been seriously damaged by his incapacity or his inability to give even an overall figure of what the cost will be. As the Tánaiste will be aware, for this project to succeed will require a national buy-in, absolute certainty as to the cost and the business case for investment and the consequent benefits to the customer and the consumer. This transparency is completely missing in this case.

The ESRI report issued today clearly states that major rail projects must be the subject of a full cost-benefit analysis and this makes sense. There is broad public support for the project.

[Mr. Kenny.]

Anything that will tend to alleviate the frustration of hundreds of thousands of motorists, consumers and citizens in this city, is welcome. However, doubts are being expressed about this project. The number of occasions on which it has been announced previously and the failure of the Government to deliver on time and on budget on so many major projects in this city, leaves the credibility of the Minister for Transport in tatters.

I wish to ask the Taoiseach a straight question. What is his estimate of the cost of this project? Is it €1 billion, between €1 billion and €5 billion or as much as €15 billion, according to some estimates? What is the overall figure? Given that the taxpayer will be paying for this until 2040, is the Taoiseach prepared to state that the issues determining credibility of a project such as this, in terms of the case for investment being made and evaluation before the project is given the green light, will all be published so that the public at large will know exactly what is involved in the project? The Taoiseach has €3 billion of taxpayers' money in respect of which the Government has been unable to budget in the past. It must be transparent and be published so everybody understands what is involved.

The Taoiseach: I totally reject what Deputy Kenny said about the performance of the Minister for Transport. Under the Minister's watch we are seeing one of the best ever roll-outs of infrastructure. We are seeing this on all the main roads — the road to Belfast which is done, and the roads to Cork, Limerick and Waterford. Some €1.5 billion is being spent on roads infrastructure. On the rail programme, the main rail lines to Cork, Galway and Waterford have all been successfully enhanced.

A Deputy: I was delayed for a full hour.

The Taoiseach: In 18 of the last 19 contracts, the procurement and the contract system are coming in on time and on budget. Therefore, the first part of Deputy Kenny's assertion does not hold up and I should not bother to comment on it.

On the second issue, the cost assessment analysis has been done on the metro. There will be a further cost assessment analysis when we go to the market on the basis of PPPs and all the advices. We will not publish figures before going to the market. We have done the assessment. The RPA has completed a comprehensive consultation process and worked with its own and international teams, including a team from the UK which is familiar with this work and has been involved in some of the biggest contracts in Europe.

The metro north will be procured as a public private partnership, funded through annual availability payments over a period of 30 years which is what would be done with a large project like

this anywhere in the world. The first availability payment is not due until the metro opens for passenger services. The capital costs included in the metro business case and the value of the annual availability payments remain commercially sensitive in advance of a public procurement. What dumbwit would go out to the market and state the benchmark at which one should quote? For God's sake let us have some sanity. One does not use one's assessment and go out to the market and suggest one should come in between A and B. What we would hope on this contract is to get some of the biggest contractors and PPP operations in the world to take an interest in this project at a competitive tender price. That is the way we should do it. Yes, we have our assessment but we will go to the market and have a second analysis. As in the case of any contract, the assessments will be transparent.

Mr. Durkan: The same as e-voting.

The Taoiseach: One does not take a major infrastructural project and spell it out before testing the market and the interest from various parts of the world. That would be a nonsense. While the RPA has done careful assessments and will continue to do so I agree it is a huge project. I heard the same arguments a few years ago here about Luas, that we would never build it, the project would hit a brick wall, nobody would use it, it would always be late, cars would crash into it—

Mr. Durkan: They did.

The Taoiseach: Now more than 23 or 24 million people use it. This project is being carefully thought out, carefully planned and will be carefully operated through the system. I assure Deputy Kenny that the assessment will be transparent because it involves a huge amount of public money.

Mr. Durkan: That is something.

The Taoiseach: As he rightly said the project is required and will carry in the order of 20 million or 30 million people. We have to put it out to tender in a careful way and that is the way we will proceed.

Mr. Kenny: Of course, the Taoiseach did not answer the question. He is asking us to take a leap of faith for Martin e-voting Cullen.

Mr. Cullen: I thought the Deputy would be more original than that. That is Deputy Rabbitte's line.

Mr. Kenny: I ask the Minister to hold on.

Mr. Cullen: Is it dumb and dumber? Can the Deputy not say something original?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister should allow Deputy Kenny to speak without interruption.

Mr. Kenny: The Taoiseach has gone out of his way to defend the Minister's record. The problem is that during the past ten years none of those over there on the front row has had to shuffle through the queues at Dublin Airport or the traffic jams which the rest of us have to endure. Nor has any of them had to put up with the traffic lights being erected at the exit to the port tunnel. One can imagine the traffic jams when they become operational. With respect, for the past ten years, none of those on the front row, who have been cosseted by their civil servants and get VIP treatment on their way out of the country, has to accept what ordinary citizens put up with on a regular basis.

Mr. Rabbitte: We are going to move the port.

Mr. Kenny: The Taoiseach said with the benefit of rose-tinted glasses that the Minister for Transport, Deputy Cullen, had had the project costed and evaluated. We have had all of this before on various projects including, in the Taoiseach's case, Campus and Stadium Ireland, where all the assessments, analyses and all the figures were supposed to be done on time and on budget and we saw the result of that. The Luas lines do not join up. The port tunnel is not yet opened, is five years behind time and has cost €700 million.

Mr. Cullen: It would not have been built by the party of which the Deputy is a member. The Deputy was against it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow Deputy Kenny to speak without interruption, please.

Mr. Kenny: The Taoiseach is asking us to believe 30 weeks before a general election that big bores will be under St. Stephen's Green on the way out to Swords. He knows in his heart and soul that is not possible—

Mr. Cullen: The Deputy is looking for a few votes.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Chair will have to take appropriate action if the Minister for Transport does not allow Deputy Kenny to proceed uninterrupted.

Mr. Kenny: The Taoiseach said it would be very dumb indeed to go to the market place seeking a ballpark figure. I remind him that the second phase of the M50 upgrade is a PPP project and the Government and the Minister for Transport have already announced it will come in at between €600 million and €700 million. That is an example of a major PPP project where the Government has given its ballpark figure, yet we are now asked to commit the entire nation to the

biggest infrastructural project in the history of the country which the vast majority of the people will agree with intuitively but the Taoiseach will not tell the House the figure the RPA has arrived at, even in global terms. I shall ask the Taoiseach again. Does he agree that the M50 upgrade is a PPP project? Does he agree that the Government has already published a figure in respect of that? Will he commit himself to telling the nation the assessed figure? Is it €1 billion, €5 billion or €15 billion because we will be paying for this until 2040? If that man's record over there is anything to go by, this too will go down in flames.

The Taoiseach: Without getting into an argument the difference with the M50 is that the work has already commenced. It is in three phases and the work is under way.

Ms O. Mitchell: The PPP has not come in yet.

The Taoiseach: Obviously when a contract is under way in the first phase, one knows the price. The second and third phases have been priced also. Based on the assessment, the feasibility study and the cost analysis done by the RPA we will go to the market before Christmas. Then we hope to see, although we can never be certain, interest from serious international operations. Not many companies in the world would be able to get involved in a project of this scale. There are probably only six to ten companies. That will give us the ballpark figures against which we will do a further cost analysis. For strategic reasons, we will not provide that figure. The RPA will carry out a second analysis at that stage against the tenders. It is not a project that will happen overnight. It is fair to say the cost assessment analysis, the tendering projects and the timescale, including on the Luas, have improved dramatically. Eighteen of the last 19 contracts came in on time.

To go to the market and state where we believe the market will be and not to allow the companies to compete against each other would not be wise. Nobody in the business has advised us to do anything other than what we are doing. I do not think we will have to wait many months to see what happens. There is no doubt it will be a very large contract and will take several years to complete but we do need it. That is clear from the figures at Dublin Airport this year where there were 21 million passengers. Only a few years ago we were told that by 2010 there would be 15 million passengers but in 2006 Dublin Airport already has 21 million passengers. We are now told that within a decade 35 million passengers will pass through the airport. A project such as this is required, as is the development of Dublin Airport. The plans of Dublin Airport Authority and the work on the M50 are all major construction projects that must be done as cost effectively as possible. They will be done over a 30 year period on a pay-back system from the State. That is the wise way to

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do this work. The Minister will keep the House informed but to set it out now is not the way to proceed.

Mr. Rabbitte: In the report published today by the ESRI, there was a focus on a number of different areas of waste. One that was not mentioned, however, was the indemnity deal that we traced in this House on quite a few occasions in the past. The Taoiseach will recall this was a secret deal that gave indemnity to an entire array of contingent liabilities without ceiling. He will also recall that the State was bound to pay for the outcome. Notwithstanding the recommendation from the Department of Finance that it would be on the basis of a 50-50 break between the religious congregations and the State, the Government went ahead and ratified the deal in a most unusual fashion.

On several occasions in this House when I quoted figures advanced by the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Taoiseach used one of his favourite phrases saying that I was off the wall. In September 2003, I questioned whether figures from the Comptroller and Auditor General, ranging from €869 million to €1.04 billion, were correct. In reply, the Taoiseach said: "Our view continues to be that it will not be anything like what the eminent Comptroller has said." The Taoiseach repeated that line several times in the House. The 2005 report of the Comptroller and Auditor General was published recently and showed that the cost of the indemnity deal is now estimated to be €1.327 billion. How can the Taoiseach possibly justify the secret deal that was done without a memorandum to Cabinet, based on a verbal presentation by a Minister who was to leave office the following day, excluding the usual professional advice from the Attorney General's office, and without sight of the agreement? A deal was entered into that capped the contribution of the religious congregations at £100 million or €127 million.

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

Mr. Rabbitte: If one subtracts that figure from the €1,327 million it means the Taoiseach is out by €1,200 million, or if he accepted the Department of Finance's 50-50 split, which would roughly have given €660 million to the State and €660 to the religious congregations, the Taoiseach is out by €534 million. That is the kind of waste that occurred. Does the Taoiseach admit he was wrong?

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: No.

Mr. Rabbitte: Does he admit the deal was a disaster for the taxpayer? Has he learned any lessons from it other than the lesson we will apparently now have to live with, which is that

the Minister, Deputy Cullen, will not tell us the cost of projects anymore?

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

Mr. Rabbitte: He cannot be wrong on that. If he does not tell us, we cannot know. The Taoiseach defended the Minister, Deputy Cullen, as being wise in not telling us, while the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform applied the opposite methodology when he bought a prison site. He let it be known who the purchaser was and we ended up paying €30 million for a site that was valued at about €6 million. Is there any limit to the waste in which the Government is engaged? What does the Taoiseach now say on the figures chalked up under the indemnity deal for which taxpayers will continue to pay in future?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy began by mentioning the ESRI report and I would have been glad to debate it but he did not ask a question on it so I will leave it aside.

Mr. Rabbitte: Good.

The Taoiseach: We thank the ESRI for its contribution to the debate. The Government will continue to do the right things to help the economy.

Mr. Howlin: Will the Taoiseach not comment on that?

Mr. Rabbitte: He should not read the rest of the page.

The Taoiseach: We will not tax more, spend more or put up school fees. Some 14,000 applications have been made to the Residential Institutions Redress Board. Earlier estimates of the final cost by the Department of Education and Science, and of the board itself, were lower than this. The Department's estimate prior to the establishment of the board was €610 million, including legal and administrative costs. It must be accepted that nobody could have predicted with certainty how many applications there would be. It was not known how many people were in our institutions that were under State control and it was not known how many of those would put forward a case of abuse of one kind or another. I think we are getting closer to knowing what that is. The final cost of the scheme will not be known until the board has completed its work. The estimate that the final cost could be up to €1.3 billion was based on the number of applications received by the Department at the 2005 deadline, a cumulative average award of €76,000, and legal and administrative costs of approximately 20%.

In outlining this estimate last January, the Comptroller and Auditor General also referred to the possibility of the average award decreasing

as more applications are processed. Allowing for this, he put the final cost of the scheme at between €1 billion and €1.3 billion. He added that any estimate of the ultimate liability arising from the redress scheme is based on assumptions which are impossible to validate and should therefore be treated with caution. Recent trends in awards made by the board would suggest that the average award is indeed falling, as the Comptroller and Auditor General said, but there is no guarantee that that trend will continue.

The fact has been accepted by the PAC report that none of us could have known what the figures would be. Indeed, the redress board has emphasised that. The board's original estimate, in its 2003 report, was between 6,500 and 7,000 applicants and it estimated between 7,500 and 8,000 applicants in its 2004 report. The figures were tentative and there were no precedents for the scheme. Either way, those are the statistics. I know Deputy Rabbitte's view on this matter and he knows mine. As far as the deal is concerned, we had an obligation to set up a scheme to deal with people who were abused, in one form or another, in State institutions run by religious. Seven years ago, I apologised on behalf of the State and I said we would set up a scheme.

Mr. Rabbitte: The taxpayers will pay for it.

The Taoiseach: Yes, the taxpayers will pay for it, as they did for Army deafness and other issues. Let us be honest about the point at which Deputy Rabbitte and I differ on this matter. He believes I should have taken the money from the church but I do not. I do not believe the church should have coughed up another €500 million. I accept Deputy Rabbitte's view and he should accept mine. The Irish church does not have those resources. I was not prepared to go down that road, nor am I prepared to do so now. Some 14,000 people who were abused in institutions have applied to the Residential Institutions Redress Board. We all thought there were 5,000 such people at one stage but then the figure rose to 7,500, then 8,000 and later 9,000. If the figure is 14,000, so be it.

What happened in those days is sad. The Deputy may argue that they should not be paid or that we should take land off the churches, but that is not a road I would go down.

Ms Lynch: Fifty-fifty.

The Taoiseach: I make no apology to this House or to anyone else about the way we did it. We made an apology and said that we would give substantial payments to these individuals, many of whose lives were wrecked. In addition, many of their family lives were non-existent because of what had occurred. The position is that we are paying them and I stand over the decision. I do not believe for a second that we should have

taken any more money from the religious institutions in the State. That is my position.

Mr. Rabbitte: There is no point in the Taoiseach looking across at me with his "Brian Dobson" eyes and saying "Sure, nobody could have known". If nobody could have known, why did he cap the amount at £100 million? He is dealing with taxpayers' money. There is no point in taking out the handkerchief again and talking about how — it is true — so many thousands of lives were disgracefully ruined. It is true that everybody in this House believes that they ought to be compensated, but that is not the issue. The issue is that the Taoiseach was in charge of taxpayers' money and he set up an arrangement whereby a man who was leaving office the next day did not comply with required Cabinet procedures, did not submit a memorandum, excluded the Attorney General's office from the advices that were given in advance and did not make the agreement available to Ministers. The Taoiseach entered into a secret deal. As the number of applicants climbs by thousands, the Taoiseach now says "Sure, how could I have known?". How can the Taoiseach know the length of the port tunnel to Dublin Airport? At that rate of going he would probably end up at the prison site in Thornton Hall.

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

Mr. Rabbitte: The Department of Education and Science's original assessment was €250 million, not €651 million, yet the Taoiseach has ended up paying €1,200 million of taxpayers' money. Many people would translate that into so many classroom places or special needs assistants. Why, if the Department of Finance said 50:50 was a fair division, was it forced from that in a secret arrangement while the then Attorney General was locked out?

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

Mr. Rabbitte: The Attorney General of the day subsequently went into retreat, as he does on occasions like this, and we will have to await his memoirs to hear what happened. This would put special needs assistants into a great many classrooms and provide a lot of additional classroom places. A 50:50 division was regarded as fair by the Department of Finance but the Taoiseach made an unorthodox secret arrangement through the agency of Deputy Woods. There is no point in implying the rest of the House is in any way begrudging the due entitlement of the unfortunate people who were abused and in respect of whom the State did not carry out the invigilation it ought to have done of these institutions.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Rabbitte is not going to have it both ways. I have listened carefully to his points.

Mr. Rabbitte: No, the Taoiseach did not.

The Taoiseach: The figures compiled in the Department of Education and Science and at various times by the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Residential Institutions Redress Board range from 6,000 to 9,000, but 14,000 applications have been made. The State was responsible for these institutions and either ran them or contracted religious orders to do so.

Ms McManus: It did not.

The Taoiseach: I have listened to the Deputy's leader, so the Deputy should listen to me.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach continue without interruption.

The Taoiseach: The State placed——

Ms McManus: The State abdicated its responsibilities.

The Taoiseach: I am trying to answer the Deputy's leader. The State placed the children in these institutions.

Ms Burton: It did not look after them.

The Taoiseach: Please allow me to answer the Deputy's leader. The State placed the children in these institutions and was responsible for them. If it had been fought in court, the State would have been jointly liable and——

Ms McManus: Jointly liable.

The Taoiseach: ——the State's deeper pockets would have ended up paying the full bill. That is what would have happened legally.

Ms Hanafin: Exactly.

Mr. Rabbitte: Why did the Tánaiste not give that advice at the time, rather than offering it now?

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach continue without interruption, please.

The Taoiseach: I am answering Deputy Rabbitte's question.

Mr. Rabbitte: It is not necessarily true and the Taoiseach knows that.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Rabbitte took seven minutes despite being entitled to three. He should not take the Taoiseach's time now.

The Taoiseach: He takes that much time every day, as a matter of interest and outside of Standing Orders.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach, without interruption.

The Taoiseach: Some 14,000 of our citizens were abused in one form or another in State-run institutions. The Deputy cannot say they should be given their due entitlement but that we should not have done it this way. There was no other way but to apologise, which we did, set up a redress system, which we did, and put in a system which would give them fair recompense for what happened to them. That was a fair thing to do. Deputy Rabbitte's view, which I respect, is that the Irish Catholic Church should have paid the money. My view was that it did not have the money and we owed it to these people to pay them back. That was the judgment we made; it was made in a full and open Cabinet decision and I make no apologies for it.

Mr. J. Higgins: A full 12 months have passed since Deputy Catherine Murphy and I first raised in Dáil Éireann the novel phenomenon of management companies being forced on householders in new housing developments, which is especially hitting first-time buyers. We outlined how this was a scam to benefit developers and, depending on which services might be turned over to them, to bring about the possible privatisation of public services. We gave shocking examples of a barefaced rip-off involving no less than six management companies running 1,700 houses in Tyrellstown, leaving aside 400 apartments, which did not even take over public services but almost exclusively built its structure on the management of open air car parking spaces in the estate for which, unbelievably, €360,000 per year is being demanded from the unfortunate householders. It is a cash cow for the developers and the managing agents who take one third of that money each year. I recently exposed a barefaced swindle in Tyrellstown, where €17,000 per year was being demanded from the same householders in fees for public lighting. However, I have established conclusively that Fingal County Council met all the lighting and maintenance costs for the past five years.

Over the past year, the developers in that and other estates, masquerading as management companies, have been trying to drag dozens of householders into court to force them to pay fees which are being boycotted. Happily last Thursday, Judge Alan Mahon in the Circuit Court quashed a demand for management company fees on legal grounds, the important implications of which we are still studying.

The Taoiseach said, in response to the concerns expressed by me, Deputy Catherine Murphy and

others, that management companies in housing estates were never envisaged, represented a major problem and an unnecessary cost, and were totally wrong and highly unfair, yet he has not lifted a finger to stop the practice. How serious was the Taoiseach, given that he was in Tyrellstown last Wednesday evening not to extend solidarity to hard-pressed residents, but to open a €40 million hotel for the very developer who is at the heart of the management company rip-off and who has been dragging householders through the courts? Local people who tried to attend the bash were turned away from their supposedly local hotel.

When will the Taoiseach introduce legislation to control management companies for apartment owners and what will he do to quash the ones that exist for thousands of householders who are now caught in a legal nightmare not of their making?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Joe Higgins knows I have considerable sympathy for the arguments around this and I think he also knows I met the group he mentioned at the bash in Tyrellstown, when it raised the points made by the Deputy. I met similar groups in other places. Three things have happened since then. Two weeks ago I reported to the House that the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche, met all the county managers earlier this summer and at the beginning of the year—

Mr. McCormack: They are still making it a condition of planning permissions.

The Taoiseach: —regarding the procedures that were being operated in each of the councils. From what Members said during that debate, a number of those initiatives have been successful in terms of getting coherence in what local authorities do and how they treat housing developments, whether apartments or estates. I have previously made the point that these management companies were intended in the first instance for controlled small apartment blocks. They were not meant for residential housing estates. The Minister has made significant progress with a number of local authorities with regard to implementing the procedures as they were originally envisaged.

The Director of Consumer Affairs recently produced a detailed report in this regard which highlighted issues the Government will have to examine. That examination will be done in the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Whether a legislative proposal or other solution will have to be brought forward will be decided shortly, but a lot of the procedures and operational issues which were arising in local authorities do not require legislation. They can be dealt with by the management and I understand from the Minister and his

officials that is being done. I will revert to the House when the report of the Director of Consumer Affairs has been examined and a question to the Tánaiste or the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will receive a more detailed response on the position with regard to the examination of the report.

Mr. J. Higgins: Apartment owners need a new, simple, democratic and co-operative structure to manage their units. Happily, since Deputy Catherine Murphy and I raised the matter in the Dáil and turned it into a national issue, the local authorities have begun to put a block on this being included as a condition, which represents progress. However, some tens of thousands of householders have been caught in the management company scam in the intervening twilight years, a period of four to five years. They are tied up legally, with the deeds of their houses tied up into the scam, which should never have happened. The Government and local authorities have a key responsibility to those householders. The Government needs to provide the legal means whereby this completely unnecessary structure is taken off the back of those householders.

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

Mr. J. Higgins: Judge Mahon's judgment in the Circuit Court had the benefit of stripping away the fig leaf. He said the developers should have pursued the householders and not the management company, because the so-called common areas had not been handed over. In other words, it is really the developers who are behind this matter. What will the Taoiseach do for the thousands stuck in this legal limbo? Did the Taoiseach ask the Larkins of Twinlite to stop pursuing the residents who made them such a fortune in buying their homes in Tyrellstown and in other areas?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for acknowledging the local authority effort and what the Minister is doing. Based on the present report of the Director of Consumer Affairs, we will see if there is a legislative mechanism to deal with this issue. It is under examination in both the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. I do not know if there is an easy legal remedy, but I understand clearly the point that is being made by many groups regarding the period in which they were caught. I am not sure where that examination is in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government — the Deputy can table a question to the Minister. We will see if there is a legislative way to deal with it because I understand the difficulties it has created for several thousand people. I am not sure if it is that enor-

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mous a number, but it certainly covers quite a sizeable number.

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.

Dr. Cowley: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the failure of Shell to even vacate the compulsory acquisition orders for the existing Corrib gas route granted and facilitated by the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Deputy Noel Dempsey, and his Fianna Fáil predecessors, despite assurances given that the pipeline route was being altered and to ask whether the Government will direct Shell to cease construction of the Corrib gas refinery at Bellanaboy, County Mayo, which would mean an end to the Corrib gas protest and would prepare the way for talks, where other options to bring the gas to shore would be seriously considered.

Mr. Ferris: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the urgent need for the Government to intervene directly in the dispute over the Corrib gas pipeline and terminal in order to come to a resolution that addresses the concerns of locals on health and safety and the lack of economic benefits they see accruing from the project.

Mr. Healy: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, given that tens of thousands of electors have this week been notified they are being deleted from the register of electors, the urgent need for the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to ensure that no one is deleted from the register of electors unless he or she has died, his or her entry is a duplication or he or she has moved, and to ask the Minister to make a statement on the matter.

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

Order of Business.

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 2, Citizens Information Bill 2006 — Order for Second Stage and Second Stage. Private Members' business shall be No. 49, motion re health services.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are no proposals to put to the House.

Mr. Kenny: I have four questions on the Order of Business. As everybody now knows, five young men lost their lives in a tragic occurrence in County Monaghan. When will the roads (amendment) Bill, dealing with further critical road safety initiatives, which is No. 76 on the list, be introduced? It should be expedited and this side of the House will facilitate it. When does the Government expect to deal with the report on assisted human reproduction referred to it by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children? When is the House likely to have a report on it? When is the Dublin transport authority Bill, No. 21 on the list, expected to be published? Obviously it is of critical importance.

An cheathrú rud — tá a fhios ag an Taoiseach go raibh reifreann thíos i nDaingean Uí Chúis i gContae Chiarraí, áit ina raibh sé i rith an tsamhraidh. Tá formhór na ndaoine ann go mór i bhfábhar go mbeadh ainm an bhaile aithruithe go “Daingean Uí Chúis” agus “Dingle”. An bhfuil sé ar intinn ag an Taoiseach go ndéanfaí leasú ar Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla i dtreo is go mbeadh meon agus intinn na ndaoine sáite isteach sa dlí? In other words, is it intended to amend the Official Languages Act such that following a plebiscite in an area such as Dingle, the will of the people can be reflected in the law of the land?

The Taoiseach: The road traffic (amendment) Bill is listed for 2007. The Dublin transportation authority Bill is due this session. Subject to correction, I understand the report on assisted human reproduction is before a committee of the House.

Ms McManus: No. It is finished.

Mr. Kenny: It has been referred back.

The Taoiseach: I will need to check its status.

On An Daingean, the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Ó Cuív, has noted the result of the plebiscite that voted in favour of changing the name from An Daingean to the composite and bilingual Dingle-Daingean Uí Chúis. He previously made clear that was one option on which he could not act within the law. The Kerry County Council plebiscite asked the electorate to vote on the only option that is a legal impossibility. I am not sure how the Minister can deal with a legal impossibility.

Mr. Kenny: He could amend the Act to reflect the will of the people.

The Taoiseach: He will need to look at it now.

Mr. Kenny: What he is at is complete nonsense.

Mr. Durkan: Does the Minister intend to change the names of any more towns?

Mr. Rabbitte: I have no doubt that the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs,

Deputy Ó Cuív, will make all this clear because I am unclear as to what it means. I ask the Taoiseach about the judicial council Bill, which was promised in 2001. It may have a topicality at present. Is it the intention of the Government to publish it? I also ask the Taoiseach about the commitment to invigilate the rights of workers in the workplace with the appointment of a director of enforcement or compliance with standards. When will that Bill be brought before the House?

The Taoiseach: The draft heads of the judicial council Bill to provide effective remedies for complaints about judicial misbehaviour, including lay participation in the investigation of complaints, are being prepared in the Department, taking into account work done by the Constitution review group, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Constitution and the Chief Justice's committee on judicial ethics. It is still listed for next year but the heads are not ready yet. I believe it will be some time.

On the employment rights legislation, a number of Bills arise from the recent social partnership agreement. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Martin, has established a section in his Department to progress a number of these. It is the intention to fast forward as many of them as we can. I do not believe they can all be contained in one Act. They had started working on legislation for the protection of workers back prior to the summer. I do not have a date — it is not listed. However, we have told the social partners we will give this priority. I believe there are three different measures. The officials are working on them and we hope to bring them forward as soon as possible.

Mr. Boyle: I have questions on two Bills. The Ombudsman (Amendment) Bill, which would give more powers to the Office of the Ombudsman, was first promised by the Government in October 2002 and was to be published by the middle of 2003. In the most recent programme, it is indicated that it will be published in early 2007. Is it the Government's intention to have it enacted before the general election?

The second Bill relates to the establishment of a carbon fund, which the Minister for Finance promised in budget 2006. The Government indicated the legislation would be published this year but the most recent legislative programme indicates it will be published in early 2007, at the earliest. This will be 15 months after the first indication in this regard by the Minister for Finance. Is it the Government's intention to have the Bill enacted before the general election?

The Taoiseach: The Ombudsman (Amendment) Bill has 18 heads. They have all been completed and work has progressed satisfac-

torily on the legislation. It is due for introduction in the spring session.

The heads of the carbon fund Bill were approved just before the summer break at the end of July. The Bill is still listed for early 2007. It is with the Parliamentary Counsel at present.

Mr. Durkan: Will the Taoiseach bring forward the minerals development Bill in view of the topical nature of what is proposed therein? Publication has been promised for mid-2007. However, in view of the discussion on the development of a mineral industry, and on oil and gas, etc, might it not be good to bring it forward?

The Taoiseach: The heads of the Bill were completed on 27 June. It has been submitted for drafting but is not expected until the middle of 2007.

Mr. Stagg: The Taoiseach will recall I raised the issue of the broadcasting and communications Bill with him, including the section that would enable RTE to broadcast to the Irish abroad. He wrote me a nice letter about it and said the Minister would contact me. The Minister was present on the last occasion I wanted to raise the issue. The Ceann Comhairle called me on Thursday when I was not expecting to be called — I thank him for calling me — and I asked, through the Tánaiste, that the Minister might consider what the Taoiseach said to him. I just received a smart answer, asking whether I was not able to read the Bill. Perhaps the Taoiseach will talk to the Minister again because the Taoiseach and I are very anxious that the possibility of broadcasting to the Irish abroad, particularly those in Britain, be realised as soon as possible. The whole House would agree to the taking of the section in question as a separate short Bill.

The Taoiseach: I have always been sympathetic in respect of this matter. If we deal with the longer Bill, which refers to the e-consultation process, it will take a long time. It would be desirable if we could try to agree to take the relevant section separately. I have said this to the Department and the Minister and I will ask the Whip to pursue it. If we proceed the other way——

Mr. Stagg: It will not see next year's All-Ireland final.

The Taoiseach: I do not believe so.

Mr. Hayes: We all know about the many tragic accidents that have happened throughout the country and the fall-out from them. Can I ask the Taoiseach a very simple question on legislation? Is it proposed to introduce any roadside testing for drugs?

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

Mr. Hayes: It is very serious.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is so serious that I suggest the Deputy raise it in the proper fashion in the House. There is any amount of ways in which he can do so, but the Order of Business is not one of them.

Mr. Hayes: The Taoiseach is prepared to answer.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Kehoe.

Mr. Hayes: This is a very serious issue.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy does not want to allow his colleague, Deputy Kehoe, to contribute, we will move on to the next item of business.

Mr. Hayes: Does the Taoiseach propose to introduce legislation——

An Ceann Comhairle: Only questions on promised legislation are allowed and the Deputy's colleague has already raised the road traffic legislation.

Mr. Hayes: ——to deal with this very important issue?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach, on the road traffic legislation.

The Taoiseach: I do not want to mislead the Deputy in this regard. We have said previously that if there was a system in the world that provided for roadside testing for drugs, or narcotics in any form, we would legislate for it. The fact is that there is none anywhere in the world; there is no such system. There have been a few trial systems in various countries over the past decade or so but none has worked. I do not want to mislead the Deputy by telling him I will introduce a system that does not exist. If there was a system, we would legislate for it.

Mr. Kehoe: I asked the Tánaiste last week about the EPACE Bill and he was not able to give me any direction as to when it would be before the House. What is the position on the Bill and what does it entail?

The Taoiseach: No heads have been drafted and it is not possible to indicate at this stage when it will be introduced. The Bill is to provide powers of inspection to individuals mandated by electronic contractors. To be frank, I do not believe the Bill has progressed very far.

Mr. Allen: In the context of the promised aviation regulation Bill, we were promised a decision on the question of the debt of Cork Airport by the end of September. There has been nothing but silence——

An Ceann Comhairle: That does not arise. The Taoiseach on the aviation regulation Bill.

Mr. Allen: When will there be a decision on the €160 million that his comrade in arms promised?

An Ceann Comhairle: We will proceed to No. 2, the Citizens Information Bill 2006, Order for Second Stage and Second Stage.

Mr. Allen: They are a dynamic duo.

The Taoiseach: Next year.

Citizens Information Bill 2006: Order for Second Stage.

Bill entitled an Act to amend the Comhairle Act 2000 to change the name of Comhairle, so that it shall be known, in the English language, as the Citizens Information Board or, in the Irish language, as An Bord um Fhaisnéis do Shaoránaigh, to amend and extend its functions and, in particular, to confer a function on it to provide, or arrange for the provision of, a personal advocacy service to certain persons with disabilities, to make certain changes to its membership and to provide for certain related matters.

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): I move: "That Second Stage be taken now."

Question put and agreed to.

Citizens Information Bill 2006: Second Stage.

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

The Citizens Information Bill 2006 is a key element of the Government's national disability strategy and is designed to ensure that people with disabilities are supported to enable them, as far as possible, to lead full and independent lives, reach their full potential as individuals and participate fully in society.

This Bill, together with the Disability Act 2005, the accompanying sectoral plans and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, demonstrates clearly the intention to have an effective combination of legislation, policies, institutions and services in place to ensure equal access to services and full participation in everyday life for people with disabilities.

The primary purposes of the Bill is to amend the Comhairle Act 2000 to enhance the functions of the statutory body in supporting the development of advocacy services, in particular for people with disabilities. Most important, the Bill provides for the introduction of a personal advocacy service for certain people with disabilities

who would otherwise have difficulty obtaining access to the services in place to assist them.

The substance of the Bill provides for matters such as the qualifying conditions for eligibility for the assignment of a personal advocate, how the service is to be organised, the responsibility of the personal advocates, the application process, an independent appeals system and related matters to ensure that the new service is placed on a sound footing.

The Citizens Information Bill further provides for a number of important changes to the Comhairle Act 2000 to sanction the functions of the statutory body. Some of these changes include the provision to change the name of Comhairle to the Citizens Information Board or, in the Irish language, An Bord um Fhaisnéis do Shaoránaigh. My objective is to better reflect how the statutory body carries out its functions in the provision of information on social services to the public. The name change is to secure a country-wide branded image associated with citizens information.

In section 2, I want to include a definition of “social services” to include a broad range of social and civil services provided to the public and to expand the definition of “voluntary body” to include citizens information centres. I want to include number of amendments to section 7 of the Comhairle Act to strengthen the board’s role in supporting and developing the provision of information on social services and the work of the citizens information centres and other voluntary bodies throughout the country.

I propose amendments to section 9 of the Comhairle Act to change the size and the term of office of the board to provide for improved operational efficiency and to allow for greater continuity in the leadership of the organisation. This will be to the benefit of the local services that rely on its support.

Before I outline the full provisions of the Citizens Information Bill 2006, I would like to acknowledge the significant increase in funding for disability support services that has been provided in recent years. Almost €3 billion was spent on addressing disability issues in 2005. That figure does not include the almost €2 billion that was spent last year by the Department of Social and Family Affairs on income supports and entitlements for people with disabilities or illnesses and their carers. Such significant increases in social welfare rates over recent years further underline the Department’s position at the forefront in providing for the income support and other needs of people with disabilities. It is in the context of this comprehensive and strategic programme of support for people with disabilities that I am bringing this Bill to the House.

This Bill relates to the provision of services. It will streamline the citizens information structure by bringing some branding to it in a way that will mean the citizens information brand is national as well as local. It will also introduce an advocacy service, which will be equally important. There is

an important link between the provision of information and advocacy. Accessing information and enjoying a range of options on foot of that information are two key aspects of empowerment and citizenship. That is particularly relevant to the functions of the newly named citizens information board, which will offer enhanced services to people with disabilities.

The Citizens Information Bill 2006 envisages that advocacy services will support people with disabilities in identifying and understanding their needs and options and securing their entitlements to social services. In its broad sense, advocacy is quite a traditional concept. It is linked to the notion of the citizen taking responsibility not only for himself or herself but also for his or her neighbour. It should not be confused with the giving of information or the offering of advice *per se*, although they are aspects of the advocate’s role.

Advocacy is something many people do for others on a daily basis. Parents advocate for their children every day, relatives and friends speak on behalf of vulnerable people and public representatives often act as good and strong advocates. To put it simply, advocacy is the act of supporting or speaking up for someone. To put it more formally, it is a dynamic process of negotiation that is conducted by or on behalf of an individual who is marginalised in some way. The proposed service, as outlined in the Bill, will provide for the assignment of a personal advocate to assist, support and represent a person with a disability in applying for and obtaining social services and in pursuing any right of review or appeal in connection with those services. It is envisaged that the arrangements for the new personal advocacy service will be completed without delay when the legislation is in place.

The board of Comhairle has undertaken a significant amount of work in preparation for the introduction of the personal advocacy service. Two important studies which have informed this work provide the basis for the legislative provisions in this Bill. The first of these, known as the jigsaw of advocacy, was published in 2003. A second study, which relates to the development of an advocacy service for people with disabilities, also informed the legislation. In October 2005, Comhairle published guidelines to inform and guide the development of advocacy services by community and voluntary organisations. In tandem with the guidelines, I launched a programme of funding amounting to some €2 million for advocacy projects in that sector. Some 31 projects will be in place throughout the country by the end of 2006. Each project employs an advocate to work with people with disabilities in accessing a range of different services to help them to achieve their personal objectives.

In the current phase of the programme, there is an emphasis on representative advocacy because it will provide Comhairle with the most relevant experience in developing its advocacy service when the new legislation is in place. It is

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aimed to ensure that advocacy services are of the highest standard and that they are underpinned with strong values and principles. Above all, there is an objective of keeping the person with the disability at the centre of the service. Other work undertaken in preparation for the introduction of the advocacy service on a statutory basis includes producing a resource pack for the new advocacy projects, organising training and networking days and supporting the higher certificate course in advocacy studies, which is accredited through Sligo Institute of Technology.

I would like to outline the contents of the Bill. Sections 1 and 2 provide for the usual definitions of the terms used in the Bill. The definition of “disability” is that used in the Disability Act 2005. Section 2 amends the definition of a voluntary body in the Comhairle Act to include citizens information services and citizens information centres. I am proposing to provide statutory recognition for the citizens information centres which comprise the primary channel through which the citizens information board provides information to the public. This section also includes the definition of a “social service”, which will underpin the board’s work in the provision of information about entitlements and public services. Social services are broadly defined in the section as including health, social welfare, education, family support, housing, taxation, citizenship, employment and training, equality, asylum and immigration.

Section 3 provides for a change of name from Comhairle to the Citizens Information Board, or An Bord um Fhaisnéis do Shaoránaigh. My objective here is to ensure the citizens information board and the voluntary bodies which provide information services, particularly the citizen information centres, will be readily identifiable by the public as a single brand as part of a single overall coherent approach to the provision of State-funded information services in matters of civil rights and entitlements.

Section 4 amends section 7 of the Comhairle Act. It provides for a number of changes to the functions of the statutory body, in particular to provide greater support for people with disabilities. A function of the board will be to support the provision of advocacy services in the community and voluntary sector for people with disabilities. The citizens information board will introduce a personal advocacy service for people with disabilities who meet the criteria of qualifying persons for the service. The board will be charged with supporting and developing greater accessibility and public awareness of the social services which are available to people. Part of its remit will be to promote the provision of integrated information about those services by voluntary and statutory bodies. The provisions state that the board, in offering the personal advocacy service to a person with a disability, will have regard to the financial resources available to it

and to whether such services are available to the person in the community or elsewhere.

Section 4 inserts in section 7 of the Comhairle Act a number of new provisions which will enable the Citizens Information Board to set the terms and conditions for voluntary bodies which seek funding and to promote the development of high quality standards in the provision of information to the public. The effect of these provisions is that voluntary bodies which seek funding may be asked to demonstrate how they will pursue quality service objectives. Funding may be refused if the body concerned fails to supply the board with the information requested, or fails to convince the board that it is necessary in any case.

Section 5 provides for the details of the personal advocacy service. It inserts a number of new provisions in section 7 of the Comhairle Act, to be contained in the new sections 7A to 7E. The proposed new section 7A provides for the designation of persons as personal advocates by the chief executive officer of the citizens information board; the appointment by the board of a director of the personal advocacy service, who will manage that side of the organisation; and the qualifying criteria to be satisfied by a person if he or she is to have a personal advocate assigned to him or her.

The legislation provides that a qualifying person, in the case of a person 18 years of age or older, is a person who in the opinion of the director is unable to obtain or has difficulty in obtaining a social service without the support of a personal advocate because of his or her disability. The director must also consider whether there are reasonable grounds for believing there is a risk to the person’s health, welfare or safety if he or she is not given the social service in question. A person under the age of 18 may qualify for a personal advocate if his or her sole parent or guardian is a qualifying person, or if he or she has a disability and in the circumstances of the case it would be unreasonable to expect a parent or guardian to act on his or her behalf to obtain the social service without the assistance of such an advocate.

The new section 7A(3) provides that a person will not be disqualified from the assignment of a personal advocate if he or she is already getting a social service. Section 7A(4) sets out how the board will prioritise the assignment of personal advocates to people who qualify for the service. The process will take account of factors such as the needs of the person to have a personal advocate assigned to him or her, the benefits likely to accrue to him or her by the assignment of the advocate, and any risk of harm to health or well-being that may arise if he or she cannot obtain the services which are sought. The section also provides that the Minister may make regulations for incidental or supplementary matters that may arise, to give effect to these provisions.

The new section 7B of the Comhairle Act details the arrangements for making an appli-

cation to the personal advocacy service for the assignment of a personal advocate and for the decision process in respect of applications. It states an applicant may appeal against a decision of the director of the personal advocacy service if he or she is not satisfied with the decision about qualification for the service. It also provides for a reversal of a decision to refuse the assignment of an advocate in the light of new evidence or if a mistake is made about the facts. The new section 7C of the Comhairle Act sets out the arrangements for a person to make an appeal against a decision that he or she is not qualified for the assignment of a personal advocate.

The section provides, in effect, that the social welfare appeals rules and procedures which are detailed in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 will apply, in a modified form, to appeals regarding the personal advocacy service.

It is my intention to appoint the chief appeals officer of the social welfare appeals office to determine appeals in the personal advocacy service. My objective is to ensure that people who are unhappy with the decision on their qualification for the assignment of a personal advocate have access to an impartial and independent appeals system. The social welfare appeals office has a proven record in this regard. It has an established reputation in providing a speedy and highly accessible service for people and is ideally positioned to meet the needs of people who seek the assistance of an advocate.

The new section 7D sets out the duties and responsibilities of the personal advocate, including assisting, supporting and representing the qualified person in applying for and obtaining a social service, including an application for an assessment of need or a service specified in a service statement under the Disability Act 2005. The personal advocate will also pursue any right of review or appeal on behalf of the qualified person and provide support and training to the qualified person, any member of his or her family, a carer or any other person who represents the interests of the person with a disability.

This section empowers the personal advocate, acting on behalf of the person with a disability, to enter any place that provides day care, residential care or training for him or her and to represent his or her interests. It also provides that the personal advocate may, subject to data protection legislation, access information and attend meetings or consultations on behalf of the person concerned.

Section 7D(4) imposes an obligation on statutory or voluntary bodies to co-operate with a personal advocate in the performance of his or her functions on behalf of the person with a disability. Subsections (5), (6) and (7) of section 7D set out provision for offences to apply to persons who obstruct or hinder a personal advocate in that context.

The new section 7E of the Comhairle Act 2000 provides that the citizens information board may

arrange for the functions of personal advocates to be performed by persons other than members of the staff of the board, as it considers appropriate. Such a move by the board would be subject to the approval of the Minister for Social and Family Affairs.

Sections 6 and 7 of the Citizens Information Bill provide for changes to the term of office and membership of the citizens information board. The changes are considered necessary in light of operational experience since the board was first constituted in June 2000.

Section 6 amends section 9 of the Comhairle Act 2000 so the term of office of members of the board will be extended from three to five years and so the number of members of the citizens information board will be reduced from 20 to 15. The approach is in keeping with a general trend towards smaller, more efficient boards in respect of State agencies. For example, in the case of other agencies under my Department's aegis, the Pensions Board and the Combat Poverty Agency have 16 members on their boards while the Family Support Agency has a 12-member board. This section provides for a consequential adjustment to be made to the board arising from the reduction to 15 members. The number of members representing people with disabilities is changing and, having regard to Government mainstreaming policy, the nominating role of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform in regard to those members is being altered.

Section 7 amends section 11 of the Comhairle Act 2000. It provides for a revised quorum for board meetings as a result of the reduction from 20 to 15 members. The quorum is being reduced from 11 members to a number between eight and five as may be considered appropriate by the board from time to time.

Section 8 provides for the insertion of a new section 24A in the Comhairle Act. It provides that the Minister for Social and Family Affairs may issue policy directions to the citizens information board, including directions to directly undertake information campaigns on specific social services.

Section 9 sets out the standard provisions relating to Short Title and collective citation. It also provides for the commencement arrangements for the implementation of the Bill's provisions with different commencement dates applying to different sections of the Bill.

The introduction of the personal advocacy service by the citizens information board is an important priority in my Department's programme of work to enhance the services available to people with disabilities. Much progress has been made since 2001 when the prospect of such a service was mooted. The views and the experience of people with disabilities and of those who work with them have made a significant contribution to the development of the programme already under way and to the development of the proposals in this legislation. Officials of my

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Department will continue to consult with disability interest groups throughout the legislative process.

Advocacy is in many respects a new and emerging profession in Ireland. Even as this legislation is being progressed, new models of best practice are being developed and indeed new emerging needs are being brought to my attention. I advise the House that in this context it is my intention to bring forward a number of Committee Stage amendments to address some of these issues. I am considering the inclusion in the Bill of a broad definition of the qualifications required to be a personal advocate in the personal advocacy service. Such a provision is contained in section 26 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004. I am also considering the inclusion of a new provision framed in terms of the citizens information board proactively following up cases of people who are particularly vulnerable and who may be in need of a personal advocate where cases are brought to the attention of the citizens information board.

A further proposal for a Committee Stage amendment relates to public accounting requirements to ensure clarity in legislation regarding the accountability of the chief executive officer of a statutory body to the Committee of Public Accounts in line with certain recommendations of the Mullarkey report.

The issue of resources is, of course, central to the successful implementation of any new service introduced by the Government. I assure the House that the resources necessary to introduce the new personal advocacy service will be provided by way of an additional allocation to the citizens information board which will be negotiated in the annual Estimates and budgetary processes for my Department. In 2005, an additional €1.15 million was provided to Comhairle for the development of the voluntary and community advocacy programme in preparation for the introduction of the personal advocacy service. A further €2 million will be spent on the continued development of the advocacy programme in 2006 with an additional €250,000 set aside specifically for the early stage development of the personal advocacy service which is provided for in this Bill.

This legislation, which I recommend to the House, represents two major steps forward. We are establishing the personal advocacy service and establishing a fresher structure for the citizens information boards by creating a national organisation called the citizens information board. This will be achieved by giving new powers and focus to that board and will ensure it is focused on the provision of information, increasingly to immigrants, throughout the country. People coming to our shores will now see more clearly that the provision of information is their entitlement.

All our people will receive more succinct information and independent, impartial and confiden-

tial advice. This relates not only to social welfare but to a range of issues across the public service and will be achieved through the network of offices, websites, dedicated phone lines and highly professional staff and volunteers throughout the country.

This Bill provides for a new, well funded advocacy service and the restructuring of the way the State gives information to immigrants and citizens alike through a new citizens information board structure.

Mr. Stanton: I welcome publication of this Bill and hope it is enacted by the Oireachtas as soon as possible. We will do everything we can to facilitate this as we have waited over two years for it to come before the House and it is badly needed. I thank the Minister for Social and Family Affairs and his officials for the briefing we received today which was, as usual, welcome, useful and positive.

The Citizens Information Bill 2006 is one of the major strands of the national disability strategy. It will establish a personal advocacy service operated by the citizens information board. The establishment of a personal advocacy service to assist people with disabilities in accessing health and personal social services and supports has been urgently sought by numerous disability groups, in particular the National Disability Authority, NDA, and Inclusion Ireland. The service aims to ensure equal access to services and supports for people with disabilities. The Minister stated that he expects the service to be fully operational by 2008.

It is clear that advocacy services for people with disabilities are underdeveloped in Ireland. The 2004 report, *Developing an Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities*, stated that service providers and the community and voluntary sectors are increasingly aware of the need for these services. The report stated that unlike many other countries, Ireland still has a significant population of people with disabilities resident in institutions. Perhaps this Bill does not focus on this aspect enough. It is something we should consider. The report also stated: "As these people are particularly vulnerable, it is essential that advocacy services are designed to reach out to this group." We have seen various reports over the years condemning the practices carried out in many institutions. This is something we need to discuss further on Committee Stage.

The first Comhairle (Amendment) Bill was published in September 2004. It was intended to establish on a statutory basis a personal advocacy service for people with disabilities. However, this Bill was withdrawn to be replaced by the Citizens Information Bill. I welcome the idea of a one-stop shop. Some colleagues did not know of the existence of the Oasis website — they simply did not know what it was. I was amazed to discover that and I compliment those who developed this fantastic website. It contains useful information

laid out in an easily accessible way and I use it all the time. Now that we are to have a one-stop shop, not only will Members know of the existence of the service, but the public will too. However, I am a little concerned about its name. While it is easy to type the word “Oasis” into an Internet search engine, the term “citizen information” is a bit longer and may be more challenging for people.

An independent advocacy service is essential if people with disabilities are to be fully included in the process of service provision. We discussed personal advocates during the debate on the Disability Act. This will give many people with disabilities, who may be unable to seek services for themselves, the opportunity to put forward their requests and views on the range of services they receive. I welcome the definition of social service outlined in the Bill. However, while it is broad, it does not include transport and access. While section 2 lists a variety of such services and states the definition of social services is not limited to these items, it should explicitly refer to transport and access.

What will be the geographic remit of the personal advocacy service? Where will the personal advocates be based? Will they be based in Dublin only, or around the country? Has the citizens information board worked out how many advocates there will be, what kind of office supports they will have and where they will be located? Perhaps the Minister will refer to this when he responds.

It is worthwhile reminding ourselves what advocacy means. A comprehensive and often quoted definition was provided by Professor Wolfensberger in the 1960s. It is the “functioning — speaking, acting, writing — with minimum conflict of interest on behalf of the sincerely perceived interests of a person or a group in order to promote, protect and defend the welfare of, and justice for, either individuals or groups in a fashion which strives to be emphatic and vigorous”.

One of the main issues is the establishment of the personal advocacy service. I examined how a person can qualify for this service. Individuals need to apply for this service in writing. In one of its submissions, the Disability Federation of Ireland, DFI, pointed out that the service seems to be passive; a person must make an application to it. The Minister seemed to row back from this at the conclusion of his speech. Perhaps we can tease this out further. Individuals may not know where or to whom they must apply, whether he or she is entitled to the service, or even know of its existence. After all, we are talking about the most marginalised and vulnerable in society.

Section 5 of the Bill states that a person must be at “risk of harm to his or her health, welfare or safety if he or she is not provided with the social service or services that he or she is seeking to obtain”. These seem very negative grounds for availing of a service. There should be something

to indicate that a person could avail of the service if he or she would benefit from it. As it stands, individuals will only qualify if harm would otherwise come to them should he or she not get the service. We should turn that around and state that a person qualifies if they would derive benefit from the service. This is a much better way of putting it. In order to qualify for a personal advocate, the person must prove that he or she will come to harm if they do not get the service. How does one do this? The Minister should re-examine this aspect.

The issue of prioritising also arises. Section 5 states that “The board shall have regard to the following to determine the order of priority to be accorded to different qualifying persons in the assignment of personal advocates to such persons...”. It goes on to list five different grounds for qualifying. How this will work is not made clear. It appears that only the most complex services will be dealt with by the personal advocacy service. This needs to be teased out further. Otherwise, the service could tie itself up in knots.

Comhairle has already been providing an advocacy service involving the voluntary and community sector. The DFI suggests that we should be pulling these advocacy services together under a single director. This Bill provides for the establishment of a director of personal advocacy. I am not sure whether this person will be an advocate — perhaps the Minister could let me know. The director of personal advocacy does not seem to have a role in the wider advocacy remit of Comhairle, or the new citizens information board. The role of director would not be particularly onerous, especially at the beginning. It may be useful to examine the overall advocacy of Comhairle and bring it together under the director of advocacy. DFI has recommended that the changes proposed in the Bill should include mechanisms to link the personal advocacy service with the existing advocacy and support functions in Comhairle, and with organisations with a history of acting as advocates or providing advocacy through Comhairle, for those most vulnerable. It is certainly worth examining.

The DFI is also concerned with the complicated nature of the application process and the qualifying criteria outlined in the Comhairle (Amendment) Bill. In order for the personal advocacy services proposals to succeed in supporting those most at risk, the DFI says that the service must respond directly to the needs of people with disabilities. As well as demanding a clear understanding of the isolated and vulnerable position of many people with disabilities, this requires that the service operators are harmonised and are an integrated part of a programme on advocacy. The DFI maintains that there is a passive nature to the proposed service and that many people with disabilities will either have difficulties in self-identifying or being identified through the system, while many others may not

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be deemed eligible to benefit from it. DFI considers this restrictive.

Many people with disabilities are found not only in day and residential care and training places, but also in hospitals and places of detention. Under section 7C, the personal advocate can enter premises to attend and represent the person at any meeting, consultation or discussion but would he or she be able to enter a hospital or place of detention? DFI maintains that the powers of the personal advocate must extend to any place where people with disabilities reside.

Many of those who will qualify for the personal advocacy service will not have the capacity to apply or have someone to apply on their behalf. If someone has an intellectual disability, under the Bill it appears that he or she may apply in writing under section 7B, or such other forms as specified by the Minister, to the director for the assignment of a personal advocate to him or her and he or she shall specify in the application the social service or services he or she is seeking to obtain. Are we talking about an application form? We must make the application process as simple as possible with the service being proactive instead of reactive. It should reach out to the marginalised people who need this help.

What happens if a personal advocate giving advice, information and acting for a person with a disability makes a mistake? Is there a review process? The advocates appear to work on their own; in other cases, there would be a team effort. Will the advocate work as part of a team? If the advocate gives incorrect advice, what recourse does the person have?

It is important that the service is independent, particularly of service providers. That should be written into the legislation — we can work out the wording on Committee Stage. We must also avoid the establishment of a cartel between advocates and service providers; there should always be a distance between the two. An advocate should be fighting on behalf of a person with a disability. Advocates must also avoid downplaying the expectations of the person with the disability.

The advocate can attend and represent the person at any meeting, consultation or discussion but who decides when the meetings take place? If the person is not qualified, the meeting may not take place at all. Who notifies them of the meetings? Are they entitled to such notification?

The advocate can enter at any reasonable time any place where day care or residential care and training is provided for the person. That avoids mention of places of detention and hospitals. Who defines reasonable time? Is it the service provider? Must an appointment be made and notice given and when the advocate attends, what can he or she do? These questions were put to me by an advocate.

A statutory body or voluntary body that provides social services shall co-operate with the per-

sonal advocate in the performance of his or her duties. A person who by act or omission obstructs or hinders a personal advocate in the performance of his or her function shall be guilty of an offence and will be liable on summary conviction to punishment. Can a statutory or voluntary body be guilty of an offence? In the rest of the Bill, it states statutory bodies shall co-operate but here it mentions a “person” who obstructs or hinders an advocate. Who lays that charge?

In similar legislation, an advocate or inspector who enters a premises needs identification and is required by law to produce it. Otherwise, anyone could claim to be acting as a personal advocate for someone. It is important that it is a requirement where, if a person demands entry to a premises, he or she must have such means of identification. That provision should be added to the Bill.

Proceedings for an offence under this section may be brought and prosecuted by the Minister. What is the process for bringing the information to the Minister?

These questions must be teased out as we go through the Bill line by line. This is a short Bill but there is a great deal of detail in it. We are establishing an entirely new service that works with vulnerable people. We must take extra care. We must ensure we give these people a voice and that the service is proactive. The advocates must be trained and qualified to carry out their work and there should be ongoing review of their work. There is a pressing need for a comprehensive advocacy service and this Bill will provide it.

National standards of service for people with disabilities are long overdue. The delay in bringing such standards forward is inexcusable. We need them as soon as possible. There has been a long delay in putting the nursing home inspection regime on a statutory footing, an issue we have consistently highlighted on this side of the House. This breach is exceeded only by the delay in applying statutory national standards of service for those with disabilities. There is no excuse for further hesitation. It would be good to bring those standards into play now while we are establishing a personal advocacy service. The Government must be held accountable for its negligence in this area and the Minister must introduce these standards as a matter of urgency.

Did the Minister consider any other title when Comhairle’s name was changed? The new title, the citizens information board, may be a little long, especially when one considers that it will deal with people who are marginalised or have intellectual or learning disabilities. I am sure if the many intelligent, ingenuous officials working in the Department put their minds to it, they will find a short, snappy, instant recognisable title.

Branding is important and it is a good idea to bring together citizens information centres, Comhairle and Oasis. When will recruitment begin for the new body and how many staff will be appointed?

It is estimated that 400,000 people have some form of disability. How much research has been conducted into demand for personal advocacy services? Does the Department plan to expand the 18 advocacy projects operated by Comhairle?

As I indicated, a person with an intellectual disability seeking a personal advocacy must submit a written application. It is crucial that application forms, if they are required, are easy to understand. We need to avoid circumstances in which those applying for a personal advocate need an advocate to make their application or indicate the social services he or she requires. The applicant may not be aware that he or she is a qualifying person.

I welcome the provision giving a role to the social welfare appeals office. Is it possible to provide that the Ombudsman will act as a further avenue of appeal? I am not certain whether the Ombudsman's legislation covers this area or whether it would be possible to take this step, but the Ombudsman has examined and overturned decisions made by the social welfare appeals office in other areas.

Section 4 amends section 7 of the principal Act by proposing to insert a new paragraph (bb)(i), which states that the board must take account of its financial resources when deciding to provide advocacy services. It is essential that the advocacy service is adequately resourced to ensure no one is denied personal advocacy because the board cannot afford to provide it. I accept the Minister indicated that funding will not be an issue.

The sign language interpretation service for deaf people was covered by the original legislation, the Comhairle Act 2000, but it is not included in the Bill and the Minister did not refer to it. What are his intentions regarding this service? If it is not intended to establish it on a statutory basis, will it operate as another of the Department's administrative schemes? The sign language interpretation service is essential for deaf people, many of whom cannot lip-read and suffer high levels of social exclusion that are intensified by poor literacy levels caused by a lack of communication with education providers and teachers. There is a major shortage of Irish sign language interpreters for deaf people. I understand only 50 freelance interpreters serve approximately 5,000 deaf sign language users and many of these are based in the greater Dublin area. How many additional interpreters will be provided? Where will they be trained and how will they be distributed?

The Bill does not include a facility for the director of the personal advocacy service to appear before an Oireachtas committee, except in the case of accounting for funds. While an Oireachtas committee may be able to call the director before it, similar legislation on other bodies makes explicit provision for directors to appear before committees of the Houses at regular intervals.

I welcome the publication of the Bill and look forward to the Committee Stage debate. I ask the Minister to respond to the points I have raised.

Mr. Penrose: I am glad to have an opportunity to contribute to this debate and espouse the view of the Labour Party on this important, welcome and long awaited legislation. My party will make every effort to facilitate the speedy passage of the Bill, an integral part of the national disability strategy.

The Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004 set out to introduce a personal advocacy service for people with disabilities. The content of that legislation has been incorporated, with significant amendment, into the broader Bill before us. The Disability Federation of Ireland has been in contact with a number of Members, including me, seeking to ensure that various aspects of the legislation are improved and the Labour Party intends to propose such amendments. I note the Minister indicated that suggestions made by the legislative consultative forum will be considered prior to Committee Stage. It is important that all sides show openness to ensure that the best interests of the 400,000 people who have one form of disability or another are addressed in the Statute Book. The Legislature is the forum in which Members act as advocates for those whom they represent and are given an opportunity to suggest improvements to legislation on their behalf.

The Bill replaces the Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004. Comhairle was the successor agency to the National Services Board. The Bill changes the focus of the new agency replacing Comhairle, the citizens information service, and the services it will provide. I note also that the new body will be decentralised to Drogheda. As a statutory agency, the citizens information service will come within the remit of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The original remit of the body was to support the provision of information, advice and advocacy on social services and ensure access to these services. The new body will support the provision of information to the public through three information channels, or "strands" as they were described by the Minister, namely, the Oasis website, the citizens information phone service, CIPS, and a nationwide network of 235 to 240 offices of the citizens information service, CIS. One of these channels, the Oasis website, is administered directly by the organisation, while the CIS and CIPS are delivered by independent voluntary bodies.

Deputy Stanton, who is more technologically minded than me, found the various statistics useful. The Oasis website, for example, counted 2.5 million individual users, while the citizens information phone service received 88,000 calls and the citizen information centres logged 734,000 queries. Between 2003 and 2005, use of the Oasis website and CIPS, both comparatively new services, increased by 144% and 113%, respec-

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tively. In the same period, use of the citizens information service centres increased by 30%.

Essentially as an add-on, the agency was subsequently given a statutory commitment to assist and support people with disabilities in identifying and understanding their needs and options and accessing their entitlements to social and civil services. The original intention was that the Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004 would further strengthen the role of Comhairle in providing personal advocacy services to adults and children with disabilities as they seek to access disability specific and mainstream services. It appears an alternative route has been taken in that the original citizens advice remit is being strengthened while disability is being relegated to an add-on status. We must continue to focus on the disability sector and ensure the necessary services are provided.

At best, the Minister is trying to ride two horses because the Citizens Information Bill has two central themes — on the one hand, the development and expansion of an advocacy service for people with a disability and, on the other, a name change that will give public expression to the link between the national body and citizens information services nationwide. I hope he does not fall between the two.

Comhairle admits that the remit in respect of advocacy services for people with disabilities, as set out in the Citizens Information Bill, will “be rolled out as resources permit”. That is the first warning. There are important issues here. One is the independence of the service; it must not be subject to external interference. I always worry when I see that the hand of the Minister of the day will be the overlay. It is important that the service is not impinged upon or subject to interference so as to diminish its independence. However, the phrase “as resources permit” is the huge financial constraint placed upon the ability of the service to be provided in a wholesome, proper way. That concerns me.

There will be a cost, and I raised this last April. Why must we go to all the bother of rebranding? There will be financial costs in terms of working hours associated with the national rebranding campaign for a service that already exists. It is being strengthened but the main service already exists. Will it cost €0.5 million, €1 million or €1.5 million? Nobody knew last April. Has any research been conducted in the meantime? There is a new logo to replace the clasped hands, the current emblem of the citizens information service. Have we reached that point? Obviously an agency will be or has been appointed to deal with the rebranding. I am concerned about this, given the profligacy of this Government in spending money without examining the cost benefit.

This money would be better spent on additional services rather than inserting some qualifying condition or prohibition clause in the

Bill whereby everything is subject to resources and the say of the Minister. Last April, the Government did not have a clue how much money would be involved in this exercise. The money should be spent on the advocacy service and ensuring that the maximum number of services will be provided for the maximum number of people.

Not everybody in Comhairle was happy that there would have to be a name change. Whose idea was it? The Minister will say it is widening the service and making it more accessible and identifiable for immigrants and people with different languages. That is a point and I will not be churlish or petulant about it. However, I wonder at the penchant for spending significant amounts on money on matters such as logos and the like, which are not a major necessity.

Comhairle has been doing tremendous work. It is an important body. With regard to the personal advocacy service, I must refer to the carers. I have long espoused and articulated their cause; nobody can deny that I have always been a strong and forceful advocate of their cause. The application form for carer’s allowance is mind boggling. There is no need to ask people, in effect, how many spoons of sugar they have in their tea. I detest that type of detail.

I listened yesterday to Derek Mooney’s radio show on RTE 1 between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. I must pay tribute to him. For the first time I heard a public broadcaster say — he obviously did not know that the Labour Party has always advocated the universality of carer’s allowance — that the means test should be abolished. He advocated it strongly. The person to whom he was speaking was obviously in the citizens information centre and could not express a view on policy, only implement it. Derek Mooney is a radio presenter of note and has a major time slot on the airwaves but he did not know that the Labour Party had advocated this move. That is probably a failure on our part but it is also a failure of the general media to ensure that people are aware of these things.

It would cost €180 million to pay the other 100,000 people who provide necessary care, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year. They did get some help from the Minister, and it would be churlish not to acknowledge it, in terms of respite care. Unfortunately, people must wait for considerable periods to avail of respite care, something to which they should be entitled. There should be a free flowing and streamlined system in place. People need this to survive. Sometimes they end up with more severe health difficulties than the people for whom they are caring.

We should not be putting blockages and hurdles in their way. In that context, there must be simplicity in anything that will be dealt with under this legislation. It should not become a morass of form filling. Access to the personal advocacy service must be free flowing and not

become a morass of hurdles, as often happens. It is time to simplify the application form for carer's allowance. It is difficult enough being a carer.

Everybody subscribes to the importance of people being allowed to remain in their homes. I strongly advocate it. People are more content there. The cost of nursing homes is so prohibitive that we cannot turn a blind eye to it. There is already a cost with subventions. The €180, or €200 if the person is over a certain age, is a small cost to the Exchequer and the taxpayer for providing a service that is so important to so many people and which gives people comfort in their home environment, where they feel most content. Simplicity will be most important in this area.

When somebody feels aggrieved by the decision made, it is important that there is an appeals mechanism. I subscribe to Deputy Stanton's view that the Ombudsman should have a role in this area. It would be no harm to give the Ombudsman this remit. The social welfare appeals office works extremely hard to deal with a huge number of appeals. The independence of the office is acknowledged and is essential in ensuring that people get a fair deal under the social welfare system. If they feel aggrieved, they can access an independent appeals office.

However, sometimes one is obliged to wait three months or more for an appeal to be heard. If there will be more appeals as more people have their applications for the intervention of a personal advocate turned down, what steps will the Minister take to ensure there will be more independent appeals officers under the chairman of the chief appeals office? There must be an increase in the number of appeals officers. Otherwise, the system will become bogged down. I am glad that the chief appeals officers will have a role. It gives one greater confidence in the system if there is an independent appeals process but it is important that the appeals are heard quickly, so justice can be administered swiftly. People can then be confident that if they are entitled to something, the decision will be made quickly. That is most important.

A number of months ago, the Disability Federation of Ireland, DFI, responded to the Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004 by way of presentation to the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs. The DFI raised a number of issues it wanted to be addressed. The first of these was the provision of a review mechanism in respect of the operation of the legislation and the second was the establishment of a comprehensive advocacy remit for a director of advocacy within Comhairle. There is a significant difference between what the Minister for Social and Family Affairs has included in the Citizens Information Bill and what was requested by the DFI, namely, the appointment of a director of advocacy within Comhairle whose remit would extend to cover the overall advocacy function within that organisation. The third issue highlighted by the DFI was the need for access to and participation in the

personal advocacy service among people with disabilities.

The Minister has introduced the Citizens Information Bill, which was to have been brought forward before the summer recess. One can understand why that did not happen, however, because significant legislative and policy developments took place during the summer months. Only last month, for example, the provisions of the Disability Act 2005 finally came into play. In addition, the social partnership programme, *Towards 2016*, was brought forward in recent months. The latter includes mechanisms to progress Government commitments under the national disability strategy. One of those commitments was to establish an advocacy service for people with disabilities. In particular, *Towards 2016* states that legislative provision for the introduction of the new personal advocacy service will provide for the assignment of a personal advocate to a person with a disability who is unable to obtain or who has difficulty in obtaining a social service without the assistance or support of the personal advocate. It states that this will complement, in a balanced way, the other advocacy and support functions of Comhairle in relation to people with disabilities.

In fairness, this is a first step and it was easy for the Government to include it in this legislation, which was formerly the Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004. It is well recognised that officials of the Minister's Department worked hard during the summer and engaged with the disability legislation consultative group. As a result of that work, the Minister made a commitment that some legislative provision would be framed on Committee Stage and that the citizens information board would follow up, in a proactive way, the cases of people who are particularly vulnerable and who may need personal advocates in circumstances where such cases are brought to its attention. That is extremely important, particularly in light of people's tendency to throw up their hands and state that a matter cannot be progressed further. If, however, a Member of these Houses brought a case to the attention of the citizens information board, it is important that it should be in a position to follow up on his or her concerns in order that people's rights and entitlements will be protected and pursued. The board must operate as an active participant to ensure that such rights are vindicated.

The Minister received a great deal of assistance over the years in respect of the development of the advocacy service. The report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, which was published in 1996, and the disability legislation consultative group's document, *Equal Citizens*, which was published in 2003, clearly outlined the need to develop an independent advocacy agency. *Towards 2016* underlined the glaring need for such a service. What must come next is a legislative framework that will offer people with disabilities the right to a full range of independent

[Mr. Penrose.]

advocacy services that will assist people to access public services. Equal Citizens, the report of the disability legislation consultative group, indicates that there is a need for advocacy services to provide training for people with disabilities in advocacy, as well as supports for parents and families regarding their role as advocates. This recommendation is essential.

The three documents to which I refer, including *Towards 2016*, clearly outline the requirements of a holistic and successful advocacy service which will underpin any framework for advocacy proposed through legislation. That is what we must try to achieve and it is the objective on which we must focus as we commence our deliberations.

Deputy Stanton stated that the DFI and others have indicated that they have some concerns regarding the introduction of the personal advocacy service as set out in the Bill. It would be foolish and somewhat ostrich-like of us to ignore such concerns because they have been raised by people who operate at the coalface. The DFI set out its concerns in a previous submission on the Comhairle (Amendment) Bill, particularly in respect of the need to introduce timely review mechanisms. It is important that every three, four or five years a review mechanism should be triggered. Section 6 of the Disability Act 2005 provides a review mechanism and it is important that the Bill before us, particularly because it relates to people with disabilities, should also make such provision. It would be prudent, wise and useful to build in a review mechanism that would be triggered after a reasonable period, be it two, three, four or five years. It is important that there is some evaluation or assessment that will indicate the level of progress that has been made and highlight whether there is a glaring need for a change to be made in respect of any aspect of the advocacy service we are about to put in place on a statutory basis. Such a mechanism is important because it will provide the only means by which the service will be successful.

The DFI indicated that the personal advocacy service proposed in the Bill will fall significantly short of people's expectations and that the establishment of the service will not, in itself, secure the development of a comprehensive programme of advocacy for people with disabilities. It also highlighted the importance of Comhairle's existing work on advocacy, in respect of which provision is made in section 7(1) of the Comhairle Act, which states:

(1) The functions of the Board shall be—

(a) to support the provision of or, where the Board considers it appropriate, to provide directly, independent information, advice and advocacy services so as to ensure that individuals have access to accurate, comprehensive and clear information relating to social services and are referred to the relevant services, In other words, the DFI is

saying that the critical and important advocacy work carried out by Comhairle under section 7(1) of the Comhairle Act must complement that of the personal advocacy service. Together, these services must provide an integrated and comprehensive system of advocacy for people with disabilities.

Section 4 of the Citizens Information Bill proposes to introduce changes to section 7(1)(b) of the Comhairle Act and to add several subsections to the section. It would be foolish of the Minister to miss the opportunity afforded him in the Bill to put in place a holistic advocacy programme which will link all Comhairle's work in the area of advocacy and of which the new personal advocacy service will be a new, exciting, important and integral part.

We should give some consideration to the proposal that a director of advocacy be appointed to give effect to all of the advocacy and support functions in Comhairle as they relate to people with disabilities. Will the proposed director of personal advocacy services, included in section 7A(6) and (8), be sufficient? Will he or she have the opportunity to oversee the various advocacy and support functions of Comhairle? We should look at this and if the Minister does not support it, he should explain why not on Committee Stage.

Any changes that are made in this Bill should be clear and transparent. How will a personal advocacy service enhance existing programmes through Comhairle and the community and voluntary sector? How will they interact and integrate? It is important that Comhairle continues its work and that there is an integrated delivery of these advocacy services and programmes can be supported.

The power of entry is outlined in section 7D(2) of the Bill. It states:

A personal advocate assigned to a qualifying person under this Act may, for the purpose of performing his or her functions, at any reasonable time enter any place where day care, residential care or training is provided for the person and make such inquiries in such place in relation to the person as he or she considers appropriate. That appears to be a fairly comprehensive definition of a personal advocate's power of entry. I believe that we should welcome the extension of that power because it enables personal advocates to link with service settings that are currently providing a service to a qualifying person. However, we should examine the places in which people with disabilities are found. They are not just found in day care, residential care or training locations. They are also found in places of detention, such as hospitals. We must ensure that power of entry afforded to personal advocates extends to any place in which people with disabilities reside. It is extremely important that it is not

curtailed in any way. Wherever a person with a disability resides, a personal advocate should have the power of entry to deal with that person and advocate his or case having obtained the relevant information.

The Minister is being skimpy with the resources provided under the Bill. I concur with Deputy Stanton's point about the sign language service. The current sign language services should be extended on a nationwide basis. The mechanism used to implement the services, be it through technology or training, should also be extended nationwide.

I support the broad thrust of the Bill and I look forward to debating it on Committee Stage.

Ms C. Murphy: This Bill is to be welcomed in principle. However, I wish to raise issues relating to its practical application. If someone arrives into my constituency office who is a suitable candidate for referral to an advocacy worker, I want to be sure that the resources exist to deal adequately with the issues. My local citizens information centre in Maynooth covers a very large area. In fact, the three north Kildare towns have a population in excess of the city of Waterford. The CIC does excellent work and is developing all the time. However, the service seems to develop in a manner which puts the egg before the chicken, as the centres are encouraged to seek additional clients, offer outreach services and generate additional workloads, but only at that point do they seek resources to deal with that increase. A need must be established before it can be satisfied. An additional amount of work will be placed on the CICs, even though I am sure they will be up to the challenge. Much of what they do is supported by people on CE schemes.

The advocacy workers currently employed by the CIC are employed on a shared basis, often between different geographical areas or between different CICs. My understanding is that the current advocacy workers are support workers for the information officers in the CICs, rather than working directly with the client. The problem created by having a shared worker between two CICs on Dublin's southside is significantly different from that created by having a shared worker in two CICs in Kildare and Wicklow, or Cork and Kerry. We can end up with a disproportionate service and location can be important from that point of view.

The advocacy officer described in the Bill is dedicated to disability as it relates to social services. That is quite limited and members of the Disability Federation of Ireland probably feel the same way. How will it work in practice? I question the number of advocacy workers to be employed. Will the employment be shared? Who will estimate the case load? Will there be an average case load? There are different levels of population in different parts of the country. How will

the location of the advocacy worker be determined? People must have access to the service.

Many citizens information centres have limited physical space. They have been very frugal and have tended to be very good at finding a central location, but space is often very limited and one of their biggest problems can be in accommodating additional community employment employees.

The accommodation will need to be accessible if a drop-in service is to be provided. These are practical issues in providing a service. Is it intended to be a call-in service or will the advocacy workers do most of their work on an outreach basis? For someone in a wheelchair and with limited means, the geography is important. How will they get to the centre if it is to be a drop-in service?

With regard to the estimation of needs, it is difficult to judge the needs in the first year of operation and a better estimation may be possible once the centre is up and running. People will take some time to become familiar with the service and to know that it is available. It will take time to build up a client list. There will be a need to advertise or get in contact with individuals who need the service.

Will the advocacy employee assist groups of people with disabilities? For example, St. John of God's service in St. Raphael's in Celbridge carries out ongoing advocacy work with its clients which is very impressive. I have been involved in a few sessions. During the local elections, I and other candidates were grilled by the clients who had been working on this over several months. They knew exactly the issues they wanted to raise, which were mainly access issues such as dishing footpaths, pedestrian crossings or even moving an ESB pole to allow for the movement of wheelchairs. They made a presentation which included photographs. They put a lot of effort into it. I noted they were more interested in issues than the people I met on the doorsteps who did not have a disability. Many of them live in traditional housing estates with support staff from St. Raphael's. If I as a candidate did not call to their house during an election, it would be noted and I would be hauled over the coals. The advocacy work certainly worked in the case of those people. It gave them confidence and they were most impressive in a group situation. Will the advocacy worker operate in a group situation?

I have been involved with the network of people with disabilities in Kildare who try to link up the various agencies and organisations for individuals with disabilities in order to address the issues in a comprehensive way by advocating for services and facilities. A group can achieve a greater result than an individual and I recommend that this aspect be developed.

I talked to a number of people who have an association with citizens information centres and who attended a course on the subject of this Bill which was held in Sligo. They were concerned

[Ms C. Murphy.]

that aspects of their future work seemed vague in the Bill. They work at the coalface and when a person walks in their door, they cannot give an academic response, but rather must provide practical advice because this is what is sought. The existing citizens information centres are being encouraged to expand their workload by providing outreach services. I am concerned that they will be asked to take on much more work without the back-up services being provided and resources will be a key issue.

My contribution is to do with practical issues because the Bill is of no value if the practical side is not addressed and if the Bill does not deliver in practice. Building communities is more than just bricks and mortar. A citizens information centre and an advocacy centre for people who require it are crucially important.

The role of citizens information centres is changing. Many of the people who attend now are immigrants and there may be a language barrier. This was not the case ten years ago. The citizens information centre in Maynooth employs 1.5 information officers and its catchment area has the same population as Waterford city. A small number of staff deal with a very large area, with the support of community employment staff. While the community employment staff receive excellent training, they are often moved on when fully trained and at their best. This service will require continuity and I am concerned it may not exist in this kind of environment.

I welcome section 4 of the Bill as it is a useful mechanism. It is encouraging that voluntary bodies realise they must address this issue of access if they are to be grant aided or receive national lottery funding.

Mr. Boyle: This Bill was announced with great fanfare a number of years ago as the third leg of a stool which the Government intended introducing to fill in many of the gaps that existed and which I would argue still exist in the policy on people with disabilities. Since that time, the Education of Persons with Disabilities Act and the Disability Act have been passed. This Bill is the second incarnation of the Citizens Information Bill, as the Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004 has already been laid before the House. I have yet to hear the reason that Bill, which is still on the Order Paper, was not the vehicle chosen to proceed with completing this Government initiative which was announced with such great fanfare. The only issue between that Bill and this was a concern that seemed to exist about the name of the organisation. If this was the central issue, then it should be explained in the debate.

I wish to declare an interest. A number of years ago I worked on a six-month contract with what was then the National Rehabilitation Board. I still remain confused as to the reason that body disappeared into the mist. It became part of the new Comhairle organisation. It seems that some-

one decided the delivery of public information and services to people with disabilities was an even knit in some way. It is a compatibility which did not exist then and does not exist now to a certain extent. I agree there is a need for the introduction of a personal advocacy service, but I cannot understand the reason for a marriage of convenience and the maintenance of a very uneven alliance for the delivery of very distinct and separate services. I hope this anomaly can be addressed in the future.

I hope the chosen name will be a matter of debate on Committee Stage and that consideration will be given to renaming the Bill and the organisation which the Bill is to establish. From where has the demand to change the name of Comhairle come? Will the Minister reveal whether he has received particular representations in this regard? Is it his personal opinion which has informed this change of legislation?

Could it be that the lack of proper consultation within the organisation which is currently delivering these services has failed to bring about a proper focus as to what that organisation is and should be about? While this Bill is necessary, it is flawed in many respects and much attention will have to be paid to it on Committee Stage if we are to repair what should be much needed services. That said, the provision of personal advocacy was an essential element in the aborted disability Bill 2001, section 5 of which came in for much critical comment at what is known as the infamous Mansion House meeting which drove the Government to withdraw that Bill.

The concerns of people who live with disability, those who live with people with disability and organisations who represent their interests is that the introduction of personal advocacy in this way, with much uncertainty as to how it is to be resourced and what it can achieve, may end up as nothing more than a fancier form of consultation with no guarantee of adequate resources being provided or delivery of services which those with disability so badly need. At the heart of this has been the Government's refusal, despite this being the third in a series of Bills, to recognise the need for rights-based legislation for people with disability. Until that is ceded by the Government as a central principle or is acted on, debates on people with disability will be informed by this debate.

Outside of that, there are a number of other flaws that need to be debated. Even though I speak in a negative sense, I hope the Minister will be open to accepting some amendments on Committee Stage. The decision to entitle it the citizens information board will cause untold confusion. The introduction of a statutory board when there already exists 42 independent citizen information boards that are non-statutory and deliver face to face services, which will interact with a statutory board which will not deliver face to face services, does nothing to clear the confusion that exists in this area. If the Minister wants to talk about what

this organisation would do, he can either maintain or come up with a different version of Comhairle as a name or put into the title its more wide embracing remit which is to be an advocacy and information service because it certainly is more than a citizens information board. The work being done under that title is done in a different and more effective way. That is a particular confusion that needs to be sorted out.

The appointment of a director of personal advocacy services is welcome. My concern is whether the person to be appointed under the provisions of the Bill will have sufficient independence. It is important that independence is given and can be acted on. There are too many references in the Bill to the office of that person having to refer to or possibly be influenced by the Minister in any given time. If we are talking about asserting the rights of people with disabilities, there has to be a necessary distance and independence in this office to allow it to be effective.

On a slightly more technical aspect, the establishment of a new office should be restricted to the same type of restrictions as for other office holders in the State. The idea of a State appointment being limited to a seven-year term and only extended under certain circumstances, with the advice of the chief executive of the organisation, is missing from the Bill. If we want to appoint the right person and have renewal of ideas and energies in that office, such a provision should be included in the Bill.

The other area where the Minister is proposing to make changes is in the composition of the board. Some are welcome changes while others are in need of further consideration. I was surprised that during the past year the Comhairle organisation appointed a new chair, yet there was no public announcement of that appointment. The person appointed is excellent. He is a well respected former member of the press gallery here. I wonder whether that information was withheld not because of any modesty on the part of the person appointed, but because it was decided not to name the composition and chair of the board until a new name and remit of the organisation was put in place. Perhaps I can have clarity from the Minister on that issue.

I agree with the reduction in board members. A membership of 20 is too large, while 15 will make it more effective. The terms of office which are to be extended from three to five years have a logic, although the Minister and I will disagree about the manner of public appointments. My preference and that of my party would be for an independent public appointments commission rather than that such appointments should be in the remit of an individual Minister, but we can argue about that in another forum. The proposal to reduce the number representing people with disabilities from five to three needs to be looked at again because it is not a proportionate reduction. What had been a 25% representation on the board of 20 becomes a 20% representation

on a board of 15 members. There are issues about whether the representation is of people with disability or people representing people with disabilities. It would be a retrograde step if in a smaller board the voice of people with disability was smaller on the new board. The Minister should at least increase the number to four. If he is open to such amendment, it would be a big improvement on the Bill.

The only other governance issue he wants to talk about is the quorum for board meetings. There is a certain logic in that because it is hard to get a quorum for meetings at the best of times. I would suggest on Committee Stage that to ensure there is a voice of people with disability, at least one member of that quota at all times should be one of the representatives who are appointed in that way. I welcome the fact that those people will no longer be appointed by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if only for the fact that I am always happy to see less decisions being made by the current Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

While I have strong reservations about the Bill, I recognise the need to implement it and I am willing to co-operate with the Minister to ensure much of the Bill comes into being. I hope he is forthcoming and accepts a number of amendments on Committee Stage.

Mr. Crowe: I thank the Minister's staff for the briefing earlier today which was helpful and much appreciated.

I listened carefully to what the Minister said on the Bill, particularly on the important changes to the Comhairle Act which, he said, would strengthen the functions of the statutory body in the provision of high quality information, advice, awareness and advocacy as part of the delivery of a new seamless and customer friendly national information service under one easily accessible and highly visible brand, citizen information. None of us could have any problem with that.

He went on to speak about accompanying sectoral plans and the Education for People with Special Needs Act. This demonstrates the direction in which legislation is going. Unfortunately, when we look at the Education for People with Special Needs Act, we are all aware of the difficulties of roll-out.

Parents of special needs children have problems in accessing school places, speech therapists and so on. Much of the problem is the lack of resources. I listened to what the Minister had to say about resources but it is vague. The issue is whether this Bill will be resourced sufficiently. One speaker mentioned Irish sign language and the problem that it is centred in the Dublin area. Similarly, if one looks at the issue of children with special needs, the national educational psychology scheme is around the Dublin area and the east coast generally, so there are problems of roll-out in that regard.

[Mr. Crowe.]

The Education Welfare Board was established as a statutory organisation and everybody agreed that it was a great idea, but the necessary resources were not provided. Even though that board is statutorily responsible for children attending school, the resources are clearly not there. If this Bill is to work, it comes down to the provision of resources.

The Minister did not mention in the Bill the fact that if one has a disability in Ireland, one is more likely to be poor, unemployed and on welfare. Therefore, the difficulties facing such people are compounded. The ESRI estimates that fewer than one in three potentially eligible claimants had made a claim and been awarded a family income supplement payment. This ties in with the question of advocacy and highlights the fact that people in need of services are not getting them. Advocates for the disability sector say how society impairs people with disabilities. The lack of roll-out of information hampers such people's access to the services they require.

The introduction of a personal advocacy service specifically aimed at clients with disability is particularly welcome. If the required support is there for them, things are clearly going in the right direction. Personal advocates can be invaluable for marginalised and vulnerable people who are seeking their entitlements and understand the criteria applying to them. While I am worried about the roll-out of those personal advocate services, today's briefing has clarified the matter to some extent.

As was mentioned earlier, the Disability Federation of Ireland has called for the establishment of a director of advocacy who would not merely implement and supervise the personal advocacy service, but would also be responsible for linking and delivering a comprehensive system of advocacy, including a personal advocacy service which would play a vital part. It is essential that the new personal advocacy service should complement the other advocacy functions of Comhairle for persons with disability. The Minister can ensure this by extending the functions of the proposed director of the advocacy service, as other speakers said.

Concerns have been expressed about changing the name Comhairle but I do not have a problem with the branding of the organisation. If people wish to change the name, I have no problem with it. I am more concerned about the roll-out of the services provided.

The purpose of the legislation is to improve access to services by vulnerable groups but the ongoing transfer of community welfare officers from the HSE to the Department of Social and Family Affairs is causing concern in many communities. Details on community welfare officers are vague, which is a worry because these are the people who will be rolling out such services. There is a fear that people with disabilities will lose out if such services are no longer provided in

their locality. This could result in longer travelling times to access services.

The accountability of the citizens information boards to the House is another question that arises in the context of quangos. Who will respond to parliamentary questions in this regard? Will the Minister, Deputy Brennan, reply to them or will they be passed elsewhere?

Vulnerable people, such as those with disabilities, should be facilitated in participating fully and equally in society. In this regard, the procedures used to apply for the assignment of a personal advocate must be user-friendly. The powers of personal advocates need to be extended to include all places in which people with disabilities reside. The success of this Bill will be judged on the roll-out of services it achieves but it will take time to assess.

I do not have a major problem with the Bill, which represents a positive step forward. We hope to improve it on Committee Stage but I do not think anyone could have a problem with the broad thrust of the legislation. If it improves services for people with disabilities and is rights-based, it will be a positive achievement. Facilities for such people are thin on the ground and at local level we are still dealing with simple matters such as the provision of suitable footpaths and access to housing. Even though legislation has improved, small things can have a big impact on the quality of people's lives, yet we are still trying to catch up, which is a pity.

Mr. O'Connor: I will keep the thrust of what I want to say until tomorrow's debate when I wish to contribute again. I echo what other colleagues have said in complimenting the Minister, Deputy Brennan, and his staff for looking after Members' needs and keeping us fully informed. I am glad that so many prominent Members of the Opposition were here to hear my brief contribution. I particularly wish to single out Deputies Penrose and Stanton as we work well together on the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs. I hope Deputy Penrose will not get into trouble because I said that. He runs the meetings of that joint committee very well. On all the occasions that he has attended the joint committee, the Minister will be aware that we work well together.

I am happy to work with the Minister as secretary of the policy group in our party, Fianna Fáil. The Minister listens to what Members say and the Bill reflects some of the matters raised at the joint committee, as well as matters he has heard about from Members generally. As the Minister said when introducing this Bill, we should always deliver customer-friendly services to the public. Deputy Catherine Murphy spoke about every street in Kildare and in tomorrow's debate I will talk about Tallaght. I am proud of the citizens' information service there. I was invited to be a member of that particular board but when I became a public representative, I was

no longer eligible. While I do not have a gripe about it, I sometimes wonder how public representation on various boards is addressed. While I am not referring to the Minister personally in this respect, I feel it is important to make that point.

In tomorrow's debate I will support what other colleagues have said with regard to the various disability groups that have spoken to us at length over the years. While we all acknowledge that there has been much progress, we must continue to listen to what they are saying, without patronising them. They are the people on the ground and, as such, they understand the issues involved. Like Deputy Crowe, I receive calls every day about disability matters. Earlier today, somebody contacted me about access in and around his estate to the local community centre and other local services. Everybody has a role to play in various bodies, including their local authority, which in my constituency is South Dublin County Council.

Debate adjourned.

Message from Seanad.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Seanad Éireann has passed the Sea Pollution (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2003, without amendment.

Private Members' Business.

Health Services: Motion.

Ms McManus: I move:

That Dáil Éireann, believing:

- that the Irish people are entitled to a health service that will deliver excellence, equality and efficiency;
- that a person's financial means must not be a barrier to him or her receiving the most appropriate and best medical treatment; and
- that health must be treated as a community service;

expresses its serious concern at the growing pattern of privatisation of medical services under the current Government and the increasing trend towards reliance on for-profit medicine;

deploring, in particular:

- the decision of the Minister for Health and Children and the Government to promote the building of private for-profit hospitals on the grounds of existing voluntary and public hospitals;

- the continued use of tax incentives to promote the development of private super-clinics;
- the increased use of beds in private nursing homes, for which no statutory scheme of regulation and inspection is in place; and
- the running down of the publicly provided home help service and the decision to contract a US based company to provide home help services for the elderly;

calls on the Government to abandon this strategy as it will exacerbate the two-tier system of health care, whereas the goal should be to deliver an integrated service, and to:

- move immediately to provide at least 1,500 community care beds for patients who currently and inappropriately occupy acute hospital beds;
- publish a coherent programme for investment in additional acute hospital beds in not-for-profit hospitals, as promised in the health strategy published in 2001;
- mandate the Health Service Executive to pursue strategies that will make greater use of existing beds, including more ward rounds by consultants and better discharge planning;
- abolish tax incentives for super private clinics and use the monies thus freed up, as well as lands on public hospitals, where appropriate, to construct community care facilities;
- establish an independent inspectorate to implement a rigorous programme of inspection in all nursing homes and community care facilities; and
- invest in a modern home help service and establish a programme to train and employ a significantly greater number of public health nurses whose services are so valuable to elderly patients.

I wish to share time with Deputies Howlin and Costello, by agreement.

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

Ms McManus: I thank my Labour colleagues for agreeing to table this motion. It is important that we discuss in our national Parliament what we want as a people from our health service. Ask anyone in the street what they want when they become sick and the answer is unequivocal. It would be the same as what any of us in this Chamber would want for ourselves and for those we love, namely, to be able to get medical care when we need it and not because we can afford

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it, to be able to access a hospital bed without delay and with dignity, to receive top-class attention in a hospital that is clean, efficient and health promoting, to come home when we are able or able enough to do so with supports close at hand, and when our time comes to be able to die in conditions which respect our vulnerability at the end of our lives. That is what people want from our health service. The public desire is clear. It is diametrically opposed to the desire of private developers and business interests to make the biggest profits possible from health care. There is no shame in that because that is what they do. However, there is no glory in it either, although there are some on the Government side who glorify the market to a ludicrous degree. The leopard does not change its spots because of any glossy or soft-focus marketing of private health care and the pure and simple objective remains to make money.

On occasion, the making of money can coincide with the public interest but it does not always do so and when it comes to health care, the two interests rarely coincide. The Labour Party recognises that a role exists for the private sector but the over reliance on that sector espoused by this Government is not good for patients. The experience in general has been that the impact of large scale privatisation of health is socially regressive and very costly, yet we have a Government so wedded to the market that it makes the choice to follow the private route even when the best advice is to do otherwise. This is clearly a choice made by Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats. By funding for-profit hospitals out of the public purse, they choose a quick fix solution despite poor returns for the taxpayer and a deepening divide between the public and private systems of health care. Having done so, they hope to divert attention from their inability to introduce progressive changes and real improvements in health.

The Minister for Health and Children is at least consistent. After all, she carries a lot of ideological baggage. Her leader has argued the case that inequality is good for society, her party stands by the principle that greed is good and her policy of featherbedding private health care businesses reflects her world view. The Labour Party fundamentally disagrees with the Progressive Democrats agenda. We are opposed to the privatisation of our health services and we will, if returned to Government, bring this wasteful and ill-thought scheme to an end. We will strengthen and expand the public and not-for-profit hospital sector and bridge the gap between public and private patients.

The Minister has prepared no proper analysis for her scheme and she will not do so because no analysis will support her case. In fact, the only argument in favour of such a plan would arise if the Government was unable to find the capital to invest in health care but we all know that is not

an issue at present. If the Minister wants to convince us, she should publish the results of cost benefit analyses being carried out on her scheme. The Department of Finance seems to have no difficulty with stalling other health projects through sanctions, yet it blithely allowed this scheme to proceed despite an estimated first year cost of €2 billion. Today, I sought information from the HSE but, once again, it was impossible to extract any details which would help me prepare this speech.

The Minister's proposal was made for ideological rather than logical reasons because she has an almost foolish attachment to Boston over Berlin. Logic would warn us to keep as far as we can from US health care system, yet she is trying to bring us closer to it. Health care in the US is extremely expensive and deeply unfair. Approximately 40 million Americans who lack health cover are locked out of an unequal health system in an unequal society. In Ireland we spend €1,950 per person per annum on health, a sum which the Minister seems to consider excessive. Does she even know that health care largely provided by for profit interests in the US costs €5,535 per person? Due to the unequal nature of US society, health outcomes are relatively poor in terms of life expectancy and infant mortality.

The Tánaiste should be told that, far from inequality being good for us, a fair society is a healthier society. The US demonstrates the link between inequality and low health outcomes which a massive investment in health has failed to address. Almost 16% of GDP in the US is spent on health care because of the private nature of the health service and almost 50% of the world's expenditure on health occurs in the US. Despite that, the Government persists with private solutions in order to disguise its failure to deliver a decent health service, let alone a world-class one. The Minister will no doubt argue, as she has done before, that handing over scarce public lands to private interests along with enormous tax breaks is not privatisation. It looks, sounds and acts like privatisation but the Minister does not see it in that way. She maintains that all she is doing is freeing up private beds in public hospitals to provide more capacity. However, her claim is simply not true. She is creating additional private beds to those in our public hospitals. Private patients will still be entitled to access beds in public hospitals and they will continue to do so. After all, 68% of all patients come through accident and emergency departments, a figure which includes public and private patients. It is untrue to claim that private patients will no longer present at public hospitals.

Speaking at a private health care conference, the Minister stated: "It is not privatisation to cease the practice whereby 20% of new public beds built with public capital are reserved for private use." However, she never told us how she intends to stop patients from exercising their rights. There is no evidence to indicate that the

addition of private beds will liberate beds for public patients on a like by like basis. We simply do not know whether that is the case and the Government has not bothered to find out. We do know, however, that the taxpayer will pay for a net increase in private beds. The likelihood is that we will end up with an overly doctored class of private patients who enjoy additional privileges and pay higher insurance premia, while public patients will continue to wait in line. There is an Irish phrase which, roughly translated, means "to grease the bum of the overfed pig". That, it seems, is the goal of this Government.

It is worth reminding ourselves that we are citizens of a republic. During this year, the 90th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, we have spent much time debating many aspects of our history. We need to begin a debate on the meaning of being a citizen in this republic and the rights that citizenship confers on us as individuals, such as rights to education, health care and a roof over our heads. Must we accept these rights do not matter because it is all about "bling bling" or that gold credit cards are the passport to good health care? The Labour Party will not be drawn down that path. If returned to Government, we will end this crazy misuse of public resources and bridge rather than broaden the divide between public and private patients.

Overdependency on the private sector will lead to the cherry-picking of patients. For-profit hospitals choose profitable procedures and services rather than those which meet greatest need. This trend will be facilitated further if private hospitals are placed next to public ones. Private hospitals rarely have accident and emergency departments and usually lack services and equipment for severely ill or injured patients. Their proximity to public hospitals will enable the private operator to rely on tax supported services for costly aspects of patient care. As a recent report produced by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions pointed out:

The public hospital is the safety net that protects a community with a private hospital. If a private hospital performs badly or closes, the community will look to the State to come to their aid. The experience of Leas Cross private nursing home confirms that where there are private facilities the investors are not the only ones bearing a risk.

It is small wonder that stockbrokerage firms have advised investors that private hospital developments are good investment prospects in Ireland. When the scheme was announced it was met with whoops of jubilation by investors. "It is the answer to our prayers; we could not have written it better ourselves" is how one private health care promoter responded. Why would they not celebrate? For every €100 million invested the Irish people will contribute €40 million, a gift from a Government that cannot deliver to low income families the 200,000 medical cards it

promised. However, it has no difficulty subsidising fat cats.

In reality the cost to the taxpayer is quite enormous. These are not the words of a red-clawed socialist, although they could be, they are the words of the man whom the Minister has appointed to the most senior post in the Health Service Executive. Time and again Professor Drumm has expressed his opposition to the Government scheme as clearly as the man can do in the circumstances. In October 2005 he warned:

The pendulum will leave the public health service and that for me would be disastrous. I really believe health care should be provided in as many facets as possible through the publicly funded system.

He sketched out the dangers on the Government proposals in stating:

We need to be extremely careful that we do not drive to the front gates of our hospitals and find the road left to the nice flowered structure with a fountain in front where those that can afford it go to that structure and someone goes sheepishly in the other direction towards the HSE hospital.

In reality that is exactly what will result if this scheme proceeds. That is the point of a private hospital; the more marked the divide the more attractive the private option and the worse will be the effect on the public hospital system. The attractions are not all based on hard medical evidence. There is mounting proof that the outcomes for treatments in for-profit hospitals compare unfavourably with those of not-for-profit ones. However, patients will still be beguiled by the flowers and the fountain.

Currently we need to employ more hospital consultants in certain specialties in our public hospitals. Since 2003, for example, only one additional accident and emergency unit consultant has been appointed. Private hospitals will become attractive options for those specialists who are frustrated with the problems and restrictions in the public system. Not only financial return but also better conditions will siphon away doctors who currently work within the public sector. Meanwhile public hospitals will lose vital funding they receive for looking after insured patients as they do at present, which is likely to lead to a downward spiral.

It is not just in the hospital system that the Minister is imposing her will to privatise. One of the hallmarks of the Government record is that since 1997 there has been a shrinking of public provision in care for the elderly and in community services. Since 1997 the number of community nursing beds has been reduced by hundreds of beds. As the Government struggles to make up the shortfall we are witnessing an increased reliance on private nursing homes to fill the gap. There are many excellent private nursing homes which fill an important need but surely

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even the Government has to learn from experience. There is an urgent need to ensure high standards and quality control of private nursing homes.

After all these years, we still do not have a satisfactory regulatory system of private and public nursing homes. We on this side of the House have grown weary raising this issue with the Government, yet there is still no sign of a full, effective statutory authority that will protect elderly and frail people in residential care. The current inspection system does not inspire confidence. The HSE asks us to trust it and places its minimalist reports up on the Internet. Most people would have more confidence in the opinion of Martin Hynes's conclusion of the current system of inspection as being "fragmented, disjointed, with no evidence of joined-up thinking". Mr. Hynes is the person who first blew the whistle on Leas Cross, yet his critique continues to be ignored. Eighteen months ago the Taoiseach promised an inspectorate independent of the HSE, and we are still waiting.

When a crisis occurs, as it did in the Leas Cross nursing home exposure by the media, the public rightly expect a response from the Government. Promises were rightly made by the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health and Children but then, wrongly, they were broken. Last May the Health Service Executive received the Professor O'Neill report into Leas Cross. Last May, the Minister for Health and Children could and should have published it. She has failed to do so to this day and it is her greatest failing. On the one hand, she is so excessively reliant on the private sector, yet on the other she is lethargic in her approach to proper regulation and strong oversight on the facilities that she is enriching.

All this is having a demoralising effect on those working within the health service. There is seepage from the health service of public provision that is often almost invisible except to those who experience it directly. Public health doctors disappear into a layer of bureaucracy and are not replaced. The anecdotal evidence is legion. A dentist in my county of Wicklow left and was not replaced. It was only when parents discovered their children were not being treated that the loss was discovered because accountability has been stripped from the system with the establishment of the Health Service Executive. There are vacancies in a range of health professional posts that are not being filled.

I was contacted by a general practitioner recently who works in the north east. He is clearly a good family doctor and wanted someone to hear what was happening on the ground. His medical practice provides blood tests for patients who need them and the samples were, until recently, tested in the laboratory at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda. Now the laboratory is unable to keep up with demand and has sought one extra staff member and some equip-

ment from the HSE. However, instead of meeting that need the HSE decided to pay, at heaven knows what expense, for testing of blood samples to be transferred to a private clinic in Kildare and another one in Britain. According to the doctor it is not as good or as speedy a service as the public one. The HSE seems infected by the privatisation bug which is being spread by the Minister to a point where rather than developing further a tried and trusted service in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, the HSE made the choice to export blood samples to Britain. The family doctor is frustrated in what he sees as an enormously wasteful solution to a simple problem.

I have promised to table a parliamentary question on the cost of this change but, knowing the Minister and the HSE as I do, I reckon it will take until Christmas to get the reply and probably much longer, if ever, to get the information I want. The silliness of replies to parliamentary questions never fails to amaze. Recently I asked if the minutes of the HSE management meetings for July and September 2006 had been signed off yet. In a functional world the answer would be a simple yes or no, but in the dysfunctional world of the Minister of Health and Children the answer was:

Section 6 of the Health Act, 2004 states that the Health Service Executive is a corporate body. In view of this, the matter of minutes from Health Service Executive management meetings is a matter solely for them. 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.

This is heartbreaking stuff. It is as simple as lifting the phone, asking whether the minutes have been signed off and getting me the answer. The problem is that, as long as the minutes are not signed off, it is not possible to obtain answers to freedom of information requests regarding decisions that have been made. People probably do not appreciate this fact. We receive our replies and are supposed to be satisfied with the kind of gobbledegook contained therein.

Earlier this year, we witnessed another example of the Minister's determination to promote the private over the public. The Government instituted home care packages to help elderly patients to stay in their homes. This is a very worthy objective and we all support it but even in this area the Minister is intent on favouring the private over the public. She launched the American Comfort Keepers franchise in Ireland and spoke glowingly of the role of private companies in home care. Since the launch there have been complaints in some instances and there is no proper regulatory system to protect patients at home. A senior trade union official, who has been very concerned about the status and extremely shabby treatment of home helpers in the public

sector, described this trend as part of a parallel private home help system that would fit into the Minister's wider privatisation plans.

By far the most significant of these plans is the scheme to develop private hospitals on public lands, essentially in the car parks of public hospitals. These will be partial hospitals creaming off profitable work and leaving costly long-term care to the taxpayer. The two-tier system will be further institutionalised and locked into the system. There will be no incentive to have continuity of care or develop an integrated service where the money follows the patient regardless of his or her income. It is pure Progressive Democrats ideology in action. It is noteworthy that Fianna Fáil Members are willing to fall in like sheep behind a policy that fails to deal with the important challenges that must be faced so as to meet the public desire for fairness and efficiency in the health service. I would have thought Fianna Fáil would have adopted a different approach but it has offered no criticism and has not expressed an alternative view.

We have great doctors, nurses and other staff in our system who are committed to patient care and looking after people on the basis of need. They deserve better. When I visit hospitals, I find it striking to listen to the needs of the staff, which can include increased space in the accident and emergency unit, more acute beds or more step-down beds. Not one person I have met in my travels around the country has sought the building of a private hospital beside a public one. Individuals raise their eyes to heaven when I mention it and ask what I think of it. They know it is not a good idea because they are working in the health service and trying to meet the needs of patients while dealing with the restrictions and pressures that exist. They deserve better and this is why the Labour Party has tabled this Private Members' motion, for which we seek full support to ensure that what is done in the health service truly meets the needs of patients and those who care for them.

Mr. Howlin: I am very glad of the opportunity to support this critical motion and I congratulate Deputy McManus on its comprehensiveness and clarity. This is not one of the run-of-the-mill debates we have during Private Members' business about a particular identified need or an undelivered facility required in one part of the country or another; rather, it presents one of the rare opportunities the House gets to decide the shape of our future health service.

Health care has been at the top of the agenda for the past ten or 15 years. Taoisigh have campaigned in elections and discovered it is very much at the top of the agenda of the vast majority. Sooner or later, all of us will test the effectiveness of the health service. Our nearest and dearest, or ourselves, will be dependent on it one day or another and therefore it is critically important that we get it right.

I was dismayed when I read the Government's amendment to the Labour Party's motion. It calls on the House to support the Government's policy of encouraging the public and private sectors to work together, and to support the co-location initiative to develop private hospitals on the campuses of public hospitals. I regard that as health apartheid. There is no mandate for it from the people and I genuinely believe it will be resisted by the vast bulk of citizens.

The amendment calls on the House to note that the HSE is engaged in a public procurement process to develop private hospitals at ten public hospital sites. Members of all parties — but perhaps not from the Progressive Democrats as I do not recall whether they were present — met the senior executive of the HSE to ask who is calling for this public procurement process. We did not get an answer immediately but eventually that it was on the direction of the Minister and her Department. This approach represents an historic new direction in health care. Although it may be true that private health care has always been a feature of health care provision in Ireland, as the Minister invites us to acknowledge in the amendment to the motion, it is true of a different Ireland in which we built up a health service on an *ad hoc* basis. It featured at a time when religious orders provided services the State could not afford to provide, some of which were later subsumed into the system. We got along because we had to get along, with an element of private service and an element of public service. However, we now live in a new and different Ireland.

I intend to focus on the acute services but, as Deputy McManus stated, there obtains across the whole health service a philosophical attitude to the effect that health care is regarded as a commodity to be delivered by the market and not as an aspect of a public service to be delivered on the basis of need. That is the inescapable truth.

What the Government has embarked upon is radical, new and highly ideological. It is traditionally claimed that those on the left want to upset things with radical ideology, yet the most ideologically driven party in this House — the one with the least support — is the Progressive Democrats. It is driving an ideological agenda to deliver privatised medicine. Health care is to be privately delivered and owned, a commodity to be bartered in the marketplace, paid for by those who can afford it and queued for by those who cannot.

The exemplar of decent health care standards, to which most developed European countries have looked since the 1940s, is the United Kingdom's National Health Service. It has been considered a unified, integrated, world-class health system. Apparently the concept of a unified, integrated, world-class health system, free at the point of delivery, is no longer Ireland's objective. Ireland could never afford this goal in the past but it can afford it now. We are no longer

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debating the difference between Boston and Berlin, at least in health care, because we are already serving up the clam chowder in our private hospitals. This profound mistake will ingrain inequality, in the form of a two-tier hospital service, in this country for years to come. There is little public knowledge or awareness of the major shift that has led to the bedding down of a two-tier health care system. I honestly believe this approach is contrary to the overwhelming bulk of public opinion, including the public opinion that supports the major party in government.

If this policy is not abandoned, we will have parallel hospitals on adjoining campuses — one hospital for people who are insured, or who can pay, and another hospital for the rest of the people. I do not doubt that private hospitals will tender for some categories of public patient work, but they will not tender for difficult or long-term work that involves caring, for example. It will be paid for by some future version of the treatment purchase scheme. Public patients — the lesser mortals — will have to endure a sufficient waiting period before they can earn admission. The simple and inescapable truth is that as long as there are two parallel systems of health care delivery, the public system will always be seen as less important than the private system. If that were not the case, there would be no incentive for people to pay for health insurance. If the public system offered an identical standard and speed of care, who would pay to go private? The Tánaiste, Deputy McDowell, has said that “a dynamic liberal economy like ours demands flexibility and inequality in some respects to function”. He added that such inequality “provides incentives”. We will provide such incentives if we continue to base our health service on in-built inequality.

Similar problems are encountered when one examines how our society cares for the elderly. Families are being told to find private nursing homes for their elderly loved ones who are sick, so that acute hospital beds can be freed up. Every weekend, I deal with people who are distraught because they have been told to find private beds somewhere for their family members, who are too ill to go home. I do not know whether the Minister, Deputy Harney, has had the same experience at her clinics. I live in a large constituency. Patients who are based in Wexford town are sometimes referred to beds in New Ross, Gorey or somewhere in south-west Wexford. Such people deserve better at that stage of their lives. We should provide better services for them because we can afford to do so. Where are our First World public long-stay hospitals for the elderly? Why is it not our objective to provide such services at a time when, for the first time in our history, we can afford to offer a decent regime of publicly funded and staffed geriatric facilities, thereby allowing elderly people to live close to their home bases? Given that experience else-

where has taught us that the standards in the private sector are less than optimum, why are we demanding that the market should provide such services for profit?

I have exhausted my time. I had hoped to refer briefly to Wexford General Hospital, but I will do so on another occasion. I would like to make a philosophical point in conclusion. The Minister for Health and Children knows I have great personal regard for her ability and her acumen as a politician. I genuinely believe that what is happening in health care under her stewardship is a profound shift. It will cause major hardship and will bed down inequality in the delivery of health care for generations to come. I hope the public is alert to what is happening.

Mr. Costello: I compliment Deputy McManus on proposing this important motion, which relates to one of the central reasons we are here — to improve the quality of life of all our citizens. I am afraid the Progressive Democrats are serial privatisers. That is the sum total of the Progressive Democrats ideology. The approach of the Labour Party in this regard differs fundamentally from that of the Progressive Democrats.

When the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, took over that portfolio two years ago, her major task was to solve the accident and emergency shambles. She published a ten-point plan, which was to bear fruit within six months, but then sank without trace. Two years on, the accident and emergency units in many of our major hospitals are sad places for the old, sick and vulnerable to find themselves as we move into the winter season.

The central part of the Minister's approach is to follow the lead of her Progressive Democrats colleagues, Deputies McDowell and Parlon, who have trawled the land banks and buildings of their Departments to sell property to the highest bidder. The Tánaiste, Deputy McDowell, has disgracefully sold the offices of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in St. Stephen's Green and has moved into rented accommodation, as if it were his God-given right to do so. Likewise, he is preparing to sell the most historic prison in the country, Mountjoy Prison, to the highest bidder without consideration for its heritage or the fact that it is likely to be demolished. The Minister of State, Deputy Parlon, is selling a treasure trove of State assets as part of his decentralisation splurge. He is jacking up the price of land throughout the country as he acquires sites for new offices for people who do not want them. One of the Minister for Health and Children's first acts was to conduct an audit of the land in her Department that might be flogged to the private sector. That was one of her earlier statements.

The mindset of the Progressive Democrats is that State land is real estate to be sold to the private sector, rather than to be protected and developed for future generations of Irish citizens.

The new proposal for resolving the accident and emergency crisis and the bed shortage is to develop private hospitals on public lands in public hospitals. Ten such hospitals have been identified and targeted by the Minister. The development of these new private hospitals will be incentivised by tax reliefs which will cost taxpayers approximately €0.5 billion in today's prices. Every €1 spent by speculators and developers will lead to a refund of approximately 40 cent. The Finance Acts of 2001 and 2002 allow the developers of new private hospitals to sell the capital allowances associated with the cost of developing the hospitals to external investors and thereby raise equity in the marketplace. The legislation allows the capital allowances to be made available in respect not only of private hospitals, but also of sports injury clinics, nursing homes and private convalescent clinics. We are not yet finished with this proposal. The Health (Nursing Homes) Amendment Bill 2006, which passed all stages in the Dáil last week, will cause fear and consternation in the minds of elderly, infirm and disabled people whose homes are liable to be sold to pay for their care in nursing homes.

The public health service is quickly becoming a private health service under the stewardship of the current Minister for Health and Children. She believes that all the problems in the health sector can be solved by private sector intervention. The Minister should realise that the objective of the private sector is profit — it will always put profit before people. The State will pay a fortune to promote private sector involvement in health provision while the sector remains unreformed and inefficient. The president of the Irish Medical Organisation, Dr. Christine O'Malley, put it well in today's *The Irish Times*, when she was asked, "If you could grant three wishes for the health service, what would they be?". Her response was:

Put doctors and other health professionals back at the heart of health service planning. Develop extra acute hospital beds in acute medical units and ringfence surgical beds to allow GPs to refer directly to hospital wards as they used to be able to do. Make people recognise that despite subsidies, Irish private hospitals remain niche specialists that don't treat A&E patients.

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "Dáil Éireann" and substitute the following:

— welcomes the Government's commitment to promoting high quality health services and in particular to the setting up of the independent Health Information and Quality Authority which will drive the quality agenda in the health services;

- notes the proposed statutory role of the Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services in inspecting and maintaining registers of residential centres for people with disabilities, children in need of care and protection and older people, including private nursing homes;
- recognises the fact that private healthcare is and has always been a feature of healthcare provision in Ireland;
- commends the Government on the measures it is promoting to improve access for public patients to acute hospital care;
- supports the Government's policy of encouraging public and private sectors to work together in the provision of health care for the benefit of the entire population and encourages further innovation and initiative in this regard;
- supports the co-location initiative to develop private hospitals on the campuses of public hospitals in order that up to 1,000 beds currently reserved for private patients may be re-designated for use by public patients in a most cost effective way;
- notes that the Health Service Executive is engaged in a public procurement process to develop private hospitals at 10 public hospital sites;
- notes the increase of 1,200 in the number of inpatient beds and day treatment places since the publication of the Health Strategy in 2001 and the plans to open new acute hospital units;
- notes that an independent review of the scheme of capital allowances for investment in private hospitals recommended its continuance as a means to address supply shortages and reduce costs;
- welcomes the introduction by the HSE of a broad-based Winter Initiative which is designed to ensure that the services required to address the particular demands of the winter season are in place and operating optimally, including the co-ordination of services in relation to discharge initiatives, continuing care and home supports;
- commends the Minister for Health and Children for the provision of over 900 long-stay beds in private nursing homes in the last two years and acknowledges that all private nursing home beds are subject to registration and inspection;
- commends the Minister for Health and Children for providing funding to

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provide a further 1.75 million home help hours this year and a tripling of home care packages to 3,000 and notes that the HSE is improving and enhancing the service by using a range of additional providers including voluntary groups and the private sector;

- acknowledges and supports the important role of public health nurses, who are a key element in the delivery of community based health services, and notes that the HSE sponsors 130 staff to train as public health nurses each year at a cost of over €5.2 million;
- acknowledges that the HSE is currently engaged in contracting 800 additional nursing home beds as part of the Winter Initiative; and
- acknowledges that the HSE is finalising proposals for the provision of 350 additional public beds in the Dublin region and an additional 200 such beds in Cork also.”

Some might say the motion from the Opposition puts everything in black and white. Some could say it is devoid of colour and shades to reflect the diversity of health services and patient choice in Ireland today. That would be kind because the motion is not just black and white, it is all black. It betrays an attitude that private involvement in health is all bad. In a similar vein, 12 years ago, Deputy Liz McManus accused the then Minister for Health, Deputy Howlin, of having made slavish concessions to the private sector.

It is as if, in Labour Party eyes, only public sector doctors take the Hippocratic Oath. It is as if the vast majority of general practitioners were not self-employed in a direct relationship with two thirds of the population. It is as if Dean Swift had not set up a private hospital more than 200 years ago that is still in operation, and has been joined by many others over the years. It is as if thousands of beds in public hospitals had not been reserved for private patients under previous Ministers and Governments. It is as if the private nursing home subvention scheme had not been introduced by a Labour Party Minister for Health, Deputy Howlin, and perpetuated unchanged by a Fine Gael Minister. It is as if 52% of the population did not choose to pay for health insurance.

The fact is, we have a mixed public-private system of finance and of provision of health services. If any party does not want that, and wants to base policy on a public service monopoly, let them have the courage of their convictions and say so. Let them propose a ban on private interactions between patient and doctor. Let them ban the purchase of private nursing

home places for older people. Let them close the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, and ban the State from purchasing badly needed treatments for 50,000 public patients who used to wait very long times. Let them refuse to allow a public patient use a private magnetic resonance imaging, MRI, scanner. Let them forbid the Health Service Executive to purchase kidney dialysis treatment for patients in the south east. Let them overturn European market freedoms and ban hospitals that seek to make a profit. Let them also forbid doctors in partnerships from making profits. Let them take themselves, but not us, back to North Korea.

The Government and I believe we can make better use of both public and private finance and health providers to provide a better health service to the whole population. The job of a Minister for Health and Children is to achieve the best possible health outcomes for the whole population, not just to fund and organise exclusively publicly provided health services, as seems to be the approach of the sponsors of this motion.

Health policy encompasses all sources of finance, all types of health providers and all patients. Private health care is a long established feature of health care in Ireland, in almost every county. It involves general practitioners, dentists, pharmacists, chiropractors, private nursing homes and private hospitals, now used systematically by the National Treatment Purchase Fund. Our GP service, in particular, is a public-private mix that works very well for all patients who use the same facilities and are seen by the same doctors. It works far better for patients than the models in some other countries which have a more nationalised GP service. It takes almost a week in some parts of the UK to see a GP.

This Government is committed to using fully the scope for the private sector to provide additional capacity and services in the health system. There are a number of Government policies and initiatives that support the co-existence of public and private health care. They include the designation of private and semi-private beds in public hospitals, income tax relief on private health insurance premiums, income tax relief on medical and dental expenses, the work of the National Treatment Purchase Fund, the co-location initiative to free up to 1,000 beds for public patients and capital allowances for investment in the development of private hospitals and nursing homes.

The policy of this Government is to achieve the best for all patients using the mixed public-private system we have. Far from preserving the public-private mix on ice, that means change in the way it works. I am committed to ensuring private practice within public hospitals will not be at the expense of fair access for public patients.

There are 13,000 beds in the 53 public hospitals and 2,500 of those beds are designated for use by

private patients. The figures I have given the House previously show that in most public hospitals, the designated ratio of private work, approximately 20%, is greatly exceeded, sometimes accounting for up to 40% of inpatient activity. For example, 46% of elective work in Tallaght Hospital last year was for private patients. This means some public hospitals are increasingly being run as private fee earning opportunities. Changing this is the very opposite of privatisation: it is reclaiming public beds and public facilities for public patients.

It is high time to start changing the system of reserved, subsidised private beds in publicly-funded hospitals. When the private sector is willing to finance the facilities, to manage the service and to fund the running costs 100%, why stop it? What compelling reason is there for the State to insist the public sector must pay all the capital cost of reserved private beds in public hospitals and more than half of the running cost? The State pays for the nurses, management, support staff and service staff dealing with private beds. The co-location initiative will free up to 1,000 of these beds for public patients.

The Health Service Executive is now undertaking the procurement process to select a consortium to build and operate a private hospital on each of ten public hospitals. The new private hospitals will be procured by utilising the new competitive dialogue tendering process. It involves a three stage process including a pre-qualification stage, a competitive dialogue phase within which solutions are identified and discussed and a final tendering stage.

The HSE has seen much of interest in the initiative. It has pre-qualified a number of bidders for each site and is now in the process of evaluating outline proposals and short-listing bidders for each site. The site will be made available to the successful bidder at the full market value. Each proposal will undergo a rigorous value for money assessment, the public interest will be fully protected and each proposal will fully adhere to public procurement law and best practice.

I expect innovative proposals from the private sector to maximise the use of public hospital sites and foster full co-operation between private and public hospitals. This procurement process will be completed in the early months of next year.

As we see contracts completed for St James's Hospital, Beaumont Hospital, Connolly Hospital and Tallaght Hospital in Dublin, and in Galway, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Sligo and Letterkenny, I expect local populations will be very keen to see the new facilities and new public beds open. I also expect that what is opposed in theory today at national level, will be supported in practice next year at local level. Some of the loudest local calls for public patients to be treated at off-site private facilities at Limerick and Waterford,

for example, have come from members of parties opposite who oppose this plan at national level.

There has been much misinformation about this cost effective plan. Far from creating a new two tier system, the new facilities will be required under the Finance Act to offer their services to the State for purchase at a discount. The NTPF has shown how the purchasing of treatments can work to benefit nearly 50,000 people and it has opened private hospitals for public patients, breaking down a two tier barrier in our system. In addition, while managed separately, the private hospitals will connect physically on site with the public hospitals and there will be opportunities for shared services.

There will be no sweetheart deals or bailouts. The lease of land will be on fully commercial terms and no public land will be given away. If anyone wants to claim that there is more value for patients to be gained from grass and empty lawns at public hospitals, they can attempt to do so. Under this plan, we will maximise the value of the land to the public sector.

The operators of the new facilities will have to bear all the financial risk and they will be compelled to manage their services efficiently. There will be no guaranteed State contracts, and any service arrangements with the State will be competitively priced. This is a financially sound proposition. Only the most twisted logic, and there has been some, could suggest it is more cost effective for the State to continue to meet 100% of the capital cost of private beds and half the running cost.

Arrangements will be put in place whereby consultants will be able to work at these facilities. As stated in the policy direction, this will be subject to better work practices being put in place in each public hospital. Many consultants at individual hospitals are keen to do this already and have expressed their support for this arrangement to me. This initiative does not introduce for-profit hospitals into Ireland; for-profit hospitals exist here already and are used by private and public patients. We have a mixture of not-for-profit and for-profit independent hospitals in Ireland and this mix will continue. The largest private operator in the country, Bon Secours Ireland, is a not-for-profit organisation.

The co-location initiative does not require an operator to be a for-profit hospital. I expect there will be strong interest from not-for-profit hospitals in winning some of these contracts. They, too, must raise finance to expand their activities and that finance, unless it is a charitable donation, has to be repaid. The finance invested has tax advantages for investors, but those tax advantages are not in any way dependent on whether the hospital is operated on a for-profit or not-for-profit basis.

The motion from the Labour Party proposes the abolition of this capital allowance for invest-

[Ms Harney.]

ment in hospitals. It describes the position, pejoratively of course, that there is no provision whatsoever in our tax code for “super-private” clinics. However, the motion does nothing to explain why it is more socially just to give capital allowances for film productions than for hospitals. The motion calls for the Government to publish a programme for investment in additional acute hospital beds. We have done so; it is called our capital investment framework for health and it is a €3 billion programme. We will have invested more than €2 billion in acute hospitals under the current national development plan. There are 1,500 more publicly-funded acute hospital beds now than in 1997, a rate of annual increase that is about six times that of previous governments. Current plans include provision for another 450 beds in addition to those released by the co-location initiative. We are also committed to developing an entirely new tertiary children’s hospital.

It is no wonder that the motion looks to the Government to provide new beds since the combined Labour and Fine Gael parties failed, as recently as two weeks ago, to make a commitment to any number of new hospital beds in their A&E document. The motion also seems to forget that it was the Labour party that set up the social services inspectorate without any statutory powers and no scope to inspect public nursing home places.

The motion’s call for the Government to move immediately to provide 1,500 community care beds for patients currently in hospital is also mis-cast and out of date. I do not know what sort of government would move immediately to acquire new community beds but rule out private nursing home providers on ideological grounds. This year so far, the HSE, with my support, has sourced more than 500 beds and will acquire 200 more by the end of the year. In all, 1,350 beds are being arranged. There is no ideological bar here — beds are being acquired in both public and private facilities. Far from running down home help services, this year we are expanding all services for older people, particularly home helps and home care packages. The full year cost next year of this expansion will be €150 million. This year, 1.75 million more home help hours are being provided, with 3,000 home care packages. Whatever works best and fastest for patients is being done, using all providers, public and private.

The Government is investing one quarter of all current expenditure in health. We are investing more than €500 million annually in health capital. With this, we are funding approximately 75% of all health spending in the economy. This is the OECD average. The American model is different with 60% coming from the private sector and 40% from public sources. These patterns of high public investment will continue in a coherent

framework where both public and private providers will be challenged to deliver top quality health care of all types to all patients.

It makes sense to use the public and private systems together. While the private sector does not provide all the answers to our health care problems, it has a complementary role to play. Many private providers in Ireland, like the Bon Secours hospitals or St. Vincent’s Hospital, are not-for-profit organisations. They provide the bulk of the private beds that currently exist in our private hospital facilities. Anyone who would suggest converting into public beds 1,000 of the 2,500 private beds that currently exist in public hospitals is privatising the health system. Why are all the nursing, management, clerical, catering and support staff paid for by the taxpayer? Why is 100% of the capital cost of providing those beds funded by the taxpayer? Only one group of employees, consultants, get paid for seeing those patients. Surely this does not make sense. Seeking to minimise this in public hospitals and convert those beds for public patients, and have private beds and nursing staff funded and managed privately makes eminent sense to increase capacity in the health care system. The co-location model is important. It will keep doctors on site instead of having to travel around a couple of different hospitals. This makes eminent sense for the public and private systems.

I commend the amended motion to the House. I forgot to say at the outset that I am sharing time with the Minister of State, Deputy Tim O’Malley, if it is in order.

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O’Malley): I welcome the opportunity to address the House on issues relating to the provision of services for older people. I acknowledge the significant investment made by the Government for the care of older people, and palliative care, by the provision of €110 million additional revenue funding in the budget announcement for 2006 and a further €40 million in 2007.

The Government is committed to maintaining older people in dignity and independence in their own homes and, in accordance with their wishes, for as long as possible. It is also committed to providing high quality long-term residential care for older people when living at home is no longer possible. People are generally living longer these days and even though most are leading healthy independent lives, the number of people in need of long-term care is increasing. There is a strong demand for long-stay places and it is imperative that the nursing home places on offer, both public and private, are of a high order and appropriate standard to meet the needs of our older population.

The nursing home sector is governed by the Health (Nursing Homes) Act 1990 and sub-

sequent regulations. The Nursing Home (Care and Welfare) Regulations 1993 set out the standards to which the private nursing home sector must adhere for the purpose of registration under the Health (Nursing Homes) Act 1990. These apply to all beds in private nursing homes whether contracted, subvented or not.

This year, the Minister for Health and Children carried out a public consultation process on the draft scheme and heads of a Bill to establish the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA. The office of the chief inspector of social services with specific statutory functions was also established within the authority. The intention is to bring a Bill to Government for approval this session.

The establishment of HIQA is a key feature of the health services reform programme. HIQA will be a vehicle to strengthen quality assurance and information in the health system. It will set standards on safety and quality of services provided by the Health Service Executive and service providers. It will monitor and advise the Minister and the HSE on the level of compliance with those standards. It will investigate services at the request of the Minister or the HSE. At the request or with the approval of the Minister, it will review and make recommendations in respect of services to ensure best outcomes for the resources available. It will operate accreditation programmes. It will evaluate and provide advice to the Minister and the HSE on the clinical and cost effectiveness of health technologies. It will evaluate information and data and identify deficiencies in respect of that information. It will set standards on information and data, including governance arrangements.

In line with commitments made in the health strategy and the new social partnership agreement, Towards 2016, the remit of the social services inspectorate is being widened to include residential care for people with disabilities and older people. The functions of the chief inspector of social services will be to establish registers for residential centres for people with disabilities, children in need of care and protection and older people, including private nursing homes. The chief inspector will have powers to inspect centres, register them, attach conditions to registration and cancel a registration. The chief inspector will also inspect the Health Service Executive's performance of its functions in respect of foster care services, boarding out of older people and inspections of pre-schools. When it is necessary for older people to move into long-term residential care, it is important that they have a choice of top quality nursing home care. For this reason, a working group has been established by the Department to develop appropriate standards for residential care settings for older people. Membership of the group comprises officials from the Department, the HSE,

the SSI and the Irish Health Service Accreditation Board. The group has developed draft standards for the inspection of both public and private residential care for older people. It is intended that these draft standards will be the subject of a public consultation process in the coming months.

The Government's commitment to the development of a comprehensive range of services for older people and palliative care can be demonstrated clearly by outlining the resources made available in recent years for service developments. Between 1997 and 2005, additional spending on health care services for older people was in excess of €302 million. In addition, the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, announced a €150 million package to expand and improve services for older people and palliative care in 2006 and beyond. This has resulted in a major improvement in home and community-based support for older people. A comprehensive health and social care service is being developed, in a way that is reliable and that respects and values older people. This is the largest ever increase in funding for services for older people.

These initiatives set out the Government's continued commitment to older people and putting older people at the centre of health policy now and in the future. The investment package is focused on caring for people at home, in accordance with their expressed wishes. It is a major step in focusing new resources on home care first and foremost, while still supporting appropriate residential care. This is in line with international trends and also reflects the growing independence of older people who want to stay living in their communities.

This new investment involves additional resources of €150 million in a full year, €110 million in 2006 and €40 million more the following year. Reflecting the new emphasis on home and day care, almost three quarters — €109 million — of the full year costs are being committed to community care supports.

This investment is a response by the Government to older peoples' preference to be cared for at home rather than going into residential care. Very often that may require some additional home help or more developed home support, including various therapy services. All the evidence shows that families caring for elderly relatives continue to provide care in partnership with the support services put in place for those that require it.

The budget day package provides for a number of initiatives. The home help service plays a very important role in keeping people at home for as long as possible. An additional €33 million was allocated to this service in the budget for 2006, €30 million of which was for 2006 and will provide a further 1.75 million home help hours.

[Mr. T. O'Malley.]

Home care, including the home help service, is delivered through the HSE in partnership with a range of providers including the executive itself, voluntary groups and the private sector. This has long since been a policy in home care. While public nursing home provision continues to be expanded, it is necessary nonetheless to continue the working partnership with private and voluntary providers to ensure the highest level of additional service delivery possible.

There are, however, no plans to privatise the home help service or give priority to private companies over public or other home care providers. The most important factor in delivering home care and home help is not who provides the service but that an appropriate level of service is delivered in as flexible a manner as possible which is highly responsive to the real needs of the individual.

A comprehensive collective agreement between health employers and SIPTU was finalised in 2000 regarding the terms and conditions for employment of home helps. This agreement provided for a significant improvement in the pay and conditions of employment for home helps. They now receive the same benefits as all other staff in the health services, which include premia pay, paid annual leave and paid sick leave.

It was agreed with SIPTU in February 2006 to establish a high level group with an independent chairman to address, in partnership mode, issues pertaining to the standardisation of home help services, including clarification on the nature of the service and standard criteria for entitlement, among others.

Home care packages deliver a wide range of services and have been piloted successfully in several regions in recent years. They include the services of nurses, home care attendants, home helps and the various therapists, including physiotherapists and occupational therapists. A home care package will vary according to the care needs of the person so that, for example, there might be a greater emphasis in some packages on home care assistants while other packages may require a greater level of therapy and nursing.

The priority is older people living in the community or who are in-patients in an acute hospital and who would need to be admitted to long-term care without this support. The home care packages are also available to those older people who have been admitted to long-term care and who now wish to return to the community. In addition, the packages will be offered to people who are already using existing core services, such as home helps, but need more assistance to continue to live in their community.

As with the home help service, the packages are delivered through the HSE by a range of providers, including the Health Service Executive

itself, voluntary groups and the private sector. About 1,100 home care packages were provided to people at the end of 2005. By the end of this year, a total of 2,000 additional home care packages will have been provided. The HSE has advised that 1,800 new clients were in receipt of home care packages in the first six months of 2006. The 2,000 packages will support more than 2,000 persons as, for example, individuals could in some cases need a care package on a temporary basis.

An additional €20 million was allocated to the nursing home subvention scheme for residents of private nursing homes. The additional €20 million is a 2006 full-year cost and is going towards supporting increasing numbers entitled to basic nursing home subvention, reducing waiting lists for enhanced subventions and bringing greater consistency to the different levels of enhanced subvention support throughout the country.

A total of €8 million was provided in the budget to cover the cost of 250 extra nursing home beds which the HSE has sourced from private nursing homes. The HSE has provided over 900 long-stay beds in private nursing homes in the last two years and is currently engaged in contracting 800 additional nursing home beds as part of the winter bed initiative.

Extra funding was also provided, as part of the budget investment package, for a range of other community supports, including day and respite care, which are an integral part of delivering a comprehensive community service for older people; meals on wheels, which again is part of the range of services which help support older people to continue living in their own homes; and sheltered housing, which provides a real alternative to residential care and reflects the desire of older people to live with as much independence as possible.

In addition to services for older people, €9 million was provided in the budget day package for specialist palliative care, including home care and community initiatives in 2006.

It is clear from the package that the Government is firmly committed to developing services for our older people. The emphasis on developing home care packages and the increases in the home help and meals on wheels schemes and other community based supports are assisting older people to remain in their own homes and communities for longer, in accordance with their wishes. In addition, additional funding has been provided to the nursing home subvention scheme to go towards supporting the increasing numbers entitled to subvention and to reduce waiting lists for enhanced subvention.

The Health (Nursing Homes)(Amendment) Bill 2006 is currently being debated in the Oireachtas and is designed to ensure that the existing subvention scheme for private nursing home care is grounded in primary legislation and

to help the HSE to implement the scheme on a standardised basis across the country.

The Government is currently considering policies on long-term care. Several principles underlying this policy were agreed with the social partners in *Towards 2016*. These principles specify, for example, that there should be one standardised national needs assessment for older people needing care. The use of community and home-based care should be maximised. Sheltered housing options will be encouraged. Where residential care is required, it should be quality care and there should be appropriate and equitable levels of co-payment by care recipients based on a national standardised financial assessment. The level of support for residential care should be indifferent as to whether that care is in a public or private facility. The financial model to support any new arrangements must also be financially sustainable.

The Government's commitment to older people is clear. The focus is on supporting older people in their homes and communities for as long as possible, and at the same time supporting those who require residential care if the time comes that such is the most appropriate care required. The Government is committed to ensuring high quality care to all older people in public, private and voluntary nursing homes and is working towards having the best standards and inspection processes in place to achieve this. By its investment programme this year, the Government has demonstrated its commitment to older people. We acknowledge that we must continue to develop policy in this area to meet the growing demand for services.

Dr. Twomey: I wish to share time with Deputy Neville.

The Fine Gael Party has no problem with private medicine. General practice, where public and private patients are treated equally, is the most successful of the public private partnerships and many of our private hospitals work well.

I agree with Deputy McManus that the House needs to debate this motion. Two weeks ago, I wrote an article in one of the medical journals, the *Irish Medical News*, on the topic of private hospitals. I know the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, was made aware of the piece because her advisers inform her about everything written by Deputy McManus or me.

Given that the Minister chose not to answer any of the questions put to her, the Government cannot be accused of lying on this issue. Having listened to him give an economist's view of the health service, it is difficult to believe the Minister of State, Deputy Tim O'Malley, holds office in the Department of Health and Children.

Mr. T. O'Malley: Is Deputy Twomey not interested in the facts concerning services for older people?

Dr. Twomey: The Minister of State should answer the questions I ask him if he is so intelligent and sure of his brief. The initiative on private hospitals will result in the transfer of €2 billion of capital and current assets from the public sector to the private sector. Where is the cost-benefit analysis carried out by the Department on this initiative and why has it not been made available to Members? The Department of Finance will not sanction a project in the Department of Health and Children which costs more than €30 million without first receiving a cost-benefit analysis. The extensions to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital and Mullingar General Hospital did not proceed this year, despite budgetary allocations having been made for this purpose, because cost-benefit analyses were not submitted to the Department of Finance. The Minister tried to make hay about the private provision of dialysis services to the population of the south east. The plan to provide Beaumont Hospital with a dialysis unit will not proceed because the Health Service Executive did not submit a cost-benefit analysis to the Department of Finance.

The Minister of State informed me that the HSE is not a political organisation. Political interference in the HSE is widespread but there is no political responsibility. The Department is not being held to account for a decision to move €2 billion in taxpayers' money out of the public system. For example, no policy paper or cost-benefit analysis was produced on this initiative. I believe this crazy proposal was written on the back of beer mat when the Minister was out at night with her friends. If the Minister of State does not agree it is daft, he should prove the contrary. As Deputies ask week after week, let us see the proof.

Professor Drumm, as the Accounting Officer of the Health Service Executive, should be sacked this time next year if he does not produce a cost-benefit analysis on this proposal. Similarly, Mr. Michael Scanlan, the Secretary General and Accounting Officer of the Department of Health and Children, should be sacked if he does not provide a cost-benefit analysis of the proposal. The Minister is good at sacking Secretaries General but the general public should sack the Government. The Progressive Democrat Party talks a great deal about how it looks after taxpayers' money. It is the height of incompetence that the Minister has nothing to show how €2 billion will be spent.

It is possible that this initiative is no more than a pre-election charade by the Health Service Executive and Departments of Health and Children and Finance. Perhaps Professor Drumm

[Dr. Twomey.]

knows in his heart that the proposal is rubbish and he is stringing out the issue until the general election in the knowledge that the Progressive Democrats will no longer be in power when a new Government is formed. Patients are being misled that a great initiative will proceed. How many loops must be jumped through in terms of qualifying even for pre-qualification? Certainly, there are enough loops to stretch out the proposal for five or six months. Patients and investors must ask themselves some hard questions because they may be being led down the garden path. Who is pulling the wool over their eyes?

Besides the taxation and financial implications of this daft approach, what are its implications for patients, those who will be most affected by this crazy, beer mat policy produced by a PD-led Government in which the Fianna Fáil Party has fallen asleep? As a result of it, consultants will spend their days in private hospitals looking after private patients. We already experience a problem of a small number of consultants who neglect their public patients and give their time to private patients. Given that private hospitals do not have the same number of doctors and nurses on duty as public hospitals, consultants will be compelled to stay in private hospitals during the day to look after their patients. As a result, less experienced doctors will be left to look after patients in public hospitals during the day.

What will happen at night? As the Minister of State will be aware, the standard of doctors on duty in private hospitals at night varies considerably. As private hospitals are not compelled to have doctors in training on duty, one cannot be sure of the quality of doctors working in them. While some of them are excellent, others are a little suspect. Fortunately, however, this is not a major problem because unlike public hospitals most private hospitals do not engage in intensive surgery. However, once an additional 1,000 private beds come on stream, more surgery will be performed in private hospitals without standards being in place.

The Government has not introduced standards for inspecting nursing homes and only minimum standards are in place for inspecting doctors. In addition, it failed to introduce a composite insurance scheme, despite a recommendation in the report of the inquiry into various matters in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital that the Government get its finger out. This crazy policy puts patients at risk, even if the Government is not aware of it.

What will happen to the premiums of private patients? In the past decade, throughout which the current coalition has been in power, premiums have doubled for VHI and BUPA policy holders. Thanks to the Progressive Democrats, the Government proposes to introduce a free-for-all in which the insurance companies can make as

much money as they like. I hate to think what will happen to VHI and BUPA premiums in the next five years if the Progressive Democrats return to power and continue to force through this crazy policy. It is possible, however, that this may be a ruse to fool people into believing that action is being taken. If that is the case, the Minister is playing politics with people.

On another matter about which the Minister is unable to answer questions, what is the current status of the consultants' contract? This time last year, the Minister stated she would introduce public-only contracts for consultants. What happened to that commitment? Did the Progressive Democrats fall asleep? The proposal has fallen by the wayside. The Minister's current policy is a waste of time and money because it could not work if public only contracts were in place.

As a supporter of private medicine, I believe the Minister's policy on private medicine is daft and makes no sense. It is time she got her finger out and produced background information on this initiative with a view to persuading the Opposition it has substance.

With regard to community care beds, I acknowledge that while they cannot do everything, the majority of those involved in the private nursing home sector are doing a great job. The Minister received a set of standards for private nursing homes from a Government body in November 2005 but did not publish them. As a result, the private nursing home representative bodies had to publish their own standards in June this year. We are still waiting for the Minister to publish the standards she has chosen to sit on.

The Minister of State should not talk about protecting elderly patients. The Minister of State has done the least to protect elderly patients during the term of this Government. He has been a shocking disgrace. He promised much but delivered nothing.

Eligibility and provision on entitlement have moved nowhere since the publication of the health strategy in 2001. I understand why elderly patients prefer to remain at home. With this Government in office, I would not wish to send anybody into a nursing home. The Government has no respect for these patients and will not protect them. The Health and Social Care Professionals Bill has been postponed until 2007. The social services inspectorate will not be a statutory agency until the legislation is passed but that will not happen until the next Government takes office. It will not happen under this Government.

The legislation the Minister is trying to sneak in under the radar will take their homes from elderly people. However, Age Action Ireland has sent a letter to every Fianna Fáil Deputy to alert them to what the Minister is doing. I wonder what they will do when the legislation is voted on in two weeks. The Minister is taking away their homes and there is nothing else to it. The Leas

Cross report, which the Minister refuses to publish, shows that the Government and the HSE are a disgrace. They have neglected patient care in an unbelievable manner. That is why they are hiding behind lawyers and claiming the report cannot be published because of the people who are named in it. The only people named in it as a disgrace, and I have read it, are the Government and the HSE.

There is also the report on P. J. Walsh, the elderly man who was allowed to bleed to death. I asked the Minister, Deputy Harney, priority questions about it but the answer was so comprehensive that I have had to submit six further parliamentary questions to get answers. If I get an answer from the Minister, Deputy Harney, to a question, I will be bowled over. I never get answers, only waffle. After the two speeches this evening, I am sure I will be able to put down another 20 parliamentary questions.

The Minister cannot claim that the home care packages look after patients. There are no occupational therapists, community physiotherapists or speech therapists for patients in the community who have suffered strokes. The home care package gives the idea that patients are being looked after. Elderly patients are being sent home from hospital with PEG tubes, where a tube is inserted into the person's stomach and they are fed with a bottle through that tube. One must be careful that one does not put in too much, that one does not put the substance in too fast or that one does not make the patient sick.

Elderly men and women in their 70s and 80s are being asked to look after spouses on PEG feeding. They are not qualified nurses and they were not qualified 20 years ago. However, the HSE says that if they get a nurse, it will give them the home care package. It is stretching the imagination to consider this a progressive policy. It is dangerous and patients' lives are being put at serious risk. The Minister is paying no attention to what is happening. She is simply full of waffle and daft proposals. The home care packages will work for a certain number of people but they are not the ultimate solution the Minister thinks. She is putting patients at serious risk.

With regard to the 800 additional nursing home beds the Minister is currently contracting as part of the winter initiative, I believe she is looking for the beds in Westmeath and, perhaps, in east Galway. There are no nursing home beds available anywhere else. Where the Minister is sourcing the 800 beds will be the subject of another parliamentary question. I heard on the grapevine that she is seeking these beds in Westmeath, which will be great for a family from Fingal, Ballymun or Darndale. The family will have to visit their elderly relative in a nursing home 30 miles beyond Athlone on the Galway road. I am sure plenty of people will be willing to take those beds.

The Minister has allowed this bad situation to build up and is now trying to deal with it through the winter initiative as a pre-election problem.

The Minister has neglected to deal with the problem in the last couple of years and has made a right mess of the health service. In the amendment, the Minister commends the Government on the measures it is promoting to improve access for public patients to acute hospital care. Three to five years waiting for an orthopaedic appointment is not improving access to acute hospital services. It is a two to three year wait for ENT services.

Procedures to test for cancer and heart disease are not being carried out. They are regularly cancelled because the Minister has made a mess of the acute hospital service. She claims to be doing something about the trolley crisis but she is disregarding other patients. It is the most cynical attempt I have seen by a Government to try to win an election. It is cynical and sickening. We support the motion because we wish to speak the truth about what is happening.

Mr. Neville: I am pleased to support the Labour Party motion. Of course, the Irish people are entitled to a health service that will deliver excellence, equality and efficiency and in which a person's financial means is not a barrier to receiving the most appropriate and best medical treatment. The health service should be treated as a community service.

The Minister of State, Deputy Tim O'Malley, is responsible for disability and mental health services but he did not mention mental health in his speech. One in four people at some stage of their life will suffer a psychiatric illness. The level of service in the psychiatric services is deplorable, yet throughout the Minister of State's speech on the health service, he did not mention psychiatric services. Mental illness can be debilitating and occasionally life threatening, as is the case with physical illness.

The impact of conditions such as depression, anorexia or schizophrenia extends beyond the individual to families and communities and can be the cause of great unhappiness. Although mental health is central to our well-being, the treatment of mental illness and the promotion of good mental health do not receive the same attention, investment and resources as physical illness.

It is over 20 years since the report on the mental health services, *Planning for the Future*, was adopted as Government policy. The cornerstone of the recommendations in that report was the establishment of multi-professional teams for service delivery in the psychiatric services. However, as the report from the Mental Health Commission stated two months ago, nowhere in this country have fully staffed teams been delivered. Community based care was another central feature of *Planning for the Future*. However, admission rates do not reflect a substantial shift in focus to a community approach and readmission rates are persistently high.

Large tranches of the 20 year old report have still not been implemented. The Government

[Mr. Neville.]

must be held accountable by the public for its failure to implement this national policy and the reduction in the proportion of the health budget allocated to mental health from 11% in 1997 to 7% in 2006. This report was accepted as party policy 22 years ago but was not implemented. Last January, a new report, *A Vision for Change*, was accepted and the Minister says it will be implemented. How can we have confidence that it will be done if a 22 year old report, 50% of which was included in *A Vision for Change*, was not implemented?

There are still not enough beds for those who need them, resulting in young teenagers being treated in adult psychiatric wards. This happens in the Minister's constituency in Limerick. There are still no early intervention programmes which would make a real difference for those who develop serious illness.

Fine Gael and the Labour Party have committed themselves, in government, to delivering an effective and well resourced mental health programme that will be directed as a policy towards recovery. Recovery involves a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and productive life even within the limitations caused by psychiatric illness. The proposed policy of Fine Gael and the Labour Party will build and foster positive mental health across the community and provide accessible, community based, fully staffed, multi-disciplinary services for people with mental illness. The provision of these services will be brought at least to a par with the provision of general health services, both in hospital and community services.

The commitments include putting in place multi-disciplinary community mental health teams, thus reducing the need for inpatient care. Early and consistent intervention is the most effective way of helping those experiencing mental illness to recover or to manage their personal situation. The Minister must close the psychiatric institutions that are inappropriate for their purposes, as he promised in March 2005. However, a reply to a parliamentary question I tabled last May — 14 months after the announcement was made — indicated that not one institution was identified.

Debate adjourned.

Adjournment Debate.

Illegal Fireworks.

Mr. Costello: This matter relates to the need for the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to take steps to prevent the placing of advertisements in the Border region of the Republic in respect of the sale of illegal fireworks in Northern Ireland. I raised the issue of the sale of illegal fireworks in this jurisdiction approximately two weeks and made some suggestions as

to what the Minister should do. He subsequently made an announcement regarding the 2006 Act and the advertising campaign. I did not, however, realise the full extent of the problem and the ineffectiveness of the Minister's response until I was travelling between Donegal and Dundalk a week ago, when I had the opportunity to observe the disastrous situation that arises when the law in one jurisdiction is the opposite to the law in the neighbouring jurisdiction.

In the Republic, it is an offence to possess a firework with intent to sell or supply under the Minister's new Criminal Justice Act 2006. Moreover, it is an offence to light an unlicensed firework. The penalty for each of these offences is a fine of up to €10,000 or five years imprisonment, or both. The simple possession of a firework attracts a €10,000 penalty. These are severe penalties. Across the Border in Northern Ireland, however, unlimited quantities of fireworks are legally on sale in bona fide retail outlets and in wholesale warehouses. I saw no Garda presence of any sort along the Border to deter purchasers from the Republic crossing into the North or to confiscate their criminal cargo on their return.

To further underline the stupidity of the situation, there were hoardings and signposts erected in the Republic advertising the illegal goods available for sale legally in the neighbouring jurisdiction. The Minister's new penalties and offences in the legislation ring very hollow, particularly as he has not taken steps to ban the advertising of illegal goods along the Border or to increase patrols to deter purchasers or confiscate illegal goods from motorists returning to the Republic. Most important, he has not taken steps to discuss with his counterparts in Northern Ireland the illogicality of having diametrically opposed legal positions on the possession and use of fireworks in the two jurisdictions. The only solution to the annual explosion of fireworks in the run up to Hallowe'en is to bring forward proposals to synchronise the legislation on an all-Ireland basis. Either fireworks should become legal under strict controls in both jurisdictions or they should be banned in both jurisdictions.

Last year in Northern Ireland there was a whopping 56% increase in injuries involving fireworks and there is a campaign afoot in schools there to reduce accidents this year. There is a strong case for banning them in both jurisdictions. It is high time an effective approach was agreed so that elderly people will not be obliged to dread the imminent arrival of Hallowe'en and that parents will not be worried about injuries to their children from dangerous explosive devices in the hands of irresponsible people.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Mr. C. Lenihan): The Tánaiste is aware that a number of persons and companies in Northern Ireland which manufacture and/or sell fireworks in that jurisdiction advertise their prod-

ucts in the Republic. However, before addressing the issue of advertising, I wish first to outline the law and current policy relating to the control of fireworks.

The Explosives Act 1875, as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 2006, governs the importation, manufacture, storage and sale of fireworks. While the law does not specifically ban the importation, manufacture, sale or use of fireworks, they may only be imported into Ireland on foot of an importation licence granted by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. It is current policy, in the interests of safety and security, to restrict, to the greatest extent possible, the availability of fireworks to the general public. Effect is given to this policy through the use of the licensing powers, conferred on the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform by the 1875 Act. Licences are only issued for the importation of fireworks used in organised displays, conducted by professional or competent operators. In effect, this policy means that the only fireworks imported into the State under licence and “legally held” are those used in professional displays. All other fireworks imported, held, sold or used in this country are illegal and any person in possession of fireworks without a valid licence is liable to prosecution.

Last year, the Tánaiste commissioned research into the public’s attitude to current policy on the control of fireworks. The general conclusion of the research was that people are generally in favour of the thrust of the current policy of prohibiting the importation of fireworks for sale to members of the public.

On the question of prohibiting the advertisement in this jurisdiction of fireworks for sale in Northern Ireland, the House will be aware that the sale of fireworks there is not illegal. It is, therefore, open to any person who wishes to import fireworks into this jurisdiction, on foot of an importation licence issued by the Tánaiste, to purchase fireworks in Northern Ireland. While the question of advertising generally, and the accuracy of the advertisement content, is a matter for the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, it seems that in the circumstances one could not prohibit in this jurisdiction the advertising of fireworks for sale in Northern Ireland.

The question of advertising of fireworks for sale in this jurisdiction is, however, a different matter. As already stated, while our law does not ban the importation of fireworks for sale, it is current policy not to issue licences for the importation of fireworks for sale here to the general public. As a result of recent changes in the law, any person found in possession of fireworks for sale, or with intent to supply, will be liable on conviction on indictment to a fine of up to €10,000 or up to five years imprisonment, or both.

The Tánaiste is fully aware of the difficulties which the illegal use of fireworks present each year at this time, the distress they cause to people, particularly the elderly, and the dangers they pose. Conscious of this, he introduced, in the Criminal Justice Act 2006, a number of amendments to the Explosives Act 1875. These provide for new offences governing the misuse of fireworks in public places and an offence of possession of illegally imported fireworks with intent to supply. They also provide for significantly increased penalties governing the illegal importation, sale and use of fireworks. These new offences and penalties are that it is an offence for any person to possess a firework with intent to sell or supply, without a licence; it is an offence to throw an ignited firework at any person or property; and it is an offence to light unlicensed fireworks in a public place. The penalty for such offences is a fine of up to €10,000 or five years imprisonment, or both.

The simple possession of fireworks without a licence is also an offence for which a person may be liable to a fine of up to €10,000. This year, for the first time, the Tánaiste embarked on a nationwide advertising campaign designed to generate knowledge among members of the public that it is illegal to possess fireworks without a licence, to bring to their attention the new offences and penalties for the illegal possession and use of fireworks introduced under the Criminal Justice Act 2006 and to improve awareness of the danger of fireworks. The campaign is national in nature, comprising print, radio and outdoor advertisements and will run up until Hallowe’en. In this regard, it should be noted that large advertising billboards with the clear and simple message of the campaign, “No Licence — No Fireworks”, and outlining clearly the penalties, have been strategically located in the Border counties.

In the lead-up to Hallowe’en each year, special efforts are made by the Garda to combat the illegal importation, sale and use of fireworks. Where necessary, specific policing plans are put in place in areas where particular problems can arise. These plans include intelligence gathering on known dealers and suppliers and, once identified, putting plans in place to arrest them and seize their stocks of illegal fireworks.

This year an intelligence-led operation — Operation Tombola — which aims to prevent and detect the organised importation for sale of fireworks, has been put in place by the Garda Commissioner. In this context chief superintendents throughout the country have been instructed to introduce measures appropriate to their respective areas of responsibility, with particular emphasis on Garda divisions in the Dublin metropolitan region and Border areas. The operation, while being intelligence-driven, is also coupled with sporadic high visibility policing activities. Operation Tombola commenced on 25

[Mr. C. Lenihan.]

September 2006 and, to date, there have been 30 seizures of fireworks with an estimated value of €87,000.

In the past five years, operations of this kind have resulted in significant seizures of illegally imported fireworks with an estimated value of over €2 million. All fireworks seized are forfeited by the person possessing them and destroyed in accordance with the provisions of the Explosives Act 1875.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister of State's time is exhausted and he must conclude.

Mr. C. Lenihan: I will forward the remainder of my reply to the Deputy if he so wishes.

Mr. Costello: The Minister of State is very kind.

Anti-social Behaviour.

Mr. Crowe: I wish to raise the issue of safety on our public transport system, following an incident last week in Tallaght where a young man was thrown out of the top window of a bus. This is the latest in a series of such incidents. Something similar happened a few years ago in Tallaght when buses were stoned. Elected representatives, members of the Garda, the community, the unions and South Dublin County Council met to try to resolve the situation. Unfortunately, these incidents continue to occur.

I have a list of incidents that have occurred recently, which includes passenger abuse, a row on a bus, drug taking on a bus, a child assaulted on a bus, bottles thrown on the upper saloon of a bus, abuse of a driver, spitting at a driver, passengers causing disturbances, a man set on fire, broken windows, stone throwing, syringes found on the upper saloon, anti-social behaviour, fighting on the upper saloon of a bus, youths setting fire to a bus with lighters, youths setting fire to a bus with paper and passengers assaulted. These are just some of the incidents that have been reported to the Garda and to Dublin Bus. What is happening is unacceptable. We need to look at the serious incident that occurred on Friday and come up with new ways of tackling the problem that exists.

The current system that operates in Tallaght is called Operation Saferoute, but I presume it operates elsewhere in the city. These assaults are not just happening in the Tallaght area as it is a general problem. When people use public transport they expect the service to be safe, clean, reliable and to be reasonably priced. Having listened to the list of incidents I have read out, I do not think that anybody would feel safe getting on a bus. We were assured a few years ago that CCTV would be put in every bus. However, that has not happened. The drivers, management,

gardai involved and members of the community all suffer due to these incidents. The community suffers because the buses are withdrawn and because members of the community are often victims on the buses. The drivers suffer because they are terrified of the incidents that happen and of being assaulted. The Garda Síochána is suffering due to the bad publicity involved and Dublin Bus is also suffering because people are less likely to get on the bus. A different response is needed.

We need a higher visibility of gardai in the area, which will not be a drain on resources. However, we need extra resources as well. In other jurisdictions there are river police, transport police and so on. We need to look at that in the long term. In the short term, we need to provide assurances to the travelling public that the buses will continue to run and that this hooligan element will be removed.

Mr. O'Connor: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle and the Ceann Comhairle for facilitating us in this matter. The timing was critical because there has been much adverse publicity in recent days about the Tallaght region. It is very important that we make the point that this is not just about Tallaght. We are very sensitive about the image being created of Tallaght, but these problems need to be addressed. Deputy Crowe and I attended the Dublin Bus Community Forum in Killinarden Enterprise Centre this morning. The Garda representation was headed by the superintendent and the local inspector. Dublin Bus management and unions and members of the community were also there. We all made the point that action must be taken.

If there are problems on our buses, Dublin Bus has a duty to ensure that the bus service is preserved and protected on behalf of the local community. It is not good enough to take the easy option every time a problem occurs. The people of Tallaght will not tolerate this situation and they want their bus service protected and preserved. We are raising this matter tonight to tell the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to allow the Garda to maintain vigilance and take new actions for our bus service in Tallaght.

I compliment all of my colleagues who attended this morning's meeting. It was tense but we did much good work and I compliment everyone involved, including the Garda, Dublin Bus management and unions and the members of the community. We are all united on this issue. We are fighting to ensure that the bus service is protected. There have been a number of unfortunate incidents in recent weeks. A few weeks ago, the bus services were withdrawn from a point west of the Square because of difficulties. A serious incident occurred last Friday and I am sorry that the young man was identified by some of the media today. His family is anxious to maintain a

low profile while he recovers. We send him our best wishes and hope that he makes a good recovery. The incident highlights the difficulties that we are having. Resources must be made available to the Garda to allow it to work with Dublin Bus to ensure the continuation of bus services in Tallaght and to protect the service on behalf of the community.

Mr. C. Lenihan: I thank the Deputies for raising this matter and I am aware of recent media reports on the matter. I am deputising for the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform who is unavailable at this time. The Tánaiste shares their concern and that of the public about anti-social behaviour, including the recent serious attack on a young person on a bus. The Tánaiste was appalled to hear of this senseless and potentially fatal attack on the young man. On behalf of the Tánaiste and myself, I wish him a speedy recovery from his injuries.

Strong provisions are already in place to combat anti-social behaviour. The recently enacted Criminal Justice Act 2006 contains further provisions to deal with anti-social behaviour. The provisions allow a senior member of the Garda Síochána to apply to the District Court by way of a civil procedure for an order to prohibit an adult from behaving in an anti-social manner. For children aged 12 to 18 years, specially tailored provisions, fully integrated into the Children Act 2001, allow for a number of steps to be taken. These also culminate in court orders for those engaged in anti-social behaviour.

The relevant provisions of the Act will be commenced following consultations between the Tánaiste's Department, the Office of the Minister for Children and the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána. Section 1(3) of the Act makes specific provision to this effect. The purpose of this is to ensure that these provisions will be commenced only after the Commissioner has had the opportunity to make the necessary internal arrangements to ensure the smooth introduction of these new procedures.

The Tánaiste is informed by the Garda authorities that Garda management within the Dublin metropolitan region has an excellent working relationship with the management of Dublin Bus. Regular contact is maintained and any issues raised are dealt with promptly. The Dublin Bus Community Forum is in place to address anti-social behaviour on buses and meets regularly. Local Garda management and community leaders from the Tallaght area participate in the forum along with Dublin Bus management and union representatives. Local Garda management met with Dublin Bus management following the incident and this was followed by a meeting of the community forum.

Local Garda management, in conjunction with Dublin Bus, has put Operation Saferoute in place

to address public order issues on public transport in the Tallaght area. This involves members of the local community policing unit travelling on Dublin Bus services in the Tallaght area in order to prevent and detect incidents occurring on public transport.

The Tánaiste understands the Garda authorities are actively investigating the incident referred to by both Deputies. Five juveniles were arrested following an examination of CCTV footage from the bus on which the incident took place. It is expected that an investigation file will be submitted to the national juvenile office when these inquiries are completed.

I am informed that the Department of Transport has provided €2.8 million for the provision of new digital CCTV on Dublin Bus buses, through the national development plan. Dublin Bus currently uses CCTV to assist in investigating incidents on board buses as well as assisting in identifying the perpetrators of acts of vandalism. In this way Dublin Bus aims to deal with the threat of anti-social behaviour on board and in the immediate vicinity of the bus.

One of the big advantages of the new technology being used is that the quality of the images is much improved. Up to eight cameras can be fitted to each bus. This allows Dublin Bus to produce much clearer images to the Garda Síochána when pursuing individuals and bringing them to account for their activities. The Garda Síochána and Dublin Bus work very closely in this area and Dublin Bus is very appreciative of the support and assistance provided at local level by the Garda Síochána.

Other security measures taken by Dublin Bus include the fitting of all buses with radios enabling almost instant contact with supervisors and the Garda Síochána. In addition Dublin Bus has fitted security screens to all buses to protect drivers and all buses have alarm sirens fitted.

Garda personnel resources have been significantly increased by the Government. The total strength of Tallaght Garda station at 2 October 2006 was 173, all ranks. By comparison, the total strength of Tallaght Garda station at 31 December 1997 was 133, all ranks. This represents an increase of 40, or 30%, in the number of personnel allocated to Tallaght Garda station since that date.

Local Garda management is satisfied with the measures which are currently in place to combat public disorder and other anti-social behaviour on public transport in the Tallaght area. Garda management is not complacent but will continue to focus the resources available where they are most needed.

Health Services.

Mr. Crawford: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for the opportunity of speaking on the Teamwork report. With apologies to the Minister of State,

[Mr. Crawford.]

Deputy Conor Lenihan, I would like to have seen a Minister from the Department of Health and Children come to the House to discuss this major national report, which contains 115 pages in total. We will not be able to do it justice in ten minutes but it is vital to Monaghan General Hospital.

That hospital has been the subject of more reports than any other. One of the most important of those reports was carried out by Mr. Bonnar. Its findings were to have been implemented and funded but in the end it was ignored. His report showed what could be done with safety in mind at the hospital. The Teamwork report highlighted many difficulties due to the Government failure to do what the Bonnar report and other proposals recommended. The Government failed to provide the promised staff and even forced others to leave. Monaghan General Hospital's brand new theatre was often left idle while the State, through the National Treatment Purchase Fund, paid others to carry out operations in some less well-equipped private hospitals. Monaghan General Hospital was carrying out such work for Northern Ireland before the then Minister, Deputy Martin, allowed it to be taken off call.

During the years that Monaghan General Hospital was off call, many lives were lost. The Teamwork group was brought in to look at the overall north-east region that suffered serious problems as a lack of leadership led to issues being dealt with through the courts system. This lack of management was highlighted by the independent Pat Joe Walsh report. It substantiated what I and others highlighted in this House on many occasions but was ignored by the Minister.

Mr. Chris Lyons, who is in charge of the hospital group, recently stated that the Teamwork plan was based on international best evidence and that it was a unique opportunity to lead health care in Ireland towards a model which provides best quality care.

In a reply to my parliamentary question, the Minister assured me that no service would be taken away until a better service was put in place, yet Mr. Lyons is now rushing ahead to close down services in Monaghan General Hospital and using all sorts of spurious excuses. He told us recently that the Teamwork report was a bottom-up exercise but in reality the Teamwork report personnel refused to meet anyone who knows or cares about the patients and users of Monaghan General Hospital.

Several Ministers, including the Minister of State's brother, Deputy Brian Lenihan, promised that meetings would be arranged with those who understood and were willing to discuss the issue of the Teamwork report, but this did not happen. The report was published and the Government allowed for its implementation without debate in the House.

The first proposal was to centralise all level three care at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda. It was proposed to close units in Cavan, Louth and Dundalk as well as Monaghan. It is known that Drogheda is not able to cope. This was obvious when they had to send Pat Joe Walsh to Monaghan at a time when it was clear he was not fit to be moved, yet it is Monaghan that is under question. When the report was issued, the Minister for Health and Children, then Tánaiste, stated that Monaghan would have to be closed while Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital got off scot free.

A young handicapped man had his life saved by Monaghan hospital just last month. His parents asked me to put this on the record of the House. From what was said today on local radio, it seems that Mr. Lyons now seems to be moving the critically ill patients to Cavan, yet there is no room there except on trolleys. Cavan hospital is also to be closed. What is the Minister doing about this? Has she any understanding or care? She has never once visited Monaghan General Hospital and it is clear she does not want any open or frank discussions about it.

I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House to reply but I urge him to ensure that the House has a full discussion on this major report. Mr. Chris Lyons has stated this report is not just applicable to Monaghan General Hospital but is a template for all Ireland. I hope the Government backbenchers will wake up to that fact and realise the serious implications it will have for an all-Ireland health service.

Mr. C. Lenihan: I will reply on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney. I am informed that all Ministers associated with the Department of Health and Children are on ministerial duties associated with their portfolios this evening.

Mr. Crawford: They are certainly not in Monaghan.

Mr. C. Lenihan: The Health Service Executive has recently established a steering group and a north-east project group to oversee a programme designed to improve safety and standards across the acute hospital network in the north-east region. The decision was taken having regard to the issues raised in the report prepared for the HSE by Teamwork Management Services, entitled Improving Safety and Achieving Better Standards — An Action Plan for Health Services in the North East, and taking account of the findings of the recent report into the death of Mr. Patrick J. Walsh. Led by the HSE's national hospitals office, the steering group has representation from key stakeholders such as clinicians and primary care providers. The project group is being led by a consultant surgeon from outside the region.

The Teamwork report concluded that the present system, where five local hospitals deliver acute care to relatively small populations in the region, is exposing patients to increased risks and creating additional professional risks for staff. The report highlights the need to develop a high quality and responsive emergency and planned service, in line with international standards, by developing local services within existing hospitals and other local centres supported by a new regional hospital. The HSE recently published the report of the independent inquiry into the death of Mr. Walsh. The report details the difficulties that arose in trying to secure Mr. Walsh's transfer from Monaghan to either Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, or Cavan General Hospital. It also exposes a failure in communications between clinicians and hospitals in the region. Since the death of Mr. Walsh, a new protocol for patient transfer has been put in place. It provides that all requests for transfer from Monaghan General Hospital to Cavan General Hospital or Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, should be granted and processed immediately.

International best practice demonstrates that patients have better outcomes when treated in hospitals with appropriate numbers of specialist staff, high volumes of activity and access to the right diagnostic and treatment facilities.

Patient safety and quality must be paramount and must be the key drivers in the reconfiguration of our acute hospital services. The policy of the Government is to provide safe, high-quality services that achieve the best possible outcomes for patients. This will mean rebalancing service delivery so that those services that can be safely delivered locally are delivered locally and that more complex services that require specialist input are concentrated at regional centres.

The HSE has given the Minister an assurance that, in progressing the implementation of the teamwork report and the report of the independent inquiry into the death of Mr. Walsh, there will be no discontinuation of existing services until suitable alternative arrangements have been put in place.

Schools Building Projects.

Dr. Devins: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for allowing me raise the important issue of a new school for Dromore West in County Sligo. Dromore West Central national school is situated in Dromore West village in west Sligo. Dromore West is a designated growth area under Sligo County Council's development plan. It has experienced rapid growth in population in the recent past. The school is in a bad condition and in urgent need of replacement. Unfortunately, this has been the position for some time.

There have been ongoing discussions between the board of management and the Department as to whether a new school should be built or whether the existing school should be reconstructed and extended. I am pleased to say that agreement has been reached that a new school is the answer. That is the correct way forward. There has been much discussion locally and great interest in the future of the school. In that regard, the board of management, teachers and parents are to be congratulated on their commitment to and interest in the school.

I would be grateful if the Minister of State would outline to the House and for the people of Dromore West the current status of the school's application for a new building. I have spoken with the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Hanafin, and have communicated with her and her Department in regard to the school on many occasions. I know the Minister of State is well aware of the need for a new school. I strongly urge that Dromore West Central national school be included in the 2007 schools building programme.

The children, parents, teachers, board of management and wider community in Dromore West village and its surroundings are badly in need of this new school. I ask that the school be sanctioned early in the new year.

Mr. C. Lenihan: I thank the Deputy for affording me the opportunity of outlining to the House the position of the Department of Education and Science regarding Dromore West Central national school, Dromore West, County Sligo.

The building project for Dromore West Central national school was one of a number of schools that the Department of Education and Science announced in 2005 to progress through architectural planning. This project is at stage 3, developed sketch scheme, of architectural planning. The brief on the project is to provide adequate accommodation for a principal plus four classroom teachers with the possibility of future expansion. It has not yet been decided whether this accommodation will be provided by means of an extension to the current school or a new school building.

A letter issued to the board of management in May 2006 requesting additional stage 3 information. This information was submitted by the board of management in August 2006. The stage 3 submission received in the Department deviated from the agreed brief for the building project and consequently the Department wrote to the board of management seeking a revised stage 3 in accordance with the agreed brief. When the revised stage 3 submission is received in the Department, a meeting will be convened which will involve the board of management representative and the design team presenting the submission, outlining key aspects of same. Any issues

[Mr. C. Lenihan.]

or commentary by the Department will be addressed at the meeting.

The minutes of the meeting will issue to the school afterwards as a formal record of the meeting. It is envisaged that unless there are very exceptional circumstances involved, the meeting will be sufficient to authorise the project to progress to the next stage of architectural planning subject, if necessary, to formal receipt of confirmation by the school from the design team that issues raised by the Department have been addressed.

The design and planning of the project is covered by stages 1 to 5, during which the project

is developed from the assessment of site suitability, through the detailed design, including the obtaining of planning permission, to the point where detailed bills of quantities are prepared. In the case of all large capital projects currently on hands, progression of projects to construction will be considered in the context of the school building and modernisation programme 2006-2009.

I thank Deputy Devins for raising the matter. I know he has the interests of constituents and parents in mind when he addresses this matter. I thank him for his sustained interest on my own behalf and that of the Minister for Education and Science.

The Dáil adjourned at 9.05 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 25 October 2006.

Written Answers.

The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].

Questions Nos. 1 to 17, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 18 to 91, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 92 to 100, inclusive, answered orally.

Educational Disadvantage.

101. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will assist to pay increases in gas and electricity costs which is causing hardship to schools in disadvantaged areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34110/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department's scheme of capitation grants provide funding towards the general operating costs of schools which would include heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, painting, teaching aids and other miscellaneous charges. The capitation grant has been increased substantially in recent years.

The standard rate of capitation grant for primary schools has increased from €57.14 (£45) in 1997 to €145.58 in 2006. This represents an increase of almost 155% in the capitation grant over that period.

This grant is in addition to the Ancillary Services Grant which provides additional funding for primary schools towards the cost of secretarial and caretaking services. The standard rate of grant per pupil under this scheme has also been substantially increased — from €102 per pupil in 2002 to the current rate of €139 per pupil.

There has also been significant improvements in the level of funding for second level schools in recent years. Since January 2005, the standard per capita grant has been increased by a cumulative €24 per pupil and now stands at €298 per pupil.

Voluntary secondary schools have also benefited from a series of equalisation payments.

Payments to all second level schools under the school services support fund initiative have also increased in recent years. Introduced with effect from the 2000/01 school year, the school services support grant has been increased since January 2005 by a cumulative €28 per pupil bringing the annual grant from €131 per pupil to €159 per pupil. These grants are in addition to the funding of up to €40,000 per school that is also provided by my Department to secondary schools towards secretarial and caretaking services. A secondary school with 500 pupils, for example, now receives annual grants of up to €270,000 towards general expenses and support services. This represents an increase of 83% since 2000.

These significant increases in the funding of both primary and post primary schools are a clear demonstration of my commitment to prioritise available resources to address the needs of schools. Increases in general day-to-day funding are, in my view, a preferable approach to putting in place grants for specific cost items such as that referred to by the Deputy.

Of course, as well as providing for significant increases in the grants paid to all schools, I am very conscious of the need for extra funding for schools serving disadvantaged areas. As the Deputy will be aware, we continue to provide extra grants to schools benefiting from schemes aimed at tackling disadvantage.

Under the new action plan for tackling disadvantage — the DEIS programme — which is currently being rolled out, additional funding is being provided to the most disadvantaged schools.

The total amount that will be paid to schools participating in DEIS and those getting funding under other initiatives to tackle disadvantage will be over €17 million this year. Taken together with the increase in capitation payments in recent

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years, I believe that this has improved the financial position of our disadvantaged schools.

However, I will, as always bear in mind the cost pressures on our schools in assessing the rate of capitation that should be paid in 2007. This Government has shown a strong commitment to improving school funding in recent years and I will continue to prioritise this area.

School Accommodation.

102. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 477 of 3 October 2006, when the current assessment began and when it will be completed; the person who is carrying out the assessment; if similar assessments are underway for other primary schools in the east Cork area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34237/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The initial application from the school sought to have its accommodation needs met by way of a devolved grant under the Additional Classroom Accommodation scheme 2006. While acknowledging that the school had an immediate deficit of mainstream accommodation which was addressed by way of approval to rent a mainstream classroom, my officials' preliminary appraisal of the school's longterm accommodation need indicated that a more thorough assessment of the projected long term staffing, on which the school's overall accommodation needs will be based, was required with a view to providing the necessary building project under the traditional building programme.

Projects developed under the traditional building programme are generally assessed having regard to, *inter alia*:

- current and projected enrolments,
- demographic trends in the area,
- recent and planned residential developments which are likely to impact on the school and where necessary liaison with the local planning authorities, and
- consultation with the School authority.

In this regard, my Department will be meeting with Cork County Council in the coming weeks to discuss potential and anticipated developments in the general area in which the school is located. Following on from the findings of this meeting my Department will give further consideration, in consultation with the school authorities, to the likely accommodation needs of the school.

The Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position to state when the assessment needs of this school or the schools in the area which have applications with my Department will be completed. The Deputy can be assured that the

matter will be dealt with as expeditiously as possible.

Educational Disadvantage.

103. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools to receive funding under the DEIS scheme; when such funding will come on stream; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34209/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the new action plan for educational inclusion provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP). The DEIS plan states that as well as provision being made under the SSP for schools with a concentrated level of disadvantage, financial support will also continue to be provided for other primary schools where the level of disadvantage is more dispersed.

DEIS is designed to ensure that the schools serving the most disadvantaged communities benefit from the maximum level of support available. Schools which have not qualified for the new School Support Programme and which are receiving additional resources, both human and financial, under pre-existing schemes and programmes for addressing concentrated disadvantage, will retain these supports for 2006/2007. After that, schools will continue to get support in line with the level of disadvantage among their pupils.

As a result of the identification and review processes, 873 schools have been invited to participate in the new Programme. These comprise 670 primary schools (338 urban/town schools and 332 rural schools) and 203 second-level schools.

Grants due to the 670 Primary schools which are participating in the School Support Programme will be lodged to their schools' bank accounts on 17 November 2006. This is in addition to payments totalling €1 million which issued to those schools in June 2006. Grants due to the 203 Post Primary schools which are participating in the School Support Programme will be lodged to their schools' bank accounts in the coming month.

In addition, approximately another 2,000 schools will receive rates of grant assistance to assist them with their respective levels of dispersed disadvantage, including those that are benefitting from previous schemes.

In addition to supplementary financial assistance which is provided to Schools in SSP, schools will benefit from additional measures under DEIS which range from pre-school interventions, supports for tackling children's literacy problems, reduced pupil teacher ratios, allocation of administrative principals on lower enrolment, measures to tackle early school leaving and measures to

strengthen ties between the school, the family and the community.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

104. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Education and Science the most up to date figures regarding the number of children in primary classes of 35 to 39 children inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34184/06]

114. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the most up to date figures regarding the number of children in primary classes of 25 to 29 children inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34180/06]

121. **Mr. G. Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Science the most up to date figures regarding the number of children in primary classes of 40 or more children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34186/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 104, 114 and 121 together.

Information in relation to class sizes is provided in the annual census of primary schools. The reference date for the provision by schools of this information is the 30th September of the school year in question and the date for return by the schools is 31 October. Consequently, the details for the current school year (2006/2007) are not yet available.

The most recent figures available in my Department are for the 2005/2006 school year in which there were 9,863 children in primary classes of 35 to 39, 162,174 children in primary classes of 25 to 29 and 206 children in primary classes of 40 or more.

In terms of measuring progress, I am sure the Deputies will be interested to know that in the school year in which this Government came into office there were 52,190 children in classes of 35 and over — five times the number that there are now. 1,901 of these children were in classes of 40 and over — compared to just over 200 last year.

As the Deputies will be aware, major improvements have been made in staffing at primary level in recent years. At the beginning of the current school year there are no less than 4000 extra teachers in our primary schools, compared with 2002. The average class size in our primary schools is 24 and there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level, including resource teachers etc.

Children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas are getting more support than ever before to help them to make the most of their time at school. Indeed, with the thousands of extra primary teachers hired by this Government, recent years have seen the largest expansion in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. Furthermore, the Govern-

ment is committed to providing even more primary teachers next year to reduce class sizes.

As the Deputies will know all primary schools are staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. 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 28 children in the school. Next year (2007/2008 school year) this is being reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

A further initiative that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the current school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned in the 2006/07 school year compared to 170 in 2005/06.

This Government has shown a clear determination to improve the staffing in our schools and we will continue to prioritise this issue going forward.

Language Programme.

105. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the training provided in teaching English as a foreign language for primary teachers and teachers specifically assigned to teach children whose first language is not English; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34101/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department is committed to ensuring that all children get the necessary support that they need to do well at school. In order to ensure that children whose first language is not English can fully participate at school, my Department is providing extensive training in teaching English as a foreign language for primary teachers specifically assigned to teach children whose first language is not English.

Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT), a campus company of Trinity College Dublin, is funded by my Department to provide training and resource materials to assist schools in meeting the needs of pupils for whom English is a second language. A wide range of teaching resources has been developed by IILT which are available on their website at www.iilt.ie or directly from IILT.

In 2005, more language support teachers than ever before attended the IILT bi-annual round of in-service seminars. In the spring term of 2005, an overall total of 408 primary teachers attended seminars and in the autumn term a further 548 primary teachers attended, bringing the total number for the year to 956. This is a significant increase on the number attending for 2004 which was 680.

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In March 2006, IILT held in-service seminars in Dublin, Longford, Cork and Limerick. These seminars were attended by teachers from 77 primary schools from around the country. All teachers present were new teachers, who had not previously attended IILT seminars and IILT intends to continue to target newly-appointed teachers for the remainder of this year.

A range of courses focusing on the areas of diversity/interculturalism were also approved for inclusion in my Department's summer course programme. A total of 155 primary teachers attended these courses.

Education Centres are playing an integral role in the task of identifying and designing programmes and courses to meet the distinct needs of teachers in this area. Funding has been provided to Centres under the local course initiatives to design, develop and deliver courses locally. The needs addressed include diversity and interculturalism.

A collaborative project between the Education Centre Network and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, supported by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform and the Teacher Education Section of my Department, has been established to provide in-service training for teachers in the implementation of the Intercultural Guidelines for Primary Schools. This project has been well received by teachers who are ensuring that their teaching of the eleven subjects which comprise the primary curriculum reflects the increasingly intercultural nature of the student cohort.

My Department is currently reviewing provision in this whole area with a view to determining the appropriate educational response to the needs of newcomer children, with particular reference to their language needs.

Special Educational Needs.

106. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has identified the schools at which the most serious and pressing needs in respect of remedial resource or speech and language therapy or other special needs teaching requirements exist; her proposals to meet these requirements as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34143/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The National Council for Special Education, through the 75 local special educational needs organisers, known as SENOs, is responsible for processing applications from schools for special needs supports. These supports include resource teaching hours and SNA support for pupils with low-incidence special needs and assistive technology or equipment for pupils in either high-or low-incidence special educational needs categories. In this way pressing needs in

the area of special needs supports in schools are identified early and acted upon quickly.

In addition a general allocation scheme has been in operation since September 2005 under which mainstream primary schools have been provided with resource teaching hours, based on enrolment figures, to cater for children with high incidence special educational needs such as dyslexia and those with learning support needs.

There has been enormous progress made over the past number of years in relation to increasing the number of teachers in our schools who are specifically dedicated to providing education for children with special educational needs. At primary level, there are now over 5,000 teachers in our primary schools working directly with children with special needs, including those requiring learning support. At second level, 1,843 whole time equivalent additional teachers are in place to support pupils with special educational needs as well as 534 wholetime equivalent learning support teachers.

I am confident that the advent of the National Council for Special Education, the introduction of the General Allocation Model and the significant number of teaching posts allocated in recent years have ensured children with learning support and resource educational needs are receiving the necessary educational supports.

The responsibility for the provision of speech and language therapy services rests with the Health Service Executive. However, I can advise the Deputy that my Department has sanctioned 59 special classes for children with specific speech and language disorder. Each class can cater for up to 7 children and children have access to a speech and language therapist.

School Curriculum.

107. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science when standardised testing will be introduced at primary level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34208/06]

157. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the ages at which standardised testing at primary level will take place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34210/06]

210. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position with regard to the introduction of standardised testing at primary level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34212/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107, 157 and 210 together.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, in its advice submitted to me in April 2005, recommends that the practice of standardised testing which is currently well established in primary schools should be built upon

and that all pupils should be tested in literacy and numeracy at the end of first or beginning of second class and at the end of fourth or beginning of fifth class.

I fully agree with the NCCA's advice since I believe that standardised testing, carried out on a systematic basis, has great potential to enhance the quality of teaching and learning for our pupils at classroom level, and to provide valuable information for parents about their children's learning.

However, to reap the full benefits of standardised testing, it is essential that a range of supports are put in place for teachers and parents in advance of introducing a requirement on schools to conduct tests.

In that context, the NCCA is preparing guidelines which will assist schools in developing and implementing a policy on assessment practice in classrooms and on reporting to parents. These will be available during the 2006/07 school year.

The NCCA is also developing guidelines in specific subjects which will provide teachers with information on what to assess in individual subjects of the Primary School Curriculum and how to use assessment information to plan for children's future learning in that subject.

A national report card for recording and reporting data on pupils' attainment to parents is also being developed by the NCCA. This will be piloted in a number of schools in the current school year and will be available to all schools in the following year.

Significant funding to support the initiative has been provided for in the current Estimates. Plans for inservice training to support assessment for learning are also being finalised at present. My intention is that we will proceed carefully but as quickly as possible to ensure that the recommendations proposed by the NCCA are implemented in a way that has positive benefits for children, parents, teachers and the system as a whole.

108. **Mr. Crawford** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools that offer physics to leaving certificate level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34181/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department publishes data on the number of schools offering each subject in its annual Statistical Report. Although the report for the 2005/06 school year is still in preparation, I can provide the following provisional information to the Deputy.

In the 2005/06 school year there were 554 post-primary schools offering Physics as a subject in their Leaving Certificate Programme. Of these, 113 were Boys schools, 129 were Girls schools and 312 were Co-educational schools.

Significant progress has been made in a range of science areas including curricular reform, the provision of equipment grants to schools and the refurbishment of school laboratories.

Pre-school Services.

109. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of pre-school places currently funded by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34211/06]

137. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children currently receiving a pre-school education which is funded by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34213/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 109 and 137 together.

Early Years Education in Ireland covers the period from birth to six years. Almost all five year olds and half of four year olds attend junior infant and senior infant classes in primary schools. Outside of junior classes in primary schools, my Department's main role in the area of early years education encompasses targeted pre-school provision for children from disadvantaged areas, for traveller children and for those with special needs. The Early Start pre-school project provides some 1,680 places in 40 primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Galway, Drogheda and Dundalk. My Department also funds 46 pre-schools for Traveller children, catering for some 500 pupils.

In the special needs sector, there are currently 16 pre-school classes for children with autism located throughout the country. In addition to this, 12 stand-alone autism facilities that provide an applied behavioural analysis (ABA) model of response to children with autism cater for a number of children of pre-school age. My Department sanctions home tuition grants for children with autism who are of pre-school age and for whom a home educational programme is considered appropriate – grants for some 200 such children are currently in payment. In a small number of cases, my Department allocates funding to service providers to assist them in providing an educational component to pre-school age children in Child Educational Development Centres (CEDCs).

Targeted early childhood education provision is a key element of the School Support Programme (SSP) under the new action plan for educational inclusion DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), which provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage. The objective in relation to early childhood education is to concentrate actions initially on those children aged from three up to school enrolment, who will subsequently attend the 190 urban/town primary schools serving the most disadvantaged communities. My Department will work in partnership with other Departments and agencies to complement and add value

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to existing childcare programmes in disadvantaged communities, with a view to ensuring that the overall care and education needs of the children concerned are met in an integrated manner. A strong emphasis will be placed on adding value to the work of other providers by embedding quality early learning within childcare provision. The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education will provide advice on the future development and direction of pre-school measures for children in disadvantaged communities.

Departmental Expenditure.

110. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Science the method of evaluating expenditure on initiatives which are in place in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34214/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department approaches the evaluation of its programmes and initiatives in a number of different ways.

One of these is the formal Government programme of Value for Money Reviews, formerly called Expenditure Reviews, in which my Department participates. The objectives of these reviews, which were introduced in 1997, are to analyse Exchequer spending in a systematic manner and to provide a basis on which more informed policy and expenditure decisions can be made.

Value for Money Reviews are one of a range of modernisation initiatives aimed at moving public sector management away from the traditional focus on inputs to concentrate more on the achievement of results. They are organised on the basis of three year planning periods. The current programme of reviews is scheduled to be completed in the 2006-2008 period.

A critical component of my Department's approach to evaluation is the work of the Evaluation Support and Research Unit of the Inspectorate, which focuses on educational outcomes. The Unit co-ordinates periodic evaluations of the quality of educational provision in primary and post-primary schools and centres for education. The approach to conducting these evaluations usually involves collection of data about student achievement levels and observation in classrooms by inspectors to determine the quality of learning and teaching. Interviews and meetings are also held with key stakeholders in the relevant schools and centres for education.

Over and above this, my Department, through its line management divisions, examines particular issues, programmes and elements of programmes to inform changed approaches. This forms part of the general obligation on public sector managers to ensure that State funds are utilised in an efficient and effective manner.

School Evaluations.

111. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of whole school evaluations completed so far in 2006; the number made public; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34203/06]

564. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of whole school evaluations completed to date in 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34443/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 and 564 together.

The publication of the first school inspection reports on my Department's website took place on 22 and 29 June 2006. A further tranche of school inspection reports will be published in the next few days.

The process of publication of a WSE report involves a number of discrete stages between the end of the in-school evaluation activity of WSE and the final publication of the report on the Department's website. Following the carrying out of the in-school evaluation activity a meeting takes place between the WSE evaluation team and the board of management, senior management within the school and the school staff. The main findings and recommendations arising from the evaluation are presented and discussed and the school is encouraged to address the issues identified. The WSE report then goes through a process of verification with the school for factual accuracy. The school is then offered an opportunity to make a written response to the report. The WSE report is then finalised, issued to the school, and published on the Department's website along with the school response, if any. In general, WSE reports are ready for publication within 70 working days following the completion of the in-school inspection activity. A whole-school evaluation is considered completed when the report has been finalised and issued to a particular school.

At primary level 122 whole-school evaluations (WSE) were carried out in the first half of 2006. 41 of these evaluations had commenced prior to 6 February 2006 and, in accordance with the "Publication of Inspection Reports — Guidelines", these reports were issued to schools but were not eligible for publication. 39 of these reports have been issued to schools. 81 primary whole-school evaluations were planned to commence on or after 6 February 2006. 36 WSE reports were issued to primary schools and were published at the end of June. Approximately 20 of the remaining 45 WSE reports from the first half of 2006 will be published and issued to schools in the next few days. At this stage 75 of the 122 whole school evaluations planned for the first half of 2006 can be considered fully completed having been officially issued to the schools.

At post-primary level 29 whole-school evaluations were carried out in the first half of 2006. 9 of these reports related to evaluations commenced prior to 6 February 2006 and were, therefore, not eligible for publication but have been issued to the post-primary schools concerned. 5 of the remaining 20 whole-school evaluation reports were published at the end of June. Reports on approximately 10 of the remaining 15 post-primary WSEs conducted in the first half of 2006 will be published on my Department's website in the next few days. The remaining WSEs conducted in primary and post-primary schools during that period will shortly complete all stages of the factual verification and school response processes and will then be published.

Overall 89 of 151 whole-school evaluations planned at primary and post-primary levels for the first half of 2006 have been completed and a further thirty evaluations will be completed in a few days. Looking at the full year for 2006 it is anticipated that WSE inspections will have been conducted in 228 primary schools and 57 post-primary schools. Some of the WSE inspections commenced early in the current school term in primary and post-primary schools will have completed all stages of the publication process before the end of this school term and will be issued and published by the end of December 2006. The remainder of the 2006 WSE evaluations will be published early in 2007.

Up-to-date information on the WSE inspections that have been carried out in primary and post-primary schools and the list of published reports are available on the website of my Department (www.education.ie) at any time. The availability of the reports will now mean that the school community can play a more informed role in the ongoing process of school review and development.

School Accommodation.

112. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the way her Department anticipates future enrolment for primary schools; the actions her Department is currently taking with regard to same in the east Cork area; if she is confident that these primary schools are currently providing sufficient accommodation for pupils and will be able to cater for future demand; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34236/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I would like to assure the Deputy that my Department has a number of proactive strategies to ensure that the accommodation requirements for schools in developing areas, such as East Cork are addressed in a manner that will meet the long term education needs of the population.

The process of assessing the need for new or additional accommodation 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 existing school capacity to meet current or future demand. As part of the process, my Department is included among the prescribed authorities to whom local authorities are statutorily obliged to send draft development plans or variations to development plans. As a matter of course meetings are arranged with local authorities to establish the location, scale and pace of housing developments and their implication for both current and future school provision.

In this regard, officials in School Planning Section of my Department will be meeting with Cork County Council in the coming weeks to discuss potential and anticipated developments in the general area with a view to making informed decisions in relation to the long term accommodation needs of the schools in the area and in particular for those schools that have made applications for major capital investment in their buildings.

School Transport.

113. **Mr. Callanan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason for the delay in the processing of a school transport grant for a person (details supplied) in County Galway who is attending school for speech and language classes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33723/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): The family of the pupil referred to in the details supplied by the Deputy submitted documentation to my Department in the belief that they were entitled to a grant. A claim for a grant is generally not considered by my Department until an assessment has been made of the pupil's eligibility for school transport. This assessment can only be made on receipt of the relevant background information from Bus Éireann.

A report has now been received from Bus Éireann on the matter and my Department has written to the family concerned, suggesting that they contact their local Bus Éireann office with a view to having arrangements made for the provision of a transport service.

Question No. 114 answered with Question No. 104.

Higher Education Colleges.

115. **Mr. Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of men who applied to each of the primary teacher education colleges in 2006; the number of men who applied in 2005; the number of women who applied to each of the colleges in 2006 and in 2005; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34137/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The student application figures for places on the B. Ed. programmes in the Colleges of Education are not readily available. However, I have asked my officials to secure the number of applications to the Colleges of Education from the CAO and I would be glad to provide this material to the Deputy once available.

My Department has information on the numbers of students currently pursuing B. Ed. programmes at First Year in the Colleges. These

students represent applications for the programmes whom achieved the required entry standards and have registered in the Colleges. This information covers the student enrolment figures for the years 2005/06 and 2006/07.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the figures show an overall increase of 11.5% in the number of males enrolled in the Colleges of Education in the number of males enrolled in the Colleges of Education in the current academic year. The figures are:

2005-2006

Name of College of Education	Male	Female
Church of Ireland	2	29
Froebel College	8	55
Marino Institute of Education	16	90
St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra	40	353
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	58	382
Total:	124	909

2006-2007

Name of College of Education	Male	Female
Church of Ireland	2	31
Froebel College	8	73
Marino Institute of Education	12	102
St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra	50	410
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	67	345
Total	139	961

The Deputy will be aware that since the 1970s there has been a significant and continuous decline in the number of males entering the teaching profession, particularly at primary level. In the 1970s, approximately 30% of teachers were male and this had declined to approximately 18% in 2005. A similar decline in numbers has been experienced in most OECD countries.

My Department established The Primary Education Committee in October of 2003 to examine a range of issues in relation to males entering primary teaching, and to make recommendations on short-term and long-term strategies to increase the numbers in this regard. This work resulted in the publication of the Committee's final report, entitled: Males into Primary Teaching, which I launched in November of 2005.

One of the key recommendations in the Report calls for a co-ordinated promotion campaign, which would encourage boys as well as girls to enter primary teaching, should be undertaken.

The Deputy will also be aware that I launched the Men As Teachers and Educators (MATEs) Promotion Campaign aimed to attract more males into the teaching profession. Following a competitive tendering process, an advertising

agency (QMP) was engaged in January, 2006 to assist my Department in designing and managing the Men As Teachers and Educators campaign.

The campaign aims to highlight the wide variety of skills that a primary teacher uses, and to promote the rewards of being a teacher such as the value to society, work/life balance, career satisfaction, diversity of skills, professional development, conditions of employment and job security.

The target audience for the campaign includes:

- Young males 14+, with particular focus on those considering CAO course choices,
- Parents of school-going boys and girls
- Guidance Counsellors
- Teachers
- Mature students.

The campaign commenced in January of this year and, to date, it has included advertisements in the national newspapers, two phases of advertisements on national and local radio stations, a poster campaign in schools, and the placement of banner ads on specifically identified websites.

The next phase of the campaign will be put in place in the coming weeks. The Teaching Council will be involved in this coming phase, in line with the recommendations of the Primary Education Committee's Report.

While it is very encouraging to note that the enrolment figures indicate an increase in the number of males entering the Colleges of Education this year, it is too early to draw conclusions as to the effect of the campaign at this stage and it is expected that any effect would take a number of years to emerge. Indeed, the campaign is targeted, *inter alia*, at students who have yet to make subject choices for the Senior Cycle and any effect here would not yet be visible in the numbers applying for teacher training colleges.

I would like to assure the Deputy that the campaign to attract more males into teaching will continue and the number of males entering the profession will continue to be closely monitored by my Department.

Schools Building Projects.

116. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of building projects awaiting progression which are assessed by her Department as being of band three status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34228/06]

119. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of band one building projects which will be given clearance to proceed further before the end of 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34224/06]

122. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of band four building projects which will be given clearance to proceed further before the end of 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34218/06]

138. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of building projects awaiting progression which are assessed by her Department as being of band one status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34232/06]

141. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of building projects awaiting progression which are assessed by her Department as being of band four status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34226/06]

162. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of building projects awaiting progression which are assessed by her Department as being of band two status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34230/06]

191. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of band two building projects which will be given clearance to proceed further before the end of 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34222/06]

214. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of band three building projects which will be given clearance to proceed further before the end of 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34220/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 116, 119, 122, 138, 141, 162, 191 and 214 together.

As I indicated when publishing the various strands of the Department's Capital Programme for 2006, I intend to move through the School Building and Modernisation Programme in a planned way over the next five years. This is possible with the availability of a €3.9bn multi-annual capital funding envelope (primary, post-primary and third level) over that period to underpin a continuous programme of modernising school buildings. The number of building projects under consideration can change on a day to day basis as new applications are received and existing applications are progressed in my Department.

The Deputies will appreciate that this investment must continue to be targeted using the published prioritisation criteria. Details of projects to move forward under the programme will be published as and when they are ready to be advanced in the context of capital expenditure requirements.

Computerisation Programme.

117. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on the finding in Education at a Glance 2006 that Ireland ranks 20th out of 30 countries in terms of ratio of students to computers in schools; if she will resource schools to compete in the information age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34116/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): It is important to be noted that the indicator on access to and use of ICT in the Education at a Glance report is based on the data from its PISA survey of 15 year-old students in Spring 2003. Progress has of course been made in our school's ICT programme since then.

While Education at a Glance reports that there was one computer for every 9 post-primary students in Ireland in 2003, a census of school ICT facilities carried out in May and June of last year by the National Centre for Technology in Education found that by then there was one computer for every 7 post-primary students.

As the Deputy will be aware, major investment has also been provided for developing school net-

[Ms Hanafin.]

works and bringing broadband to our schools in recent years.

I am aware of the benefits that good use of ICT can bring to our children's education and will bear this in mind in considering what areas should be the future priorities for the ICT in Schools Programme.

Education Schemes.

118. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will allocate funding to schools to set up school book rental schemes to supplement the inadequate book grants currently available and to provide for a comprehensive school book rental scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34104/06]

206. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has had discussions in relation to introducing a national school book rental scheme. [34149/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 118 and 206 together.

My Department continues to urge the management authorities of both primary and second level schools to put in place book rental schemes to the greatest extent possible.

At primary level schools that opt for book rental schemes are allocated enhanced grants to encourage them to participate in such schemes.

In respect of the 2006/2007 school year primary schools not operating book rental schemes have been paid €14.70 per eligible pupil in the infant classes and €22.00 for each eligible pupil in the 1st to 6th classes. This compares to primary schools operating book rental schemes which have been paid €28.40 in respect of each eligible pupil in the infant classes and €38.10 for each eligible pupil in the 1st to 6th classes. Primary schools designated as disadvantaged and operating book rental schemes have been paid €32.00 in respect of each eligible pupil in the infant classes and €44.30 for each eligible pupil in the 1st to 6th classes.

A total of €5,350,000 — an increase of €1,350,000 on the allocation for the 2005/06 school year — was allocated in respect of the school books scheme in the 2006/2007 school year. Of this amount €4,775,253 was paid to primary schools operating loan/rental schemes. The allocation for 2006/2007 included an amount of €0.5m which was made available under the School Books Grant Scheme to primary schools in the School Support Programme (SSP) under DEIS.

Schools participating in the SSP that indicated that they would operate a book/loan rental scheme in 2006/2007 received grant aid at a higher rate per eligible pupil than applied in the case of schools generally. The extra funding is aimed at supporting the establishment, develop-

ment and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes.

At second level, in addition to the provision of grants towards the cost of providing school textbooks for needy pupils, my Department also provides seed capital funding to certain schools in order to assist in the establishment of book loan/rental schemes. These would be schools designated as disadvantaged or which participate in schemes aimed at combating educational disadvantage.

Expenditure on the School Books Grant Scheme in second level schools in 2005 was €7.018m. Of this amount some €0.3m was provided in seed capital for book loan/rental schemes. The 2006 allocation is €7,518,000, an increase of €500,000 over 2005.

The additional €500,000 in 2006 is for second level schools participating in the SSP under DEIS, who have indicated that they will operate a book loan/rental scheme in 2006/07.

Question No. 119 answered with Question No. 116.

Question No. 120 answered with Question No. 98.

Question No. 121 answered with Question No. 104.

Question No. 122 answered with Question No. 116.

Special Educational Needs.

123. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on providing tax relief in conjunction with the Department of Finance for parents of autistic children who have to pay for appropriate education in the private sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34139/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department is of the view that children with autism, in common with all children should have access to appropriate provision delivered by suitably qualified teachers within the school system where children can mix with their wider peer group and have maximum opportunities for integration. The preferred approach to the provision of appropriate education for children with autism, is through the primary and post primary school network, whether through placement in mainstream classes, in special classes or in special schools, a view that is supported by the findings of the Task Force Report on Autism. My Department's ongoing commitment is to ensuring that all children, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders receive an education appropriate to their needs and in this regard my Department has established:

- 171 Special Classes for children with autism, attached to special and mainstream schools;
- 5 special Classes for children with Asperger's Syndrome;
- 16 pre-school classes to facilitate the demand for early intervention provision for children on the autistic spectrum; and
- 12 Stand Alone facilities providing an Applied Behavioural Analysis; (ABA) specific methodology on a pilot basis. These units currently provide in the region of 217 places. Approval has also been given for the establishment of a further two such facilities.

While the question of providing tax relief for fees relating to private education is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Finance I consider that it is preferable that resources be allocated to fund direct provision.

Computerisation Programme.

124. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount allocated towards information and communications technology in schools by her Department for 2005; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34193/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department spent €15.17m under the ICT in Schools Programme in 2005, €5.59m in capital expenditure from subhead F05 and €9.58m in current expenditure from subhead B18.

As the Deputy is aware, the major focus for my Department under the ICT in Schools Programme has been the roll-out of broadband connectivity to all recognised schools. This project is being undertaken in partnership with industry, in the context of the joint Government/IBEC — TIF (Telecommunications and Internet Federation) Fund, to provide local connectivity to schools. The broadband connectivity is being provided via a Schools National Broadband Network supported by HEAnet, in order to provide managed Internet access, email, security controls and content filtering. A broadband support service is being managed by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) to assist schools with advice and information relating to the roll-out and ongoing use of their broadband connectivity within the schools network. Almost €3m of the capital expenditure and €2m of the current expenditure in 2005 was related to the broadband project.

The remaining €2.6m capital was provided in grants to schools under the networking grants scheme and allied grants to schools, either directly by my Department or via the NCTE.

The remaining current expenditure met the costs of the NCTE and the regionally based ICT advisory service which provide a range of sup-

ports to schools towards the integration of ICT into teaching and learning. These supports include a comprehensive teacher professional development programme, the provision of on-line teaching resources via the Scoilnet Portal, the support and dissemination of innovative practice and the provision of technical advice.

School Evaluations.

125. **Mr. McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of individual subject evaluations completed so far in 2006; the number made public; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34205/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): A subject evaluation is considered to have been completed when the report has been issued to a particular school. However there are a number of intermediate stages in this process. The draft report is sent to the school for verification in terms of factual accuracy and then the school is offered the opportunity to respond to the final report before issue.

271 subject evaluations were carried out in the first half of 2006. 14 subject inspections had commenced prior to 6 February 2006 and, in accordance with the the "Publication of Inspection Reports — Guidelines", these reports were issued to the schools but were not eligible for publication. 93 subject inspection reports were published by the end of June.

Therefore, 107 subject inspections have been completed. Of the remaining 164 subject inspection reports more than 120 will be published in the next few days. A further 117 subject inspections have been carried out as part of whole-school evaluations conducted in the first half of 2006. Already 57 of these subject inspection reports have been issued as part of whole-school evaluations already issued to schools and, in the near future, all will have been issued.

Early School Leavers.

126. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the progress made in relation to addressing the number of pupils failing to make the transition from primary to secondary level education. [34146/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There is no up to date research on the number of children who do not transfer from primary to post-primary education on an annual basis.

Measures designed to improve school completion include the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board in 2002 with a remit to monitor school attendance and tackle the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving, which includes the transfer of pupils from primary to post primary.

[Ms Hanafin.]

Working with parents to promote school attendance is an important part of the work of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and in addition to this, a key component of the School Completion Programme (SCP) is developing strong links between primary and post-primary schools in disadvantaged areas.

The School Support Programme under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the new action plan for educational inclusion will bring together, and build upon, a number of existing interventions in schools with a concentrated level of disadvantage. The new 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.

As a result of the initial identification process and review process, 873 schools have been invited to participate in the new Programme. These comprise 670 primary schools (338 urban/town schools and 332 rural schools) and 203 second-level schools.

The key principle of early intervention, to identify and help children at risk of leaving school early is a major component of DEIS, with a continuing emphasis being placed on the development of effective transfer programmes for pupils making the transition to second-level, by building on the existing work of the HSCL scheme and the School Completion Programme in this area.

Initiatives such as Familiarisation Days and week-long transfer programmes for new entrants to second level have been shown to have very positive results in helping children to make a smooth transition to their new school. I am anxious that a strengthening of such programmes be prioritised under the new Action Plan.

Services for People with Disabilities.

127. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Education and Science the measures in place to increase the participation rate of people with disabilities in higher and further education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34125/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The participation rate of people with a disability in higher education has improved significantly over the last decade. In 2004 the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) recorded that there were over 2,700 students with a disability in higher education (about 2.4% of full-time undergraduates). This represents a major improvement from ten years earlier in 1994 when AHEAD found there to be just 400 students (about 0.5% of full-time undergraduates) with a disability in the sector.

The main measures which have underpinned this success are firstly the allocation to higher

education institutions by my Department and the HEA of dedicated funding for the development of access and disability support services and secondly the resources for students allocated through the Fund for Students with a Disability. The purpose of this latter fund is to ensure that students with a disability have the necessary supports which enable them to fully access and participate in their chosen course of study, such as assistive technology and software, learning support initiatives, library services, transport, personal assistants, note-takers and sign-language interpreters.

The level of resources and the uptake by students has grown significantly in recent years. In 2000-01 €1.2m was allocated to just 512 students. In 2005-06 this had grown to over €8.1m being allocated to 2,032 students with a disability in further and higher education.

Special Educational Needs.

128. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will reform the criteria for students with dyslexia to ensure that students with profound dyslexia who make the transition from primary into secondary school will receive vital resource training help and assistance which they may require in order to successfully complete second level education. [34152/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department has given a very high priority to the provision of resources to address the learning difficulties of children with low levels of achievement in reading such as those referred to by the Deputy. As the Deputy is aware, my Department implemented a general allocation system in all primary schools with effect from the start of the 2005/2006 school year. The general allocation scheme is designed to ensure that each school has learning support/resource teaching support available to meet the needs of children with high incidence special needs including dyslexia.

There are now over 5,000 teachers in our primary schools working directly with children with special needs, including those requiring learning support. This compares to fewer than 1,500 in 1998.

Where a pupil's condition is of a more serious nature, provision can be made in one of the 4 special schools, or 23 special classes attached to ordinary primary schools, dedicated to the needs of children with dyslexia. All special schools and special classes for such children operate at a reduced pupil teacher ratio of 9:1 and pupils attending such facilities attract a special increased rate of capitation grant.

Second level pupils with dyslexia are normally integrated into ordinary classes. In such situations, they may receive additional tutorial support from the remedial/learning support teacher, guidance counsellor and subject teachers.

There are currently a total of 534 wholetime equivalent remedial/learning support teachers and 684 wholetime equivalent guidance teachers in place at second level.

My Department also allocates additional teacher support and special needs assistant support to second level schools and Vocational Education Committees to cater for pupils with special educational needs, including, where appropriate, pupils with dyslexia. To qualify for additional teaching support, under this category, children must be assessed by a psychologist as being of average intelligence or higher and having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics, which places them at or below the 2nd percentile on suitable, standardised, norm referenced tests.

In accordance with the terms of circular letter M10/94, pupils with dyslexia may also meet, depending on an educational assessment, the criteria for exemption from the learning of the Irish Language on the grounds of having a learning disability. Depending on the degree of the condition, they may also be eligible for special arrangements in the Certificate Examinations.

My Department provides funding to the Dyslexia Association to facilitate the operation of dyslexia workshops. This funding helps the organisation operate an information service for members and the public. In addition, part of the funding assists in meeting the costs associated with the attendance of some children from disadvantaged backgrounds at workshops and programmes organised by the association.

My Department also provides funding to schools for the purchase of specialised equipment such as computers to assist children with special educational needs, including children with dyslexia, with their education once relevant professionals recommend the equipment. Schools can apply to the local special educational needs organiser (SENO) directly for this support.

In September 2003, my Department established the Special Education Support Service (SESS) to manage, co-ordinate and develop a range of supports in response to identified training needs. As part of its response to the growing demand from teachers for support and training, the SESS is currently developing teams of trainers to deliver training in four specific areas: Autism, Challenging Behaviour, Dyslexia, and Inclusion. This training will be delivered locally through the Education Centre network and/or through whole-staff in-school support. The SESS provides fees subsidies for the online training course, "Dyslexia: Identification and Early Interventions". Fees subsidies are also provided for teachers to enable them to avail of the Dyslexia Association of Ireland courses.

Training is available through the 21 Teacher Education Centres nationally for teachers using ICT and assistive technologies to support pupils

with special educational needs, including those with dyslexia.

The Deputy may be aware that my Department has developed an information resource pack on dyslexia in CD-Rom, DVD and video format, in association with the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. This product has been made available to all primary and post-primary schools. The DVD and video provides support for parents of pupils with dyslexia while the CD-Rom assists teachers who are teaching children with dyslexia in the mainstream classroom.

Stay Safe Programme.

129. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools now offering the stay safe programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34195/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The 'Stay Safe' Programme, which is also known as the Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP), is a school-based approach to the prevention of child abuse operating at primary-level. The Programme aims to reduce vulnerability to child abuse through the provision of in-service training for teachers, parent education and personal safety education for children at primary school level. My Department is committed to the successful implementation of 'Stay Safe' in our primary schools.

A survey on the number of schools offering the Stay Safe programme is currently being completed. When I have the results, I will send them on to the Deputy.

Psychological Service.

130. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of primary schools now covered by the National Educational Psychological Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34189/06]

131. **Mr. Coveney** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of secondary schools now covered by the National Educational Psychological Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34187/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 130 and 131 together.

The Deputy will be aware that all primary and post primary schools have access to psychological services either directly from the National Educational Psychological Service of my Department or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments whereby the school can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists which is approved and paid for by NEPS.

[Ms Hanafin.]

Additionally NEPS provides assistance to all schools and school communities that experience critical incidents, regardless of whether or not they have a NEPS psychologist assigned to them. Also, in relation to all schools, NEPS processes applications for Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations and responds to queries in relation to individual children from other sections of my Department and from the specialist agencies. NEPS also provides a service to children with visual impairment irrespective of the schools which they attend.

As there has been some movement of staff over the summer months and new staff have recently been employed the final school allocation is not fully completed. The coverage for 2006/2007 will be available in early November (2006). The figures requested in respect of Primary and Post-Primary schools will be sent to the Deputy at that time.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

132. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will implement the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child which, following a presentation by an Irish delegation led by the Minister with responsibility for Children, concluded that class sizes must be reduced at all levels and also raised concerns regarding the cost of education and materials in primary schools, including water and waste charges at commercial rates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34245/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, major improvements have been made in staffing at primary level in recent years. At the beginning of the current school year there are no less than 4000 extra teachers in our primary schools, compared with 2002. The average class size in our primary schools is 24 and there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level, including resource teachers etc.

Children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas are getting more support than ever before to help them to make the most of their time at school. Indeed, with the thousands of extra primary teachers hired by this Government, recent years have seen the largest expansion in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. Over the next two school years even more teachers will be put in place both for the above priority areas of disadvantage and special education and also under a reduction in the mainstream staffing schedule.

As the Deputy knows all primary schools are staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. 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 28 children in the school. Next year (2007/2008 school year) this is being reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

A further initiative that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the current school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year, as is the case in many schools. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned in the 2006/07 school year, compared to 170 in 2005/06.

This Government has shown a clear determination to improve the staffing in our schools and we will continue to prioritise this issue going forward.

In relation to the cost of education materials, water and waste charges in primary schools, capitation grants are the main source of funding provided by my Department to schools to meet their day to day running costs. They are intended to contribute towards the general operating costs of schools including teaching aids and other miscellaneous charges. Charges payable to the various Local Authorities do not come within the remit of my Department. It would be a matter for those Authorities to decide whether schools are liable to pay such charges. The capitation scheme is flexible in nature and affords Boards of Management discretion as to how the funding is used in meeting school's day-to-day running costs.

Since 1997 the standard rate of capitation grant has been increased from £45 (€57.14) per pupil to €145.58 with effect from 1st January, 2006, an increase of almost 155% in the period.

The capitation grant is in addition to the Ancillary Services Grant which provides additional funding for primary schools towards the cost of secretarial and caretaking services. The standard rate of grant per pupil under the scheme was increased from €102 per pupil in 2002 to the current rate to €139 per pupil.

These significant increases in the funding of primary schools are a clear demonstration of my commitment to prioritise available resources to address the needs of schools.

Computerisation Programme.

133. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the arrangements in place to allow schools with information and communication technology equipment to access technical support for this equipment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34194/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): In its 2005 Census on ICT Infrastructure in Schools, the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) asked a number of questions about technical support and mainten-

ance. In their responses, 68% of primary schools, 55% of post-primary schools and 44% of special schools reported that they used the services of an IT contractor, where a fixed contract was not in place, while 8% of primary schools, 24% of post-primary schools and 17% of special schools used the services of an IT contractor under a fixed service contract. ICT co-ordinating teachers played an important role in providing technical support, providing services in 41% of primary schools, 66% of post-primary schools and 54% of special schools. Other schools used other staff members and parents provided support services in 9% of primary schools. Clearly, there are a range of school responses in place to address their technical support requirements.

The NCTE and the regionally based ICT advisory service provides advice to schools on pedagogical and technical issues and in this context the NCTE currently offers two specific training courses for teachers in the area of technical support and maintenance. My Department has requested the NCTE to review the technical support arrangements in place in schools, as reported in its recent Census and to advise me in this regard.

Capitation Grants.

134. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science the levels of capitation awarded to schools by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34207/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): 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 schools which would include heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, painting, teaching aids and other miscellaneous charges.

The primary school 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 €145.58 with effect from 1st January, 2006. This represents an increase of almost 155% in the standard rate of capitation grant since 1997. Furthermore enhanced rates of capitation funding are paid in respect of children with special educational needs who attend special schools or special classes attached to mainstream schools. The current rates range from €400.00 to €619.50 per pupil.

The standard rate of capitation grant is paid to all primary schools except Gaelscoileanna located outside of Gaeltacht areas which receive an additional €25.39 per pupil over and above the standard rate grant.

The capitation grant is in addition to the Ancillary Services Grant which provides additional funding for primary schools towards the cost of secretarial and caretaking services. The standard rate of grant per pupil under the scheme was

increased from €102 per pupil in 2002 to the current rate to €139 per pupil.

There has also been significant improvements in the level of funding for voluntary secondary schools in recent years. Since January 2005, the standard per capita grant has been increased by a cumulative €24 per pupil and now stands at €298 per pupil.

Secondary schools have also benefited under the school services support fund initiative. Introduced with effect from the 2000/01 school year, the school services support grant has been increased since January 2005 by a cumulative €28 per pupil bringing the annual grant from €131 per pupil to €159 per pupil. These grants are in addition to the funding of up to €40,000 per school that is also provided by my Department to secondary schools towards secretarial and caretaking services. A secondary school with 500 pupils, for example, now receives annual grants of up to €270,000 towards general expenses and support services. This represents an increase of 83% since 2000.

These significant increases in the funding of primary and secondary schools are a clear demonstration of my commitment to prioritise available resources to address the needs of schools.

Educational Projects.

135. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when a primary pupil database will be in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34204/06]

154. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason no primary pupil database is currently in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34206/06]

188. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science when her Department will publish a primary school data base; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34103/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 135, 154 and 188 together.

I am committed to the development of a Primary Pupil database as it will give us valuable data on the pupils in our primary schools as well as enabling us to better track children's progress from primary to post-primary level. The database project is linked to the development of an on-line claims system for schools for the processing of salary claims. The online claims system project will be completed soon and then the primary pupil database will be progressed.

Special Educational Needs.

136. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the extra resources she will allocate in 2006 to implement the Education for

[Ms O'Sullivan.]

Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34098/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) recently submitted its Implementation Report which sets out its views and recommendations on a plan for the implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004.

Both the Disability Act 2005 and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 refer to the need to co-ordinate and plan special needs resources in both the Health and Education sectors. The level of resources needed will be considered in the context of the Implementation Report and the Sectoral Plan in relation to Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005.

Question No. 137 answered with Question No. 109.

Question No. 138 answered with Question No. 116.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

139. **Mr. Crawford** asked the Minister for Education and Science the most up to date figures regarding the number of children in primary classes of 30 to 34 children inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34182/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Information in relation to classes is provided in the annual census of primary schools. The reference date for the provision by schools of this information is the 30th September of the school year in question and the date for return by the schools is 31 October. Consequently, the details for the current school year (2006/2007) are not yet available.

The most recent figures available in my Department are for the 2005/2006 school year in which there were 101,608 children in primary classes of 30 to 34.

In terms of measuring progress, I am sure the Deputy will be interested to know that in the school year in which this Government came into office there were 52,190 children in classes of 35 and over — five times the number that there are now. 1,901 of these children were in classes of 40 and over — compared to just over 200 last year.

I am sure the Deputy will also be pleased to know that there are now no less than 4000 extra teachers in our primary schools, compared with 2002. The average class size in our primary schools is 24 and there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level, including resource teachers etc.

Children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas are getting more support

than ever before to help them to make the most of their time at school. Indeed, with the thousands of extra primary teachers hired by this Government, recent years have seen the largest expansion in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. Furthermore, the Government is committed to providing even more primary teachers next year to reduce class sizes.

As the Deputy knows all primary schools are staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. 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 28 children in the school. Next year (2007/2008 school year) this is being reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

A further initiative that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the current school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned in the 2006/07 school year, compared to 170 in 2005/06.

This Government has shown a clear determination to improve the staffing in our schools and we will continue to prioritise this issue going forward.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme.

140. **Mr. S. Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the provision her Department is making to meet the expected costs associated with the work of the Residential Institutions Redress Board as predicted by the Comptroller and Auditor General; her response to his view that the cost will far exceed the Government's original predictions and that the burden on the taxpayer will be greatly in excess of the 50% recommended by the Department of Finance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34135/06]

578. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of people whose cases have been dealt with by the Residential Institutions Redress Board; the number that remain to be dealt with; the amount of compensation paid out to date to the victims; the estimated total outstanding; the amount of payments made to solicitors to date; her plans to extend the remit of the redress board; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33965/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 and 578 together.

The Residential Institutions Redress Board was established under statute in 2002 to provide financial redress to victims of child abuse in resi-

dential institutions in order to assist them in their recovery and enhance the quality of the remainder of their lives.

The Board received 14,541 applications by the 15th of December, 2005, the closing date for receipt of applications. The original term of office of the Board was for a period of three years up to December 2005. I have extended that period to December 2007 and will be advised by the Board whether it will be necessary to provide a further extension at that time.

As at end September 2006, the Board had made 6,639 awards totalling €461 million and had 7,902 applications remaining to be dealt with. Total costs incurred by the Board at this date, including €62 million legal costs, was €544 million. The average award to date is approximately €70,000 and awards have varied between zero and €300,000.

In view of the higher than anticipated number of applications to the Redress Board, the Department included a revised contingency provision of up to €1.3 billion for the total liability potentially arising from the scheme in the notes to the 2005 Appropriation Accounts. This was based on total applications of 14,541, an average award of €76,000 at end 2005 and legal and administration costs of approximately 20% of awards. Recent trends in awards made by the Board would suggest that the average award is decreasing though some 7,900 applications remain. While earlier Department estimates of the total cost of the scheme were lower than the current estimate, the redress scheme is without precedent and nobody could have predicted with certainty how many applications there would be.

In making any assessment of cost, one must consider that if the scheme had not been introduced the State in all likelihood would have been engaged in civil court actions which would have been protracted and traumatic for the victims and would have resulted in the State incurring extensive legal and settlement costs. The Government in establishing the scheme considered it was the just and humane thing to do as the State was responsible for children that were placed in institutions by the courts and other public bodies.

I should add that the decision to establish the redress scheme was made regardless of whether the religious congregations who managed the institutions would contribute to the cost of the scheme. Nevertheless, it was considered desirable that the congregations should make a meaningful contribution towards the redress of past child abuse and accordingly the Government entered into negotiations with the congregations which culminated in agreement being reached in June 2002 on an aggregate contribution by the congregations of €128 million. At the beginning of the negotiations, the Department of Finance had recommended that the negotiating team should strive for a 50% contribution towards the redress scheme. However, it was subsequently recognised

that this was not achievable and the Department of Finance was satisfied with the contribution of €128 million achieved.

Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 116.

Apprenticeship Places.

142. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of apprenticeship places available here; her views on whether they are adequate to the needs of the building industry and the number of young people who wish to pursue an apprenticeship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34114/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): FÁS registered apprentices attend Institutes of Technology for the 4th and 6th phases of their apprenticeship training and my Department provides funding to the Institutes to provide training places for these phases. The total number of apprentice training places increased from approximately 4,100 in 1997/1998 to around 11,100 in the 2005/2006 academic year.

Apprentice numbers and new registrations have experienced a rapid growth in the past number of years. Apprentice numbers across all 26 trades have increased from approximately 14,000 in 1997 to some 29,000 in October 2006. The largest increases have been in the construction-related trades which now account for approximately 75% of registrations.

Notwithstanding this increase in training capacity, the level of registrations in the construction trades remains high. In order to alleviate backlogs of apprentices awaiting phase 4 and 6 training in these trades, my Department has provided funding to Institutes in recent years to run additional apprentice courses during the summer months. Summer courses represent an efficient use of resources by maximising the use of existing facilities.

While funding was again available this year for summer courses, it was not possible to reach agreement with the TUI on the provision of these courses. My Department is currently engaged in consultations with the TUI with a view to providing further summer courses in 2007 in order to help alleviate backlogs in the construction trades. Apart from summer courses, my Department has also sanctioned some phased expansion that will yield additional capacity.

My Department continues to liaise with FÁS, the Institutes of Technology and other interested parties in order to ensure that national training needs are met.

Computerisation Programme.

143. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount allocated towards information and communications technology in

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schools by her Department for 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34191/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The 2006 Estimates for my Department include a provision of €21.418m for the ICT in Schools Programme, €10m capital in subhead F05 and €11.418m current in subhead B18.

As the Deputy is aware, the major focus for my Department under the ICT in Schools Programme has been the roll-out of broadband connectivity to all recognised schools. This project is being undertaken in partnership with industry, in the context of the joint Government/IBEC — TIF (Telecommunications and Internet Federation) Fund, to provide local connectivity to schools. The broadband connectivity is being provided via a Schools National Broadband Network supported by HEAnet, in order to provide managed Internet access, email, security controls and content filtering. A broadband support service is being managed by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) to assist schools with advice and information relating to the roll-out and ongoing use of their broadband connectivity within the schools network. Over €2.5m of the capital allocation and €2m of the current allocation this year is related to the broadband project.

The remaining capital allocation focuses on grants to schools under the networking grants scheme and allied grants to schools, either directly by my Department or via the NCTE.

The remaining current allocation covers the costs of the NCTE and the regionally based ICT advisory service which provide a range of supports to schools towards the integration of ICT into teaching and learning. These supports include a comprehensive teacher professional development programme, the provision of on-line teaching resources via the Scoilnet Portal, the support and dissemination of innovative practice and the provision of technical advice. The current allocation also provides funding for the engagement of two ICT curricular experts in the NCCA, who focus on ICT curricular development, to ensure a specific priority is afforded to ICT in all curricular formulation.

Schools Refurbishment.

144. **Mr. Stagg** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will make larger sums of money available to schools under the summer works programme to address the cost of much of the work undertaken under the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34140/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): In the 3 years since the Summer Works Scheme was introduced, over 2,000 projects have been carried out in schools nationwide at a cost

in excess of €186m. The Scheme has allowed for significant improvements in the integrity of our school buildings such as electrical and mechanical upgrades, refurbishment of specialist rooms, roof replacement and repairs, window replacement, toilet upgrades, structural improvements and access works. The amount of grant aid payable in individual cases is based on tender outcomes.

145. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of primary schools that have had remedial works executed due to higher than acceptable levels of radon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34223/06]

161. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools in the State which have not been tested for radon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34233/06]

163. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if all schools in the State have now been tested for radon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34231/06]

200. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of secondary schools who have had remedial works executed due to higher than acceptable levels of radon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34225/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 145, 161, 163 and 200 together.

The detail requested by the Deputy on the radon remediation programme is dealt with by the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland. The programme, which commenced in 1998, involves surveying radon levels in schools and carrying out, where appropriate, mitigation works. The programme is 100% funded by my Department and has cost approx €6m to date.

All schools have been advised of the programme and where excess radon levels are located, funding is provided for the mitigation works. Follow-up monitoring also takes place to ensure that the remediation action has been successful. The remaining handful of schools who have not agreed to participate in the radon surveys are regularly advised of the need to do so. Radon barriers are included in the design of all new school building projects.

School Curriculum.

146. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Science the projected cost of allocating laboratory assistants to secondary schools to support the teaching of science; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34196/06]

152. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the estimated cost of providing laboratory assistants for science subjects in post-primary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34111/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 and 152 together.

Student practical work has been a major feature of science syllabi at both junior and senior cycle levels for many years and science teachers have long experience of carrying out programmes of practical work with their students. Up until recently, this practical work has been assessed through the medium of written papers in the Certificate examinations only.

The revised Junior Certificate Science syllabus introduced in 2003 differs from the previous syllabus in a number of ways that are intended to make the subject more relevant to students' needs in the twenty-first century and to provide the students with a richer educational experience. One of the major changes is that the students' practical work is now directly assessed as part of the Junior Certificate examination.

In addition to the revised Junior Certificate syllabus, revised syllabi have already been fully implemented for Leaving Certificate Biology, Physics and Chemistry.

The introduction of curricular change in the sciences has been supported in a range of ways. There have been comprehensive in-career development programmes for teachers and a major focus of these programmes has been to support teachers in providing an appropriate experience of practical work for their students. Additional funding for equipment and resources has also been provided. For example, some €16 million was made available to schools in 2004 for the purchase of equipment and the refurbishment of school laboratories to support the introduction of the revised Junior Certificate Science syllabus.

I have no plans at present to make provision for laboratory technicians. In the Report of the Task Force on the Physical Sciences it was estimated that the cost of providing technicians at second level was €18.8m per annum at 2002 prices. Provision of technicians in this area would undoubtedly lead to demands for similar assistance across other areas of the curriculum where there is a strong practical component. It is my understanding that the availability of laboratory technicians has not been a universal feature of support for science teaching in second level schools and that in some countries that do provide this type of resource it is confined to certain types of schools. However, I will keep the matter under review.

Schools Building Programme.

147. **Mr. Stagg** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of money allo-

cated for spending in 2006 under the school building programme; the amount spent by the end of September 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34141/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Funding amounting to €506 million is available for the primary and post primary schools' building programme for 2006. Not only was spending by the end of September ahead of target at €302m, but I am confident that the remaining balance of the funding will be spent by year end.

State Examinations.

148. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of students who sat the leaving certificate in mathematics in 2006 at foundation, ordinary and higher level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34131/06]

196. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of students who sat chemistry, physics, biology, home economics and applied mathematics in the leaving certificate in 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34132/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 148 and 196 together.

The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations, including organising the holding of examinations and issuing the results of examinations.

In view of this, I have forwarded the Deputies' query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to them.

Home-School Liaison Scheme.

149. **Mr. McCormack** asked the Minister for Education and Science the level of funding directed towards the home school community liaison service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34202/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) is a major mainstream preventative strategy targeted at pupils at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of background characteristics which tend to affect adversely pupil attainment and school retention. The scheme is concerned with establishing partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning. It focuses directly on the salient adults in children's educational lives and seeks indirect benefits for the children themselves.

Currently, 370 local co-ordinators are assigned to 309 primary and 204 post primary schools in

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disadvantaged areas to work with school staff, parents and relevant community agencies in advancing the educational interests of children. Each co-ordinator acts as a link between home and school, encouraging parents to become more involved in their children's education. The co-ordinator organises locally based activities aimed at encouraging greater contact between parents and teachers and liaises with local voluntary and statutory groups in the area. A Co-ordinator usually services more than one school in an area.

The total cost of the HSCL scheme in 2005 was in the region of €21.9 million.

Under DEIS, the new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, HSCL services will be extended to the 203 post primary and 338 urban/town primary schools, serving communities with the highest concentration of disadvantage, that do not currently have the service. The whole rationale behind the new DEIS programme is to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools benefit from all of the available supports.

Psychological Service.

150. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of educational psychologists currently working for the National Educational Psychological Service in each region here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34129/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The information sought by the Deputy is provided in the table below.

Region	No. of Psychologists
Director	1
Eastern Region (ECA)	10
Eastern Region (Northern Area)	13
Eastern Region (South Western Area)	17
Midlands	6
Mid-Western Region	8
North-Eastern Region	11
North-Western Region	7
South-Eastern Region	14
Southern Region	18
Western Region	13
Not Assigned by Region	5
Total	123

School Completion Programme.

151. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of breakfast clubs currently supported by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34198/06]

170. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of homework clubs currently supported by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34200/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 151 and 170 together.

The majority of the 412 schools currently in the School Completion Programme, operate some level of breakfast or other meal provision, in accordance with the Nutritional Guidelines issued by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. In addition to being able to use funding from the School Completion Programme, the provision of school meals is primarily funded by the School Meals Programme, administered by my colleague, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, and involving both an urban scheme operated by local authorities and a local projects scheme.

The School Meals Programme aims to supplement the nutritional intake of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in order to allow them to fulfil their potential within the educational system and also to reduce the risk of early school leaving. In 2006, it is estimated that 69,903 children benefited in 1,008 schools under the local projects scheme and the urban scheme provided support for more than 386 primary schools, with 55,000 pupils. In 2006, the Department of Social and Family Affairs has provided estimated funding of €10.4 million for the programme — an increase of approximately 25% on the 2005 provision of €8.2 million.

My Department has been working in close cooperation with the Department of Social and Family Affairs to ensure that the resources available for school meals are used to best effect and to further expand school meals provision in schools serving disadvantaged communities.

Educational research has shown that good nutrition improves the concentration levels of students and that students from low-income families are less likely to have access to an adequate diet. The provision of healthy school meals is therefore a priority for the Government in tackling educational disadvantage.

In relation to homework clubs, many of the schools receiving extra funding from my Department under the School Completion Programme use some of this funding to provide homework clubs. The new DEIS plan also provides for further expansion in this area.

Each of the 873 schools participating in the new School Support Programme will have access to a range of academic supports such as one to one, small group tuition, literacy/numeracy and curricular supports, individual learning plans, revision and study skills courses and non-academic supports such as sports/recreational/extra-curricular activities, clubs & meal provision, after school supports

including homework support and holiday time supports.

Question No. 152 answered with Question No. 146.

Special Educational Needs.

153. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on whether more leniency is needed in severe special needs cases in national schools; if her Department will review same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34239/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Children who have been assessed as having special educational needs (SEN) have access to a range of special support services. The services range from special schools dedicated to particular disability groups, through special classes or units attached to ordinary schools, to placement on an integrated basis in ordinary schools, with special back-up supports.

The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through the local special educational needs organiser (SENO), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special needs supports such as resource teaching hours and special needs assistant (SNA) support for children with low-incidence SEN, based on applications in respect of individual pupils.

In allocating additional teaching and SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs examine what teaching and other resources are available to these pupils within the school. The SENO also operates within the parameters of my Department's criteria for the allocation of such resources. The criteria are set out in my Department's circulars having regard to the recommendations of the Report of the Special Education Review Committee, 1993, also known as the SERC Report.

Primary schools are also supported by means of a general allocation, which provides additional teaching support to enable schools to cater for pupils with high incidence special educational needs, such as dyslexia, and those with low attainments. The system was constructed so that allocations would be based on certain pupil numbers, taking into account the differing needs of the most disadvantaged schools and the evidence that boys have greater difficulties than girls do in this regard.

The NCSE will review decisions previously taken in relation to individual cases on foot of a request from the school or parents/guardians, when accompanied by relevant additional information that may not have been available at the time of the original decision. The NCSE has outlined this process in its Circular 01/05, which has issued to all primary schools.

Question No. 154 answered with Question No. 135.

Higher Education Colleges.

155. **Mr. M. Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to consider the provision of a post-graduate entry veterinary degree course in a higher education college here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34108/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are currently no proposals to introduce a Graduate entry programme in Veterinary Medicine. However, the Veterinary Medicine programme in University College Dublin has, since 2001, had a process to admit a small number of graduates. This is a separate entry route, but not a separate programme: the curriculum followed by the graduate entrants is the same as that pursued by school-leavers. Application is made through the CAO. All applicants sit an examination, the GAMSAT examination (Graduate Australian Medical Schools Admission Test) which tests reasoning ability and critical thinking. Selection for the programme is based on the applicants' performance in the examination, previous third level success and prior evidence of veterinary experience. A minimum of five entry places (from a total of 90 places) has been allocated to graduate entrants every year for the last six years.

Special Educational Needs.

156. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of places in ABA schools for children on the autistic spectrum that are financed by her Department; if there is financial assistance to mainstream schools in providing the ABA method; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34138/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department provides funding to 12 Stand Alone facilities providing an Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) specific methodology on a pilot basis. These units currently provide in the region of 217 places for children with autism. Approval has also been given for the establishment of a further two such facilities.

My Department considers that children with autism, in common with all children should have access to appropriate provision delivered by suitably qualified teachers within the school system where children can mix with their wider peer group and have maximum opportunities for integration. The preferred approach to the provision of appropriate education for children with autism, is through the primary and post primary school network, whether through placement in mainstream classes, in special classes or in special schools, a view that is supported by the findings

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of the Task Force Report on Autism. My Department's ongoing commitment is to ensuring that all children, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders receive an education appropriate to their needs and in this regard my Department has established: 171 Special Classes for children with autism, attached to special and mainstream schools; 5 special Classes for children with Asperger's Syndrome; 16 pre-school classes to facilitate the demand for early intervention provision for children on the autistic spectrum.

My Department supports a multi-skills approach in regard to the education of children with autism where a range of teaching methods are available e.g. Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH), ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis), Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

Additional training supports for staff engaged in the education provision for children with special needs including autism can be accessed through the Special Education Support Service (SESS). The service will, as appropriate, consolidate, co-ordinate, develop and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and support structures to the relevant staff.

Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 107.

Education Welfare Service.

158. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will review and increase the resources allocated to the National Education Welfare Board in order that it can satisfactorily carry out its statutory responsibilities as set out in the Education Welfare Act 2000. [34147/06]

181. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she will resource the Education Welfare Board adequately to fulfil its statutory responsibilities as referred to in the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on Educational Disadvantage Initiatives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34115/06]

192. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of education welfare officers currently employed by the NEWB; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34197/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Mr. B. Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158, 181 and 192 together.

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was established under The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 as the single national body with responsibility for school attendance. The Act

provides a comprehensive framework which promotes regular school attendance and tackles the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving. The general functions of the Board are to ensure that every child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education.

The budget allocated to the NEWB for 2006 is €8.15m, with the allocation to the Board having increased by more than 25% since 2004 to support it in delivering on its key objectives.

The Board is developing, on a continuing basis, a nationwide service that is accessible to schools, parents/guardians and others concerned with the welfare of young people. For this purpose, Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) have been deployed throughout the country to provide a welfare-focused service to support regular school attendance and discharge the Board's functions locally. The authorised staffing complement of the Board is 94 comprising 16 HQ and support staff, 5 regional managers, 12 Senior EWO's and 61 EWO's. Five regional teams are in place with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. In deploying its service staff, the NEWB has prioritised the provision of services to the most disadvantaged areas and the most at-risk groups. This deployment includes areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme where an intensive full level of service is provided. Since September 2005 every county in Ireland is served by an educational welfare service.

In addition to the NEWB personnel there are some 490 staff, within the education sector, deployed in education disadvantage programmes whose work involves an element of school attendance and significant scope exists for integrated working between these personnel and Educational Welfare Officers. My Department is anxious to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from these substantial personnel resources. Consequently work is ongoing to develop appropriate protocols for all agencies and services to work together in collaboration and to ensure that optimum use is made of the resources deployed.

This government is determined to do all that is possible to ensure that every child gets all the opportunities and support they need to enable them to achieve their potential and participate fully in education.

I will be keeping the issue of the NEWB's staffing and financial resources under review in light of the rollout of services, the scope for integrated working and any proposals that the Board may put to me in relation to clearly identified priority needs.

Adult Education.

159. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the recommendations of the McIver Report on Further Education will be

implemented; if a timetable for implementation has been agreed; the progress expected to be made in the 2006 to 2007 academic year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34126/06]

178. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the recommendations of the McIver Report which will have been progressed this year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34215/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 and 178 together.

Government commitment to the PLC sector, by reference to the resources applied in teachers' pay, non-pay running costs, student support and certification costs, is very significant.

We have increased the number of PLC places by 60% since 1996/97. Indeed, the number of PLC places approved for 2005/2006 is up by more than 1,600 on the 2004/05 level. The number of approved places in the sector now stands at 30,188.

We also extended the provision of maintenance grants to PLC students with effect from September 1998. There were nearly 8,000 PLC grant holders in 2005 and they received some €23 million in direct support. Tuition fees for PLC courses are also waived.

PLC students are included in the calculation of non-pay budgets issued to schools in respect of running costs. A supplementary non-pay grant towards running costs specifically for PLC schools is also payable. This amounted to €5.5 million in 2005.

Other developments funded by my Department of direct benefit to the PLC sector include the provision of national certification under the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the development of progression links with higher education in the Institutes of Technology.

The McIver Report contains 21 over-arching recommendations, incorporating 91 sub-recommendations. It has been estimated, in consultation with management and staff interests, that the recommendations for staffing would involve at a minimum the creation of at least 800 new posts at a cost of over €48 million.

The recently published "Towards 2016: Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015" has noted that, having regard to developments in the PLC sector, including the McIver report, concrete prioritised proposals in relation to PLC provision, and focused in particular on the larger PLC providers will be prepared and will be the subject of further negotiations between management and unions.

The level of resources for the PLC sector will be determined in the light of resources generally and the implications for other areas of education. The scope for rationalisation of provision, will

also be examined having due regard to ensuring appropriate provision, on a geographic basis and the necessary critical mass for delivery of a quality education service.

I want to invest in educational opportunity for learners in Further Education by providing the necessary system supports that will allow the sector as a whole to fulfil its important potential.

School Curriculum.

160. **Mr. McCormack** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of students taking science to junior certificate level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34201/06]

165. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools offering applied mathematics to leaving certificate level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34199/06]

172. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools which offer the full complement of science subjects to leaving certificate level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34179/06]

207. **Mr. G. Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools that offer biology to leaving certificate level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34185/06]

217. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools that offer chemistry to leaving certificate level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34183/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160, 165, 172, 207 and 217 together.

With regard to the number of schools which offer the full complement of science subjects to leaving certificate level, the Deputies will be aware that the curriculum offered to students attending a post-primary school is a matter for the authorities of the schools concerned subject to meeting the Departments regulations concerning provision of the core curriculum.

My Department publishes data on the number of schools offering each subject in its annual Statistical Report. Although the report for the 2005/06 school year is still in preparation, I can provide the following provisional information to the Deputies.

A total of 348 schools offered Science to Junior Certificate level and 12 schools offering Science with Local Studies to Junior Certificate level.

There were 193 schools offering Applied Mathematics to Leaving Certificate level. There were 691 schools offering Biology to Leaving Certificate level. There were 550 schools offering Chem-

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istry to Leaving Certificate level. There were 554 schools offering Physics and 69 schools offering Physics & Chemistry to Leaving Certificate level.

Question No. 161 answered with Question No. 145.

Question No. 162 answered with Question No. 116.

Question No. 163 answered with Question No. 145.

Third Level Education.

164. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she will appoint a visitor under the Universities Act 1997 to investigate allegations in relation to financial and operational matters in University College, Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34102/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The provisions for appointment of a visitor to a university are set out in Sections 19 and 20 of the Universities Act, 1997. It provides that “where the Minister is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for contending that the functions of a university are being performed in a manner which prima facie constitutes a breach of the laws, statutes or ordinances applicable to the university, the Minister may, after first advising the governing authority of his or her opinion and considering any explanation given in response, and with the concurrence of the Government, request the Visitor to the university to inquire into any matter giving rise to the Minister’s opinion”.

I have asked the Higher Education Authority for a report on the issues that have been raised and I understand that the Chief Executive of the HEA is meeting the Chair and representatives of the Governing Body of UCC to discuss how they may be addressed. Once the Higher Education Authority has furnished me with a report, I will consider the matter further.

Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 160.

School Evaluation.

166. **Mr. O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the timescale for the evaluation of all primary and post primary schools under the whole school evaluation scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34216/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Last June saw a major advance in terms of the transparency of our education system, as school inspection reports became available to the general public for the first time. The publication

of whole-school evaluation reports will ensure that parents and other stakeholders have access to balanced and fair information on the wide range of activities in which schools are involved. WSE reports identify when schools and teachers are working to optimum effect and where improvements are needed. They provide a fair analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of schools in a way that can provide a real indication of school quality. They not only provide valuable information for parents but they also help to foster improvement in schools and spread best practice.

In June 2006 a total of 154 inspection reports arising from inspections in primary and post-primary schools were published on the Department’s website. These include 36 WSE reports on primary schools, 5 post-primary WSE reports and 113 Subject Inspection reports. More than 160 inspection reports will be published in the next few days encompassing WSE reports at primary and post-primary levels as well as subject inspection reports on post-primary schools. Looking at the full calendar year it is anticipated that 228 primary WSEs and 57 post-primary WSEs will have been conducted by the end of 2006. The inspection rate may vary from year to year and clearly it will take some time to reach all schools. However, I would like to stress that whole-school evaluations are just one aspect of the work of the inspectorate of my Department.

At post-primary level, for example, in addition to WSE, 449 stand-alone Subject Inspections will be undertaken in post-primary schools this year. These inspections provide very valuable and focused information on teaching, learning and curriculum provision in an individual subject in a post-primary school. Taking WSE inspections and Subject Inspections together, it is expected that almost 500 of the 735 post-primary schools in the state will have an external evaluation by the Inspectorate this year and all schools should experience a subject evaluation approximately every three years.

At primary level, in addition to WSE, the Inspectorate will this year evaluate and report on the work of approximately 2,300 newly-qualified and other primary teachers who are on probation. Because I have been able to increase the numbers of teachers at primary level at an unprecedented rate, the number of newly qualified teachers in primary schools has risen rapidly. As a consequence, the evaluation of newly qualified teachers now represents a very significant element of the overall inspection programme at primary level. The presence of inspectors in a very large number of primary schools in the context of probationary evaluation work has had an additional benefit for the schools through the advice and support given to school management.

My Department is progressing a range of quality-focused initiatives that must be considered alongside our external evaluation processes.

These include, for example, the promotion of school development planning in all of our primary and post-primary schools with the assistance of the School Development Planning support services, direct support for curriculum implementation through the Second Level Support Service and the Primary Curriculum Support Programme, and support for school principals and deputy principals through the Leadership Development for Schools initiative.

A balanced strategy that provides support for internal development within schools along with effective external inspection will, I believe, deliver continuous improvement in schools.

Up-to-date information on the inspections that have been carried out in primary and post-primary schools and the list of published reports are available on the website of my Department (www.education.ie) at any time.

Third Level Education.

167. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she expects to make a decision with regard to the provision of post-graduate entry medical degree courses; the proposals for such courses received; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34107/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): On the 1 February 2006 the Minister for Health and Children and I published the report of the Fottrell Working Group on Undergraduate Medical Education and Training. Among the recommendations of the Fottrell Group was that a graduate stream of entry to medicine be introduced and that all graduates of honours Bachelor degree programmes should be eligible to apply.

It is anticipated that the Higher Education Authority will shortly issue a competitive call for proposals to provide the new graduate entry programme, with a view to additional places being provided on this programme from 2007.

It has been decided that graduate entry will be open to graduates of all disciplines. The provision of a graduate entry stream is an important development in reducing pressures on aspiring medical students who until now have effectively had one chance of entry, based on their Leaving Certificate performance. This will allow students to make a decision to enter medicine at a more mature age and should result in a more diverse range of entrants into the profession.

Educational Programmes.

168. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department has evaluated the Incredible Years programme piloted here by the Clondalkin Partnership; if extension of the programme is being considered in view of its positive results; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34133/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I understand that 'Incredible Years' is one of a number of preventive programmes emanating from the United States of America focusing on early intervention with children and their parents in the context of managing behaviour. I am informed that the focus of the programme is on improving outcomes for children, aged 4 to 9, who demonstrate emotional/behavioural difficulties in a school context, which can not be addressed through normal good classroom management practice and involves collaboration between various agencies.

A level of co-operation exists between psychologists from my Department's National Educational Psychological Service in regions where the programmes are led by the HSE and the Voluntary Sector, including Area Partnerships. In-service sessions for teachers and other supports have been provided by psychologists in NEPS.

While I welcome this and other well developed evidence based programme that offer assistance to children, to teachers and to parents, no formal evaluation of the effects of the overall programme has yet taken place in Ireland. My Department would welcome the outcomes of the formal evaluation of this particular programme which I understand will be initiated shortly.

Youthreach Programme.

169. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of places available in Youthreach here; if there are waiting lists for entry to such programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34113/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): The Youthreach Programme is an Inter-Departmental initiative which provides two years integrated education, training and work experience to young people aged 15-20 years who are at least six months in the labour market and who have left school early without any qualifications or vocational training. The programme funded by my Department is delivered in out of school centres and is managed by Vocational Education Committees (VECs). There are a total of ninety Youthreach Centres managed by the VEC sector throughout the country. Overall, there are about 6,500 places available nationally at present, 3,200 of which are in the VEC sector and the remainder in Community Training Centres under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Basic skills training, practical work training and general education are features of the programme, and the application of new technology is integrated into all aspects of programme content. The programme provides a strong emphasis on personal development, on the core skills of literacy/numeracy, communications and IT, along with a choice of vocational options such as Cater-

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ing, Hairdressing, Computers, Woodwork, Photography, Video, Sports, Art and Craft and a work experience programme.

Expenditure on the programme in 2005 was nearly €47 million. In addition, my Department provides funding to VEC's annually to assist towards the childcare expenses of participants in Youthreach. The information on waiting lists for Youthreach centres is not maintained centrally in my Department as applications are dealt with at local level in the centres.

Question No. 170 answered with Question No. 151.

Youth Services.

171. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Education and Science the additional moneys that were made available in 2006 to promote and sustain young people's participation in youth work; the basis of her consideration for a special allocation in 2007 for this sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33065/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): The 2006 financial provision for my Department's Youth Affairs Section is €45.037m. This represents a 9.8% increase over the 2005 allocation. In addition, I am also proposing to make a further €2m from the Dormant Accounts Fund available to local youth clubs and groups on a one-off basis for small scale equipment grants over the coming months.

My focus of financial allocations in 2006 is on the consolidation of current provision, a priority identified by the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) in submissions to my Department. This includes a 5% increase (over the 2005 baseline) in funding in 2006 for the three main funding schemes i.e. Youth Service Grant Scheme, Special Projects for Youth and Youth Information Centres. Some €8.176m has been provided to the youth work sector by my Department under the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund which seeks to address the needs of young people who are at risk of substance misuse. This represents an increase of €1.091m over 2005 and includes funding for a further 24 projects which have been mainstreamed to my Department in 2006. In addition, a further eight Special Projects for Youth (SPY) were expanded from one-worker to two-worker projects and two new SPY projects were sanctioned in 2006.

In addition, funding of over €926,000 has been allocated to the VEC sector in 2006 to allow VECs to carry out their functions under the Youth Work Act, 2001. Also, a Development Fund for Youth Work Organisations of €300,000 has been set up again this year to assist those

organisations in meeting requirements arising from the Act.

Increased financial resources have been allocated this year to other youth work initiatives and programmes including Léargas — the Exchange Bureau, Gaisce — the President's Award and Child Protection programme for the youth work sector.

With regard to 2007, my Department intends to continue the focus on the consolidation of existing provision and on the further roll out of the various elements of the Youth Work Act, 2001 and of the National Youth Work Development Plan as resources permit. This will include ongoing work on the establishment of a Youth Work Development Unit in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth and the further development of the Child Protection Training Programme for the youth work sector.

Question No. 172 answered with Question No. 160.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

173. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Science the most up to date figures regarding the number of children in primary classes of 1 to 19 children inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34234/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Information in relation to classes is provided in the annual census of primary schools. The reference date for the provision by schools of this information is the 30th September of the school year in question and the date for return by the schools is 31 October. Consequently, the details for the current school year (2006/2007) are not yet available. The most recent figures available in my Department are for the 2005/2006 school year in which there were 62,596 children in primary classes of 1 to 19 children.

As the Deputy will be aware, major improvements have been made in staffing at primary in recent years. At the beginning of the current school year there are no less than 4000 extra teachers in our primary schools, compared with 2002. The average class size in our primary schools is 24 and there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level.

Children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas are getting more support than ever before to help them to make the most of their time at school. Indeed, with the thousands of extra primary teachers hired by this Government, recent years have seen the largest expansion in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. Over the next two school years even more teachers will be put in place both for the above priority areas of disadvantage and special education and also under a reduction in the mainstream staffing schedule.

As the Deputy knows all primary schools are staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. 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 28 children in the school. Next year (2007/2008 school year) this is being reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

A further initiative that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the current school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned in the 2006/07 school year, compared to 170 in 2005/06.

This Government has shown a clear determination to improve the staffing in our schools and we will continue to prioritise this issue going forward.

School Curriculum.

174. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to introduce driver education for school students; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34106/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I have no plans to introduce driver education, in the form of driving lessons, in schools, and this is not the norm within the EU. As the Deputy may be aware, a report produced for the NCCA by an expert group which included representatives of the National Safety Council, the Garda Síochána, the Irish Insurance Federation, and the Society of the Irish Motor Industry indicated that the research available internationally was inconclusive on the benefits of teaching young people to drive at school. Particular issues highlighted include the gap arising between the time practical skills are learned initially and put into regular practice, and the risks arising from more young people taking up driving at an earlier age.

Nonetheless, I do believe that schools have a role to play both in teaching students about road safety issues and in helping them to develop the attitudes necessary to promote safe behaviour on the roads. The Social Personal and Health Education programme, which is mandatory in primary schools and at junior cycle level, provides a framework under which the generic values and skills which underpin responsible decision-making, and respect for the rights and safety of others can be developed and promoted among students. SPHE has a specific personal safety strand within the programme, and this provides a mechanism through which road safety issues for all can be best dealt with in an age appropriate way.

Specific materials for teaching young people about road safety have also been given to schools. 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. This is also supplemented by Garda visits to primary and second level schools during which the themes of crime, road safety, personal safety and substance abuse are explored as part of the SPHE programme. There were some 1900 school visits in 2005.

So, not only is there a curricular framework in place already in which the importance of road safety can be taught to our young people, but this is supplemented by specific teaching materials and by a comprehensive programme of Garda visits to schools.

Finally, my Department will continue to work with the Road Safety Authority to strengthen the role of schools in promoting road safety even further. The RSA has already commenced work on a number of key areas including the development of a Road Safety programme for use in Transition Year. This work is being undertaken in co-operation with my Department and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Legislative Programme.

175. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science when changes to Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34219/06]

185. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the changes she will now bring forward to Section 29 of the Education Act 1998; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34217/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 and 185 together.

The Deputies will be aware that the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools recommended that section 29 of the Education Act, 1998, be reviewed and amending legislation

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brought forward. I am pleased to inform the Deputies that the Office of the Parliamentary Council is drafting a new Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill which will give effect to the Task Force recommendations. This legislation will set out the criteria to be taken into account in the section 29 appeal process. These will include the rights of the individual student to an inclusive education. They will also include the right of the general body of students and the whole school community to the maintenance of a school and classroom environment which is conducive to learning.

I hope to be in a position to publish the Bill in the near future.

School Staffing.

176. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Education and Science if there has been a change in policy on the eligibility of teachers with restricted recognition, defined in circular 08/99 of her Department, to apply for resource teaching posts in mainstream schools; if so, the basis for such a change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34142/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There has been no change in the policy with regard to the qualification requirements for appointment to Learning Support (formerly Remedial) posts in primary schools. Boards of Management are obliged to recruit and employ fully recognised and probated teachers for any vacancies arising for Learning Support/Resource Teaching (LS/RT) posts. Any posts that comprise an element of general allocation hours and low incidence hours are regarded as LR/ST posts.

Teachers who hold provisional or restricted recognition may be appointed to fill Resource Teacher (low incidence) posts in ordinary primary schools and posts in special schools and classes.

177. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a decision has been made with regard to the employment of behaviour support teams; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34229/06]

180. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force on Student Behaviour, particularly in relation to the provision of additional second level teachers. [34250/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 177 and 180 together.

Earlier this year I announced an implementation strategy following publication of “School

Matters”, the Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools, and that strategy is now well advanced.

At the core of the recommendations of the Task Force was the putting in place of a National Behaviour Support Service. This has now happened with the appointment of a National Co-ordinator and four Assistant National Co-ordinators. In addition, nine Regional Development Officers and twenty part-time Associates have been recruited to ensure the success of this significant initiative. A key feature of the composition of the National Behaviour Support Service is the assignment to it of a senior psychologist and three psychologists. These have been seconded from the National Educational Psychological Service and their presence will ensure that the team operates in a multi-disciplinary way.

In the short time since the recruitment process concluded and its personnel took up duty, the new National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) has been in a set-up and preparation phase. Its work has concentrated on the establishment of a National Intervention Framework for dealing with inappropriate student behaviour. It is intended that direct engagement with schools will begin after the October mid-term break. Initially this will take the form of inviting schools in an area to meet with the NBSS and to hear about their work and proposed approach. Subsequently intensive work will begin with a smaller number of schools most in need of this intervention.

It is my intention that this new service will work intensively with those schools initially selected for inclusion in this development. I have already announced that part of this work will see us trialling the concept of a behaviour support classroom in up to 30 schools next year. I want to emphasise however that these classrooms cannot be, in themselves, a solution to the issue of poor student behaviour. They must be one part of a holistic response which should see a school, actively supported by the Behaviour Support Team, defining for itself a pathway to improvement.

In relation to the Task Force recommendations in respect of class size, I wish to draw the attention of the Deputies to the significant improvements that have been made in the pupil teacher ratio at post primary level in recent years. The ratio has fallen from 16:1 in the 1996/97 school year to 13.21:1 in the 2005/06 school year. The reduction in the ratio was achieved through the creation of 2,017 additional posts and the retention of over 2,100 posts which would otherwise have been lost due to the fall in enrolments. I should add that I have consistently ruled out the creation of additional teaching posts across the second level system as a response to the issue of poor student behaviour. On the contrary I see this issue as requiring focused intervention along the lines now being pursued.

Question No. 178 answered with Question No. 159.

School Curriculum.

179. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Minister for Education and Science the percentage of leaving certificate students taking Irish, French, German, Italian and Spanish who attempted the higher level paper in the most recent examination for

which statistics are available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34221/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations, including organising the holding of examinations and issuing the results of examinations. The results of examinations are publicised widely in the media and are also available on the Commission's website at *www.examinations.ie*. Please see following table.

Leaving Certificate 2006

	Higher Level	Ordinary	Foundation	Subject Total	% of total candidates
Irish	12,948	26,437	4,543	43,928	86.2%
%	29.5%	60.2%	10.3%		
French	13,421	14,388	0	27,809	54.6%
%	48.3%	51.7%	0.0%		
German	4,774	2,957	0	7,731	15.2%
%	61.8%	38.2%	0.0%		
Italian	150	92	0	242	0.5%
%	62.0%	38.0%	0.0%		
Spanish	1,375	996	0	2,371	4.7%
%	58.0%	42.0%	0.0%		
Maths	9,018	35,112	5,104	49,234	96.6%
%	18.3%	71.3%	10.4%		
Chemistry	5,712	1,359	0	7,071	13.9%
%	80.8%	19.2%	0.0%		
Physics	5,200	2,135	0	7,335	14.4%
%	70.9%	29.1%	0.0%		
Biology	17,048	7,837	0	24,885	48.8%
%	68.5%	31.5%	0.0%		
Physics+Chemistry	458	124	0	582	1.1%
%	78.7%	21.3%	0.0%		
Home Economics	8,200	4,099	0	12,299	24.1%
%	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%		

Figures exclude Leaving Certificate Applied programme.
Total candidates excluding LCA 50955.

A range of measures are in place to encourage the take up of the physical Sciences at senior cycle building on the success of the investigative approach which is a feature of the revised Junior Certificate science syllabus. These will be further strengthened in the context of the Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation 2007 to 2013. In regard to languages, the Post Primary Language Initiative operates to diversify the languages in post primary schools and to move away from

the dominance of French as the most commonly taken language. The Initiative promotes Italian, Spanish, Russian and Japanese. Arabic is also available.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is currently undertaking a reconfiguration of subjects in senior cycle to embed key skills, and to provide for a second assessment component. The advice on Phase 1 of this process is due in Spring 2007, and will focus on Math-

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ematics, Science and Languages. A review of languages generally is also under way.

Question No. 180 answered with Question No. 177.

Question No. 181 answered with Question No. 158.

School Management.

182. **Mr. Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department has made a decision on an application by County Clare Vocational Educational Committee to become the patron of two primary schools in the county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34136/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department is in receipt of an application from the VEC for registration as school patron in respect of two primary schools. This application and the related issue of the principle of a VEC being a patron of a primary school is under consideration in my Department and a decision will be notified to the VEC in due course.

School Curriculum.

183. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of time set aside for physical education as part of the secondary school curriculum; if she has satisfied herself that secondary school children are receiving this allocation of physical education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34192/06]

201. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of time set aside for physical education as part of the primary school curriculum; if she has satisfied herself that primary school children are receiving this allocation of physical education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34190/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 183 and 201 together.

It is my belief that a well planned Physical Education programme has a vitally important role to play in a broad and balanced curriculum for our primary and second level students. At primary level, Physical Education is one of seven curriculum areas within the revised Primary School Curriculum which was introduced in 1999. A minimum of one hour of physical education per week is recommended for all primary school pupils.

In accordance with the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools, all second level schools should provide Physical Education as part of the curriculum. The programme that each school plans and delivers should be based on my Department’s approved syllabuses and the teaching hours should be registered on the school time-

table. The syllabuses have been developed on the basis of a time allocation of two hours per week.

Physical education is an integral part of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. All LCA students must take two modules — Leisure Studies and Health Related Fitness — and there are four additional modules from which they can make further choices.

The Physical Education curricula at both primary and second level have been developed on the understanding that facilities available to schools vary. Consequently, they offer a level of flexibility that allows each individual school to design a programme that can be delivered using the resources and supports available to it.

Apart from the formal curricula, schools can take a range of measures to encourage physical activity among students during the school day and many provide extensive, broad-based programmes of co-curricular physical activities that are highly rewarding for both pupils and teachers alike. In particular, schools play a major role in nurturing and promoting the involvement of students in sporting activities in the wider community. Sports organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association, Basketball Ireland, the Football Association of Ireland provide extensive opportunities for such participation.

Educational Disadvantage.

184. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she is satisfied regarding the fact that expenditure on educational disadvantage initiatives is more focused on third level than on pre-primary, primary or post-primary education. [34151/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): A key focus of the Government’s education policy is to prioritise investment in favour of those most at risk and to optimise access, participation and outcomes at every level of the system for disadvantaged groups. The wide variety of measures in place for tackling educational disadvantage and social exclusion reflect these concerns. These measures range from pre-school interventions, supports for tackling children’s literacy problems, reduced pupil teacher ratios, increased capitation grants, measures to tackle early school leaving and strengthen ties between the school, the family and the community. In addition, there are interventions in support of youth, access to third-level and in providing “second chance education” for young people and adults.

The total provision for educational inclusion programmes in 2006 is more than €640m across all levels of education, as compared with almost €600m in 2005. This includes additional funding for the implementation of measures under the DEIS action plan at pre-school, primary and second-level, additional funding for further education programmes and an increase in provision for third-level student support schemes.

DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the new action plan for educational

inclusion that I launched last year, will focus on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years).

The new action plan represents a shift in emphasis away from individual initiatives, each addressing a particular aspect of the problem, with the new plan adopting a multifaceted and more integrated approach. This is the first time that an integrated educational inclusion strategy has been developed for 3-18 year olds in this country.

The key principle of early intervention underpins both the early childhood education measure and many of the literacy and numeracy measures being adopted under the new action plan. The plan will place a renewed emphasis on the involvement of parents and families in children's education in schools.

The action plan will be implemented on a phased basis over five years and will involve an additional annual investment of some €40m on full implementation. It will also involve the creation of about 300 additional posts across the education system generally.

Question No. 185 answered with Question No. 175.

Schools Building Projects.

186. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools in band one by county with regard to the school building and refurbishment scheme; the number of these she expects will have extensions or new schools approved to commence in the coming year; the number of schools in band two by county; the number of these expected to have extensions or new schools approved and commenced within the coming year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34055/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As I indicated when publishing the various strands of the Departments Capital Programme for 2006, I intend to move through the School Building and Modernisation Programme in a planned way over the next five years. This is possible with the availability of a €3.9bn multi-annual capital funding envelope (primary, post-primary and third level) over that period to underpin a continuous programme of modernising school buildings. The number of building projects under consideration can change on a day to day basis as new applications are received and existing applications are progressed in my Department.

The Deputy will appreciate that this investment must continue to be targeted using the published prioritisation criteria. Details of projects to move forward under the programme will be published as and when they are ready to be advanced in the context of capital expenditure requirements.

Special Educational Needs.

187. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will review the practice where schools are allocated psychological assessments in student numbers rather than on need; her views on whether this system is not working; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34238/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, all primary and post primary schools have access to psychological assessments either directly through the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are available on my Department's website. Schools that do not currently have NEPS psychologists assigned to them may avail of the SCPA, whereby the school can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly. Details of this process and the conditions that apply to the scheme are available on my Department's Website. The prioritisation of urgent cases for assessment is a matter for the school principal in the first instance.

In common with other psychological services NEPS encourages a staged assessment process, whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention, in consultation with their assigned NEPS psychologist. Only if there is a failure to make reasonable progress in spite of the school's best efforts, will a child be referred for individual psychological assessment. This system is based on need and allows the psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually.

The introduction of the new General Allocation model last year has also meant that children with high incidence special needs can get support without the requirement of a psychological assessment as all primary schools now have an allocation of hours to meet the needs of such pupils.

Question No. 188 answered with Question No. 135.

Third Level Qualifications.

189. **Mr. M. Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she will appoint a new board to FETAC; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that courses cannot be approved in the absence of a board; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34109/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I hope to be in a position to appoint a new Council shortly. I have been advised by FETAC that the absence of a new Council is not

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delaying the validation of new programmes. The previous Council of FETAC had agreed quality assurance and programme validation policies and procedures, and the published criteria are being implemented on an ongoing basis by the staff of the Council.

Providers may submit programmes for validation on an ongoing basis, provided they have previously agreed their quality assurance procedures with FETAC. The process for programme validation takes approximately twelve weeks and involves the evaluation of submissions received by experts in the relevant field. Centres are advised by FETAC that their programmes must be approved prior to delivery. FETAC received in excess of 100 submissions over the summer and it is expected that decisions will be made on these and conveyed to the centres by the end of October.

Garda Vetting Services.

190. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when all primary and secondary teachers, and other school staff, will be vetted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34227/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Ensuring the protection, health and welfare of children is a key concern for the Government, for parents, for agencies that work with children and for society generally and I can assure the Deputy that the Government is determined to do all that we can to keep our children and vulnerable adults safe.

In the education sector, prior to this year, vetting was available in respect of prospective employees of children in detention schools as well as special needs assistants (SNAs) and bus escorts to children with special needs.

In order to enable the Garda Síochána's vetting services to be extended to all persons, including primary and secondary teachers, working with children and vulnerable adults, additional resources were allocated to the Garda Central Vetting Unit. As a first step in the expansion of services provided by the Garda Central Vetting Unit in respect of the education sector, it was decided that new staff employed in schools in the 2006/07 school year would be vetted.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that all new teachers have been vetted and the process of vetting non-teaching staff is underway.

It is proposed that in due course vetting will be extended to all existing staff. In this regard discussions will be held with the relevant interests.

Question No. 191 answered with Question No. 116.

Question No. 192 answered with Question No. 158.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

193. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to implement the commitment in An Agreed Programme for Government on class size; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34099/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, major improvements have been made in staffing at primary in recent years. At the beginning of the current school year there are no less than 4000 extra teachers in our primary schools, compared with 2002. The average class size in our primary schools is 24 and there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level, including resource teachers etc..

Children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas are getting more support than ever before to help them to make the most of their time at school.

Indeed, with the thousands of extra primary teachers hired by this Government, recent years have seen the largest expansion in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. Over the next two school years even more teachers will be put in place both for the above priority areas of disadvantage and special education and also under a reduction in the mainstream staffing schedule.

As the Deputy knows all primary schools are staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. 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 28 children in the school. Next year (2007/2008 school year) this is being reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

A further initiative that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the current school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned in the 2006/07 school year, compared to 170 in 2005/06.

This Government has shown a clear determination to improve the staffing in our schools and we will continue to prioritise this issue going forward.

Youth Services.

194. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Education and Science the level of funding for the youth affairs section of her Department over the

past five years; the priority projects for youth schemes during that period; the benefits that have accrued from same; the other matters under consideration by the youth affairs section of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33722/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): The level of funding for the Youth Affairs Section of my Department and for the youth work sector has increased significantly over the past five years. Funding allocations to the sector from 2002-2006 are as follows:

2002: €26.066m

2003: €27.499m

2004: €35.545m

2005: €41.004m

2006: €45,037m.

In addition, I am proposing to make a further €2m from the Dormant Accounts Fund available to local youth clubs and groups on a one-off basis for small scale equipment grants over the coming months.

This increased funding has enabled my Department to provide support for a number of youth work programmes and initiatives including long established schemes such as the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Youth Service Grant Scheme, a network of Youth Information Centres, the Young Peoples' Facilities and Services Fund and the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme. It has also facilitated the phased implementation of two major policy initiatives i.e. the Youth Work Act, 2001 and the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007, which are closely inter-linked and provide a framework for the development of the sector.

More particularly, over the 2002-2006 period, progress has been made in a number of important areas including:

- Development of the Special Projects for Youth Scheme: This is a key action point under the National Youth Work Development Plan 2002-2007.
- An Assessor of Youth Work was appointed in August 2006 for an initial period of two years to support the development of good practice in the youth work sector.
- Child Protection: A National Child Protection Unit, based in the National Youth Council of Ireland, has led and coordinated training initiatives. In addition, Garda Vetting of new youth work employees and volunteers has been introduced from September 2006.

- Establishment of a Development Fund for the youth work sector: A Development Fund to assist organisations in preparing themselves organisationally for the implementation of the Youth Work Act, 2001 was first established in 2005. Further funding has been made available in 2006 for this purpose.
- Resourcing of Vocational Education Committees (VECs) to carry out their functions under the Youth Work Act, 2001: A structure agreed between my Department and the IVEA in July 2006 provides for the appointment of 21.5 Youth Officers shared by 25 VECs. Existing posts already involved in youth work in the remaining eight VEC areas will assume Youth work Officer functions.
- Establishment of a Development Unit Structure for the youth work sector: The National Youth Work Development Unit is being established on a pilot basis within the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. This structure is seen as central to the development of youth work.
- North/South Education and Training Standards Committee: A North/South Committee for the endorsement of youth work training was established in 2005.

Other matters under consideration by the Youth Affairs Section of my Department include:

- Reviews of Funding of Youth Work and of the Provision of Youth Information
- Continued roll out of the Youth Work Act, 2001: This includes guidelines and criteria for the continued roll-out of the Act.
- Terms of reference and work plan for the National Youth Work Development Unit, and
- Finalisation of a Scheme of one-off grants for local youth clubs and groups from the Dormant Account Fund.

Psychological Service.

195. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will allocate more resources to the National Educational Psychological Service to ensure that all schools have direct access to immediate psychological assessments and subsequent supports. [34148/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Since the establishment of the NEPS in 1999, the number of NEPS psychologists has increased from 43 to 123 at present. The Public Appointments Service has concluded a new recruitment competition for the appointment of Educational Psychologists to NEPS. Regional

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panels have been established to allow my Department give greater priority in filling vacancies to areas with the greatest need.

Four additional psychologists have been appointed in September to the Mid West region and one other to the South East region. These psychologists will be assigned to schools following their induction period of two months. A number of other appointments will be made as soon as possible. The recruitment process will continue in the next few months and priority for a direct service from NEPS in each region will be given to schools designated under the DEIS policy.

The Deputy will be aware that all primary and post primary schools have access to psychological services either directly from the National Educational Psychological Service of my Department or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA).

NEPS also provides assistance to all schools and school communities that experience critical incidents, regardless of whether or not they have a NEPS psychologist assigned to them. Also, in relation to all schools, NEPS processes applications for Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations and responds to queries in relation to individual children from other sections of my Department and from the specialist agencies. NEPS also provides a service to children with visual impairment irrespective of the schools which they attend.

Question No. 196 answered with Question No. 148.

Childhood Obesity.

197. **Mr. Coveney** asked the Minister for Education and Science the actions her Department is taking to tackle the problem of childhood obesity through the education system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34188/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Our schools promote, support and encourage healthy eating and physical exercise in a range of ways.

All second level schools have been required to provide Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) as part of the junior cycle curriculum since September 2003. The aims of this programme include preparing students for responsible decision-making and promoting their physical, mental and emotional health and well-being. It aims to make students aware of the elements of a balanced diet and the importance of healthy eating for physical and mental well-being and also to develop awareness of the importance of rest and exercise for health and well-being.

Physical education is also part of the curriculum and plays a key role not just in giving

students an opportunity to exercise during the school day but also in encouraging a positive attitude towards physical activity which students will hopefully carry with them into adult life.

Quite apart from curricular provision, schools can implement measures to encourage physical activity during school breaks and schools already play a major role in promoting the involvement of students in sporting activities in the wider community. Sports organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association, Basketball Ireland, the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) provide extensive opportunities for schools to participate in sport.

Together, the above initiatives ensure that students not only get opportunities to exercise at school but also learn about balanced nutrition and making good food choices. I believe that schools are playing their part in terms of promoting a healthy diet and adequate physical exercise for students. However, it is important to remember that students spend just 20% of their waking hours at school so schools can only do so much with regard to promoting exercise and healthy eating and the main role must rest with parents.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

198. **Mr. McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Science the most up to date figures regarding the number of children in primary classes of 20 to 24 children inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34235/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Information in relation to classes is provided in the annual census of primary schools. The reference date for the provision by schools of this information is the 30th September of the school year in question and the date for return by the schools is 31 October. Consequently, the details for the current school year (2006/2007) are not yet available.

The most recent figures available in my Department are for the 2005/2006 school year in which there were 105,663 children in primary classes of 20 to 24 children.

As the Deputy will be aware, major improvements have been made in staffing at primary in recent years. At the beginning of the current school year there are no less than 4000 extra teachers in our primary schools, compared with 2002. The average class size in our primary schools is 24 and there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level.

Children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas are getting more support than ever before to help them to make the most of their time at school.

Indeed, with the thousands of extra primary teachers hired by this Government, recent years have seen the largest expansion in teacher

numbers since the expansion of free education. Over the next two school years even more teachers will be put in place both for the above priority areas of disadvantage and special education and also under a reduction in the mainstream staffing schedule.

As you know all primary schools are staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. 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 28 children in the school. Next year (2007/2008 school year) this is being reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

A further initiative that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the current school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned in the 2006/07 school year, compared to 170 in 2005/06.

This Government has shown a clear determination to improve the staffing in our schools and we will continue to prioritise this issue going forward.

Higher Education Grants.

199. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the Third Level Student Support Bill will be published; if it will address inequalities in the means assessment of different categories of workers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34127/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I announced earlier this year that the State's thirty three Vocational Education Committees (VECs) are to be given sole responsibility for the administration of third level student maintenance grants for all new applicants with effect from the 2007/08 academic year.

The change in the administration arrangements are part of my overall plans to introduce service improvements in the administration of the student grant schemes. These will include guaranteed timeframes for the earlier payment of grants, an independent appeals procedure and more efficient arrangements for handling applications and making payments. Giving sole responsibility for administering the grants to the VECs will reduce the existing client confusion caused by a variety of agencies being involved, depending on the county. It will mean that we can now achieve a greater consistency of approach across the country, while at the same time retaining local service delivery and reducing unnecessary duplication of bureaucracy.

The assessment of means under my Department's Student Maintenance Grant Schemes is based on gross income from all sources, with specified social welfare and health board payments being excluded from the calculation. Under the schemes reckonable income normally derives from the following:

Employment/Pensions;

Self Employment/Farming;

Rent and income from Land/Property;

Deposit/Investment Accounts;

Maintenance Arrangements;

Gifts/Inheritances and Disposal of Assets and Rights;

Social Welfare in certain circumstances.

I have no plans at present to alter the method of assessing means for grant purposes. However I plan to have a specific provision in the proposed new student support Bill in relation to the means of applicants. This will enable me to make regulations governing the assessment of means.

Question No. 200 answered with Question No. 145.

Question No. 201 answered with Question No. 183.

Schools Evaluation.

202. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on school evaluation reports and school league tables; and her future proposals. [34153/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, I have taken action, through the initiative to publish school inspection reports, to provide more information, for parents in particular, about our schools, in a way that I believe ensures a fair and comprehensive picture of all the different activities in a school. In contrast to school league tables, I believe that school inspection reports from Whole School Evaluations (WSE) and other inspections, when read in their entirety, can provide balanced and well-informed information on schools. Schools, of course, also have an important responsibility in relation to effective communication and provision of information for parents.

The Whole School Evaluation process involves an examination of all the varied activities of a school — from the quality of teaching and learning to the availability of extra-curricular activities and the implementation of policies in areas such as bullying, and health and safety. The inspection process also includes consultation with the school's board, parents and staff members, and,

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at second level, with the school's students. WSE reports can provide valuable information on the educational and social opportunities provided by a school. The evaluations are sensitive to the contexts in which schools operate in a way which is not possible with league tables.

I have said on many occasions that I am strongly opposed to the publication of crude league tables based solely on examination or test results. Such tables provide an unbalanced and grossly limited indication of a school's performance and can lead to ghettoising of schools in disadvantaged areas, penalising schools that have inclusive enrolment policies and encouraging an even greater emphasis on exams at the expense of other valuable school activities that contribute significantly in the holistic development of our young people.

Given the breadth of the contents of WSE reports, I believe that the publication of these and other school inspection reports goes a significant way to addressing the real needs of parents, students, teachers and others for better information on schools.

I am committed to promoting the provision of balanced information on schools to parents and I applaud the good practice in schools of providing comprehensive newsletters and reports for parents. I have seen many excellent examples of these and would strongly encourage all schools to do as much as they can to inform parents about their activities.

Adult Education.

203. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she will re-instate the National Adult Learning Council; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34130/06]

619. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science to outline if and when the National Adult Learning Council will be reconstituted; the annual cost of running the NALC when it was in operation, updated to 2006 figures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34331/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 and 619 together.

The National Adult Learning Council was formed in March 2002 on an ad hoc basis with the intention that it would be established as a statutory body under Section 54 of the Education Act 1998.

Following the formation of the ad-hoc Council, concerns emerged that the functions envisaged for it were too wide-ranging and were not sufficiently focused. Additionally, a number of developments had occurred which would impact

on the work of the Council, including the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the Further and Higher Education and Training Awards Councils.

My Department undertook a strategic review of the role and functions of the Council to address these concerns. The results of this review are being considered.

Expenditure for 2002 was €21,012.00 and for 2003 was €59,491.00. No further expenditure has been incurred since then.

Vocational Education Committees.

204. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she expects the review of allocations to Vocational Educational Committees under co-operation hours with other institutions to be completed; if her attention has been drawn to the inequality of access to practical subjects experienced by some schools while awaiting this review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34105/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department allocates additional teaching hours to VECs to support the delivery of education programmes in a range of facilities. Such allocations are made under the heading Co-Operation Hours with Other Institutions and are made in response to specific applications which are submitted by the VECs in advance of the commencement of the school year to which they relate.

The Co-operation arrangements extend over a range of educational services and needs including areas such as Community Training Workshops, Traveller Training Centres, Prisoner education, Probation and Welfare, Special Education, Youth Services, Music schools and others.

The scheme is currently under review by my Department. This review, which is in progress across all VECs, is a wide-ranging review covering many diverse areas of provision. Some of these areas are, of their nature, complex and require detailed research. Notwithstanding this, however, it is my Department's intention to complete this review to the furthest extent possible before the commencement of the 2007/08 school year.

State Examinations.

205. **Mr. S. Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the guidance given to the State Examinations Commission on the appointment of correctors for junior and leaving certificate papers; the training given to ensure consistency in marking; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34134/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): With effect from 6 March 2003,

responsibility for the operation of the State certificate examinations transferred from my Department to the State Examinations Commission. The majority of key personnel who had worked on the certificate examinations within my Department transferred to the Commission in 2003. This retention of experience and expertise ensured a seamless transition to the new organisation and also ensured the continuation of the high standards set by my Department previously.

The quality assurance processes in relation to marking of the examinations include

- A comprehensive training programme and code of practice for drafters and setters of examination papers
- Establishment of examiner teams to provide for the marking and monitoring of the work done and for the provision of advice and support to examiners throughout the marking process
- Trialling of draft marking schemes before finalisation, through their application to samples of candidate's work so that any necessary amendments can be made
- Provision of comprehensive instructions and marking schemes for examiners
- Training of advisory teams, followed by convening of Marking Conferences during which all examiners are trained in the application of the marking scheme and the administrative processes associated with the examinations, and apply the marking scheme to exemplar material
- Continued monitoring of the work of examiners to ensure consistency, ensuring a minimum of 5% of the scripts of each examiner are re-marked by a supervising examiner, with larger samples or a complete re-marking where the need is identified
- A supervisory structure under the direction of the Commission's Examination and Assessment Managers, which consists of a Deputy Chief or Chief Advising Examiner and a team of Advising Examiners who oversee the work of the examiners
- Examination of appeals by a person other than the original marker. At the appeal stage, the training and supervisory process continues, and further quality assurance takes place which includes monitoring of an increased sample of the work of examiners, and where the need is identified, complete re marking by a different examiner.

In addition to this, the marking schemes and examination papers are published on the Commission's website, and candidates may review

their marked scripts before deciding whether to appeal their result. For example, in the 2006 Leaving Certificate alone, over 352,000 grades were processed, 9442 results (2.7%) were appealed and 2004 results were upgraded (0.6%). The staff of the State Examinations Commission also keep abreast of best international practice through direct links with other examination authorities, site visits to other examination boards, participation in international conferences and membership of international specialist networks such as the International Association for Educational Assessment. These processes place the State Examinations Commission at the forefront internationally in terms of the openness, transparency and accountability of the examination system.

Question No. 206 answered with Question No. 118.

Question No. 207 answered with Question No. 160.

Early Childhood Education.

208. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the way she intends to address the roll out of accessible early childhood education and care. [34150/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Early Years Education in Ireland covers the period from birth to six years. Almost all five year olds and half of four year olds attend junior infant and senior infant classes in primary schools. Outside of the junior classes in primary schools, my Department's main role in the area of early years education encompasses targeted pre-school provision for children from disadvantaged areas, for traveller children and for those with special needs.

Currently, the Early Start pre-school project operates in 40 primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage and my Department also funds 46 pre-schools for Traveller children. In the special needs sector, there are currently 16 pre-school classes for children with autism located throughout the country and a number of children of pre-school age are catered for in 12 stand-alone autism facilities that provide an applied behavioural analysis (ABA) model of response. My Department also sanctions home tuition grants for children with autism who are of pre-school age and for whom a home educational programme is considered appropriate.

The bulk of early childhood care and education places in the country are financed by the Office of the Minister for Children and previously by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, which has provided unprecedented levels of funding for childcare in recent years.

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€499.3m has been allocated to the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000-2006 and some 41,000 places will have been created by the time the programme finishes. Going forward, childcare and pre-school provision will continue to attract substantial investment under the new National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010. €575m has been allocated to the new programme, which will also be administered by the OMC and aims to provide a proactive response to the development of quality childcare and pre-school services by supporting the creation of an additional 50,000 places and supporting a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of early childhood education and care, centred on the needs of the child.

Under the new action plan for educational inclusion DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), my Department is developing supports for early childhood education which will complement and add value to existing childcare services in disadvantaged communities with a view to ensuring that the overall care and education needs of the children concerned are met in an integrated manner.

Actions will initially be concentrated on those children aged from three up to school enrolment, who will subsequently attend the 190 urban/town primary schools serving the most disadvantaged communities. My Department is working in partnership with other departments and agencies in this regard and a strong emphasis will be placed on adding value to the work of other providers by embedding quality early learning within childcare provision. The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education will provide advice on the future development and direction of pre-school measures for children in disadvantaged communities.

My Department is committed to the development of quality early learning opportunities for children. Following on from the publication of the White Paper on Early Childhood Education "Ready to Learn", the Centre for Early Childhood Development was established and this year published a comprehensive draft quality framework for early childhood education. In addition, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is developing a national framework for early learning, which will be relevant and useful to all those responsible for children's early learning and development. A new Early Years Education Policy Unit has been established within my Department and will be co-located with the Office of the Minister for Children, established by the Government in December 2005 to maximise the co-ordination of policies for children and young people and to provide an overall strategic policy framework to bring together and promote close co-operation between the relevant areas of my Department, the Department of Health and

Children and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Departmental Expenditure.

209. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on the fact that Ireland is one of the lowest spenders on education among OECD States. [34154/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I assume the Deputy is referring to figures published in the 2006 OECD Education At A Glance report. It is important to note that this report draws on 2003 data in most instances, and that as a result significant advances in Ireland's performance on a number of fronts over the last three years is not reflected in this report. For example, total expenditure by the Department of Education and Science has increased from 4.9% to 5.2% of national income (Gross National Income) between 2003 and 2005 arising from a 23% increase in overall spending. The 2006 budget for my Department is €7.9 billion, compared to €5.4 billion in 2002 and €2.9 billion in 1997.

While the 2003 data is somewhat out of date at this point, nonetheless the figures given in the Education at a Glance report do highlight the fact that among OECD countries we had the third highest growth in real terms in total public spending for education between 1995 and 2003 (at 65% for all levels combined). In terms of European comparisons, public spending on education as a percentage of Gross National Income was 5.2% in 2003, in line with the EU25 (weighted) average of 5.2%. As the Deputy will be aware, the increased investment in education provided by this Government has allowed for major progress to be made in areas such as special education provision, falling pupil-teacher ratios at primary and post-primary levels, large increases in the numbers of teaching staff and higher levels of spending per student in real terms.

Along with other public services such as health and social protection we will continue to give a high priority to investment in education in the overall allocation of national resources. Clearly, different tax levels and proportions of national income devoted to public spending impact on these results. It should be noted that, in 2003, 13.2% of total public spending in Ireland went on education compared to an average of 11.0 across the EU25 average. On this particular comparison Ireland has the 6th highest proportion for education out of 25 EU Member States. Our aim is to strike a balance between a relatively low level of taxation by international comparisons and the provision of strong public services and measures to address socio-economic disadvantage.

While this Government has consistently prioritised increased investment in education, it should

be noted that levels of investment are the not the only thing that affect the quality of the education provided. In fact, it is very clear from the Education at a Glance report that countries that some of the countries that spend proportionately more on education do not have outcomes nearly as good as Ireland's. In that context, I am sure the Deputy will be pleased to know that in increasing investment in recent years we have also put a major focus on measures to improve educational outcomes. I am sure the Deputy would agree that it is important to ensure that the resources targeted towards education are being used to best advantage at all levels.

In the past, investment in public services was severely restrained by resources and public indebtedness. Today, with the highly successful economic policies pursued by this Government, Ireland is a relatively more prosperous nation and we have greater scope to make further improvements to public infrastructure and provision. It is my firm intention to continue to provide for additional resources for education at all levels.

Question No. 210 answered with Question No. 107.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

211. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the extent to which pupil teacher ratios here compare with best practice throughout Europe; her plans to address the issue in early date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34144/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Unfortunately up-to-date figures on pupil:teacher ratios across the EU are not available. The most recent OECD 'Education At A Glance' report for example provides figures for 2003/04 which are now considerably out of date and fail to reflect the major increases in primary staffing in particular in Ireland in recent years.

As the Deputy will be aware, major improvements have been made in staffing at primary level in recent years. At the beginning of the current school year there are no less than 4000 extra teachers in our primary schools, compared with 2002. There is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level, including resource teachers etc. Children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas are getting more support than ever before to help them to make the most of their time at school.

Indeed, with the thousands of extra primary teachers hired by this Government, recent years have seen the largest expansion in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. Furthermore, the Government is committed to providing even more primary teachers next year to reduce class sizes. As the Deputy knows all

primary schools are staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. 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 28 children in the school. Next year (2007/2008 school year) this is being reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

A further initiative that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the current school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year, as is the case in many schools. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned in the 2006/07 school year, compared to 170 in 2005/06.

Significant improvements have been made also been made in the pupil teacher ratio at post primary level in recent years, to the point that the PTR at second level was just 13.2:1 in the 2005/06 school year. This Government has shown a clear determination to improve the staffing in our schools and we will continue to prioritise this issue going forward.

School Staffing.

212. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will address the pressure on schools that have large numbers of pupils whose first language is neither English nor Irish; if she will, in particular, remove the cap of two extra teachers for such schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34100/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): In order to ensure that children who do not have English or Irish as a first language are not at a disadvantage in educational terms, my Department gives additional support to schools which can take the form of financial assistance, additional temporary teacher posts or portions of teacher posts.

The level of extra financial or teaching support provided to any school is determined by the numbers of non-English speaking students enrolled. In the school year 2005/06, 562 whole-time equivalent language support teachers were in place at primary level and 262 whole-time equivalent teachers were in place at second level to support such pupils, representing an investment of €46.5 million. This compares to 149 and 113 teachers respectively in the school year 2001/02. I am aware of the particular needs of schools that have large numbers of children who need extra help with their English and am currently working on proposals that will improve the level of assistance given to these schools.

Institutes of Technology.

213. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the decision was taken by her Department to locate the proposed school of podiatry in a university; the reason an institute of technology was deemed unsuitable; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33719/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Meetings are continuing at an official level between my Department, the Department of Health and Children, the Higher Education Authority and the Health Service Executive in relation to a proposed School of Podiatry. Pending the finalisation of these discussions it is not possible to advise when a call for proposals to establish the School will issue.

No decisions have been taken on the location of the proposed School of Podiatry. However, the delivery of clinical training, which is a significant core component of the course, must be facilitated in an integrated manner with Health Service Executive services. The Health Service Executive's view is that a 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.

Question No. 214 answered with Question No. 116.

Third Level Education.

215. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on reports that students who have enrolled in University College Dublin's graduate-entry medical programme this year, may not have their degrees recognised by the Medical Council; if she will provide an update on the numbers of medical students enrolled for this year in total for medicine; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29537/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I understand from the Higher Education Authority that the UCD School of Medicine and Medical Science currently offers an undergraduate course leading to the award of an MB BCh BAO honours degree in medicine. This degree has been accredited by the Medical Council.

As a pilot initiative this academic year, the School has enrolled 14 students with high grade honours degrees and high scores in a GAMSAT aptitude test into this degree programme. The ongoing modularisation of the programme allows for accelerated progression, and it is anticipated that these mature learners will complete the curriculum within four years compared with five

years for the corresponding undergraduate intake.

These individuals will receive the same educational curriculum and assessment as the school-leaver intake albeit with some timetabling differences. The students will be taught in two 45-week calendar years as opposed to three 30-week academic years. The graduate students will receive identical clinical training in their final two years as current undergraduate students receive. The University has made the Medical Council aware of this cohort intake and, given that they are pursuing essentially the same curriculum with the same outcomes as an already-accredited programme, the University does not envisage any issues with the recognition of this degree. The final numbers of medical students enrolled for the current academic year in the institution is not yet available.

Educational Disadvantage.

216. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason retention rates are included under the DEIS criteria for post-primary schools; her views on removing this disincentive to making progress at retaining young people in school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34112/06]

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). The School Support Programme will bring together, and build upon, a number of existing interventions in schools with a concentrated level of disadvantage.

The process of identifying primary and second-level schools for participation in the SSP 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

The ERC's overall approach was guided by the definition of educational disadvantage in the Education Act (1998), section 32(9), as: ". . . the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools". In the case of second-level schools, the Department supplied the ERC with centrally-held data from the Post-Primary Pupils and State Examinations Commission databases and from data holdings for the Free Books Scheme.

Based on an analysis of these data, the variables used to determine eligibility for inclusion in the School Support Programme were as follows:

- Medical card data for Junior Certificate candidates (including Junior Certificate School Programme candidates)
- Junior Certificate retention rates by school
- Junior Certificate exam results aggregated to school level (expressed as an OPS — “Overall Performance Scale” — score). This was based on each student’s performance in the seven subjects in which s/he performed best
- Leaving Certificate retention rates by school.

For a school to be eligible for extra resources under DEIS, it was considered that there ought to be evidence that a school was experiencing educational problems (e.g., it was below average on the retention variables and/or Junior Certificate performance) and had above average percentage enrolment of students from poor backgrounds.

Question No. 217 answered with Question No. 160.

Drug-related Deaths.

218. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach the number of drug-related deaths as a result of overdose in 2004 and 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34381/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt): The information requested by the Deputy is given in the following table:

Number of Deaths from HIV, AIDS or Hepatitis C (I.C.D.9 279.8 / 070.5)

1986 — 1st quarter 2006 by Health Board Area

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
North Eastern	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
North Western	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	2
ERHA	1	2	5	8	4	11	22	29	26	38	26
Midland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Mid Western	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	6	1
South Eastern	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	1	1
Southern	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	4	3	5	3
Western	0	0	1	1	1	1	3	0	0	2	1
Total	1	2	6	9	8	17	28	41	29	54	38

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	*2004	*2005	*Jan-Mar 2006
North Eastern	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
North Western	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
ERHA	13	14	17	6	13	21	19	18	10	1

Number of Drug-Related Deaths as a result of Overdose

(I.C.D. 9 Codes E850 — E858/E930 — E949/E950.0 — E950.5/E980.0 — E980.5) for 2004 and 2005

Year	Number of Deaths
*2004	126
*2005	166

*Please note that figures for 2004, 2005 are by Period of Registration.

Notes:

- Deaths are coded according to the Ninth Revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (I.C.D.9).
- An external cause code is used for the classification of environmental events, circumstances, and conditions as the cause of injury, poisoning, and other adverse effects. Where an external cause code is applied, it is intended that it shall be used in addition to the I.C.D.9 code indicating the nature of the condition.
- In the Table the following ICD 9 Codes are used:
E850-E858 — Accidental Poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biologicals.
E930-E949 — Drugs, medicaments and biological substances causing adverse effects in therapeutic use.
E950.0-E950.5 — Suicide and self-inflicted poisoning by solid or liquid substances.
E980.0-E980.5 — Poisoning by solid or liquid substances, undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted.

219. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach the number of deaths from HIV, AIDS or Hepatitis C for each health board area for each year since 1986 to date in 2006. [34382/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt): The information requested by the Deputy is given in the following table;

[Mr. Kitt.]

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	*2004	*2005	*Jan-Mar 2006
Midland	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
Mid Western	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	1
South Eastern	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0
Southern	1	1	3	3	2	0	3	0	1	3
Western	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
Total	21	18	21	12	20	24	24	19	15	6

*Please note that figure for 2004, 2005 and Jan-Mar 2006 are by Period of Registration and all other figures are by Year of Occurrence.

Notes:

(a) Deaths are coded according to the Ninth Revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (I.C.D.9).

(b) In the table the following ICD 9 Codes are used:

279.8 — Disorders involving the immune mechanism — Other

070.5 — Viral Hepatitis — Other specified viral hepatitis without mention of hepatic coma.

(There is no code in ICD 9 for either Hepatitis C nor AIDS/HIV so they are coded to their nearest classification code which are those listed above, Hepatitis C to code 070.5 and AIDS/HIV to 279.8).

(c) The names of the Health Board Areas have changed over the time period requested and the current names are displayed. However it should be noted that the Geographical areas covered by each individual Board have not changed and therefore the data is comparable over the time period provided.

220. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach the number of deaths as a result of methadone, heroin, ecstasy or heroin overdose for each year since 1986 to date in 2006 in each health board area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34383/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt): Information in relation to

the number of deaths from Methadone, Heroin or Heroin overdose is given in the table below. However, it should be noted that ecstasy related deaths are excluded from the figures provided below as the identification of these deaths is not possible due to the varying composition of the drug. In addition the classification system being used does not allow for the separate identification of ecstasy related deaths.

Number of Deaths as a result of Methadone, Heroin or Heroin Overdose

(I.C.D.9 Codes 304.0 / 305.5 / 965.0) 1986-1st quarter 2006 by Health Board Area

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
North Eastern	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
North Western	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ERHA	5	2	4	3	4	5	8	10	15	28	26	54
Midland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Mid Western	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
South Eastern	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Southern	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
Western	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Total	5	2	4	3	4	5	8	11	16	28	31	61

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	*2004	*2005	*Jan-Mar 2006
North Eastern	2		2	0	2	0	0	0	0
North Western	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
ERHA	49	64	65	46	46	40	29	42	8
Midland	1	1	1	2	2	2	0	3	0
Mid Western	1	1	1	2	1	3	3	5	1

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	*2004	*2005	*Jan-Mar 2006
South Eastern	3	1	2	3	0	3	2	3	0
Southern	1	3	3	2	1	2	1	1	0
Western	0	0	1	1	0	4	1	1	0
Total	57	70	74	56	53	55	37	56	9

*Please note that figures for 2004, 2005 and Jan-Mar 2006 are by Period of Registration and all other figures are by Year of Occurrence.

Notes:

- (a) Deaths are coded according to the Ninth Revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (I.C.D.9).
- (b) In the table above the following ICD 9 codes are used:
 304.0 — Drug Dependence — Morphine type (Heroin, Methadone, Opium, Opium alkaloids and their derivatives, Synthetics with morphine-like effects)
 305.5 — Nondependent abuse of drugs — Cocaine type
 965.0 — Poisoning by analgesics, antipyretics and antirheumatics — Opiates and related narcotics (Methadone, Codeine, Heroin, Pethidine, Morphine and opium (alkaloids)) The names of the Health Board Areas have changed over the time period requested and the current names are displayed. However it should be noted that the Geographical areas covered by each individual Board have not changed and therefore the data is comparable over the time period provided.
- (c) Drug Dependence: A state, psychic and sometimes also physical, resulting from taking a drug, characterized by behavioural and other responses that always includes a compulsion to take a drug on a continuous or periodic basis in order to experience its psychic effects and sometimes to avoid the discomfort of its absence. Tolerance may or may not be present. A person may be dependent on more than one drug. Nondependent abuse of drugs are not included in these figures.
- (d) Nondependent abuse of drugs. This includes cases where a person, for whom no diagnosis is possible, has come under medical care because of the maladaptive effect of a drug on which he is not dependent and that he has taken on his own initiative to the detriment of his/her health or social functioning.

221. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach the number of drug-related deaths in which cocaine was a factor for each year since 1991 to date in 2006. [34392/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt): The information requested by the Deputy is given in the following table.

Number of Drug-Related Deaths in which Cocaine was a factor (I.C.D. 9 Codes 304.2, 305.6 and 968.5) from 1991-1st quarter 2006

Year	Number of Deaths
1991	0
1992	0
1993	0
1994	0
1995	0
1996	0
1997	3
1998	1
1999	1
2000	2
2001	4
2002	3
2003	3
*2004	3
*2005	10
*Jan-Mar 2006	2

*Please note that figure for 2004, 2005 and Jan-Mar 2006 are by Period of Registration and all other figures are by year of Occurrence.

State Property.

222. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Taoiseach the correct positioning of the national flag and EU flag on flag staffs over Government buildings. [34538/06]

The Taoiseach: An updated version of the booklet dealing with the National Flag entitled “An Bhratach Náisiúnta” was produced by my Department in May 2001. At the time, copies were placed in the Oireachtas Library and a copy was sent to all schools in the country.

The National Flag and the European Flag are correctly positioned over Government Buildings in accordance with this publication which states that the European Flag should be flown on the immediate left of the National Flag or as seen by an observer on the immediate right of the National Flag.

Freedom of Information.

223. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Taoiseach the number of requests under the Freedom of Information Acts received by his Department in each year from 2002 to 2005 and to date in 2006; the amount of money received in application fees for each year; the amount of money received in information retrieval fees for each year; the percentage of requests coming from journalists in each year; the percentage of retrieval fees that were charged to journalists rather than members of the public; the percentage of requests from journalists for which a retrieval fee was charged; the per-

[Mr. Quinn.]

centage of requests from members of the public for which a retrieval fee was charged; the average retrieval fee charged; the median retrieval fee charged; the number of cases in which the retrieval fee was waived; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33876/06]

The Taoiseach: The statistical information sought relating to Freedom of Information requests received in my Department is contained in the table below.

		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 to date
a	number of FOI requests received	146	142	45	61	47
b	amount of money received in application fees	n/a	€315.00	€585.00	€1005.00	€690.00
c	amount of money received in information retrieval fees	€791.60	€180.17	€0.00	€35.12	€0.00
d	percentage of requests from journalists	55%	63%	55%	52%	81%
e	percentage of requests from journalists for which a retrieval fee was charged	9%	6%	0%	2%	0%
f	percentage of requests from others* for which a retrieval fee was charged	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
g	average retrieval charged	€113.08	€36.04	€0	€35.12	€0
h	median retrieval charged	€102.50	€48.19	€0	€35.12	€0
i	number of cases in which the retrieval fee was waived	0	0	0	0	0
j	percentage of retrieval fees charged to journalists rather than others*	see columns e & f	see columns e & f	see columns e & f	see columns e & f	see columns e & f

*Other refers to all FOI applications received excluding journalists.

Register of Electors.

224. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Taoiseach the live register figures for the County Clare area; the breakdown for Ennis, Ennistymon, Kilrush and Tulla offices, for September, 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34411/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt): The Live Register series

gives a monthly breakdown of the number of people claiming Unemployment Assistance, Unemployment Benefit and other claimants registered with the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Figures are published for each county and each Local Social Welfare Office. A breakdown by postal district is not available. The most recent information available is for September 2006. The Live Register figures for Co. Clare and all the Local/Branch Offices in Co. Clare for September 2006 are set out in the table below.

Live Register Co. Clare and Offices, September 2006

Persons

	Males			Females			All Persons		
	Under 25 years	25 years & over	Total males	Under 25 years	25 years & over	Total females	Under 25 years	25 years & over	Total persons
County Clare total	348	1,663	2,011	299	1,376	1,675	647	3,039	3,686
Ennis Office total	234	965	1,199	175	848	1,023	409	1,813	2,222
Ennistymon Office total	31	233	264	37	205	242	68	438	506
Kilrush Office total	57	269	326	57	172	229	114	441	555
Tulla Office total	26	196	222	30	151	181	56	347	403

Source: Live Register, Central Statistics Office.

It should be noted that:

- the Live Register is not a definitive measure of unemployment as it includes part-time workers, seasonal and casual workers entitled to Unemployment Assistance or Benefit. Statistics on unemployment are measured at regional level by the Quarterly National Household Survey.
- the exact area covered by each Local Office is not limited to the immediate locality of the particular office. For instance, in the Tallaght Local Office there may be registered, persons from the Blessington area.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

225. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Taoiseach the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34557/06]

The Taoiseach: The proportion of the cost of each tribunal under the aegis of my Department made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, is set out below.

Moriarty Tribunal

	Total Costs	Legal Costs	Legal Costs as a % of Total Costs
	€	€	%
2006 to 30 September	3,151,758	2,682,171	85
2005	3,437,023	2,788,040	81
2004	3,610,026	2,712,094	75
2003	3,440,954	2,409,836	70
2002	2,799,057	2,263,221	81
2001	2,242,361	1,640,706	73
2000	2,171,921	1,678,670	77
1999	2,139,665	1,446,407	67
1998	1,685,962	1,357,669	81
1997	553,303	331,305	60
Total	25,232,028	19,310,119	77

McCracken Tribunal (Dunnes Payments)

This tribunal was completed in 1997 and the total cost of the tribunal was €6,655,332. The legal costs were €865,193 i.e. 13% of the total cost and third party legal costs were €5,657,032 i.e. 85% of the total cost.

ning permission has been granted throughout County Wexford in each year from 2000 to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34616/06]

Planning Issues.

226. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Taoiseach the number of housing units in respect of which plan-

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt): The following table shows the number of planning permissions granted for houses and apartments in County Wexford and the corresponding number of housing units, in each quarter since 2000.

Planning Permissions Granted for Houses and Apartments in County Wexford, Q1 2000 to Q2 2006

Period		Houses		Apartments		Total Dwellings	
		Number of Permissions	Number of Units	Number of Permissions	Number of Units	Number of Permissions	Number of Units
2000	Q 1	*	871	*	15	471	886
	Q 2	*	1,079	*	76	382	1,155
	Q 3	420	727	13	138	433	865
	Q 4	408	853	11	72	419	925
	Year	*	3,530	*	301	1,705	3,831
2001	Q 1	398	1,216	14	113	412	1,329
	Q 2	322	884	11	68	333	952
	Q 3	269	449	11	41	280	490
	Q 4	264	909	13	129	277	1,038
	Year	1,253	3,458	49	351	1,302	3,809
2002	Q 1	221	335	10	33	231	368
	Q 2	217	300	3	15	220	315
	Q 3	221	303	11	107	232	410
	Q 4	207	405	16	125	223	530
	Year	866	1,343	40	280	906	1,623

[Mr. Kehoe.]

Period		Houses		Apartments		Total Dwellings	
		Number of Permissions	Number of Units	Number of Permissions	Number of Units	Number of Permissions	Number of Units
2003	Q 1	172	273	12	154	184	427
	Q 2	175	391	7	28	182	419
	Q 3	176	470	6	12	182	482
	Q 4	228	475	16	104	244	579
	Year	751	1,609	41	298	792	1,907
2004	Q 1	300	1,078	13	346	313	1,424
	Q 2	297	1,169	17	250	314	1,419
	Q 3	354	811	16	113	370	924
	Q 4	346	711	14	76	360	787
	Year	1,297	3,769	60	785	1,357	4,554
2005	Q 1	307	513	9	12	316	525
	Q 2	313	763	14	81	327	844
	Q 3	311	960	16	76	327	1,036
	Q 4	268	435	18	208	286	643
	Year	1,199	2,671	57	377	1,256	3,048
2006	Q 1	320	592	9	28	329	620
	Q 2	287	1,147	13	274	300	1,421

* Detailed information on Permissions for Houses and Apartments are not available for Q1 and Q2 2000

The Planning Permissions series is published by the CSO and gives a quarterly breakdown of the number of planning permissions granted. Figures are published for each county and each planning authority. Only final grants of permission or approvals are covered, i.e. only works which involve construction. The following permissions are excluded since they do not entail construction per se:

- Changes of a technical and business nature as distinct from a building or structural nature;
- Outline permission;
- Retention of an existing building;
- Changes to existing plan;
- Bye-law permission;
- Refusals — permissions subsequently granted on appeal by An Bord Pleanála are included.

The most recently published planning permissions data is for the second quarter of 2006.

Age Identification Cards.

227. **Mr. N. O'Keefe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason for the delay in having Garda identification cards issued to persons who are eighteen years and over; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that applicants have to wait over three

months to receive their ID cards; and if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that they cannot apply until after they reach the age of 18 years. [33872/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Intoxicating Liquor Act, 1988 (Age Card) Regulations 1999 (S.I. No. 4 of 1999) provide for a voluntary national age card scheme. Section 4 of the Regulations provides that any person who has attained 18 years of age may apply for an age card at his/her local Garda Station in order to confirm that they have attained the legal age for the purchase of intoxicating liquor. Applicants who fail to meet the necessary application criteria may be refused an age card.

Applicants must have attained the age of 18 years and shall present his/her application in writing, on the designated application form, to the Garda station in the area in which he/she resides. The application form must be accompanied by the applicant's birth certificate, at least one other document confirming identity, two recent identical passport sized photographs and the prescribed fee of €6.00.

I am informed by the Garda authorities, who administer the national age card scheme, that on average there is currently an eight week delay in the issue of cards. However, individual applications can be delayed longer than this if the application form has not been completed properly and has to be returned for amendment. The

current age card is due to be replaced shortly and a new application process will be put in place which will allow for faster processing of applications and the eradication of delays in the process.

Residency Permits.

228. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when will a decision be made in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Louth who has applied for permission to remain in the State as a parent of an Irish born child. [33894/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The person in question applied for permission to remain in the State on the basis of being the parent of an Irish child, born prior to 1 January 2005, in accordance with the revised arrangements announced by me on 15 January 2005, commonly referred to as the IBC/05 scheme.

It is a requirement under the revised arrangements that each applicant parent is residing with their Irish born child in the State on a continuous basis since the child's birth. Alternatively if the applicant is not residing in the same household as the child evidence must be provided that the person concerned is playing an active role in the upbringing of the child. The person in question in this case stated in his application form that he did not reside in the same household as his Irish born child but he failed to provide any evidence as to his role in his child's upbringing. The applicant did not meet the criteria for the granting of permission to remain in the State under the revised processing arrangements and a letter refusing his application for permission to remain in the State under the IBC/05 scheme issued on 6 December 2005. However it is noted from recent correspondence received that the person in question has changed address. A copy of the letter issued on 6

December 2005 refusing the residency application under the revised arrangements has now been re-issued to the new address provided.

In the event that the person in question does not have permission to remain on any other separate basis he will have an opportunity to make representations as to his continued presence in the State.

Garda Deployment.

229. **Ms Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Gardaí allocated to the Dublin west district; the breakdown by rank and area of activity; the number of community Gardaí and the areas to which they are assigned; the number in each area; the equivalent numbers for May 2005; his proposals to appoint additional Gardaí to the area in view of the developments taking place in the area and the consequent growth in population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33895/06]

Tánaiste and 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 increased to a record 12,762 on Friday, 8 September, 2006, following the attestation of 249 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997 and represents an increase of 2,060 (or 19%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3 billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms. I have been further informed by the Garda authorities that the personnel strength (by rank) of the Dublin Metropolitan Region West Division as at 19 October, 2006 was as set out in the table hereunder:

Strength	C/Supt.	Supt.	Insp.	Sgt.	Gda.	Total 19/10/06
Blanchardstown	1	2	5	23	135	166
Finglas	—	—	1	8	74	83
Cabra	—	—	1	10	57	68
Clondalkin	—	1	2	10	76	89
Ballyfermot	—	—	1	12	68	81
Rathcoole	—	—	—	2	21	23
Lucan	—	1	3	8	57	69
Ronanstown	—	—	1	14	75	90
Leixlip	—	—	—	3	21	24
Total	1	4	14	90	584	693

I have also been informed that the personnel strength of the Dublin Metropolitan West Division as at 31 December, 1997 was 513 (all ranks).

This represents an increase of 180 (or 35%) in the number of Garda personnel allocated to the Division between 31 December, 1997 and 19 October, 2006.

[Mr. McDowell.]

I have been further informed by the Garda authorities that the personnel strength (by rank) of the Community Policing Units attached to each Station in the Dublin Metropolitan Region West Division as at 31 May, 2005 and 19 October, 2006 was as set out in the table hereunder:

Station	31 May, 2005		19 October, 2006	
	Sergeant	Gardaí	Sergeant	Gardaí
Blanchardstown	2	16	2	17
Finglas	1	11	1	9
Cabra	—	4	1	6
Clondalkin	1	10	1	9
Ballyfermot	1	9	1	9
Rathcoole	—	1	—	1
Lucan	1	6	1	6
Ronanstown	1	11	1	11
Leixlip	—	4	—	4
Total	7	72	8	72

In addition, I would point out to the Deputy that the Division's resources are further augmented by a number of Garda National Units such as the Garda National Drugs Unit, the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) and other specialised units.

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. These personnel allocations are determined by a number of factors including demographics, crime trends, administrative functions and other operational policing needs. Garda management state that such allocations are continually monitored and reviewed along with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy. This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and that the best possible service is provided to the public.

I should add 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. The first three groups of newly attested Gardaí under this accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March, June and September of this year and the fourth such group will become fully attested members of the Force later this year. Further tranches of approximately 275 newly attested Gardaí will follow every 90 days thereafter until the programme is complete. 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 Dublin West will be given the fullest consideration.

Prison Building Programme.

230. **Ms Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount spent since 26 January 2004 on the site at Thornton Hall including expenditure on surveys, tree planting, archaeology and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33896/06]

231. **Ms Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of contracts for work signed for work to be done at the Thornton Hall site; the number of these projects not completed; the cost of the contracts that have not yet been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33897/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 230 and 231 together.

A total of nine contracts have been put in place for the work on Thornton Hall site.

Six of these are complete and three are ongoing. These are the landscape planting contract, the team of consultants appointed to oversee all of the planning of the preliminary works and the site security services.

A total of €2,568,542.36 has been expended to date on works at or related to the Thornton Hall site including surveys, tree planting, archaeology, etc.

As is the case in all major infrastructural projects, comprehensive geological/archaeological surveys were conducted at the site. I am glad to inform the Deputy that, in accordance with assurances I have previously given the House, there are no recorded national monuments on the site. In addition, the comprehensive survey undertaken did not reveal any archaeological impediment to the proposed development.

Anti-Social Behaviour.

232. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 is being used by Gardaí to deal with anti-social activity; and the position regarding other legislation to deal with drunkenness, noise and vandalism. [33908/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Strong provisions are in place to combat anti-social behaviour and vandalism. The primary basis for the law regarding public order offences is the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act, 1994, which modernised the law in this regard. Furthermore, because of my concerns about the abuse of alcohol and its contribution to public order offending and broader social problems, I brought forward tough provisions to deal with alcohol abuse and its effect on public order in the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003. One of the provisions of the Act is to broaden the application of the temporary closure

order penalty, which was originally introduced to combat under-age drinking, to cover also convictions for a series of offences, such as a licensee supplying intoxicating liquor to drunken persons and permitting disorderly conduct on the licensed premises.

The Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 2003 has also been enacted, the main purpose of which is to provide the Garda Síochána with additional powers to deal with late night street violence and anti-social conduct attributable to excessive drinking. It does this by providing for the closure of premises such as pubs, off licences, late night clubs and food premises where there is disorder or noise on or close to the premises, as well as the making of exclusion orders on individuals convicted of a range of public order offences, in addition to any penalty they might receive under the 1994 Public Order Act.

The Criminal Justice Act, 2006 contains provisions to deal with anti-social behaviour. The Act empowers a senior member of the Garda Síochána to apply to the District Court by way of a civil procedure for an order which will prohibit an adult from behaving in an anti-social manner.

The relevant provisions of the Criminal Justice Act, 2006 will be commenced following consultations between my Department, the Office of the Minister for Children and the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána. These consultations are currently ongoing. The purpose of this is to ensure that these provisions will commence as soon as the Commissioner has made the necessary internal arrangements to ensure the smooth introduction of these new procedures.

Separate provision is being made in relation to young people. The Act introduces provisions for behaviour orders for children aged 12 to 18 years into the Children Act, 2001 and the protections of that Act will apply. There will be a series of incremental stages, with parental involvement, preceding an application for a behaviour order. These include a warning, a good behaviour contract and referral to the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme. Only after these stages can a behaviour order be sought through the courts.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána has a pro-active approach to policing anti-social /public disorder issues by immediate intervention, arrest and prosecutions or advice, as appropriate. Local Garda management provide for this in policing plans and make every effort to provide a highly visible police presence on the streets of our towns and villages through the deployment of uniform Gardaí, detective units, divisional traffic corps, community policing units and mountain bike units as appropriate. Garda patrols pay particular attention to areas where the public tends to congregate such as licensed venues and fast food outlets while awaiting transport, so as to prevent and detect incidents of public disorder.

I am further informed that Operation Encounter, which was introduced by Garda management

in 2002, targets public disorder offences including assaults and drinking by underage persons.

Juvenile Liaison Officers regularly visit schools, youth clubs and social services to give presentations under the education programme and highlight alternative options for regular offenders. Community Gardaí and the Garda Schools Liaison Officers also visit schools and address young people on a variety of topics including anti social behaviour.

Members of An Garda Síochána are frequently in contact with other Government and non-government agencies, including the Health Service Executive and the local authorities in order to have a multi-agency approach to addressing criminal issues. This multi-agency liaison will continue.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects are community based, multi-agency crime prevention initiatives which seek to divert young people from becoming involved (or further involved) in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour by providing suitable activities to facilitate personal development and promote civic responsibility. The Garda Youth Diversion Projects are funded by my Department and administered through Garda Community Relations Section of An Garda Síochána.

The allocation of funding for the 74 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. As part of this expansion, ten new projects were established this year and they are located in Blanchardstown, Birr, Carlow, Castlebar, Cavan, Clondalkin, Limerick, Tallaght and Tralee (two projects).

The legislation in relation to noise pollution is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The steps which can be taken where a person is experiencing nuisance caused by noise are primarily a civil matter and as such are outside the remit of An Garda Síochána. However, when the Gardaí receive a complaint about neighbours causing noise, they can request them to lower the noise levels. The Garda powers in this regard relate to ensuring that a breach of the peace does not occur. Complainants may also be advised by the Gardaí of their civil entitlements under section 108 of the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1992.

The Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992 was enacted to make further and better provision for the protection of the environment and the control of pollution and to establish the Environmental Protection Agency.

A local authority, the Agency or any person may complain to the District Court regarding any noise, which is so loud, so continuous, so repeated

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and of such duration or pitch or occurring at such a time, as to give reasonable cause for annoyance.

The court may order the person or body making the noise to take the measures necessary to reduce the noise to a specified level or to take measures to limit or prevent the noise.

An authorised person, shall, for any purpose connected with the Act, be entitled, at all reasonable times, to enter any premises and to bring therein such other persons (including members of An Garda Síochána).

An offence under the Act may be prosecuted summarily by the Environmental Protection Agency.

233. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will put in place safety and security plans at a location (details supplied) in Dublin 9 to deal with anti-social activity. [33909/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the area referred to is regularly patrolled by uniform and plain clothes Gardaí from Santry Garda station with a view to ensuring a concentrated and visible Garda presence in the area. These patrols are backed up by Divisional Garda Units, including the Traffic Corps, Mountain Bike Unit, Drug Task Force and the District and Divisional Detective Units. I understand that Gardaí attached to the Community Policing Unit have a good relationship with the local community.

I am also informed by the Garda authorities that arising from correspondence received, and following meetings with residents' groups in the area referred to, a policing plan was put in place by local Garda management to target anti-social behaviour in this area. This resulted in a number of persons being either charged or dealt with under the Juvenile Diversion Programme for public disorder and anti-social behaviour type offences.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that current policing plans in the area are predicated on the prevention of anti-social and public order offences; the prevention of crime including crimes of violence against persons and property and the maintenance of an environment conducive to the improvement of quality of life of the residents. This strategy will continue to be central to the delivery of a policing service to the area.

Garda Stations.

234. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will confirm future plans for Mountjoy and Fitzgibbon Street Garda Stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33910/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): No final decision has been made in relation to the future of the Mountjoy and Fitzgibbon Street Stations. The decision to dispose of the Mountjoy Prison complex and the need to address the accommodation issues at Fitzgibbon Street stations are factors being considered in this regard. I will be advised by the Garda Authorities on this matter taking into account the policing requirements of the area.

Visa Applications.

235. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a visitors visa for a person (details supplied) will be granted; if, in this context his attention has been drawn to the fact that this person will return to their own country on 16 January 2007; if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that evidence in this regard has been provided to the Consulate involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33925/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Dublin Visa Office on 19th October, 2006 and is awaiting examination by a Visa Officer. A decision in respect of the application in question will be made in the coming weeks.

Refugee Status.

236. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position in relation to asylum or family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33929/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The person concerned, a Nigerian national, arrived in the State on 24 November, 2005 and applied for asylum. His application was refused following consideration of the case by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and on appeal by the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

Subsequently, in accordance with section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, the person concerned was informed by letter dated 21 July, 2006 that the Minister was proposing to make a deportation order in respect of him. He was, in accordance with the Act, given the option of making representations, within 15 working days, setting out the reasons why he 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.

The person's case file, including all representations submitted, will be considered under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, and Section 5 of the Refugee Act, 1996,

(Prohibition of Refoulement) as amended. I expect the file to be passed to me for decision in due course.

Missing Persons.

237. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he has seen the business plan submitted by an organisation (details supplied); if he has reviewed the plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33950/06]

238. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his views on reinstating funding for the missing persons helpline based on the proposals in the business plan submitted by an organisation (details supplied); when the organisation can expect a response to their proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33951/06]

239. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his Department has or will research the services available to families of missing persons in other areas, such as in England, to look for best practice models; the steps which will be taken to provide the services recommended and requested by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33952/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 to 239, inclusive, together.

A proposal for funding the organisation referred to by the Deputy has been submitted to my Department and officials are currently examining the proposal. A response on this proposal will issue to the organisation in question in the near future.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that they regularly liaise with other police forces to ensure that best practice is in place for investigations relating to missing persons, including liaison with family members of such persons. If their professional judgement is that some change in the existing legislation, protocols or structures would be of assistance in improving investigations, this would be considered by me.

Criminal Assets Bureau.

240. **Mr. Costello** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount of money that has been seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau in each year since its establishment in 1996; the amount of money seized and still frozen; the amount of money seized and released; the use to which the money has been put; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33973/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): It has not been possible within the timeframe involved to collate

the information required by the deputy. I will contact the Deputy directly when the information is to hand.

State Property.

241. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his Department, the Office of Public Works or the Irish Prison Service is responsible for the sell off of the land and castle at Shanganagh Castle, in Shankill. [33974/06]

242. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council have called on him not to sell the land and castle at Shanganagh Castle; the status of the 6.33 acre site including whether it has been put on the market; the conditions that will be attached to the sale; and if he will ensure that the land is put in the hands of the county council who are best placed to guarantee that it is put to good use for the people of Shankill and the surrounding area. [33975/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 and 242 together.

The property referred to is, following a public tender competition, being disposed of for in excess of €20m. The Chief State Solicitor has been instructed to accept the highest tender received and to proceed with the sale. There are no special conditions attached to the sale. The property is vested in the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the disposal has been arranged by the Prison Service.

Officials of the Prison Service recently facilitated a request from the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Manager and his officials to view the property. No detailed discussions on possible future uses of the lands took place nor was the matter raised by the County Manager or his officials. I would like to point out that last year about 21 acres of this site was sold to Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. I would also add that Prison Service Officials were at the time informed by the Council that it had no interest in the remaining lands, including the buildings, which have now been sold by Tender.

The proceeds from the sale of this property will be used to offset the costs of the major capital investment programme which I am making in the Prison system.

Registration of Title.

243. **Mr. Perry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress made on the land registry application for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33990/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I understand that the Land Registry has forwarded the information requested directly to the Deputy.

I would like to refer the Deputy to my letter of 26 May, 2006 to members of the Oireachtas regarding a new service for TDs and Senators concerning the current status of Land Registry/Registry of Deeds applications. As outlined in my letter, the service was introduced, *inter alia*, to provide a speedier and more cost effective alternative to submitting Parliamentary Questions.

Prisoner Transfers.

244. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to the moves by the British Home Secretary to repatriate Irish citizens who are currently in prison in Britain; if his further attention has been drawn to the number of Irish citizens currently in prison in Britain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33991/06]

245. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the contingencies he has put in place to prepare for the possible repatriation of Irish citizens held in prisons in other EU States; the number of such prisoners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33992/06]

246. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will repatriate non Irish EU citizens currently being held in prisons here to their European countries of nationality; the number of such prisoners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33993/06]

248. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his views on whether the Irish Prison Service could cope with the repatriation of Irish citizens currently being held in EU prisons to Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33995/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 244 to 246, inclusive, and 248 together.

The current mechanism by which prisoners can be transferred from one state to another is the 1983 Council of Europe Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons. The legislative basis for the operation of the Convention in Ireland is the Transfer of Sentence Persons Acts, 1995 and 1997.

The Convention requires extensive documentation to be exchanged between both jurisdictions in order to allow an application to be fully considered. A three-way consent is also required to enable any transfer to take place i.e. from the authorities of both jurisdictions and from the person concerned. On receipt of those consents (assuming they are forthcoming), an application must be made to the High Court for a warrant authorising the transfer of the person concerned and his/her continued detention here.

These procedures are required under the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Acts and must be adhered to in processing each application.

Other than the Convention and certain forms of mutual cooperation in the criminal justice area, there is no mechanism whereby a sentenced prisoner can be transferred from another country to Ireland or vice versa. It is open to countries to consider deportation of non national prisoners when they have completed their sentence. However, the deportation of a European Union citizen from one Member State to another may only occur in exceptional circumstances and a sentence of imprisonment on its own is not sufficient to justify deportation. Each case has to be considered on its own particular merits.

The number of prisoners in Irish prisons who are from other parts of the European Union stands at 114. A breakdown by nationality is attached. It is estimated that there are approximately 700 Irish citizens in prisons in other EU member States. The vast majority of these are in Britain.

I am aware that certain Irish citizens who have completed or who are about to complete prison sentences in Britain have been served with deportation orders. There is no legal basis for detaining such persons in this jurisdiction and their deportation has no direct implications for the Irish Prison Service. I am also aware that the Home Secretary made a statement on 10 October, 2006, setting out his policy regarding the deportation of foreign prisoners from the United Kingdom. In that statement he stated that because of the close historical, community, and political ties between the United Kingdom and Ireland, he was considering treating Irish citizens as a special case.

A new proposal to replace the 1983 Convention, known as “The Council Framework Decision on the application of the principle of mutual recognition to judgments in criminal matters imposing custodial sentences or measures involving deprivation of liberty for the purpose of their enforcement in the European Union”, has been sponsored by Sweden, Austria and Finland and is currently under discussion at EU level. Ireland, along with several other member states has registered a number of substantial reservations on the text as it currently stands and discussions are continuing on the matter on an ongoing basis.

Nationality	Number of Persons
United Kingdom (including Northern Ireland)	56
Dutch	5
Portuguese	3
Spanish	3
Italian	2
German	1
Danish	1
Lithuanian	19
Latvian	10
Polish	10
Czech	1
Estonian	1
Hungarian	1
Maltese	1
Total	114

Prison Accommodation.

247. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the capacity of prisons here; the capacity of each institution under the management of the Irish Prison Service; the number of prisoners by institution currently being accommodated here; the amount by which the accommodation capacity of the Irish Prison Service will expand for each of the years 2006 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33994/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The capacity and number of prisoners in prison custody on 23 October 2006, is set out in the table below:-

Institution	Normal Bed Capacity	Number in Custody
Mountjoy Prison	480	463
Dóchas Centre	85	91
St. Patrick’s Institution	217	177
Cork Prison	259	270
Limerick Prison (Male)	271	278
Limerick Prison (Female)	20	16
Castlerea Prison	206	224
Cloverhill Prison	433	408
Wheatfield Prison	378	376
Portlaoise Prison	188	116
Arbour Hill Prison	139	139
Training Unit	96	89
Midlands Prison	447	439
Loughan House	110	89
Shelton Abbey	60	56
Total	3,389	3,231

Where the number in custody exceeds the normal bed capacity alternative accommodation arrangements are made to accommodate the temporary increase in numbers.

The Prison Service five year capital building programme has been prepared, details of which are set out below. The main objectives of the capital programme are as follows:

- Provide a predominantly single cell model,
- eliminate the practice of slopping out,
- accommodate prisoners in a range of security levels consistent with the prisoners circumstances,
- as far as possible, operate each prison complex as a single campus with shared facilities,
- provide accommodation in anticipation of future growth in the prison population.

Additional Prison Places to be provided:

- 2007 138 at Portlaoise Prison, 61 at Loughan House, 60 at Shelton Abbey, 12 at Castlerea Prison
- 2008 146 at Wheatfield Prison, 60 at Castlerea Prison
- 2009 50 at Limerick Prison
- 2010 1,400 at Thornton Hall Prison PPP Project
- 2011 450 at Spike Island.

It should be noted that the net increase in capacity will be less than the additional spaces referred to above as, for example, the Mountjoy complex and Cork prison will be withdrawn from service in due course.

Question No. 248 answered with Question No. 244.

Residency Permits.

249. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the entitlement of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7 to residency here; and the way they might best apply for residency. [34014/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The person concerned was the subject of Oral Parliamentary Question No. 6 of 2 February, 2006 at which time the particular circumstances of her case were outlined.

It was pointed out that the person concerned was illegally resident in the State and was required to leave the State. It was advised that she could reapply for the appropriate visa should

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she wish to return. However, the Visa Office of my Department have no record of having received a new visa application.

I understand from the Immigration Division of my Department that a request issued to her legal representatives on 13th July 2006 for details of her departure but to date no response has been received. As it is now apparent that the person concerned has continued to remain illegally in the State, it is now the intention of the Immigration Division of my Department to issue notification to deport her under Section 3 (4) of the Immigration Act 1999.

Garda Operations.

250. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if it is appropriate for the Gardaí to film or video the movements and statements of Houses of the Oireachtas Members carrying out their duties as public representatives as occurred on 16 October 2006 at the Shell installation at Ballinaboy, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34015/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities that, as part of the routine Operational Orders put in place by Garda Management to prevent and detect breaches of criminal law during protests, marches and other events are routinely recorded on video by An Garda Síochána. I am further informed that the video-taping of events is intended to record the movement of all persons, including the members of An Garda Síochána tasked with policing the protests. Such video evidence is securely retained and is available in support/defence of any allegations made which may be subject of investigation.

Legislative Programme.

251. **Mr. Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when Section 185 of the new Criminal Justice Act 2006 will come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34034/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that section 185 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 came into effect on 1 August 2006, in accordance with the Criminal Justice Act 2006 (Commencement) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 390 of 2006).

Section 185 amends section 19 of the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 in order to extend the existing offences of assaulting or obstructing peace officers to other workers including ambulance and fire brigade members

and those providing medical services at or in a hospital. In doing so it recognises the special demands of acting in an emergency situation and provides explicit statutory protection for this essential group of workers and those assisting them.

Asylum Support Services.

252. **Mr. Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he or his Department have plans to use a premises (details supplied) in Dublin 22 to accommodate asylum seekers or for other related purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34035/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA), has entered into a contractual arrangement for the accommodation of asylum seekers at a premises in Dublin 22 as per details supplied. The centre will have an overall capacity for 250 persons or approximately 60-65 families. The centre opened on 10th October and to date, a total of 21 families have been placed there.

Residency Permits.

253. **Mr. Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if the application for residency here by a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22 will be processed from their original documentation or if they must make a new application for long term residency in the State; and the steps this person must take to secure long term residency here. [34036/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The person concerned should make a new application for long term residency when he has completed 60 months legal residency on the basis of Work Permit, Work Authorisation, or Working Visa conditions. An exemption from Work Permit requirements is considered at the same time. He should submit the following documentation in support of the application:

1. Clear and legible copy of passport, all pages (in the event that the passport has been renewed since commencing employment, a copy of the previous passport must be provided).
2. Copy of Certificate of Registration
3. Copies of work permits / working visa endorsements / work authorisation endorsements.

Applicants are advised that where their permission to remain on Work Permit conditions is due to expire, they should seek to renew their

permission to remain with their local Immigration Office while their application is under consideration. Due to the significant volume of applications, the Immigration Division is currently unable to acknowledge applications for long term residency in writing. The processing time is currently 22-24 weeks.

If the person concerned changes address while their application is under consideration, they must notify the Immigration Division of their change of address in writing immediately quoting their Department of Justice Immigration Division reference number.

Garda Vetting Services.

254. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the average time it takes to process an application, from the time of receipt to the position being filled, in respect of applications to in the Garda Vetting Unit, in Thurles, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34043/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the average processing time for valid applications for Garda vetting received at the Garda Central Vetting Unit is currently four weeks.

Any further time frame involved in the filling of a position for which Garda vetting is required is solely a matter for the recruiting organisation, over which the Garda authorities have no control.

Garda Stations.

255. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if it is intended to open Celbridge, Maynooth and Leixlip Garda Stations on a 24 hour basis. [34049/06]

Tánaiste and 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 increased to a record 12,762 on Friday, 8 September, 2006, following the attestation of 249 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997 and represents an increase of 2,060 (or 19%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3 billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms.

I have been further informed that the personnel strength (all ranks) of Celbridge, Maynooth and Leixlip Garda Station as at 31 December, 1997 and 20 October, 2006 was as set out hereunder:

Station	31/12/97	20/10/06	Increase (%)
Celbridge	12	20	8 (67%)
Maynooth	9	16	7 (78%)
Leixlip	11	24	13 (118%)

I have also been informed that the Celbridge and Maynooth Garda Stations form part of the Carlow/Kildare Division and the Leixlip Garda Station forms part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region West Division. The official opening hours of each of these stations are as set out in the table hereunder:

Station	Monday — Saturday	Sundays
Celbridge	10am-1pm 2pm-6pm 7pm-9pm	12 midday-2pm
Maynooth	10am-1pm 2pm-6pm	12 midday-2pm
Leixlip	12.30pm-1.30pm 7.30pm-9.30pm	—

Garda management state that the opening hours as set out above are dependent on the availability and rostered tour of duty of the members attached to each station.

Garda management further state that there are no plans to change the opening hours of Celbridge, Maynooth and Leixlip Garda Stations at this time. The extension of the opening hours would necessitate the employment of additional personnel on indoor administrative duties who may be more effectively engaged on outdoor policing duties.

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. These personnel allocations are determined by a number of factors including demographics, crime trends, administrative functions and other operational policing needs. Garda management state that such allocations are continually monitored and reviewed along with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy. This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and that the best possible service is provided to the public.

I should add 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. The first three groups of newly attested Gardaí under this accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March, June and September of this year and the fourth such group will become fully attested members of the Force later this year. Further

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tranches of approximately 275 newly attested Gardaí will follow every 90 days thereafter until the programme is complete. 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 Celbridge, Maynooth and Leixlip Garda stations will be given the fullest consideration.

256. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of the country's 144 Garda stations which operate on a 24 hour basis that were established within the past 10 years; the number of stations that were downgraded from 24 hour a day operations to other hours of operation, or were closed entirely; if his reply to Parliamentary Question No. 230 of 10th October, 2006 only applies to areas in which there is a new demand for an expansion to station opening times, or if he intends to scale 24 hour station opening times back in order to facilitate an increased level of outdoor policing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34053/06]

Tánaiste and 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 increased to a record 12,762 on Friday, 8 September, 2006, following the attestation of 249 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997 and represents an increase of 2,060 (or 19%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3 billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms.

I have been further informed that the number of Garda Stations established within the past 10 years which operate on a 24 hour basis and the number of Garda stations that were changed from 24 hour a day operations to other hours of operation, or were closed, are as set out in the table hereunder:

No. of 24-hour Stations established within the last 10 years	1
No. of Stations changed to other hours of operation	11
No. of Stations closed	0

Garda management state that the extension of the opening hours at individual Garda Stations is a matter for each Divisional Officer. The extension of opening hours at any Garda Station would necessitate the employment of additional personnel on indoor administrative duties and consequently a loss to outdoor operational policing.

Garda management further state that there are currently no proposals to change opening times

in 24 hour Garda stations. I should add 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. The first three groups of newly attested Gardaí under this accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March, June and September of this year and the fourth such group will become fully attested members of the Force later this year. Further tranches of approximately 275 newly attested Gardaí will follow every 90 days thereafter until the programme is complete. 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 all Garda Stations will be given the fullest consideration.

Residency Permits.

257. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, in relation to a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath who, in accordance with correspondence received from his Department on 22 February 2006, has taken up employment, will have confirmed that their permission to remain in the State remains granted on the basis that they have sufficient funds to maintain themselves and is not a burden on the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34065/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Immigration Division of my Department has received correspondence from the person concerned. They will be in touch with her in due course in relation to her immigration status.

Citizenship Applications.

258. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will confirm that his Department received an application for citizenship by naturalisation from a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath in 2004; the current status of the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34066/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): An application from the person referred to in the Deputy's question was received in the Citizenship Section of my Department on 1 June 2004. I am advised by my officials that processing of the application of the person concerned has commenced. When this is completed, I will advise both the Deputy and the applicant of my decision.

Garda Vetting Services.

259. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the way a person (details supplied) in County Mayo, who was allegedly arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol, despite the fact that they claim to have never been arrested, never accused of drunken driving and never in a criminal court, can appear on a vetting request; the way fingerprints can match when the person in question is puzzled with the details; if he will examine this case, and request details from the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34072/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that, in October 2005, an application for criminal history vetting was received at the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) from the Health Service Executive (HSE) in respect of the person in question. On this vetting application, previous residential addresses in the United Kingdom (UK) were supplied, and a Garda enquiry was made with the relevant UK authorities in respect of these. The resultant reply indicated that the person in question had previous convictions in a former name in the UK. The HSE was duly advised of this information in January 2006.

The disclosed information was disputed by the person in question. Accordingly, in September 2006, the person provided a set of her fingerprints to the Garda authorities for the purpose of verifying identity. These fingerprints were forwarded to the relevant UK authorities, which indicated a positive match with their records. The HSE was advised of this on 12 October, 2006.

I am further informed that correspondence has now been received by the GCVU from the legal representative of the person in question and that further enquiries are being made with the relevant UK authorities. In the circumstances, I consider that it is appropriate to await the outcome of these further inquiries.

Visa Applications.

260. **Mr. Perry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be made on the application for a tourist visa by a person (details supplied) in view of correspondence which has been issued to his officials; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34073/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Dublin Visa Office on 4th October, 2006 and is awaiting examination by a Visa Officer. A decision in respect of the application in question will be made in the near future.

Garda Operations.

261. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the cost to the Exchequer of the ongoing security operation at Shannon Airport by the Gardaí including an annual breakdown since 2002; and his views on whether the operation is necessary and is money well spent. [34093/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the cost, excluding basic salaries, of ongoing Garda policing arrangements at Shannon Airport is as follows:

Year	Expenditure
	€
2002	486,603
2003	762,999
2004	975,091
2005	738,018
2006 (as of September)	1,309,008
Total	4,217,719

Pursuant to the Garda Síochána Act 2005, it is the function of the Garda Síochána to provide policing services for the State with the objective of, inter alia, preserving peace and public order, protecting life and property and preventing crime.

In this context, the Garda authorities are required to allocate resources in an appropriate fashion to, inter alia, protect critical State infrastructures in accordance with assessed threat, so it is the latter which ultimately determines the associated costs. I am satisfied that Garda policing arrangements at Shannon Airport remain both necessary and appropriate.

Garda Strength.

262. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will provide the wage bill and overtime costs to Gardaí serving in the Clare Division in 2004, 2005 and to date in 2006 and the number of Gardaí serving in the division in each of the three years concerned. [34094/06]

Tánaiste and 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 increased to a record 12,762 on Friday, 8 September, 2006, following the attestation of 249 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997

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and represents an increase of 2,060 (or 19%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3 billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms.

I have been further informed by the Garda authorities that the personnel strength of the Clare Division as at 31 December 1997, 31 December, 2004, 31 December, 2005 and as at 12 October, 2006 was as set out in the table hereunder:

31/12/97	31/12/04	31/12/05	12/10/06
219	259	261	318

This represents an increase of 99 (or 45%) in the number of personnel allocated to the Clare Division since 31 December, 1997 and an increase of 59 (or 23%) in the number of personnel allocated since 31 December, 2004. I have also been informed by the Garda authorities that the total salary and overtime bill in respect of Gardaí serving in the Clare Division for 2004, 2005 and to 12 October, 2006 was as set out in the table hereunder:

	31/12/2004	31/12/2005	12/10/2006
Salaries, PRSI and Allowances	13,516,843	14,127,278	12,705,351
Overtime	1,060,228	1,227,685	1,467,599
Total	14,577,071	15,354,963	14,172,950

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. These personnel allocations are determined by a number of factors including demographics, crime trends, administrative functions and other operational policing needs. Garda management state that such allocations are continually monitored and reviewed along with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy. This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and that the best possible service is provided to the public.

I should add 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. The first three groups of newly attested Gardaí under this accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March, June and September of this year and the fourth such group will become fully attested members of the Force later this year. Further tranches of approximately 275 newly attested Gardaí will follow every 90 days thereafter until

the programme is complete. 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 Clare Division will be given the fullest consideration.

Criminal Prosecutions.

263. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of convictions for drug offences in the Clare Garda Division in 2004, 2005 and to date in 2006; and the number of samples that have been sent away for analysis in the same period. [34095/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): It has not been possible, within the timeframe available, to collate the information required by the Deputy. I will contact the Deputy directly when the information is to hand.

Illegal Fireworks.

264. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the changes made to the Explosive Act 1875, relating to possession of fireworks without a licence, in the last year; the amount of illegal fireworks seized to date in 2006; the numbers of fines and penalties imposed for same; the number of seizures of fireworks for the past three years; if he could give a breakdown of figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34162/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Explosives Act, 1875 provides for control of the importation, manufacture, storage and sale of fireworks. The 1875 Act was amended by the Criminal Justice Act, 2006 which came into effect on 1 August, 2006. These amendments provide for new offences governing the misuse of fireworks in public places and an offence of possession of illegally imported fireworks with intent to supply. They also provide for significantly increased penalties governing the illegal importation, sale and use of fireworks.

Under the new provisions it is an offence

- for any person to possess a firework with intent to sell or supply, without a licence,
- to throw an ignited firework at any person or property, and
- to light unlicensed fireworks in a public place.

The penalty for such offences is as follows:

- a fine of up to €2,500 or 6 months imprisonment or both on summary conviction, and
- a fine of up to €10,000 or 5 years imprisonment or both on conviction on indictment.

The simple possession of fireworks without a licence is also an offence for which a person may be liable to a fine of up to €10,000.

As the Deputy will appreciate the new provisions only came into effect on 1 August last and there have been no fines or convictions recorded for fireworks offences in the information available to date in 2006. Operation Tombola, the annual Garda operation to combat the illegal sale of fireworks, was launched in September this year. To date this year there have been thirty seizures of fireworks, with a total value of €86,966. The following table details the number of seizures of illegal fireworks and approximate value in recent years.

Year	No. of Seizures	Estimated Value
		€
2006	30	86,966
2005	126	454,760
2004	34	170,000

Citizenship Applications.

265. **Mr. Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a person (details supplied) will receive certification of their Irish citizenship. [34177/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a certificate of Irish citizenship for the person referred to was issued on 19 October 2006 by the Citizenship section of my Department. As the declaration was lodged originally at the Irish Embassy in London, the certificate has been forwarded to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin for transmission to

officials at the Embassy, who will then issue it to the person concerned.

Crime Prevention.

266. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Garda youth diversion projects that have been established in the country and the location of each project. [34363/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Garda youth diversion projects are a community-based, multi-agency crime prevention initiative which seek to divert young persons from becoming involved — or further involved — in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour by providing suitable activities to facilitate personal development, promote civic responsibility and improve long-term employability prospects. By doing so, the projects also contribute to improving the quality of life within communities and enhancing Garda/community relations. The number of projects has increased from 12 in 1997 to 74 at present, a process made possible, in part, by funding under the National Development Plan 2000 — 2006. Some 71 of the projects are in operation with three under review.

The allocation of funding for the 74 Garda Youth Diversion Projects (along with seven 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. As part of this expansion, ten new projects were established this year and they are located in Blanchardstown, Birr, Carlow, Castlebar, Cavan, Clondalkin, Limerick, Tallaght and Tralee (two projects).

The 74 Garda Youth Diversion Projects and 7 Local Drugs Taskforce Projects currently in place are as follows:

Project	Location
Able	Ballyfermot, Dublin
ACORN	Edenderry, Offaly
ALF	Athlone, Westmeath
Arrest Referral Scheme (Drugs Project)	Dublin
BAP (Ballincollig)	Innishmore.
BALL	Ballybeg, Waterford
BAN	Ballybane, Galway
Bandon Youth	Bandon, Cork
BAPADE	Killarney, Kerry
BAY	Ballymun, Dublin
BLOCK	Portlaoise, Laois
BOYNE	Drogheda, Louth
Bray New Directions	Bray, Co. Wicklow
Bris	Westside, Galway
Cabra Step-Up	Cabra, Dublin
Cavan	Cavan Town
Clonmel (CYD)	Clonmel, Tipperary

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Project	Location
CODY	Cherry Orchard, Dublin
Connect 7	Tralee, Kerry
Corpus Christi Youth DG	Moyross, Limerick
CYAP	Castlebar
DAN	Donore Avenue, Dublin
DAY	Dungarvan, Waterford
DIME	North Inner City, Dublin
Ennis Youth Project	Ennis, Clare
EYE	Mullingar, Westmeath
FAN	Finglas, Dublin
FAYER	Farranree, Cork
Feabhas	Midleton/Cobh, Cork
GAP	The Glen, Cork
GRAFT	Ronanstown, Dublin
HAY	St. Agathas, Dublin
High Voltage	Dundalk, Louth
HUB	Carlow
JAY	Jobstown, Dublin
Junction	Ballinasloe, Galway
Just Us	Tralee, Kerry
KEY	Killinarden, Tallaght
Kilkenny	Kilkenny
Kings Island	Limerick
Knocknaheeny/Holyhill	Knocknaheeny, Cork
Knocknaheeny/Holyhill (Drugs Project)	Cork
LAB	Loughlinstown/Ballybrack, Dublin
LEAF	Raphoe, Co. Donegal
LEAP	Longford
LSCYI	Southill, Limerick
MAY	Mahon, Cork
MAY (Drugs Project)	Cork
Mayfield (Drugs Project)	Cork
Monaghan NYP	Monaghan
MOST	Phoenix Park, Dublin
MY	Tralee, Co. Kerry
Neighbourhood Policing Unit (Drugs Project)	Cork
NICKOL	North Inner City, Dublin
Northside (Ballynanty)	Ballynanty, Limerick
NYPD	Navan, Meath
ORB	Blanchardstown, Co. Dublin
PACT Waterford	Waterford
Poodle Close	Dublin
RAD (Roscommon)	Roscommon
SAFE	Clonard/Coolcotts, Wexford
SAY	Sandyford, Dublin
Sli Eile	Tullamore
SMART	Trim, Meath
STAY	Tallaght, Co. Dublin
SUB	Birr, Co. Offaly
SWAY	Waterford
SWIFT	Clondalkin, Dublin
TACT	Togher, Cork

Project	Location
TEAM	Dundalk, Louth
The Valley	Ronanstown, Co. Dublin
Togher Link-Up (Drugs Project)	Cork
WAY	Wicklow
WEB	Blanchardstown, Dublin
WEB (Drugs Project)	Dublin
Woodale	Darndale, Dublin
YAB (Ballina)	Ballina, Mayo
YAK	Kilmore, Dublin
YAPS	Sligo Town
YEW	Whitechurch, Dublin
YIS	Oliver Bond Street, Dublin

267. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if a Garda youth diversion project has been established in a Gaeltacht area here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34364/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Garda youth diversion project guidelines have been developed to deal with the establishment, operation, administration and monitoring of projects. In accordance with the Guidelines, proposals to establish new Garda youth diversion projects are forwarded to the Garda Commissioner for consideration and recommendation to my Department. Projects are established when resources permit and in locations where it is considered this method of intervention is most needed. I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are currently no Garda youth diversion projects operating through the medium of Irish or established covering a location which is a Gaeltacht area.

Drugs in Prisons.

268. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of drug-related deaths as a result of overdose in prison each year since 1986 to date in 2006; the drug involved if established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34385/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The information

sought by the Deputy on the deaths attributed to drug overdose during the period 1986 — 2006 (to date) together with details of the drug involved, if established, is not readily available. It will require an examination of the individual files concerned. I am arranging for this work to be carried out and will communicate further with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

269. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the value of illegal drugs confiscated in prisons since 1986 to date in 2006; and the number of prosecutions for drug possession initiated and concluded for each year. [34386/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The compilation of these statistics would require a disproportionate and inordinate amount of staff time and effort to prepare and could not be justified in current circumstances where there are other significant demands on resources.

Prison Accommodation.

270. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of prisoners incarcerated on 1 November each year since 1986; and the number of beds in the prison service at that time. [34387/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The bed capacity and number of prisoners in prison custody for the dates requested are set out in the following table:

Date	Design Capacity	Bed Capacity	Number in Custody
1 November, 1986	Not available	Not available	1,901
1 November, 1987	Not available	Not available	1,934
1 November, 1988	Not available	Not available	1,958
1 November, 1989	Not available	Not available	2,057
1 November, 1990	Not available	Not available	2,131
1 November, 1991	Not available	Not available	2,141

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Date	Design Capacity	Bed Capacity	Number in Custody
1 November, 1992	Not available	Not available	2,161
1 November, 1993	Not available	2,224	2,111
1 November, 1994	Not available	2,233	2,142
1 November, 1995	Not available	2,195	2,113
1 November, 1996	Not available	2,251	2,256
1 November, 1997	Not available	2,358	2,463
1 November, 1998	2,385	2,793	2,793
1 November, 1999	2,382	2,798	2,767
1 November, 2000	3,372	3,771	2,971
1 November, 2001	3,372	3,509	3,177
1 November, 2002	3,372	3,489	3,163
1 November, 2003	3,312	3,412	3,208
1 November, 2004	3,291	3,336	3,209
1 November, 2005	3,293	3,352	3,070

The increase in bed capacity in the period 1997 to 1998 followed the opening of Castlereagh Prison as well as additional places being provided in Wheatfield and the 'D' Wing in Limerick Prison. The opening of Cloverhill Prison, the Midlands Prison and Dochas Centre between late 1999 and 2000 is reflected in the increase in bed capacity from 1 November 1999 to 1 November 2000. In the following year, the bed capacity in Mountjoy reduced with the closure of the 'A' Wing and Separation Unit. The closure of Shanganagh Castle in late 2002 and The Curragh and Fort Mitchel Places of Detention in early 2004 led to further reductions. However, the impact of these closures was partly offset by the opening of the new 'C' Block in Limerick Prison which provided an additional 100 beds. In May 2005, following refurbishment, an additional 25 beds were made available in Loughan House.

The Deputy should note that as I have stated in previous replies, accommodating prisoners is not simply a matter of matching the global prisoner population to a global figure for beds or cells. A number of factors have to be taken into account including the prisoner's age, gender, the nature of the offence, location, security and whether they are on remand or sentenced. The opening of the new C Block in Portlaoise in 2007 will realise a further 150 spaces while new developments in Spike Island and Thornton will see a massive expansion in capacity, providing prisoners with predominantly single cell accommodation with in-cell sanitation facilities.

The excess of bed capacity over the design capacity became necessary to accommodate the ongoing demands of prison spaces during the periods concerned. The figures supplied illustrate a significant reduction in the differences between the design capacity and bed capacity of the system over the last number of years.

Drug Treatment Programme.

271. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste

and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of prisoners undergoing methadone treatment per prison per year since 1986 to date in 2006. [34388/06]

272. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of addicts registered with the prison's medical authorities for other drug treatment services while in prison, per prison, per year since 1986 to date in 2006. [34389/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 272 together.

Prior to 2000, there was no systematic recording of the number of prisoners receiving methadone treatment in the Irish Prison Service. Such treatment consisted almost exclusively of brief methadone detoxification provided in prisons in the Dublin area. The position changed in 2000 in that after 2000 the number of prisoners who have received methadone treatment while in prison has increased significantly. While not directly comparable to subsequent years because the changes took place during the year, five persons in the Dochas Centre, 46 in Mountjoy Prison and 17 in Wheatfield Prison received methadone treatment in the calendar year 2000.

The annual figures for 2001 to 2005 (as reported to the Central Treatment List) are as follows:

2001	
Cloverhill	306
Dóchas Centre	250
Limerick Prison	16
Mountjoy Prison	339
St Patrick's Institution	20
Wheatfield Prison	85
Total	1,016

2002

Cloverhill Prison	343
Dóchas Centre	260
Limerick Prison	14
Mountjoy Prison	376
Portlaoise Prison	8
St. Patrick's Institution	21
Wheatfield Prison	148
Total	1,170

2003

Cloverhill Prison	591
Dóchas Centre	257
Limerick Prison	15
Mountjoy Prison	592
Portlaoise Prison	30
St. Patrick's Institution	43
Wheatfield Prison	226
Total	1,754

2004

Cloverhill Prison	528
Dóchas Centre	211
Limerick Prison	3
Mountjoy Prison	394
Midlands Prison	6
Portlaoise Prison	6
St. Patrick's Institution.	3
Wheatfield Prison	158
Total	1,309

2005

Cloverhill Prison	571
Dóchas Centre	228
Limerick Prison	4
Midlands Prison	6
Mountjoy Prison	590
Portlaoise Prison	3
St. Patrick's Institution.	1
Wheatfield Prison	162
Total	1,565

Accurate figures for 2006 will not be available until the end of this year.

The number of prisoners who take part in other drug treatment programmes is not routinely collected. Prisoners have access to a variety of services to address difficulties associated with

drug misuse including health, psychology and counselling services.

273. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the steps that are taken to ensure that prisoners in receipt of drug-related treatment while incarcerated have continuity of treatment when released. [34390/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): As part of the overall drug treatment process all possible steps are taken to ensure that prisoners being released are linked to an appropriate community treatment resource so that on-going treatment needs are coordinated and addressed. This involves engagement by and with the relevant community agencies involved in this area.

Press Council.

274. **Mr. Walsh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his plans to establish a press council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34397/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Defamation Bill 2006, published on 4 July contains provisions for the recognition of an independent press council.

Residency Permits.

275. **Mr. Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a current Garda national immigration board card will be issued to a person (details supplied) who submitted their GNIB card to his Department in March 2006 but which has since expired. [34449/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The person concerned arrived in the State on 04 October 1999 and claimed asylum on the same day. His claim was investigated by the Refugee Applications Commissioner who concluded that he did meet the criteria for recognition as a refugee and was granted refugee status by my Department on the 21 November 2001. He registered with the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) on 30 November 2001. He was issued with a registration card for one year, as is the practice, after which he failed to renew his registration (as he was required to do) until the 18 March 2004. His registration was renewed on application for two further periods up to 18 March 2006, where again he failed to renew his residency in the State. I am informed by the GNIB that he was stopped in Dundalk on 31 May 2006 crossing the border from Northern Ireland without a current registration certificate or valid travel document. His expired registration card was taken from him and

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he was directed to report to his local Immigration office at Abbeyleix Garda Station, Co. Laois. To date he has not presented himself as requested. The person in question should report immediately to the Immigration Officer at Abbeyleix Garda Station to apply to have his residency in the State renewed.

Crime Levels.

276. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of domestic violence incidents recorded by the Gardaí in 2004 and 2005 in each of the respective Garda regions and districts; the corresponding number of people arrested, charged, injured and committed as a result of domestic violence incidents in each of three regions and districts; the reason these figures have not been published in An Garda Síochána Annual Reports since 2003; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34533/06]

Tánaiste and 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 contact the Deputy again when the information is to hand.

Prison Accommodation.

277. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the tender notice, the two tenders for the former open prison at Shanganagh Castle referred to by him in a press statement of 17 October 2006 were submitted in response to; the date on which this notice was published; the medium by which and by whom the notice was published; and the criteria for assessment of the tenders.. [34534/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The sale of the property by public tender was publicly advertised in the national newspapers commencing on 13 September 2006. The advertisements stated that copies of the tender documents were available from the Chief State Solicitor. Two tenders were received by the closing date and the highest tender was accepted.

Crime Prevention.

278. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will provide a report from the Garda Commissioner detailing if adequate resources are available to the Mountjoy Garda Station, Dublin 7 to allocate a regular Garda foot patrol to cover the Blessington Basin and Royal Canal Bank, Dublin 7 to ensure that this amenity does not become a meeting place for anti-social elements;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34540/06]

Tánaiste and 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 the Garda Síochána increased to a record 12,762 on Friday, 8 September 2006, following the attestation of 249 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997 and represents an increase of 2,060 (or 19%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3 billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms.

I have been further informed that the personnel strength of Mountjoy Garda Station as at 20 October, 2006 was 88 (all ranks). The personnel strength of Mountjoy Garda Station as at 31 December, 1997 was 78 (all ranks). This represents an increase of 10 (or 12.82%) in the number of personnel allocated since that date.

Local Garda Management report that two (2) Community Gardaí based at Mountjoy Garda Station are specifically assigned to an area that includes the Blessington Basin and Royal Canal Bank. The Community Gardaí maintain contact with the Park Ranger and local residents in relation to issues of concern at the location.

Garda management state that the area is patrolled by Garda Mountain Bike Unit patrols in addition to regular foot and mobile patrols from Mountjoy Garda Station. The area is also patrolled by uniformed and plain clothes units, supplemented by District and Divisional Units, i.e. District Detective and Drug Units and the Divisional Crime Task Force and Traffic Corps Units, in order to prevent incidents of public disorder and other anti-social behaviour.

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. These personnel allocations are determined by a number of factors including demographics, crime trends, administrative functions and other operational policing needs. Garda management state that such allocations are continually monitored and reviewed along with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy. This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and that the best possible service is provided to the public.

I should add 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. The first three groups of newly attested Gardaí under this accel-

erated recruitment programme came on stream in March, June and September of this year and the fourth such group will become fully attested members of the Force later this year. Further tranches of approximately 275 newly attested Gardaí will follow every 90 days thereafter until the programme is complete. 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 Mountjoy Garda Station will be given the fullest consideration.

Garda Dog Unit.

279. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his plans to expand the number of dogs available to An Garda Síochána in view of the low level of such useful resources here compared to many other countries internationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter in view of the fact that the success rates of detections are acknowledged elsewhere and we currently have to bring in resources from outside the jurisdiction rather than deploying more of our own resources. [34541/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda Dog Unit consists 26 Garda dogs and is staffed by 2 Sergeants and 14 Gardaí. I have been further informed that the current profile of Garda dogs

within the Garda Dog Unit is as follows: 14 General Purpose Dogs — trained in public order duties, tracking for missing persons, criminals and articles contaminated by human scent; six dogs trained in drugs detection and firearms residue detection; five dogs trained in explosives detection; and one dog trained in detecting the presence of dead bodies. I have also been informed that the Unit currently has two dogs being trained in tactical support and one dog in blood detection.

Garda management state that it is proposed to expand the Garda Dog Unit nationwide on a regional basis. As part of this a pilot in the southern division (based in Cork and Limerick) has just been completed and will now be evaluated. Garda management further state that it is satisfied with the current level of expertise available within, and being developed by, the Garda dog unit.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

280. **Mr. J. O'Keefe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34555/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Name of Tribunal	Expenditure on Legal Fees	Total Cost/Cost to date
Morris Tribunal	€14,277,462 to end September, 2006	€26.2m to end September, 2006
Barr Tribunal *	€6,300,093.70 to 12 October, 2006	€10,458,181.89 to 12 October, 2006
Smithwick Tribunal	€389,729.25 to end August, 2006	€1,329,022.87 to end August, 2006.

*The Deputy should note that the details of this Tribunal were omitted in error from the response to his parliamentary question on this subject of 11 October, 2006 (PQ 32429/06).

Departmental Staff.

281. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the criteria for persons with disabilities for seeking employment opportunities within his Department; the application procedures that apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34602/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I wish to inform the Deputy that appointment to civil service positions is generally by way of open competition conducted by the Public Appointments Service. Persons with disabilities are entitled to apply for all competitions subject to their meeting the eligibility requirements of the competition in question. The same applies to any competition that my own Department might run from time to time.

Recruitment campaigns targeted at people with disabilities are occasionally run by the Public Appointments Service and I understand that it expects to advertise such a competition for recruitment to the grade of Executive Officer by year end.

I am informed that there are no special application procedures as such for persons with disabilities. Online facilities are available from the Public Appointments Service and are convenient for many people with disabilities. Where applicants request special facilities every effort is made to accommodate them during the selection process. Particular consideration is also given, when placing successful candidates in posts, to the work environment and the provision of special equipment or facilities. The overall emphasis is on ensuring that people with disabilities are facilitated with access to employment opportunities and that every necessary accommodation is made.

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The Government's 3% target for the employment of people with disabilities in the Civil Service has a key role to play in creating employment opportunities which might not otherwise be available. The Minister for Finance is responsible for this target which applies to all Government Departments and other public bodies. The proportion of staff with a disability employed in my Department exceeds the 3% target, and currently stands at over 5%. My Department's commitment to the employment of people with disabilities is further underlined by its active participation in a work experience programme for graduates with disabilities, under which five people have been placed over the last two years. This "Willing, Able and Mentoring" project, WAM as it is known, is operated and coordinated by the Department of Finance which arranges temporary placements for graduates with disabilities across Government Departments.

Anti-Fraud Measures.

282. **Mr. Dennehy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his proposals to combat identity fraud; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34603/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that identity theft is an umbrella term used for crime committed, whereby crimes are effected against an injured party by assuming the injured party's identity. The most common type of crime relates to so called phishing — debit and credit card fraud. The act of phishing constitutes a number of offences contained in the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001. The Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime, which was signed by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on behalf of Ireland in February 2002, contains provisions dealing with extra-territorial jurisdiction, in certain circumstances, in relation to fraud committed by means of computer.

Examination of the requirements to enable Ireland to ratify the Convention has been carried out and that examination has shown that some legislative changes will be required. The extent and scope of these changes are still being considered by my Department in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General. When this work is completed I will bring proposals to Government to give legislative effect to the Convention.

The Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation has been involved in a number of initiatives raising public awareness of this type of criminality including the following. A website entitled Safecard, which was launched in partnership with the Irish Payment Services Organisation, which addresses many issues around payment card

fraud, in particular the issue of identity theft. The Garda website also contains advice to members of the public on how to avoid this form of criminal activity. The Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation also participates in a High-Tech Crime Forum, which includes representatives from the major financial institutions in Ireland, the Irish Bankers Federation, the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland and the Irish Payment Services Organisation. The Forum considers strategies to target certain categories of crime, including identity theft. The Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation also participated in a 'Make IT Secure' Programme in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. Advice booklets, including one on identity theft, which were produced in this programme, have been circulated to every Garda Station in the country. My Department will continue to keep developments in this area under review.

Drug Seizures.

283. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of drug seizures in areas (details supplied) in County Wexford; the number of people arrested with drugs in their possession; the number of people arrested for trafficking in drugs; the average age of persons arrested; the average sentence they received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34612/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): It has not been possible, within the timeframe available, to collate the information required by the Deputy. I will contact the Deputy directly when the information is to hand.

Garda Strength.

284. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Gardaí in areas (details supplied) in County Wexford for the years 1997 to 2005; if there is a suitable number of Gardaí to police there areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34613/06]

Tánaiste and 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 increased to a record 12,762 on Friday, 8 September, 2006, following the attestation of 249 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997 and represents an increase of 2,060 (or 19%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3

billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms

I have been further informed by the Garda authorities that the personnel strength (all ranks)

of the Enniscorthy, Gorey, Wexford and New Ross Garda Districts as at 31 December, 1997 to 2005, inclusively and as at 20 October, 2006 was as set out in the table hereunder:

District	Enniscorthy	Gorey	Wexford	New Ross
31/12/97	41	63	76	37
31/12/98	43	68	86	40
31/12/99	40	68	88	37
31/12/00	41	69	81	42
31/12/01	44	76	89	41
31/12/02	44	79	87	42
31/12/03	44	78	89	41
31/12/04	45	77	86	41
31/12/05	45	80	90	43
20/10/06	47	86	99	47

The Garda Districts of Enniscorthy, Gorey, Wexford and New Ross form part of the Wexford/Wicklow Division. The personnel strength (all ranks) of Wexford/ Wicklow Division as at 31 December, 1997 and 20 October, 2006 was 269 and 339, respectively, representing an increase of 70 (or 26%) in the number of Gardaí (all ranks) allocated to the Division during that period.

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. These personnel allocations are determined by a number of factors including demographics, crime trends, administrative functions and other operational policing needs. Garda management state that such allocations are continually monitored and reviewed along with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy. This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and that the best possible service is provided to the public.

I should add 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. The first three groups of newly attested Gardaí under this accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March, June and September of this year and the fourth such group will become fully attested members of the Force later this year. Further tranches of approximately 275 newly attested Gardaí will follow every 90 days thereafter until the programme is complete. The Garda Commissioner will now be drawing up plans on how best to distribute and manage these additional resources, and in this context the needs of the Garda Districts referred to by the Deputy will be given the fullest consideration.

Drug Courts.

285. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the parts of the country that have dedicated drug Courts; his plans to provide more; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34614/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Earlier this year, the Pilot Drug Treatment Court, currently operating in the North inner city, was placed on a permanent footing. It will be extended on a phased basis to the wider Dublin area in consultation with the other agencies involved in supporting the Court. The President of the District Court has assigned a Judge of the Dublin Metropolitan District Court to the Drug Treatment Court on a permanent basis. The effect of this is to bring the Drug Treatment Court in closer contact with the other courts in the Dublin Metropolitan District from which the clients of the Drug Treatment Court are referred.

I am satisfied that the Court is providing a very worthwhile and innovative service and I will continue to provide it with every support. In this regard, the matter of extending the Drug Treatment Court to areas outside Dublin will be considered.

Garda Strength.

286. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of personnel that were in the Garda drugs squad in County Wexford in each year from 2002 to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34615/06]

Tánaiste and 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

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increased to a record 12,762 on Friday, 8 September, 2006, following the attestation of 249 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997 and represents an increase of 2,060 (or 19%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3 billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms. I have been further informed that the Divisional Drugs Unit in the Wexford/ Wicklow Garda Division was established in 2004. Garda Divisional boundaries do not always correlate with County boundaries. Garda Management state that the personnel strength (all ranks) of the Divisional Drugs Unit in the Wexford/ Wicklow Division and the number of personnel allocated to the County of Wexford, in the years 2004, 2005 and to date in 2006, was as set out in the table hereunder:

Year	Divisional	Wexford
2004	12	7
2005	13	8
2006 to date	13	9

Garda management further state that all Gardaí have responsibility to deal with drugs related issues as they arise. 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. These personnel allocations are determined by a number of factors including demographics, crime trends, administrative functions and other operational policing needs. Garda management state that such allocations are continually monitored and reviewed along with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy. This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and that the best possible service is provided to the public.

I should add 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. The first three groups of newly attested Gardaí under this accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March, June and September of this year and the fourth such group will become fully attested members of the Force later this year. Further tranches of approximately 275 newly attested Gardaí will follow every 90 days thereafter until the programme is complete. 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 Wexford/ Wicklow Garda Division will be given the fullest consideration.

Garda Deployment.

287. **Mr. Healy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will allocate additional Gardaí to the town of Cahir, County Tipperary in view of the increase in population in the intercensal period 1996 to 2006 and the fact that there are less Gardaí on outdoor duties than there were in 1988; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34672/06]

Tánaiste and 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 increased to a record 12,762 on Friday, 8 September, 2006, following the attestation of 249 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997 and represents an increase of 2,060 (or 19%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3 billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms. I have been further informed by the Garda authorities that the personnel strength (all ranks) of Cahir Garda Station as at 31 December, 1997 and 20 October, 2006 was 22 and 33, respectively, representing an increase of 11 (or 50 %) in the number of Garda personnel allocated to Cahir Garda station during that period.

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. These personnel allocations are determined by a number of factors including demographics, crime trends, administrative functions and other operational policing needs. Garda management state that such allocations are continually monitored and reviewed along with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy. This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and that the best possible service is provided to the public.

I should add 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. The first three groups of newly attested Gardaí under this accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March, June and September of this year and the fourth such group will become fully attested members of the Force later this year. Further tranches of approximately 275 newly attested Gardaí will follow every 90 days thereafter until the programme is complete. 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 Cahir

Garda Station will be given the fullest consideration.

Juvenile Offenders.

288. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his view on whether there is need for the appointment of additional juvenile liaison officers in An Garda Síochána; when the review in this regard was completed; the number of additional JLO’s recommended in this review; and when will they be appointed. [34673/06]

Tánaiste and 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, that at present, there are 87 Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers and 8 Juvenile Liaison Officer Sergeants working in various Divisions throughout the country. In addition, the National Juvenile Office has a staff of 1 Superintendent, (the Director of Diversion Programme), 1 Inspector and 2 Sergeants.

JLOs are responsible for implementing the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme, which provides an opportunity to divert juvenile offenders from criminal activity. It operates on a nationwide basis under the supervision and direction of the Garda National Juvenile Office, Harcourt Square, Dublin 2. The Programme provides that, in certain circumstances, a juvenile under 18 years of age, who freely accepts responsibility for a criminal incident, may be cautioned as an alternative to prosecution.

In addition, there are also 64 Garda Youth Diversion Projects nationwide. These projects aim to bring about the conditions whereby the behavioural patterns of young people towards law and order can develop and mature. These projects cater for approximately 2,500 participants per annum and are particularly targeted at 10-18 year old “at risk” youths in communities where a specific need has been identified. 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.

As I explained in my reply to Questions Number 179 and 187 of 3 October 2006, it is my intention to ensure that 100 schemes will be established nationwide before the end of 2007. Recently, I announced the establishment of ten new projects in the first phase of the expansion of the scheme, bringing the total number of projects to 74. The ten new projects are located in Blanchardstown, Birr, Carlow, Castlebar, Cavan, Clondalkin, Limerick, Tallaght and Tralee (two projects). The appointment of additional Juvenile Liaison Officers for these projects is under consideration.

I should add 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. The first three groups of newly attested Gardaí under this accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March, June and September of this year and the fourth such group will become fully attested members of the Force later this year. Further tranches of approximately 275 newly attested Gardaí will follow every 90 days thereafter until the programme is complete. The Garda Commissioner will now be drawing up plans on how best to distribute and manage these additional resources, and in this context the needs of the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme will be given the fullest consideration.

Dormant Accounts Fund.

289. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that certain financial institutions are deeming accounts dormant where there has been no transactions over a three year period; and his views on this practice. [33864/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The Dormant Accounts Act 2001 provides that accounts where there have been no customer-initiated transactions for fifteen years or more are dormant accounts and the balance in such accounts transferred to the Dormant Accounts Fund. The accounts remain with the banks in question and all monies can be reclaimed by the account holder at any time upon request. However, I understand that accounts may also be labelled dormant under a credit institution’s internal procedures if there has been no activity on them for some time. It is important to stress that such accounts are not dormant under the legislation, but each institution uses its own archiving system to administer old accounts. While procedures may vary, customers should not be unduly inconvenienced in accessing their funds and should complain to the institution in the first instance, or to the Financial Service Ombudsman, in the event that they are still unsatisfied that their request for access to their accounts has been given appropriate attention and been dealt with in a timely manner.

EU Funding.

290. **Mr. McCormack** asked the Minister for Finance the cohesion funds received by Ireland in the years 2001 to 2007; the percentage of these funds that were spent in the east and southern region and in the Border Midland Western regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33879/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): Ireland qualified for Cohesion Fund assistance since the

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inception of the fund in 1994 until the end of 2003, following a mid-term review conducted by the Commission because our GNP per capita exceeded 90% of the EU average. The main purpose of the assistance was to improve our transport and environment infrastructure and to bring them up to the standards required by EU Directives. In the case of Ireland, projects were approved over two periods i.e. 1994-1999 and 2000-2003. The projects were chosen in consultation with the European Commission, and were mainly large infrastructure projects. Details of

Cohesion Fund receipts by region for the years 2001 to 2006 (to-date) are set out in Table 1 below. The total receipts from the Fund for the period 2001-2006 was €745m. As can be seen from the table the Border, Midland and Western Region received €105.4m while the Southern and Eastern Region received €636.4m. A number of the projects approved under the 1994-1999 round of Cohesion Fund assistance spanned the two regions and are reflected separately in the Table below e.g. National Water Conservation, Vessel (Marine) Traffic Management Information.

Table 1: Cohesion Fund Receipts by Ireland 2001-2006

Year	B.M.W. Region	S&E Region	Both Regions	Total
2001	36,621,595	260,112,369	357,205	297,091,169
2002	38,967,327	164,157,500	2,869,659	205,994,486
2003	16,368,556	156,151,170	55,675	172,575,401
2004	13,451,618	12,397,578		25,849,196
2005		15,633,546		15,633,546
2006 (to-date)		27,991,936		27,991,936
Total	105,409,096	636,444,099	3,282,539	745,135,734
Percentage	14%	85%	1%	100%

291. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Finance when his Department plans to publish a draft of the National Strategic Reference Framework for consultation; if he will indicate when there will be a debate in Dáil Éireann on this draft and on the Structural Funds Programme for 2007 to 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33890/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): For the next round of Structural Funds 2007-2013 the EU arrangements require each Member State to prepare a National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF). This is not a development plan but a document that will set out the strategic focus for the Structural Funds and the link between Community priorities and national and regional policies. The Commission propose that activities to be funded should concentrate on implementing the Lisbon and Gothenburg programmes with particular focus on innovation and the knowledge economy, environment and risk prevention, accessibility to services of general interest (broadband, public transport), increasing adaptability of workers and enterprises, and enhancing access to employment and social inclusion measures. The December European Council agreed a total Budget for the 2007-2013 period of €347 billion for Cohesion Policy. During this time Ireland will receive €901 million in Structural Funds assistance. The minimum value, excluding the Exchequer matching element, for each programme to the regions is estimated at: €458 million

for the BMW Region; €293 million for the S&E Region; €150 million for Territorial cooperation including €65 million for the PEACE Operational Programme to be spent in the Border Region.

The Structural Funds will be delivered through one National European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Programme, two Regional European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Operational Programmes i.e BMW Operational Programme and S&E Operational Programme and the trans-national PEACE Operational Programme. The NSRF is being drafted in parallel with the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and will incorporate the outcome of the Estimates and Budgetary process for 2007. It also takes account of the outcomes of the Social Partnership agreement Towards 2016 and the consultation processes undertaken by the Managing Authorities for the Operational Programmes and the regional NDP 2007-2013 consultation seminars. The formal consultation on the final draft NSRF will take place in advance of the deadline for submission set down in the General Regulation of March, 2007.

Decentralisation Programme.

292. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the proposals for the Dublin offices that will be vacated in relation to the Governments decentralisation programme; if after they are sold or leased the number of workers in each of the offices will decrease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33891/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): As the Government's Decentralisation Programme advances office space will become vacant in Dublin, thereby giving rise to a rationalisation of the Dublin property portfolio. Any decisions on the future use of buildings in Dublin will, however, depend on a range of factors, including: the particular requirements of Departments remaining in Dublin, including accommodation for non decentralising staff; the timing of the relocation of staff to decentralised offices; the specific circumstances associated with each building including location, size, and whether it is leased or owned; the prevailing market conditions.

293. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of moving the existing information technology centres out of Dublin under the decentralisation programme; the expected cost of recruiting new IT specialists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33892/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The ICT functions of three large Departments, together with the Centre for Management Organisation & Development of the Department of Finance (CMOD) are due to relocate under the Decentralisation Programme as follows: Revenue Commissioners to Kildare; Social & Family Affairs to Drogheda; Agriculture & Food to Portlaoise; CMOD to Kildare. In addition, REACH and the Local Government Computer Services Board are due to move to Drogheda. As all decentralising organisations moving in their entirety will also be relocating an ICT capacity, ICT is addressed in their implementation plans to a varying degree.

The Decentralisation Implementation Group (DIG) has received a comprehensive update from CMOD in relation to progress on ICT moves in the four main organisations. Following from this, the Group proposes to discuss immediately with the Secretaries General of the organisations concerned the progress made and issues arising in each case in more detail. The Group will then revert to my Department with options for a feasible way forward.

The issue of managed data centre services was also addressed by the DIG. The OPW is being asked to convene a working group to determine (i) the feasibility of procuring private sector versus State owned accommodation for data centres, including a cost benefit analysis of the options, and (ii) the logistics, costs, financing and staffing implications of State managed/operated data centres. It is expected that this work will be completed by Spring of 2007.

A protocol has been prepared by my Department to address the filling of ICT posts and a subgroup of General Council has been established to move the process forward. The Centre for Management and Organisational Development (CMOD) has already concluded a pilot prog-

ramme of ICT certified training and is currently developing tender proposals to source trainers to provide such certified training for new entrants to the ICT area. These initiatives will assist in ensuring a pipeline of skilled ICT staff in the Civil Service. Pending the outcome of the work detailed above, it is not possible to estimate the costs associated with the ICT relocation.

National Monuments.

294. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the project for development of the Mountjoy site in Dublin; if a consultant has been appointed to lead this work; the details of the brief for this consultant; if the local community will be consulted in this process; if so, when this process will start; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33912/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The Commissioners of Public Works, on behalf of the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, have appointed a Design Team, headed by Heneghan Peng Architects, in order to seek full Planning Permission for the re-development of the Mountjoy Prison site. The brief for the Design Team recognises that the Mountjoy Prison site is a location of great cultural and historic importance and the Commissioners of Public Works are now charged with creating a new role for the site which will contribute to the regeneration of that part of Dublin while respecting and enhancing the site's important historic and cultural characteristics. A process of consultation involving all relevant stakeholders including the local community will start shortly.

National Parks.

295. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the plan to implement a new traffic management system in Blackhorse Avenue, Phoenix Park, Dublin 7; if a consultant's report has been published on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33913/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): A comprehensive traffic management study for the Phoenix Park was completed earlier this month by an independent firm of consultants, Messrs. Faber Maunsell, engaged by the Commissioners of Public Works earlier this year. In formulating the study the consultants engaged in a wide ranging public consultation process. A firm of environmental consultants, Messrs. ERM were also engaged to vet the measures proposed in the study.

The study contains a number of measures to regulate traffic using the Park and enhance the heritage ethos and amenities of the Park for the benefit of the public.

[Mr. Parlon.]

One of these measures involves the provision of a one way system at the Ashtown and Cabra gates which would have some marginal effect on Blackhorse Avenue. However, the study concludes that the marginal effects on traffic on Blackhorse Avenue arising from this measure, will be more than offset by improved traffic safety in the area. The full report is published on the OPW website.

Museum Projects.

296. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Finance when a lease or contract between the Office of Public Works and Ireland's Children's Museum was laid before Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33927/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): It is not the practice to lay leases or property contracts before the Dail.

As the 'community gain' element of a large and complex planning application for the development of State Lands at Military Road, Kilmainham, the OPW agreed to lease a building on the development to the charitable body known as the Irish Children's Museum for them to operate a science-based educational facility for children in accordance with the government's policy of encouraging children to study science subjects.

The proposed activities in the building would be governed by lease clauses agreed with the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment.

Partly as a result of this innovative 'community gain' offer, OPW was granted permission for a large mixed development on the site which will add value to the land and greatly contribute to the transformation of the Kilmainham/Heuston area in accordance with Dublin City Council's Heuston Area Framework Plan.

Tax Collection.

297. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of developing the health service system promotion of the self service system which is operational by the Revenue Commissioners Office; the number of people who have registered to use it since 1 June 2006; the number who have used it to arrange balancing statements for 2005; the number of phone requests made to the Revenue Commissioners since 10 February 2006 for balancing statements; the number of all requests made to the Revenue Commissioners since 10 February 2006 for balancing statements; the number of tax refunds made by the Revenue Commissioners since 10 February 2006; the latest estimates of the PAYE that remains overpaid for the years 2002 to 2005; the latest estimated of the PAYE that remains underpaid for each of the years 2002 to 2005; the estimates of the numbers of form 12 being, or have been, submitted for

each of the years 2002 to 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33935/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): It is presumed that the Deputy is referring to the general extension by the Revenue Commissioners of the Revenue On-line Service (ROS) to PAYE taxpayers which is currently under way. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that this on-line service will allow PAYE taxpayers to deal with all aspects of their tax affairs on-line and is not confined to tax issues related to health service or the claiming of reliefs associated with health expenses.

As the PAYE on-line service is part of the general development of ROS it is not possible in the time available to give an exact figure for the development costs associated with this subset. However Revenue inform me that with a view to maximising take-up of the service and encouraging people to claim their full entitlements they are actively promoting this new service and have allocated a budget for 2006 of approximately €1.4 million for this purpose most of which is for the purpose of posting a personalised mailshot to each PAYE taxpayer encouraging them to avail of the service and enclosing a unique Revenue pin number which is necessary for secure use of the service.

Up to 15 October 2006, 36,464 taxpayers have registered with this service and up to 18 October 2006 a total of 2,439 taxpayers have used the PAYE On-Line service to arrange for the issue of a balancing statement for 2005. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they do not record the number of requests for balancing statements via other contact channels many of which are made during contacts for other purposes. I can however inform the Deputy that the total number of balancing statements issued in the period 10 February 2006 to 19 October 2006 was 621,728.

The number of tax refunds made by the Revenue Commissioners in the period since 10 February 2006 was 442,881. The refunds arose from balancing statements and repayments made on foot of persons becoming unemployed. Below are set out the number of Forms No. 12 submitted in each of the years requested by the Deputy, plus a provisional figure for the number received up to the end of September 2006.

2002	144,314
2003	95,264
2004	64,290
2005	81,587
2006	65,146

Revenue records the number of Forms No. 12 submitted annually. Accordingly, the figure for each year would include Returns for years other than the current year. The variances in the numbers of Forms No. 12 submitted are due to

changes from year to year in the number of taxpayers selected to submit Returns.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the information requested by the Deputy in relation to estimates of underpayments and overpayments of PAYE is not readily available. However Revenue will source as much information as possible and forward this to the Deputy within a matter of weeks.

Tax Code.

298. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to incentivise the use of E-bikes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33940/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I understand that the level of VRT on e-bikes is usually no more than €20 for such vehicles. However the issue of whether the minimal tax on e-bikes should be abolished in order to incentivise their purchase, will, as with all other tax proposals, be considered in the context of the forthcoming Budget.

299. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Minister for Finance if the pensions of Irish nationals serving in the EU Commission or Civil Service are tax free; if so, the basis for this arrangement; if consideration will be given for a similar arrangement for the pensions of Irish nationals who formerly worked as civil servants in the UN service and who paid into the tax equalisation fund known as staff assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33942/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the salaries, wages and emoluments of Irish nationals who are serving civil servants of the EU are exempted from income tax in this State by virtue of Article 13 of Chapter V of the Protocol on Privileges and Immunities of the EU. This section was amended by Article 2 of Regulation number 549/69 of the Council of the European Communities to include pensions. Consequently, pensions receivable from the EU by Irish nationals in respect of service to the EU by such individuals are exempt from tax in Ireland. Of course, the salaries and pensions of such EU civil servants are subject to EU tax.

I am further advised by the Revenue Commissioners that under the provisions of Article V of the Third Schedule and Article VI of the Fourth Schedule of the Diplomatic Relations and Immunities Act 1967, officials of (a) the United Nations and (b) its specialised agencies shall be exempt from taxation in this State on the salaries and emoluments paid to them by the United Nations.

The exemptions provided for by these two articles apply only to officials of the United Nations and its specialised agencies. These

exemptions do not apply to ex-officials or retired officials and consequently United Nations pensions payable to Irish nationals are not exempt from Irish tax under the provisions of the Diplomatic Relations and Immunities Act 1967.

The tax treatment of salaries and pensions payable to officials and former officials of the UN and its specialised agencies is a complex matter and I have asked officials of my Department and the Revenue Commissioners to examine the issues raised in the question. I will report back to the Deputy on the results of this examination.

Services for Persons with Disabilities.

300. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide adequate funding in the Budget for personal assistants services in County Mayo. [33949/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): At this time of the year I receive a large number of pre-budget submissions and requests for funding for a wide range of issues. I note the Deputy's representations in that regard.

Tax Collection.

301. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Finance the position in relation to a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow who is working since April 2006 and is still on emergency tax; and if this will be dealt with as speedily as possible. [33961/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a Certificate of Tax Credits and Standard Rate Cut-Off Point for the year 2006 was updated on 18 October 2006 and will issue to the taxpayer within 5 working days.

The issue of the Certificate of Tax Credits and Standard Rate Cut-Off Point will mean that the taxpayer will no longer be on emergency tax.

Dublin Castle.

302. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department had involvement in the provision of Dublin Castle for a conference entitled a New Heart for Dublin being held on 20 October 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33967/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): Dublin Castle and its associated conference facilities is managed by the Office of Public Works. The organisers of the conference in question hired the conference facilities for the standard fee of €5,470.

Tax Yield.

303. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Finance the pattern of increases in returns from income tax, corporation profits tax, stamp duty

[Mr. Connolly.]

and other tax revenues since 2000; the impact on the economy in the medium to long term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34008/06]

Tax-Head	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Income Tax	+13.5	+2.6	-3.0	+1.1	+16.2	+5.8
Corporation Tax	+13.0	+6.9	+15.6	+7.5	+3.3	+3.0
Stamp Duty	+21.2	+10.8	-4.9	+44.7	+23.7	+30.5
Capital Gains Tax	+71.1	+13.8	-28.7	+130.0	+5.0	+29.3
Capital Acquisitions Tax	+15.4	-24.0	-11.0	+42.6	-11.3	+31.0
Excise Duty	+5.3	-5.0	+9.7	+3.0	+7.8	+6.2
VAT	+20.6	+6.0	+12.2	+9.4	+10.0	+13.1
Customs	+14.4	-20.4	-19.0	+2.1	+27.5	+30.9
Total	+14.9	+3.2	+4.9	+9.6	+10.8	+10.3

The growth rates of certain tax-heads in certain years were affected by once-off or particular factors. For example, the large year-on-year increase in 2004 Income tax was due to the very significant receipts from the Revenue Commissioners' Special Investigations, most notably the offshore assets investigation, in that year.

Another example is where the very strong growth rate in capital gains tax receipts in 2003 owes much to the due date for the payment of capital gains tax on liable transactions in the first nine months of 2003 being brought forward to the 31st October 2003 from the 31st October 2004. This meant a significant once-off cash-flow gain to the Exchequer.

In addition, corporation tax in each of the years 2002-2006 has been impacted upon by cash-flow yields from the transitional arrangements for bringing forward the payment date from six months after the end of a company's accounting period to one month before the end of the accounting period. However the transition period ends this year and in 2007 there will be a cash-flow loss to the Exchequer from the ending of these transitional arrangements.

Notwithstanding the variations between years in the growth rates for the individual tax-heads, the overall pattern of change in total Exchequer receipts reflects the strength of the economy in the period.

Tax Code.

304. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding income tax when SSIA's mature (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34029/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The Pensions Incentive Tax Credits Scheme, introduced in the 2006 Finance Act, provides an incentive for eligible SSIA holders on lower incomes to rein-

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The table below details the annual rates of change in Exchequer receipts from income tax, corporation tax, stamp duty and the other main tax heads since 2000.

vest all or part of their net SSIA proceeds, after maturity, into an approved pension product. It is primarily a savings scheme and is designed for people who are saving for retirement. The incentive involves a tax credit of €1 for every €3 of SSIA proceeds reinvested, up to a maximum of €2,500 credit (i.e. €7,500 invested). Secondly, there is an additional tax credit involving a percentage of the tax deducted from the SSIA on maturity. Where an SSIA holder avails of the Pensions Incentive Tax Credits Scheme, it is not possible to claim any tax relief for amounts invested up to and including €7,500. Tax relief can be claimed, however, on amounts in excess of €7,500 transferred from a matured SSIA to an approved pension product, subject to the standard limits.

If a person invests SSIA proceeds in a pension product without availing of the Pensions Incentive Tax Credits Scheme, he/she can claim tax relief in respect of that investment subject to the standard limits.

National Development Plan.

305. **Ms Cooper-Flynn** asked the Minister for Finance the stage of the negotiations for a new National Development Plan; the way he proposes to deal with regionalisation under the new plan; if it is proposed to make up the shortfall in expenditure under the 2000-2006 NDP in the new plan. [34051/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The preparation of the next NDP (2007-2013) which is being coordinated by my Department is continuing. An extensive consultation process on the Plan has taken place. Formal submissions have been received by my Department from the Social Partners, the Regional Assemblies, Regional Authorities and a number of concerned interest groups including the Heritage Council, Comhar,

the Combat Poverty Agency and the Western Development Commission. My Department has also had meetings with some of the bodies concerned. Consultation seminars in Dublin (S&E Region) and Tullamore (BMW Region) have also been held. In addition there has been extensive liaison between my Department and other Departments on the Plan. I envisage that a draft text will be submitted to Government for consideration in the near future. The Government has decided that the Plan will be published in mid January next.

The precise details of the Plan including indicative 7 year financial allocations will have to await its publication. Allocations will, however, be set out at national level rather than the two region approach of the current NDP. This approach arose from EU Structural Fund requirements but this will not be the case on the occasion of the new Plan. The Plan will have the promotion of regional development as a central objective. The regional dimension will be strongly based on the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and on investment necessary to progress implementation of the NSS.

With regard to the issue of expenditure under the 2000-2006 NDP I refer the Deputy to my earlier replies to questions from Deputy Harkin taken on 10th October last.

306. **Ms Cooper-Flynn** asked the Minister for Finance the figures on actual expenditure vis-a-vis planned expenditure under the National Development Plan for all programmes in the Border Midlands Western region and the southeast region. [34052/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The National Development Plan/Community Support Framework (NDP/CSF) 2000-2006 is implemented through seven Operational Programmes (OPs). The most recent expenditure data on the Plan relates to the period to the end December 2005. This data is set out in Tables 1 to 4 below. Data for first six months of 2006 will be available at end October 2006 following the

meetings of the Operational Programme Monitoring Committees. I will write to the Deputy when this data becomes available.

The House will be aware of the general state of play in relation to expenditure in the BMW region from previous debates and questions on this issue. The figures reported indicate that some €12.1bn or 76% of the total original forecast for expenditure (Exchequer, EU and private) and €10.7bn or 88% of forecast Exchequer expenditure had been incurred by the end of 2005. This is a healthy implementation rate in view of the slow start up in some areas at the very beginning, the relatively disappointing response in certain demand lead schemes and the fact that Exchequer spending in relation to the Structural Fund OPs for the 2000-2006 period will in fact continue up to 2008.

There is a wide spread of results over the various OPs. The strongest performances are in the key Economic and Social Infrastructure OP and the Employment and Human Resources Development OP, the two biggest OPs, with expenditure at 113% and 96% of profile respectively. However, this is offset by relatively poor performance in the Productive Sector OP where expenditure is 34% of profile. The result here is due to a lack of demand rather than a lack of Exchequer resources. Results over the 2000-2005 period show that, from a slow start up, there has been a steadily improving trend. I have made the point previously that the overall outturn for the NDP is expected to be near to forecast by the end of 2006, but with some over-performance and underperformance of expenditure taking place within the Operational Programmes. It is also expected that co-funded measures under the Plan will achieve their full entitlement to Structural Funds in the BMW Region by the end of 2008, the timetable set out in the Regulations.

Table 1 sets out the original indicative total expenditure forecasts and the estimated total expenditure (Exchequer, EU and Private) incurred under each Operational Programme in the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) Region for the period January 2000 to December 2005.

Table 1 — Total Profiled and Estimated Expenditure in BMW Region

January 2000 to end December 2005

Operational Programme	Original Profile	Estimated Expenditure	Expenditure versus Profile
	€m	€m	%
Economic and Social Infrastructure	5,863	5,435	92%
Employment & Human Resources Development	3,653	3,496	96%
Productive Sector	2,663	786	29%
Border, Midlands & Western Regional	3,519	2,273	64%
PEACE II & Technical Assistance	146	109	74%
Total	15,844	12,099	76%

Profiles and Expenditure data includes all NDP sources of funding; Exchequer, EU and Private.

[Mr. Cowen.]

The original Exchequer forecast and estimated Exchequer expenditure incurred under each

Operational Programme in the BMW Region for the period January 2000 to December 2005 is set out in Table 2.

Table 2 — Profiled and Estimated Exchequer Expenditure in BMW Region
January 2000 to end December 2005

Operational Programme	Original Profile	Estimated Expenditure	Expenditure versus Profile
	€m	€m	%
Economic and Social Infrastructure	4,054	4,570	113
Employment & Human Resources Development	3,654	3,471	95
Productive Sector	1,741	600	34
Border, Midlands & Western Regional	2,566	1,920	75
PEACE II & Technical Assistance	146	109	74
Total	12,161	10,670	88

The figures reported indicate all demands for expenditure are being met. This represents some €12.1 billion or 76% of the total original forecast for expenditure (Exchequer, EU and private) and €10.7 billion or 88% of forecast Exchequer expenditure had been incurred by the end of 2005.

Table 3 below sets out the original indicative total expenditure profiles and the estimated total expenditure (Exchequer, EU and Private) incurred under each Operational Programme in the Southern and Eastern (S&E) Region for the period January 2000 to December 2005.

Table 3 — Total Profiled and Estimated Expenditure in S&E Region
January 2000 to end December 2005

Operational Programme	Original Profile	Estimated Expenditure	Expenditure versus Profile
	€m	€m	%
Economic and Social Infrastructure	16,078	18,266	113
Employment & Human Resources Development	8,568	8,500	99
Productive Sector	4,627	2,405	52
Southern & Eastern Regional	4,694	3,376	72
Technical Assistance	7	7	100
Total	33,967	32,554	96

Profiles and Expenditure data includes all NDP sources of funding; Exchequer, EU and Private.

The original Exchequer profile and estimated Exchequer expenditure incurred under each operational programme in the S&E Region for

the period January 2000 to December 2005 is set out in Table 4.

Table 4 — Profiled and Estimated Exchequer Expenditure in S&E Region
January 2000 to end December 2005

Operational Programme	Original Profile	Estimated Expenditure	Expenditure versus Profile
	€m	€m	%
Economic and Social Infrastructure	10,639	14,434	135
Employment & Human Resources Development	8,568	8,441	99
Productive Sector	3,133	2,072	66
Southern & Eastern Regional	3,388	2,987	88
Technical Assistance	7	7	100
Total	25,735	27,941	108

The figures reported indicate all demands for expenditure are being met. This represents some €32.6 billion or 96% of the total original forecast for expenditure (Exchequer, EU and private). The data presented in Table 4 shows that the Exchequer contribution to the S&E Region under the NDP has exceeded its original target by €2.21 billion to the end of 2005. The overall outturn for the NDP is expected to be near to forecast by the end of 2006, but with some over-performance and underperformance of expenditure taking place within the Operational Programmes. However, a complete picture of expenditure will not be available until the full year expenditure data for 2006 are analysed and reported at the Spring 2007 meetings of the Operational Programmes Monitoring Committees and when the co-funded measures under the NDP achieve their full entitlement to Structural Funds by the end of 2008, the timetable set out in the Regulations.

Public-Private Partnerships.

307. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006*
€9.2m	€70.4m	€25.7m	€25.6m	€10m	€30m

* = projected

In the roads area, information furnished by the Department of Transport in respect of the National Roads Authority (NRA) for the value

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006*
€2.5m	€9.6m	€89.9m	€237.6m	€212.1m	€92.2m

* = projected

The Deputy may wish to note that the NRA gives a subvention towards construction payments and therefore the construction values reported are partly privately financed and partly publicly financed.

Within the Local Government sector, there are a wide range of PPP projects involving, for example, land swaps, own resources, some Exchequer funding or a mix of these but which have not to date involved ongoing unitary payments. I have therefore asked my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to arrange for his officials to contact the Deputy directly with a view to giving him an appropriate response that reflects the nature of the PPPs which are delivered in the Local Government sector.

Proposed Legislation.

308. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance his views on amending Section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1967, in order to allow

the aggregate value of PPP projects funded in each of the past five years; the value of projects funded to date in 2006; and the expected outturn by end of 2006. [34062/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): Information is not collated centrally on a routine basis on the aggregate value of investment in PPP projects on account of such factors as the significant number of separate authorities that are responsible for procuring individual PPP projects, differences in the public-private funding mix that arise between the different sectors involved and differences between sectors in the public funding contribution to projects.

The areas in which significant PPP investment occurred in the period in question were roads, education and local government. In the education area, information provided to my Department by the Department of Education and Science for the estimated level of capital construction investment in privately-financed PPP projects for the years in question to be funded by means of ongoing unitary payments from that Department's Vote is set out in the table following:

for capital construction investment for 2001-2006 is set out in the table following:

the cost of specific tuition for dyslexia to qualify for tax relief under the heading of health expenses, which would apply where a child has been diagnosed by a psychologist as having dyslexia and is deemed to be in need of specialist teaching; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34063/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The position is that expenses in respect of tuition for children with dyslexia do not qualify for health expenses tax relief and have never qualified for the relief since it was first introduced in 1967.

I understand from the Revenue Commissioners, who deal with such claims, that individuals may have been under the impression that tuition for children with dyslexia was allowable under the heading of health expenses relief. I also understand that the Revenue Commissioners have written to the Dyslexia Association to clarify the matter.

In recent years, the Government has increased significantly the supports available through the

[Mr. Cowen.]

direct expenditure system for children with disabilities, including those with dyslexia.

As with many areas where State support may be required, the question arises as to whether such support may be more effectively provided through the direct expenditure route rather than through the tax system. One advantage of the former mechanism is that the support may be better targeted at those in need, irrespective of family income, whereas support through the tax system can only benefit those whose incomes are high enough to benefit from tax relief.

I have no plans to extend Section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 to cover expenses incurred by parents who have children with dyslexia. However, this matter, like any other, can be raised by the Deputy at Finance Bill time.

Architectural Heritage.

309. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance if he will make arrangements for officials from his Department to meet with members of the local authority and local community in a case (details supplied) in County Mayo for improvements needed in keeping with the character of an area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34259/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The site referred to by the Deputy is not in the care of the Office of Public Works. However, given the association of the site with two national monuments under the care of the Office of Public Works I have asked officials from the national monuments section to contact Mayo County Council with a view to meeting to discuss issues of mutual interest.

Mortgage Interest Relief.

310. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Finance the annual cost of mortgage interest relief for first time buyers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34260/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that statistics are not available which would enable the precise information sought by the Deputy to be given.

However, out of a total cost of approximately €280 million for all mortgage interest relief granted under the Tax Relief at Source (TRS) system in 2005 it is estimated that approximately €160 million relates to first time buyers.

It should be noted that the €160 million is an estimated figure calculated by reference to base data for the tax year 2003. As such it is provisional and may be subject to change as more up-to-date data becomes available.

National Development Plan.

311. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of funding spent to date on the National Development Plan; the amount estimated to be spent by the end of the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34264/06]

313. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the amount spent to date under the National Development Plan programmes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34266/06]

314. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the amount spent to date on the Border Midland Western regional programme under the National Development Plan; the total amount estimated to be spent by the end of the NDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34267/06]

315. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the amount spent to date on the south and east regional programme under the National Development Plan; the amount estimated to be spent by the end of the NDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34268/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I propose to take Question Nos. 311 and 313 to 315, inclusive, together.

The National Development Plan/Community Support Framework (NDP/CSF) 2000-2006 is implemented through seven Operational Programmes (OPs). The most recent expenditure data on the National Development Plan reported to my Department by the OP Monitoring Committees relate to the period January 2000 to December 2005. The data for the first six months of 2006 will be available at the end of October 2006 following the Autumn meetings of the OP Monitoring Committees. I will write to the Deputy with this data when it becomes available.

Table 1 below sets out the total estimated expenditure (Exchequer, EU and private) to end 2005 and compares it against the total original indicative forecast for the lifetime of the Plan. This represents some €44.7 billion or 78% of the total original indicative forecast for expenditure (Exchequer, EU and private) on the Plan.

Table 1 — Total Original Forecast 2000-2006 and Total Estimated Expenditure from January 2000 to December 2005

Operational Programme	Original Profile 2000-2006	Estimated Expenditure to end 2005	Expenditure versus Profile
	€m	€m	%
Economic and Social Infrastructure	26,021	23,701	91
Employment & Human Resources Development	14,199	11,996	84
Productive Sector	7,341	3,191	43
Border, Midlands & Western Regional	4,094	2,274	56
Southern and Eastern Regional	5,379	3,376	63
PEACE and Technical Assistance	155	116	75
Total	57,189	44,654	78

Profiles and Expenditure data includes all NDP sources of funding; Exchequer, EU and private.

Table 2 sets out the total estimated Exchequer expenditure to end 2005 and compares it against the total original indicative forecast for the lifetime of the Plan. This represents some €38.6

billion or 87% of forecast Exchequer expenditure for the Plan. The figures reported indicate that all demands for expenditure are being met.

Table 2 — Total Original Exchequer Forecast Profiled and Estimated Exchequer Expenditure January 2000 to end December 2005

Operational Programme	Original Profile 2000-2006	Estimated Expenditure Jan 2000 to Dec 2005	Expenditure versus Profile
	€m	€m	%
Economic and Social Infrastructure	17,601	19,004	108
Employment & Human Resources Development	14,199	11,912	84
Productive Sector	5,822	2,672	46
Border, Midlands & Western Regional	2,948	1,920	65
Southern and Eastern Regional	3,731	2,987	80%
PEACE and Technical Assistance	155	116	75
Total	44,456	38,611	87

With respect to the Operational Programmes, the Economic and Social Infrastructure OP is performing well with total expenditure to end 2005 at 91% of original target. The Employment and Human Resources Development OP is on course to meet its original targets. Good progress is evident under the BMW and S&E Regional Operational Programmes. However, difficulties still exist in the tourism and agriculture sectors where implementation has been slower and demand for grant support has been less than anticipated due mainly to the impact of the slowdown in economic activity in 2000-02 and the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. This meant that businesses and the agricultural sector were not in a position to put forward sufficient investment plans to avail of funding in those early years of the Programmes. The performance of the Productive Sec-

tor Operational Programme is behind original target. Key factors accounting for the low rate of expenditure relate to the lower take up of financial opportunities by the private sector, the slowdown in economic activity in the early years of the programme, less than anticipated absorption capacity for R&D projects in the BMW Region and delays in getting State Aid clearance resulting in the late start to some funding schemes. The PEACE and Technical Assistance Operational Programmes are on track to meet their targets by the end of the programming period.

Table 3 below details the forecast expenditure under each Operational Programme for the NDP/CSF 2000-2006 based on the end 2005 position as reported by the OP Monitoring Committees.

[Mr. Cowen.]

Table 3: Expenditure Forecasts for NDP/CSF 2000-2006 as of December 2005

Operational Programme	Forecast expenditure to completion of Plan €m
Economic and Social Infrastructure	28,605
Employment and Human Resources Development	14,619
Productive Sector	4,487
Border, Midlands and Western Regional	3,846
Southern & Eastern Regional	5,028
PEACE & Technical Assistance	209
Total	56,794

The amount of estimated expenditure by completion of the NDP/CSF 2000-2006 is expected to be €56,794 million. This means that the overall outturn for the NDP is expected to be near to forecast but with some over-performance and underperformance of expenditure taking place within the Operational Programmes. However, a complete picture of expenditure will not be available until the full year expenditure data for 2006 are analysed and reported at the Spring 2007 meetings of the Operational Programmes Monitoring Committees and when the co-funded measures under the NDP achieve their full entitlement to Structural Funds by the end of 2008, the timetable set out in the Regulations.

Public Private Partnerships.

312. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of PPP investment invested under the National Development Plan to date; the amount estimated to be invested by the end of the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34265/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): Information on this matter is being compiled by my Department and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 313 to 315, inclusive, answered with Question No. 311.

Tax Yield.

316. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of VAT paid by primary schools in the last year for which figures are available. [34309/06]

317. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of VAT paid by second-level schools in the last year for which figures are available. [34311/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 316 and 317 together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that it is not possible to furnish figures of the VAT paid by both primary and second-level schools on their purchases of goods and services from VAT registered bodies, as the information furnished on VAT returns does not require the yield from particular consumers to be identified.

I would add that primary and second-level schools are treated as exempt bodies for VAT purposes. This means that the persons engaged in an exempt activity do not charge VAT on the goods or services they provide nor are they entitled to recover the VAT incurred on the goods and services which they purchase in the course of their activities. However, I would point out that the expenditure allocated to primary and second-level schools is calculated on the basis of the VAT inclusive cost of primary and second-level school spending.

Tax Collection.

318. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the tax credits available where work related expenses are incurred by a PAYE worker such as clothing, uncompensated petrol expenses and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34339/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, where a PAYE worker is not reimbursed in respect of the cost of his/her work related expenses, then he or she may claim a tax deduction in respect of — (a) the cost of expenses of travel necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of an office or employment; and (b) the cost of expenses, other than expenses of travel, wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of an office or employment.

However, it is a long established principle of tax case law that the expenses of travelling from home to work and work to home are not expenses of travelling necessarily incurred by an

employee in the performance of the duties of an employment and do not qualify for a deduction.

The cost of clothing does not, generally, qualify for tax relief. However, where the duties of his/her employment require an employee to incur the cost of protective clothing, then a deduction may be due in respect of the cost of such outlay.

I am further informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, as an alternative to employees submitting individual expenses claims to them, agreements have been entered into between Revenue and employee representative bodies (e.g. trade unions) resulting in what are known as 'flat rate' tax deductions in respect of qualifying employee expenses. The Revenue Commissioners publish such agreed flat rate expenses deduction on their website [Go to www.revenue.ie/publications/txbrefng/tb06supl — the list of agreed flat rate employee tax deductible expenses are on pages 30 to 32 of this Index].

Tax Yield.

319. **Mr. Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the number of taxpayers analysed between PAYE taxpayers and other taxpayers who claimed tax relief or allowance in respect of charges for refuse collection in 2003, 2004, 2005 and based on information available to date in 2006; the number in each of these categories of taxpayers who received this relief at the 20% rate

and the 42% rate; the cost in each of these categories; and the overall cost to the Exchequer. [34448/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the most recent year for which complete information on cost to the Exchequer and numbers of claimants for tax relief in relation to local authority service charges is the income tax year 2003. In that year an estimated number of 169,300 claimants availed of the tax relief for the service charges at an estimated cost to the Exchequer of €8.2 million.

These figures relate to the numbers of income earners in a position to absorb the tax relief either partly or fully, but do not include the numbers of qualifying claimants who, because of the operation of other deductions and reliefs, have their taxable income reduced to nil or have their tax liability reduced to nil by the impact of other tax credits. Accordingly, potential claimants for the tax relief for service charges whose tax liability has been reduced to nil in this way are not included in the numbers given in this reply.

Irrespective of the marginal tax rate of claimants, tax relief for service charges is confined to the standard rate of tax in respect of charges taxpayers have paid in the previous financial year.

A breakdown of the relevant figures by reference to the marginal tax rate of each claimant is set out in the following tables:

Service Charges — by Tax Rate 2003

All claimants

Tax Rate	Number of cases	Amount allowed for Tax Relief	Reduction in Tax
		€	€
Standard Rate (20%)*	64,711	15,120,655	3,024,131
Higher Rate (42%)	98,461	24,587,000	4,917,400
Total	163,172	39,707,655	7,941,531

*Includes claimants benefiting from marginal relief or with zero tax liability arising from the granting of service charges credit.

Claimants whose main source of income is subject to tax under Schedule E /PAYE

Tax Rate	Number of cases	Amount allowed for tax relief	Reduction in Tax
		€	€
Standard Rate (20%)*	48,920	10,801,110	2,160,222
Higher Rate (42%)	84,500	20,791,495	4,158,299
Total	133,420	31,592,605	6,318,521

*Includes claimants benefiting from marginal relief or with zero tax liability arising from the granting of service charges credit.

[Mr. Cowen.]

Claimants whose main source of income is subject to tax under Schedule D

Tax Rate	Number of cases	Amount allowed for tax relief	Reduction in Tax
		€	€
Standard Rate (20%)*	15,791	4,319,545	863,909
Higher Rate (42%)	13,961	3,795,505	759,101
Total	29,752	8,115,050	1,623,010

*Includes claimants benefiting from marginal relief or with zero tax liability arising from the granting of service charges credit.

The lower aggregate figures in these tables (compared to the slightly higher figures mentioned in the opening paragraph) are taken directly from filed income tax returns which represent about 98 per cent of all income tax returns expected for 2003. The higher figures in the initial table have, in accordance with normal practice, been grossed-up at aggregate level to adjust for this 2% incompleteness.

The designation of a tax rate to claimants is based on identifying the top tax rate applying to the taxable income of each claimant while taking into account the impact of tax credits and standard rated reliefs where they reduce tax liability to nil. To arrive at the figure for taxable income, the gross income is reduced by various relevant deductions and allowances such as capital allowances, losses, allowable expenses and retirement annuities. In some cases, these will reduce the taxable income to nil. In other cases where the impact of tax credits and standard rated reliefs, such as the relief provided for service charges, is to reduce tax liability to nil it gives rise to a cost in terms of tax forgone.

Departmental Expenditure.

320. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance the breakdown of the cost of the Commission on Electronic Voting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34460/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The Commission on Electronic Voting was appointed by the Government on 1 March 2004. The Commission, which was independent in the performance of its functions, was placed on a statutory footing by the Electoral (Amendment) Act, 2004, which was enacted on 18th May, 2004. As set out in Section 22 of the Electoral (Amendment) Act, 2004, the Commission was dissolved on 4th September 2006, two months after the presentation of the last of its reports to the Ceann Comhairle.

The Government formally decided in March 2004 that the funding for the Commission would be provided via the Central Fund with a procedure for approval of payment by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Section 25(5) of the Electoral (Amendment) Act, 2004, states that the accounts of the Commission on Electronic Voting shall be submitted by the Minister for Finance to the Comptroller and Auditor General for audit and, immediately after the audit, a copy of the accounts and a copy of the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the accounts shall be laid before each House of the Oireachtas.

The accounts of the Commission on Electronic Voting for the years ended 31st December 2004 and 31st December 2005, as well as the accounts for 2006 up to the date of the Commission's dissolution on 4th September 2006, have been submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General for audit. These, when audited by the C&AG, become the definitive record of the Commission's expenditure, and it would not be appropriate to put details of these un-audited accounts into the public domain in advance of this audit being completed.

As required by Section 25(5) of the Electoral (Amendment) Act, 2004, I will immediately after the audit lay a copy of the audited accounts and a copy of the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the accounts before each House of the Oireachtas.

Tax Code.

321. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Finance the reason persons are being charged VAT on medical devices such as a cochlear implant; if he will continue this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34461/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that in accordance with paragraph (xix) of the Second Schedule to the Value-Added Tax Act 1972 (as amended) the supply of medical equipment and appliances to assist hearing is subject to the zero VAT rate. This would include devices such as cochlear implants. The zero rate of VAT also applies to parts and accessories that are suitable for use solely or principally with "deaf aids".

Accordingly, if the Deputy is aware of a situation where a person is being charged VAT on a cochlear implant he should advise that person to contact the Office of the Revenue Commissioners with the details.

Social Partnership.

322. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance if he will ensure that the technical working group, comprising representatives of his Department Central Statistics Office, the Revenue Commissioners, together with the IFA be immediately reconvened in order that the results of its work would form an input into the 2007 budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34523/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The farmers flat rate addition review group reconvened on 12 October 2006. Under the last partnership agreement “Sustaining Progress” there was a commitment that the relevant Departments and Offices would meet with farming representatives to elaborate on the data and methodology used in the calculation of the flat rate addition with a view to full transparency in its operation.

A working group chaired by the Department of Finance was convened to discharge the commitment. The methodology employed in the calculation of the flat rate refund was fully explained to the farming organisations over a series of meetings. In this regard, the commitment made under Sustaining Progress “to elaborate on the data and methodology used in this calculation with a view to full transparency in its operation” has been met.

However, the farming organisations subsequently questioned the continuing validity of a number of assumptions unpinning the flat rate calculation on the basis of developments in the farming sector since the methodology was last reviewed in 1988. In the context of the current partnership agreement “Towards 2016” the Government has agreed that the relevant Departments and Offices should meet with farming representatives to review the data and methodology used in the calculation of the farmer’s flat rate addition.

As I have stated earlier the working group overseeing the review met on the 12th October 2006 and is due to meet again on the 1st November. In relation to the review providing an input into the forthcoming budget, the flat rate refund for unregistered farmers is examined every year in the lead up to the Budget. It is, however, not customary for me to comment on any possible changes to the existing rate which may arise in the context of the forthcoming budget.

Tax Code.

323. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance if he will introduce a provision to ensure that no capital gains tax arises on the disposal of farmland to a local authority for road building or road widening purposes provided the proceeds of the compensation are reinvested in farm business

assets or to fund retirement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34524/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I have no plans to introduce such a relief. Capital Gains Tax applies to farmers as it does, and should apply, to those disposing of property in general. The abolition of reliefs allows for a lower rate of tax for all.

324. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance if he will introduce an increased tier of tax relief of €25,000 for rental income arising from the leasing out of farmland for farming periods of 12 years or more; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34525/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The Deputy will appreciate that in line with normal practice in the run up to the annual Budget and Finance Bill I do not wish to comment on the intention or otherwise to make changes in taxation.

325. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance if he will introduce a targeted relief from stamp duty to farmers for farm consolidation where purchase or sale of land reduces the number of land parcels in a holding or reduces the distances between individual land parcels or increases the size of the overall holding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34526/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): As the Deputy is aware, I do not comment on possible tax changes ahead of the Budget. However, as far as the existing tax policy is concerned, he may be aware that in Budget 2005, I announced a special stamp duty relief relating to an exchange of farm land between two farmers for the purposes of consolidating each farmer’s holding. The relief is contained in section 121 of the Finance Act 2005 which provides that no stamp duty will be charged on an exchange of such lands where the lands are of equal value. In a case where the lands exchanged are not of equal value, stamp duty will only be charged on the amount of the difference in the value of the lands concerned. This relief was introduced for a period of two years commencing 1 July 2005.

At the Partnership talks earlier this year it was agreed to look at the possibility of extending this relief to cases where only one farmer is consolidating his/her farm holdings. However, as was stated at the time, such a measure will need EU Commission approval, which cannot be taken for granted.

326. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance if he will extend to all tax payers the employee PAYE tax credit through the system of personal credits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34527/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The position is that the PAYE allowance, as it was then, was introduced in 1980 to improve the tax progression of PAYE taxpayers and to take account of the fact that the self-employed generally then had the advantage of paying tax on a preceding year basis. The argument was also made at the time that the general scheme of allowances discriminated against employees and in favour of other taxpayers.

There have been changes since 1980 — the self-employed now pay tax on a current year basis, for example. However, the PAYE allowance has become a tax credit. Moreover, given that there can be significant timing advantages in the payment of tax for the self employed, the employee credit is still perceived as necessary to ensure a balance in the system.

I might also mention that implementation of the Deputy's proposal would cost about €845 million in a full year. I have no plans to extend to all taxpayers the employee PAYE tax credit as proposed by the Deputy.

327. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance if he will introduce a targeted capital gains tax farm consolidation re-investment relief whereby the proceeds from the sale of farmland by farmers are reinvested into replacement farmland without charges to capital gains tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34528/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): As the Deputy is aware, I do not comment on possible tax changes ahead of the Budget. However, as far as the existing tax policy is concerned, he may be aware that it was announced in the 2003 Budget that no rollover relief would be allowed for any purpose on gains arising from disposals on or after 4 December 2002. This relief was introduced when CGT rates were much higher than current levels. In effect, it was a deferral of tax to be paid, where the proceeds of disposal were re-invested into replacement assets. The taxation of these gains would take place following the eventual disposal of the new assets without their replacement.

The abolition of this relief was in accordance with the overall taxation policy of widening the tax base in order to keep direct tax rates low. Such reliefs and allowances made sense when CGT rates were 40% and above. In Budget 1998, the rate was halved from 40% to 20%. Taxing capital gains when they are realised is the most logical time to do so, and this change brought CGT into line with other areas.

Customs and Excise Service.

328. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to expand the number of dogs that are available to Customs Officers, in view of the low level of such useful resources here compared to many other countries internationally; if he will make a statement on the matter in view

of the fact that the success rates of detections are acknowledged elsewhere and that these dogs can be deemed as a deterrent. [34542/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The Revenue Commissioners are responsible for the Customs Service and its detector dog programme.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the Customs Service deployed its first drug detection dog team in 1984 and since then has steadily increased this complement to its current level of ten. In addition to these drug detector dogs and in tandem with developments in proceeds of crime legislation a cash detector dog team was also deployed last year. These detector dogs teams are strategically located at all major entry points into the State and are used to screen all modes of transport, passengers and their baggage, freight, postal and express courier packages.

In recent times the Customs Service has moved towards the use of multi purpose passive (sit and stare) dogs which can be used to screen passengers as well as freight and vehicles in the most effective manner. The active dogs that were previously deployed could not be used to screen passengers. This decision is in keeping with best practice within the international Customs sphere.

While all dog teams are assigned to specific locations, they can be deployed to any area at short notice as the need arises. They also assist local Garda units and the Criminal Assets Bureau in searches on request.

It is planned to bring the full complement of customs detector dog teams to thirteen, which, given the size and population of the country and the nature of the drug trafficking threat, compares favourably with the Customs Services of other jurisdictions.

The deployment of these detector dogs teams, the acquisition of the Revenue Customs Cutter, and the commissioning of new mobile X-ray scanning technology last year are evidence of the Commissioners' commitment to support the Government's National Drugs Strategy.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

329. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34552/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): There were no tribunals initiated under the aegis of my Department since 1997.

Flood Relief.

330. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding plans for flood relief work to be carried out by his Department in an area

(details supplied) in County Wexford; when work will begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34580/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The draft Final Feasibility Report for the area in question has been passed to Wexford County Council for their examination and the Environmental Assessment of Options Report will be forwarded to the Council in the next few weeks.

Subject to agreement on a preferred scheme, the preparation of a full Environmental Impact Statement and of other documents and surveys, which will be required for the public exhibition of the scheme will be undertaken. It is envisaged that the public exhibition would take place in summer 2007 and that work on a scheme could commence in the second half of 2008.

Departmental Properties.

331. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the properties sold by his Department in County Wexford in the years 2000 to date in 2006; the amount each property sold for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34581/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The Devereaux Hotel in Rosslare Harbour was sold on 21st July 2003 for €1,854,999.00. There were no other properties sold during the period in question.

Tax Code.

332. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Minister for Finance the grants and financial supports available for the renovation or conversion of dwelling homes to nursing homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34593/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): Capital expenditure incurred on the construction or refurbishment of registered nursing homes may be written off for tax purposes over 7 years at the rate of 15% p.a. over the first 6 years and 10% in year 7. Capital expenditure incurred on the renovation or conversion of a dwelling house also qualifies for such capital allowances. As a result of changes made in Finance Act 2006, the registered nursing home must be retained for a period of 15 years to avoid a clawback of any allowances already claimed. The holding period was previously 10 years. However, the tax life of the building was also increased to 15 years so that it will be possible for a subsequent purchaser of the registered nursing home to claim capital allowances where a sale takes place within the 15-year period. The longer 15-year holding period and tax life will come into operation for registered nursing homes that are first used, after the qualifying expenditure is incurred, from 1 February 2007

To qualify for allowances the registered nursing home must be operated or managed as a

registered nursing home within the meaning of section 2 of the Health (Nursing Homes) Act, 1990 and be registered under section 4 of that Act.

I am also informed by the Minister for Health and Children that there are no grants available for the conversion or renovation of nursing homes from her Department.

Flood Relief.

333. **Mr. Healy** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the Clonmel flood alleviation scheme including date of commencement, cost, phasing, early warning scheme and the arrangements agreed for the erection of the demountable defences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34668/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): Detailed designs of the River Suir (Clonmel West) Drainage Scheme is currently underway. It is hoped to advertise for a civil works contractor to undertake the main construction of this scheme in January 2007. Tenders have already been received for two elements of advance works on this scheme and are currently being considered. These elements involve the embankments contract for Clonmel West and the overall project design and supply of the demountable flood defence barriers. It was hoped to commence the embankment works before the end of the year but this is now unlikely due to the risk of deteriorating weather. These works will be undertaken as early as possible in 2007.

Detailed design of the Clonmel North Scheme will commence during the construction phase of Clonmel West. Similarly, the design of the Clonmel East Scheme will be undertaken during the construction of the preceding Clonmel North Scheme. OPW hopes to complete the overall construction works over a five year period. The overall project is estimated to cost €44 million based on current pricing conditions.

While the development of the flood relief scheme for Clonmel has been ongoing the OPW has been developing an early flood warning system, which will be required for the erection of the demountable flood defences. An interim system has been designed and is currently in use which provides 5 — 12 hours warning of a flood, with decreasing reliability as the warning period extends. The final system is expected to be in place in 2007 which will increase the warning time available.

The Office of Public Works has been in discussions with relevant bodies in relation to the erection of the demountable defences. Clonmel Borough Council will be responsible for the erection of these defences when the schemes have been completed. Discussions have also taken place with other interested and relevant bodies who will provide a back-up service to the local authority. The finer details of these arrangements

[Mr. Parlon.]

have yet to be put in place but the OPW is endeavouring to have these arrangements completed at an early date.

Tax Code.

334. **Mr. Healy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will amend Section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 to allow the cost of specific tuition for dyslexia to qualify for tax relief under the heading of health expenses in the same way as expenses for speech and language therapy are allowable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34669/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The position is that expenses in respect of tuition for children with dyslexia do not qualify for health expenses tax relief and have never qualified for the relief since it was first introduced in 1967.

I understand from the Revenue Commissioners, who deal with such claims, that individuals may have been under the impression that tuition for children with dyslexia was allowable under the heading of health expenses relief. I also understand that the Revenue Commissioners have written to the Dyslexia Association to clarify the matter.

In recent years, the Government has increased significantly the supports available through the direct expenditure system for children with disabilities, including those with dyslexia.

As with many areas where State support may be required, the question arises as to whether such support may be more effectively provided through the direct expenditure route rather than through the tax system. One advantage of the former mechanism is that the support may be better targeted at those in need, irrespective of family income, whereas support through the tax system can only benefit those whose incomes are high enough to benefit from tax relief.

I have no plans to extend Section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 to cover expenses incurred by parents who have children with dyslexia. However, this matter, like any other, can be raised by the Deputy at Finance Bill time.

Child Care Services.

335. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children when an application for a capital grant under the equal opportunities child care programme will be decided in relation to a creche (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34005/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. B. Lenihan): As the Deputy will be aware, I have responsibility for the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP) and the National Childcare Investment

Programme 2006 -2010 (NCIP), which are being implemented by the newly established Office of the Minister for Children.

I understand that the project in question has submitted an application for capital grant assistance under the NCIP. I understand from enquires I have made that this application is currently under appraisal. Each application undergoes a thorough assessment by Pobal, formerly known as Area Development Management Ltd., which is engaged to administer the Programme.

Following completion of the assessment, the application will be considered by the Programme Appraisal Committee, before a decision is made regarding funding. The applicant will be informed of the outcome of the assessment in due course.

Health Services.

336. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of speech and language therapists working in schools here. [34157/06]

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.

337. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she acknowledges the need for a national strategy to produce sufficient numbers of speech and language therapists. [34158/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): In response to concerns regarding labour shortages, my Department commissioned a report from Dr. Peter Bacon and Associates on current and future supply and demand conditions to 2015 in the labour market for speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. The report was published in 2001.

Arising from its recommendations three additional speech and language therapy courses commenced in the 2003/2004 academic year in UCC, NUIG and UL, providing an additional 75 training places in speech and language therapy. This expansion in training numbers was identified in the Bacon report as sufficient to meet the long-term demand-supply balance for speech and language therapists in Ireland. The first graduates from the two year Masters course in UL completed their studies in June, 2005. The first graduates from the BSc courses in UCC and NUIG will graduate in 2007.

Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive is responsible for the recruitment of its staff. I am advised that it is at present under-

taking a national and international recruitment campaign to fill current vacancies and development posts and that the situation will be reviewed in 2007.

Child Care Services.

338. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount spent to date on the child care measure under the National Development Plan; the estimated amount to be spent by the end of the NDP; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34275/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. B. Lenihan): The Equal

	Outturn to December 2005	Forecast to end of NDP
	€m	€m
Childcare Facilities	106.171	150.361
Childcare (incl. Support for Staffing Grants and Quality Improvement)	166.798	244.398

Health Services.

339. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there are approximately 900 to 1,000 children on the waiting list of a clinic (details supplied) in Dublin 6 and that at the rate of three to four being assessed on a monthly basis, as well as the arrival of additional children, it is virtually impossible to get a child fully assessed in order to establish the level of special needs educational assistance at primary school level; the steps she proposes to take to make the extra resources needed to the clinic to enable them to meet the requirements of many parents and children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34452/06]

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.

Community Care.

340. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will allocate adequate funding to the Centre for Independent Living in County Mayo in view of the fact that this service is under funded with 70 people urgently awaiting a personal assistant in order that they can live independently; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34462/06]

Opportunities Childcare Programme is funded as part of the two Regional Operational Programmes under the National Development Plan, and is split between two measures: the Childcare Facilities measure (which receives co-funding from the European Regional Development Fund) and the Childcare Measure (which receives co-funding from the European Social Fund and is divided into the Support for Staffing Grants and Quality Improvement sub-measures).

The following table sets out the amount spent to the end of December 2005 under the Measures, and the estimated amount to be spent by the end of the NDP.

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.

Health Service Allowances.

341. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will ensure that a person (details supplied) in Dublin 4 who is being funded by the social services, Northern Ireland and the independent living fund, England will be funded in a similar manner by her Department as the person is a resident tax payer here and will be without a job, education and home unless they are granted funding. [34465/06]

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.

Community Care.

342. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on increasing the grant assistance for a voluntary group (details supplied) in County Kilkenny in view of the shortfall of funding for that community organisation and the

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failure by other groups in the area to fulfil the criteria relating to site and planning permission in the current year and the fact that this group is approved in respect of the necessary criteria; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34535/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. B. Lenihan): As the Deputy will be aware, I have responsibility for the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP) and the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP), which are being implemented by the Office of the Minister for Children.

I understand that the Group in question has been approved total capital grant assistance of €417,323 under the EOCP and has also been approved staffing grant assistance of €177,830, up to 31 December 2007. I understand from enquiries I have made that, to date, the Group has not submitted a formal request for additional funding under the EOCP.

Child Care Services.

343. **Mr. Healy** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will make child care funding available to traveller women attending Cashel Primary Health Care Project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34674/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The question relates to funding which is the responsibility of the Health Services 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.

344. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the waiting time for orthodontic treatment on Dublin's northside for children of different categories of urgency; the number waiting in each category; and if she has under consideration the proposal mooted of providing a partial subsidy to parents wishing to obtain this work privately. [33865/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question regarding the way that children are assessed and deemed eligible for orthodontic treatment 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.

345. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason an appointment in the name of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny has been cancelled by Waterford Regional Hospital; if an earlier date than 20 November 2006 will be arranged; and if she will expedite the matter. [33866/06]

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.

Medical Cards.

346. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a medical card will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [33867/06]

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.

347. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a full medical card will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; the reason a request for an appeal in their case made in writing by his Deputy on 12 June 2006 has not been responded to; and if she will expedite a response. [33868/06]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities.

348. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children the supports and services in place at Kilkenny County Clinic for persons with ADHD; if patients have been informed of a change to this service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33869/06]

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.

Medical Qualifications.

349. **Mr. J. O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the commencement of a school of podiatry in a university here. [33870/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The FÁS "Healthcare Skills Monitoring Report" (2005) provided a quantitative analysis of demand and supply in 21 health care occupations including podiatry. It highlighted podiatry as among those professions where current and future supply shortages should be addressed and recommended that a School of Podiatry providing 20 to 30 places be established.

Responsibility for its establishment will be a matter, in the final instance, for the Department of Education and Science.

The delivery of clinical training, which is a significant core component of the course, must be facilitated in an integrated manner with Health Service Executive (HSE) services. The HSE has advised the two Departments of its 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.

Meetings are continuing at an official level between my Department, the Department of Education and Science, the Higher Education Authority and the Health Service Executive to progress the matter. When these discussions are finalised, it is likely that a call for proposals will be made.

350. **Mr. J. O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the registration of podiatrists, chiropodists and other health professionals as provided for in recent legislation. [33871/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 provides for the establishment of a system of statutory registration for health and social care professionals, including podiatrists.

The structure of the system of statutory registration comprises a registration board for each of the 12 professions to be registered, a Health and Social Care Professionals Council with overall responsibility for the regulatory system and a

committee structure to deal with disciplinary matters. The system will be administered by a Chief Executive Officer and staff.

My Department is proceeding with the establishment of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council in the first instance. In this regard, nominations have been sought from relevant professional bodies and other stakeholders and it is intended that the first meeting of the Council will take place in the coming months.

Following the appointment of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, work will commence on the establishment of each of the registration boards including the Podiatrists Registration Board. It will be a matter for the Podiatrists Registration Board, when established, to determine criteria for registration and the Board will be responsible for the establishment and maintenance of a register of professionals who meet these criteria.

Hospital Services.

351. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if transport will be provided to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo for their hospital appointment in Galway. [33883/06]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities.

352. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the action she will take to assist the 2,118 people with intellectual disabilities on residential waiting lists; and if she will make this a priority in 2006. [33885/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): The 2006 annual report from the national intellectual disability database committee indicates that of the additional residential and respite services required to meet the needs of those registered on the database, the majority of these individuals are already in receipt of a major element of service. For example, of the overall total who require a major element of service in the period 2007 to 2011, 89.7% are already in receipt of at least one major element of service.

As the Deputy is aware an integral part of the national disability strategy is the multi-annual investment programme published by the Government in December 2004 which contains details of

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commitments in relation to the provision of specific high priority disability services over the period 2006 to 2009. These commitments include the development of new residential, respite and day places for persons with intellectual disability and autism in each of the years covered by the programme.

Additional funding of €59 million was provided in 2006 to meet costs associated with the various elements of this programme. This funding will be used to put in place 255 new residential places, 85 new respite places and 535 new day places for people with intellectual disability and autism. In addition funding of €41 million was 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. Capital funding of €55 million was also being provided in 2006 to support these developments.

The Deputy will also appreciate that I cannot at this stage give specific commitments in relation to the level of expenditure in 2007 for any particular service as these matters will be decided as part of the discussions on the Estimates and Budget for that year between the Health Service Executive, my Department and the Department of Finance.

Health Services.

353. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of applications made for primary medical certificates in each of the old health board and new Health Service Executive regions in the years 2003 to 2006; and the number of these applications granted. [33886/06]

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.

Food Labelling.

354. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the decision of October 2006 by the French Government to require labels on alcoholic beverages warning of the dangers of drinking during pregnancy; her plans to introduce a similar requirement here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33887/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): My Department is aware of the decision of the French Government to require labels on alcohol beverage containers warning of the dangers of drinking during pregnancy. Officials from my Department are contacting the French authorities to obtain further details.

The issue of the information contained on labels on alcoholic beverages was considered by the Working Group on Alcohol Misuse which was established to help mobilise the stakeholders through social partnership to achieve a targeted and measurable reduction in alcohol misuse. One of the recommendations of the Working Group was that a group, representative of all relevant stakeholders, would be established to consider what useful information could be included on non-draft alcohol products, taking account of international evidence. An Implementation Group is now being established to monitor implementation of the recommendations of the Working Group. The issue of warning labels on alcohol products will, therefore, initially be considered within this framework.

Care of the Elderly.

355. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of money her Department has invested in the carers development officer role in a centre (details supplied); the changes this role has made to the carer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33900/06]

358. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Health and Children the role the carers development officer appointed in 2002 to a centre (details supplied) has played since appointment; the way in which to contact this person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33907/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): I propose to take Questions Nos. 355 and 358 together.

The Health Act 2004 provided for the Health Service Executive, which is responsible for the management and delivery of health and personal social services. This includes responsibility for the funding of these services. However, the centre referred to by the Deputy is a private company and therefore not within the remit of the HSE. I have however forwarded the Deputy's questions to the HSE and asked that it sends any information it may have to the Deputy as a matter of urgency.

It should be noted that the only monies available to the Department are provided through Lottery funding. No such funding has been provided to the centre in question to fund a development officer role since its establishment in 2002.

I understand that the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs may have

provided funding to this centre under the Dormant Accounts Fund.

Hospital Staff.

356. **Dr. McDaid** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the permanent appointment of the breast cancer consultant is due to take place in Letterkenny General Hospital. [33905/06]

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 respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the matter raised.

Health Service Staff.

357. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will elaborate on the skills project for carers as referred to in Parliamentary Question No. 279 of 22 November 2005; if she will outline where funding is or will be available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33906/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Health Service Executive provides funding for Carers Groups. Any training, or skills projects, and funding for same are therefore a matter for the HSE. Accordingly, the Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange for information to be supplied to the Deputy regarding funding these Groups.

Question No. 358 answered with Question No. 355.

359. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Health and Children if there is funding freely available for a skills project for carers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33914/06]

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.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

360. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position in respect of house

repairs in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare as per letter from the Health Service Executive dated 11 August 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33918/06]

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 operation of the Housing Aid Scheme for the Elderly, on behalf of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. 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.

Genetically Modified Organisms.

361. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the detection of non-authorised genetically modified organism LL RICE 601 in rice products imported from the US into the EU has implications for Ireland; the steps taken to ensure such rice is not on sale here and has not entered the Irish food chain; if any has been imported into Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33919/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), which is the competent authority in Ireland for the enforcement of EU legislation regarding genetically modified (GM) foods, carries out checks on the marketplace for compliance with GM legislation on an on-going basis.

Ireland, in common with other Member States and as required by EU rules, applies EU legislation on GM foods whether produced within the EU or imported. Under EU rules, only authorised GM foods, or foods containing ingredients thereof, can be placed on the market. The safety of GM products is independently assessed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) on a case-by-case basis and GM food is required to be clearly labelled thus ensuring greater consumer confidence and choice.

The European Commission brought in emergency measures on 23 August last (Commission Decision 2006/578/EC) requiring certification of imported long grain rice as a result of the US authorities revealing that they had found traces of a genetically modified rice line in rice batches from Arkansas and Missouri of a type which is not approved for commercial use on either side of the Atlantic: the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (which consists of representatives of the Member States) backed this decision at an emergency meeting two days

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later. These emergency measures were superseded by Commission Decision 2006/601/EC of 5 September 2006 on emergency measures regarding the non-authorised genetically modified organism LL RICE 601 in rice products. This Decision stipulates that EU Member States may only allow certain long grain rice products on the EU market where they are accompanied by analytical certification that the rice in question is not present. The Commission Decision also stipulates that Member States must carry out random sampling and analysis of rice products already on the market to verify its absence.

The FSAI, as competent authority for GM foods, has carried out random sampling and testing of rice in the Irish retail sector in line with the Commission Decision: of nineteen samples tested to date, four brands of long grain rice have produced positive results for GM LL RICE 601. Last September, the FSAI notified the European Commission of the initial unfavourable result.

In October, the FSAI forwarded three further notifications to the Commission: in all cases, the batches concerned have been removed from sale. The FSAI has also made contact with Customs and Excise to ensure that only long grain rice products with the required clearance certificates are allowed into Ireland.

In a separate development, on 14 September the Scientific Panel on Genetically Modified Organisms of EFSA concluded that 'The available data are not sufficient to allow the safety of LL RICE 601 to be assessed in accordance with the EFSA guidance for risk assessment. However, on the basis of the available molecular and compositional data and on the toxicological profile of PAT proteins, EFSA considers that the consumption of imported long grain rice containing trace levels of LL RICE 601 is not likely to pose an imminent safety concern to humans or animals.'

Member States were updated on the position at a meeting of the Standing Committee held yesterday (Monday, 23 October) and there was a discussion on likely further developments. The Commission tabled a revised Decision which extends the scope to further rice products and requires systematic testing of imports by Member State authorities according to the EU testing protocol at the point of entry to the EU which is an additional measure which supplements the certification procedure being applied by the US exporters: Member States voted in favour of this revised Decision.

362. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to unauthorised genetically modified rice in products imported from China being detected in the EU and here, on foot of the European Commission's response to non-Governmental organisations reports referred to in the European Com-

mission's Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health's GM Food and Feed Section meeting of 11 September 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33920/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), which is the competent authority in Ireland for the enforcement of EU legislation regarding genetically modified (GM) foods, carries out checks on the marketplace for compliance with GM legislation on an on-going basis.

Ireland, in common with other Member States and as required by EU rules, applies EU legislation on GM foods whether produced within the EU or imported. Under EU rules, only authorised GM foods, or foods containing ingredients thereof, can be placed on the market. The safety of GM products is independently assessed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) on a case-by-case basis and GM food is required to be clearly labelled thus ensuring greater consumer confidence and choice.

Government policy with regard to Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) is based on the Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Modern Biotechnology published in October 2000. In line with the recommendations of this report, my Department adopts a 'positive but precautionary' approach to the issue of GM foods which reflects the priority given to consumer choice and safety.

At the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health's GM Food and Feed Section meeting held on 11 September 2006 the European Commission informed Member States of reports received from non-Governmental organisations to the effect that an unauthorised genetically modified rice, known as Bt63, had been detected in products imported from China. The reports indicated that the rice products, which are not authorised for use anywhere in the world, were found in Chinese specialty stores in the UK, France and Germany.

At the meeting of the Standing Committee held yesterday (Monday, 23 October) the Commission provided an update on this issue to Member States' representatives. The Commission has requested further information on the rice products and testing methods and has followed up on the information received: it is currently awaiting validation of the testing methods used. The Commission has also contacted the Chinese authorities seeking data on GM rice in China, in particular as regards the Bt genetic constructs developed in China.

In the last number of weeks a number of Member States through their official controls (France, Germany and Austria) have informed the Commission of the presence of Chinese food products containing the unauthorised rice. In respect of the Irish market, the FSAI has not dis-

covered any samples of rice products testing positive for this GM rice.

The Commission has pledged to keep Member States informed on progress on this issue and has indicated that similar emergency measures to those taken with the GM RICE LL 601 will be introduced if considered necessary based on information as it becomes available. This issue will again be on the agenda for the next meeting of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health's GM Food and Feed Section.

Member States were advised by the Commission to ensure compliance of products with EU law as regards non-authorized GMOs. In addition, the Commission has informed the industry that it is their responsibility to ensure that they do not place on the market any products which do not comply with EU legislation.

Health Services.

363. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to repeated problems faced by carers (details supplied); the resolution that is or will be available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33924/06]

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.

364. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare has not received an earlier appointment in regard to their health condition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33943/06]

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.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

365. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the status of the application for special housing aid for the elderly for a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33944/06]

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 operation of the Housing Aid Scheme for the Elderly, on behalf of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. 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.

Care of the Elderly.

366. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Health and Children when it is planned to proceed with plans to construct an elderly care facility in Borrisokane, County Tipperary, including a day care centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33945/06]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities.

367. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason there are long delays being experienced by children in need and waiting for speech and language facilities; the reason there have not been extra personnel recruited to deal with the current caseload; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33946/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): As part of the investment package for Disability Services for 2006, a sum of €12.5 million was made available to the Health Service Executive to enhance the multi-disciplinary support services for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy is aware it is a matter for the Health Service Executive, as part of its management of the employment ceiling, to determine the appropriate staffing mix required to deliver its service plan priorities, including speech and language therapy services. My Department understands that a priority for the HSE in 2006 is to increase service provision in the area of multi-disciplinary supports to meet obligations to children with developmental delay. The investment package will facilitate the recruitment of up to 200 extra therapists, particularly speech and language,

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occupational therapists and physiotherapists. Due to the current limited supply of these grades it is acknowledged that in the short term recruitment from overseas will be required. The HSE has put in place a project plan for this.

The specific issue of extra personnel raised by the Deputy in his 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.

368. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a full reply has not been received to date to two parliamentary questions (details supplied); and when full replies will issue to same. [33947/06]

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 again requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have these matters investigated and to have replies issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Services.

369. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Health and Children her proposals to retain services at St. Luke's Hospital, Rathgar (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33954/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The decision to transfer St. Luke's Hospital was taken by the Government in the context of its consideration of the National Plan for Radiation Oncology Services. The decision is based on expert advice and is designed to ensure that radiation oncology, one element of cancer care, is integrated with all other aspects of care, including surgery and medical oncology. This is in line with best international practice. I am convinced that this model will provide better patient centred treatment with improved quality of service and outcome for patients. The Board of St. Luke's Hospital and its Executive Management Team are fully committed to supporting the Government's decision in relation to the development of radiation oncology. A transfer on similar lines took place earlier this year in Northern Ireland when radiation oncology services transferred to Belfast City Hospital, a major academic teaching hospital.

In progressing the transfer, I will build on the expertise and ethos of St. Luke's. I have ensured that experts at St. Luke's are centrally involved in the planning and delivery of the National Plan. The plan consists of large centres in Dublin (at Beaumont and St. James's Hospitals), Cork and Galway and two integrated satellite centres at Waterford Regional Hospital and Limerick Regional Hospital. Medical and scientific experts from the hospital are involved in developing the output specifications for the delivery of new radiation oncology services nationally. The Chief Executive at St. Luke's will lead the management team of the new facility at St. James's. I also appointed the Chairman of St. Luke's to chair a National Radiation Oncology Oversight Group to advise me on progress on the implementation of the plan. I have also approved the provision of two additional linear accelerators at St. Luke's to provide much needed interim capacity pending the roll out of the national plan. I expect these services to commence late next year.

Health Services.

370. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be assessed for orthodontic treatment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33955/06]

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.

371. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) in County Sligo had to avail of a private clinic appointment in Beaumont Hospital in view of their serious medical condition; if she will waive all charges in view of their circumstances as their only income is disability benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33956/06]

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 case investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities.

372. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Health

and Children if her attention has been drawn to the circumstances of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; when a personal assistant and transportation will be sanctioned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33957/06]

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.

373. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the conditions that must be met for a private hospital to provide radiotherapy services to public patients; and when negotiations between a clinic (details supplied) in County Waterford and the Health Service Executive will be completed. [33969/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Quality standards for the provision of radiation oncology services for public patients have been prepared by an expert group established on foot of a Government decision in January 2004. The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised my Department that it is applying these standards to radiation oncology services that it provides or arranges to have provided. My Department is working closely with the HSE to progress the National Radiation Oncology Plan announced by Government in July 2005. It will deliver integrated care to cancer patients by multidisciplinary teams of cancer experts at centres in Dublin, at Beaumont and St. James's Hospitals, Cork and Galway and two integrated satellite centres at Waterford Regional Hospital and Limerick Regional Hospital. The specific issue in relation to negotiations between the HSE and the Whitfield Clinic is a matter for the HSE. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to this matter.

Cancer Treatment Services.

374. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Health and Children if there are private facilities currently providing radiotherapy or oncology services to public patients here. [33970/06]

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 Execu-

tive to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the matter raised.

Medical Cards.

375. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a clinic (details supplied) in County Waterford and the Health Service Executive are engaged in service provider negotiations to cater for medical card holders. [33971/06]

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.

376. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a house (details supplied) in Dublin 9 has been purchased for use by the Health Service Executive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33972/06]

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 Services.

377. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the winter initiative scheme will be issued in a hospital (details supplied) in County Mayo; the funding which will be provided towards this; and when this funding will be available to the hospital. [33987/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The question raised by the Deputy 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. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the particular matter raised by the Deputy investigated and to have a reply issued directly to him.

Child Care Services.

378. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children her view on whether the proposed

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Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006 are feasible particularly in view of the new adult to child ratio; her further view on whether this is sustainable; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33988/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. B. Lenihan): The Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006 provide that “a person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that a sufficient number of suitable and competent adults are working directly with the pre-school children in the pre-school service at all times”. The changes to the age ranges and the adult-child ratios applying to each age range under the revised Regulations are set out in the Explanatory Guide to the Regulations as follows:

The new ratios for full day care are:

Age range	adult child ratios
0-1 year	1:3 (no change)
1-2 years	1:5 (new age range — ratio for 1-2 years is currently 1:6)
2-3 years	1:6 (new age range — no change in ratio)
3-6 years	1:8 (no change)

The above ratios will apply to part-time services also. For sessional services the new ratios are:

Age range	adult child ratios
0 -1 year	1:3 (new age range — ratio currently 1:10)
1 — 2.5 years	1:5 (new age range — ratio currently 1:10)
2.5 years — 6 years	1:10 (new age range — no change in ratio)

For drop-in centres the new ratios are:

Age range	adult child ratios
0-6 years	1:4 (currently 1:3 for under 1 year and 1:8 for 1-6 years)

There is a maximum group size for each age range in each category.

For childminders the new ratio is that a childminder (a person who provides a childminding service) should look after not more than 5 pre-school children including her own pre-school children. The ratio is currently not more than 6 pre-school children including her own pre-school children. No more than two children should be less than 15 months. Exceptions in relation to numbers under 15 months can be made for multiple births or siblings. If a childminder is caring for 6 pre-school children, including her own pre-school children, at the time of the commencement

of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006, the childminder will not be required to reduce the number cared for to 5 until the first child from that group of 6 pre-school children begins to attend school or leaves the service voluntarily. The Review Group chaired by the Department of Health and Children which drew up the Regulations had representation from the Health Service Executive, the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations and other Departments. There was broad agreement across the Review Group membership on the ratio changes in the revised regulations. The Group applied the revised ratios and group sizes and revised space ratios to some existing services and found they did not have any significant impact in terms of reducing numbers that could be cared for or in terms of the cost of the service. The Explanatory Guide advises that the adult-child ratios be applied in a flexible manner in so far as is safe and practical to facilitate sibling interaction and mixed aged groupings. It also states that the total number of child care staff available in the service should be considered as opposed to the per room allocation so that staff are fully utilised.

Health Services.

379. **Mr. McCormack** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children in County Galway on the waiting list for orthodontic treatment or assessment; the longest waiting period for assessment; the longest waiting period for orthodontic treatment for people on the list; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33989/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The Deputy's question regarding the way that children are assessed and deemed eligible for orthodontic treatment 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.

380. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of patients transported to hospital by helicopter in each of the Health Service Executive areas for each of the past five years; the cost on an annual basis of such transport; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34004/06]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities.

381. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of persons currently employed in her Department whose status has changed to that of disabled since the commencement of their employment with her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34010/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Since the commencement of their employment, two members of staff in my Department have developed a disability as most recently defined under the Disability Act, 2005.

Health Services.

382. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if funding will be targeted for diabetes treatment and prevention, as recommended and costed by the diabetes expert group four years ago; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34011/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Deputy's question relates to the funding, 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.

383. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason for the delay in introducing stroke units nationwide, where patients would be managed under the direct care of a stroke specialist in conjunction with a dedicated multidisciplinary team; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34012/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Deputy's question relates to the funding, 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.

Pharmacy Regulations.

384. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if legislation will be intro-

duced requiring pharmacists to report adverse side effects of drugs on patients to the authorities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34013/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

There is no legislation requiring pharmacists to report adverse drug reactions. Nevertheless, pharmacists may, if as part of their professional input into the medicine therapy of their patients they become aware of such reactions, advise the Irish Medicines Board, which is the relevant regulatory authority. I have no plans to introduce legislation requiring pharmacists to report adverse drug reactions.

Ambulance Service.

385. **Mr. J. Breen** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide an air ambulance to cover Loop Head peninsula and the greater west Clare area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34018/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

Inter-hospital air ambulance transport services are currently provided by the Air Corps on a request and availability basis. In this regard, a Service Level Agreement is in place between the Department of Defence, the Department of Health and Children, the Health Service Executive, the Defence Forces and the Air Corps for the provision of air ambulance services. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Health Service Executive to arrange to have the specific service matter raised by the Deputy investigated and to have a reply issued directly to him.

Health Services.

386. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of people, per county, who have been assessed and are waiting for home help; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34022/06]

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.

Care of the Elderly.

387. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she has a contingency plan in place to provide assistance for the elderly over the winter who have been approved for home

[Mr. Kehoe.]

help but are at present not receiving it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34023/06]

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.

Additional funding has been provided to the Health Service Executive this year to expand home help services under the €110m Budget package for services for older people. This additional funding is intended to allow the HSE provide significant additional support for older people this winter.

Health Services.

388. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she has intervened at any stage to resolve the dispute between the Health Service Executive and home help organisers; if she has met with home help organisers in an effort to resolve the problem; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34024/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to human resource management issues in the Health Service Executive. My Department has contacted the Health Service Executive on this matter who have confirmed that the Executive recognises and acknowledges the important services provided by personnel working throughout the home help service. It is committed to reviewing the existing models of services provided with a view to establishing a standardised high quality service that will benefit both clientele and staff.

In order to give effect to their commitment, a High Level Group has been established comprising representatives of the Health Service Executive, SIPTU and IMPACT. This group is presently addressing a number of issues including those matters relating to the Home Help Organisers. It is anticipated that this issue will be resolved shortly.

389. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average time a person must wait from being approved for home help and receiving the assistance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34025/06]

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.

Additional funding has been provided to the Health Service Executive this year to expand home help services under the €110m Budget package for services for older people.

390. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if support will be given to persons (details supplied) in Dublin 3 in relation to disruption to their lives by Health Service Executive equipment. [34042/06]

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.

My Department is advised, following previous questions in relation to this matter, that the HSE has sought to address the complaints of the person concerned, having regard to the health needs of its client. My Department has asked the Executive to make further efforts to try to resolve the situation.

391. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo is being consistently refused transport by the Health Service Executive. [34046/06]

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.

392. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be given an appointment for physiotherapy; the reason no reply issued from the Health Service Executive in this regard in response to a previous parliamentary question; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34047/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): I understand from the Health Service Executive that the matter raised by the Deputy in a previous Parliamentary Question is still being investigated and a reply will issue as soon as possible.

393. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a physiotherapy appointment

will be rearranged for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [34048/06]

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.

394. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will take steps to ensure that the supplies depot, which is held at St. Lomans Hospital, Mullingar is left in place and is not removed therefrom to Tullamore; her views on the importance of having a depot in this area to service the needs of both counties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34174/06]

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.

395. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be provided with transport by the Health Service Executive in order that they can attend hospital appointments. [34175/06]

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.

396. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be approved home help, in view of their medical condition and the availability of home help personnel already employed by the Health Service Executive in their area. [34176/06]

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.

397. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason no information is made available in leaflet or poster form that general practitioners can refer to when a patient makes a request for transport to an outpatient clinic in the local hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34254/06]

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.

398. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Minister for Health and Children if there are circumstances for which a patient can be covered financially by the Health Service Executive for acupuncture; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34255/06]

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 issue examined and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Service Staff.

399. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a doctor has been appointed (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34256/06]

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 Expenditure.

400. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount spent to date under the acute hospital measure of the National Development Plan; the amount estimated to be spent

[Mr. Kenny.]

under this measure by the end of the NDP.
[34287/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

Expenditure for the Acute Hospital Measure, under the Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme of the NDP, for the period 1 January 2000 to 30 June 2006 was €1,883.7 million. The estimated expenditure for this Measure for the remainder of the NDP is €242 million, bringing the total estimated expenditure to €2,125.7 million.

401. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount spent to date under the non-acute and continuing care hospital measure of the National Development Plan; the amount estimated to be spent under this measure by the end of the NDP; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34289/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

Expenditure for the Non-Acute Hospital Measure, under the Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme of the NDP, for the period 1 January 2000 to 30 June 2006 was €682.4 million. The estimated expenditure for this Measure for the remainder of the NDP is approximately €162 million, bringing the total estimated expenditure to €844.4 million.

Pregnancy Information Services.

402. **Ms F. O'Malley** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she is satisfied that Cura have in place arrangements which fully comply with the service level agreement made with the Crisis Pregnancy Agency on the matter of distribution of the Positive Options leaflet; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34294/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The matters at issue are ones between the Crisis Pregnancy Agency and CURA in the first instance. The Crisis Pregnancy Agency (CPA) was established in 2001. The Agency has responsibility for funding a range of independent agencies providing counselling services to women with a crisis pregnancy. The CPA has informed me that such funding is subject to a service agreement between the CPA and each counselling agency. It has also indicated that a key element of this is that each counselling service commits to refer women to other bona fide service providers where it is not in a position to provide the information or service requested. Research has shown that counselling gives women extra time and space to reflect on their decision regarding their pregnancy. If a woman has more time to come to terms with her pregnancy, this makes the option of abortion less likely.

I understand that the CPA and CURA are at present in communication regarding the question

of continued funding for the organisation based on the terms of their service agreement. I do not consider it appropriate that I should make any further comment on the matter pending the outcome of these discussions.

Hospital Services.

403. **Mr. J. Breen** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will make arrangements to put an end to the situation whereby both male and female elderly patients in Ennis General Hospital currently share the same ward thus compromising the integrity and privacy of the patients and distressing their families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34301/06]

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.

404. **Mr. N. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person who applied for an occupational therapist referral on 31 March 2006, is still waiting for the occupational therapist to visit; and if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the Health Service Executive were informed at the time of this application being submitted that they needed to be assessed as they were due to apply to Cork County Council for a disabled persons grant. [34340/06]

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.

405. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children if an application for funding will be approved as a matter of urgency in the case of a person (details supplied) County Carlow for their treatment and care at the Irish Institute of Naturopathic Medicine; and if she will expedite a response. [34341/06]

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.

406. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will intervene on behalf of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo and have them called for their treatment in view of their medical condition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34342/06]

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 case investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Medical Cards.

407. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will expedite the renewal of a medical card in the name of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny in view of the circumstances of the case. [34343/06]

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.

408. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Health and Children when will a person (details supplied) in County Meath have an appointment with the Meath Community Paediatric Physiotherapy unit; the reason this person must wait so long for an appointment for this vital service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34344/06]

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.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

409. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason for the delay in finalising an application made to the Health Service Executive under the housing aid for the elderly scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [34345/06]

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 Environment, Heritage and Local Government. 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 Screening Programmes.

410. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she is satisfied that since the pilot programme involving general practitioners in the monitoring of persons with diabetes was abandoned, that persons with this condition are receiving adequate monitoring; her plans to develop a more effective preventive monitoring programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34360/06]

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, 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 Accommodation.

411. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of respite places that have been provided in each year under the Government's five year investment programme for disability; the way this number compares to the number provided in the previous five year period; the extent to which the present provision in meeting the needs; the estimated number of families who are not receiving the level of respite support appropriate to their needs. [34361/06]

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

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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.

Drug Treatment Programme.

412. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of addicts per health board community care area on a methadone treatment scheme per year since 1991 to date in 2006. [34380/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The 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.

413. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of addicts registered with drug treatment services per health board area for each year since 1986 to date in 2006. [34384/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The 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.

Sexual Health Strategy.

414. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a sexual health strategy will be rolled out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34391/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): On foot of a recommendation of the National AIDS Strategy Committee, my Department and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency commissioned the Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships (ISSHR) in 2003.

The results of that survey form the basis of this report. The survey was conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and is in line with research in other European countries. Its purpose is to provide useful information on attitudes and behaviours and to provide a benchmark for evaluating the impact of our policies and practices in relation to HIV and other STIs and in relation to our overall sexual health.

The main report was launched last week. Three Sub-Reports focusing on 'First Sex and Sex Education', 'Sexual Health Challenges and Related Service Provision' and 'Contemporary Sexual Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviour' will be published in the coming months.

The findings are significant and convincing and send a clear message to policy makers, to parents, to teachers, to health care providers, and to society in general.

The report strongly suggests the need for a sexual health strategy to be prepared by my Department and the HSE with the involvement of other key stakeholders. A comprehensive strategy and action plan will be developed swiftly once the three further reports are issued within the next three months.

Health Services.

415. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the recognition given within the health system here to Tourette syndrome which can affect one in one hundred people and which is a significant disorder which may be linked to other problems such as obsessive compulsive disorders and attention deficit hyper activity, in addition to the more well known symptoms such as involuntary movements and involuntary vocalisations; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that adults and children suffering from Tourette syndrome need special recognition within the medical and care system, and in particular in the case of children in relation to educational needs; her plans to improve recognition of this condition and to improve inter-Departmental co-operation for Tourette syndrome patients across health, education, employment and social services; if she will carry out a review of provision for the syndrome; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34399/06]

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.

416. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive orthodontic treatment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34412/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The Deputy's question regarding the way that children are assessed and deemed eligible for orthodontic treatment 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.

School Curriculum.

417. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her Department will provide funding for a school (details supplied) in County Mayo to run a course of sign language; the way in which this school should seek funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34463/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): I have contacted the relevant Department with responsibility for this matter and they have supplied me with the following information. Each school offering Transition Year devises its own programme in accordance with the needs, interests and abilities of its own particular student cohort. The Department of Education and Science has issued guidelines to assist schools on their planning and the Second Level Support Service provides specific support to teachers of Transition Year students. In planning its Transition Year programme the school must pay due regard to the resources available to it. These include a special grant of €63.49 which is paid in respect of each Transition Year student who is in the free education scheme. Additional funding is not provided to individual schools to run specific courses in areas such as Sign Language.

National Health Strategy.

418. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the measures she and her Ministerial colleagues will take to address the growing problem of obesity here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34532/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Obesity is a major public health problem both for Ireland and for our European neighbours. The National Taskforce on Obesity published a report in 2005 containing 93 recommendations to halt the rise in levels of overweight and obesity.

The Taskforce recognises that a multi-sectoral approach is necessary, involving other state agencies and government departments and real engagement of the public and private sectors to implement all of the report's recommendations. It is proposed to utilise social inclusion structures already established as well as other working groups as required to facilitate this.

I understand that the Health Service Executive has established a Working Group to implement those recommendations of the Task Force on

Obesity for which the HSE has the lead responsibility and for which €3 million has been allocated. It is currently undertaking an audit of existing services to reduce and prevent obesity, to identify gaps in current service provision and to make recommendations for future service provision. It has already commenced a number of new initiatives and has secured 8 additional posts this year focussed on obesity.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

419. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of her Department. [34554/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The information requested is being collated in my Department and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medical Cards.

420. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on the extremely low uptake of the doctor only medical cards; if she proposes to restore the full medical cards that have been revoked from holders; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34595/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The GP visit card initiative was introduced as a graduated benefit so that people on moderate incomes, particularly parents of young children, who do not qualify for a medical card would not be deterred on cost grounds from visiting their GP. The Health Service Executive (HSE) began to issue GP visit cards in November, 2005 and thus the GP visit card has been available for less than a year. Information supplied to my Department by the HSE indicates that as at 20 October 2006 there were 40,059 persons holding a GP visit card. In relation to the Government commitment to provide an additional 30,000 medical cards this has been exceeded. As of 1st October, 2006, 1,209,284 persons hold a medical card which is an increase of 64,201 card holders from January 2005 (1,145,083).

The assessment of eligibility for medical cards and GP visit cards is statutorily a matter for the HSE and is determined following an examination of the means of the applicant and his/her dependants. Under Section 45 of the Health Act 1970 medical cards are provided for persons, who in the opinion of the HSE, are unable without undue hardship to arrange general practitioner medical and surgical services for themselves and their dependants. Section 58 of the Health Act, 1970, as amended, provides for GP visit cards for adult persons with limited eligibility for whom, in the opinion of the HSE, and notwithstanding that

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they do not qualify for a medical card, it would be unduly burdensome to arrange GP medical and surgical services for themselves and their dependants. Persons aged 70 and over are statutorily entitled to a medical card, regardless of income.

The income guidelines used by the Executive for the purpose of assessing eligibility to medical cards and GP visit cards are not statutorily binding. Medical cards and GP visit cards may be granted by the HSE to persons in circumstances where the income guidelines are exceeded but the particular circumstances of the case warrant such a decision. Decisions to refuse an application or renewal of a medical card or GP visit card may, of course, be appealed to the Executive for further consideration. In cases where the applicant does not qualify for the medical card, they are then automatically assessed to see if they qualify for a GP visit card. The assessment guidelines also provide that where an applicant's weekly income is derived solely from Social Welfare or HSE allowances/payments, a medical card will be granted.

In 2005 significant changes were made to make it easier for people to qualify for a medical card or a GP visit card. The income guidelines used to assess eligibility were increased by a cumulative 29%. A higher rate of increase was applied to the income allowances for children and was specifically aimed at assisting low income families. Also, the assessment of means is now based on income after tax and PRSI and full account is taken of reasonable expenses in respect of rent/mortgage payments, childcare and travel to work which has the effect of further reducing the threshold at which a person would qualify for the medical card or the GP visit card. In June 2006 I agreed with the HSE a further adjustment to the income assessment guidelines used for GP visit cards and these are now 50% higher than those used for medical cards.

Since the introduction of the GP visit card, the HSE has conducted two national media advertising campaigns to promote the benefit. The Executive continue to publicise all of the changes to encourage people to apply and has made the application process as simple as possible.

I believe that the substantial increases which have been made to the income guidelines in respect of both the medical card and GP visit card, allied with the HSE's campaign to encourage people to apply, ensures that the most vulnerable people in our society have free access to GP services.

Departmental Staff.

421. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the criteria for persons with disabilities for seeking employment opportunities within her Department; the application procedures that apply; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34596/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The Public Appointments Service (PAS) undertakes the recruitment of staff to posts in my Department following approval from the Department of Finance. The recruitment of all positions within the remit of the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act, 2004 is subject to codes of practice published by the Commission for Public Service Appointments. I understand that, in conjunction with the recently published Commission for Public Service Appointments Code of Practice "External and Internal Appointment of Persons with Disabilities to Positions in the Civil Service and Certain Public Bodies", the Public Appointments Service is making arrangements to run an Executive Officer competition for persons with disabilities.

My Department is, and always has been, willing to provide placements for persons with disabilities. This year my Department participated in the Willing, Able Mentoring (WAM) project, which is administered by the Association of Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD), and is providing two six month placements to graduates with disabilities.

Hospital Services.

422. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary has not received an appointment for an operation, despite five examinations to date; if an immediate appointment will be arranged; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34597/06]

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 case investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

In the meantime, the patient or his GP may also make contact with the National Treatment Purchase Fund to investigate whether it may be in a position to assist.

423. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary has not received an appointment for an operation; if an immediate appointment will be arranged; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34598/06]

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.

The person concerned or her GP may make contact with the National Treatment Purchase Fund to ascertain if it is in a position to assist her.

Cancer Screening Programme.

424. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of people in County Tipperary waiting for mammography appointments in each hospital; the number waiting nationally; the average length of time a person must wait for an appointment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34599/06]

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 respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the matter raised.

Health Services.

425. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Minister for Health and Children the level of podiatry care available at the Mid-Western Regional Hospital; the number of podiatrists employed at the hospital; if funding will be made available to the Health Service Executive to employ the necessary staff; the number of people in need of podiatry in the mid-west region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34600/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

It is a matter for the Health Service Executive to determine the appropriate staffing mix required to deliver its service plan priorities in line with public sector pay and employment policies. As this question relates to human resource management issues and 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, 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.

426. **Mr. Dennehy** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support extending the age range for which women are invited for a free breast check every two years from the current 50-64 years to 70 years as part of the general extension of the service in view of the fact that increasing age is a significant risk factor associated with breast cancer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34601/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

I have met with representatives of BreastCheck and they are fully aware of my wish to have a quality assured programme rolled out to the remaining regions in the country 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. At a meeting with Department recently, BreastCheck reported on significant progress that has been made in preparation for the roll-out. Further discussions are planned. Additional revenue funding of €2.3m has been made available to BreastCheck to meet the additional costs of rollout and an additional 69 posts have been approved. BreastCheck has appointed Clinical Directors for the Southern and Western regions and both will take up their positions in November of this year. The recruitment of Consultants and other staff, including Radiographers is underway.

BreastCheck also requires considerable capital investment in the construction of two new clinical units and in the provision of five additional mobile units and state of the art digital equipment. I have made available an additional €21m capital funding to BreastCheck for this purpose. Construction teams have been appointed for the static units in University College Hospital Galway and South Infirmary/Victoria Hospital, Cork. 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.

When the national roll-out of the programme is sufficiently developed and it is assured that a quality service is being delivered at national level, consideration will be given to including older women and thereby continuing the screening of women in the programme who have reached 65 years of age. Any woman irrespective of her age or residence who has immediate concerns or symptoms should contact her GP who, where appropriate, will refer her to the symptomatic services in her area.

Medical Cards.

427. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a medical card will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34636/06]

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 Correspondence.

428. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism has been in contact with her with regard to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34670/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I can confirm that my Private Office has received the correspondence from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism referred to by the Deputy. The correspondence has been acknowledged and referred to the appropriate line division in my Department for examination, and a response will issue to the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism in due course.

Health Funding.

429. **Mr. Healy** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will intervene with the Health Service Executive to allocate funding to the Irish Osteoporosis Society in view of the fact that no funding was received in 2006 and only part funding in 2005; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34671/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Irish Osteoporosis Society (IOS) was funded on a once-off basis by the former Northern Area Health Board in 2004 and 2005. Funding of €130,000 was provided in 2005. The IOS sought further funding of €128,000 during 2006. Following a series of meetings and checking of documentation, the HSE paid this amount to the IOS on the 22nd of September 2006.

Departmental Expenditure.

430. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the amount spent to date on the e-commerce and communications infrastructure measure under the National Development Plan; the amount estimated to be spent under this measure by the end of the NDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34270/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The total spent to the end of June 2006 under the e-commerce and communication measures of the Border, Midlands and Western and Southern and Eastern regional operational programme is €99.6 million. The total expenditure under the programme is estimated to be €179.66 million. Although outturn for the measure is below target, expenditure will accelerate rapidly through the remainder of 2006 and during 2007. Expenditure under the programme will primarily be on the second phase of the Metropolitan Area Networks Programme.

Energy Resources.

431. **Mr. Dennehy** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if he has satisfied himself that sufficient measures are being taken to encourage the use of compact fluorescent bulbs by households; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34586/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The Power of One campaign, which I launched on September 26th 2006, is a multi-annual, national awareness campaign focusing on energy efficiency and the benefits to consumers, the economy and the environment. A key message of this campaign is to raise awareness of the impact of inefficient use of energy in terms of increased costs to the user, the economy and the environment. This will be achieved by informing and empowering consumers on best practices in terms of saving energy at home and at work including the use of compact fluorescent bulbs. The message regarding the cost saving benefits of CFCs is being reinforced by ESB supply to their domestic customers.

Departmental Staff.

432. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the dates on which an officer of the petroleum affairs division of his Department may have been questioned either orally or in writing regarding acceptance of corporate hospitality in or about the time of the World Cup 2006 from a party involved in or associated with Shell EPI; and if a response is awaited from any officer. [33857/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): In preparing a reply to Parliamentary Question No. 275 of the 4th October last, my Department's Personnel Officer contacted all Petroleum Affairs officers to ascertain whether they had been the recipients of corporate hospitality as outlined in the Parliamentary Question. All of the staff concerned confirmed they had not.

Energy Resources.

433. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the reviews or feasibility studies that have been carried out by his Department on the possibility of bringing natural gas to the west and north west since 1 January 1999; the cost of these studies or reviews; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33858/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): Fingleton White and Co. Ltd. have been contracted by my Department to conduct the detailed feasibility study including cost benefit analysis to evaluate the possibility of bringing gas from the Galway-

Mayo pipeline to Donegal Town via Sligo. The estimated total cost of the study is €190,000. The study, which commenced in July, will be completed in early 2007. This is the only such study commissioned directly by my Department within the timeframe mentioned.

The Commission for Energy Regulation (with funding from the INTERREG programme) carried out a feasibility study and cost benefit analysis in relation to the proposed extension of the pipeline from Derry to Letterkenny. Bord Gáis Éireann had a number of studies carried out in relation to extending the pipeline in the west and northwest.

434. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the outcome of the contact between officials from his Department and European Commission officials in 2002 on the issue of providing grant aid to build a gas transmission pipeline to Sligo via Ballina from the then proposed Mayo to Galway pipeline; if there has been further contact between officials from his Department and the Commission since then; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33859/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The Government commitment indicated in 2001 that we would examine the feasibility of bringing natural gas from Corrib to Sligo via Ballina. It was clear from a BGE study carried out in 2001 that any of the options then considered would require either an increase in gas transmission tariffs or an extremely high level of grant aid. As part of the evaluation process at that time officials of my Department held exploratory discussions with the EU Commission regarding various possible funding configurations in the context of State Aids and on the proviso that the project would be found to be economically feasible in the first instance. These discussions were not concluded pending a definitive proposal for the Commission to consider. Further consideration was put back pending the outcome of planning issues for the Corrib Terminal.

Consultants have recently been contracted to conduct a detailed feasibility study, including cost benefit analysis, to evaluate the possibility of bringing gas from the Galway-Mayo pipeline to Donegal Town via Sligo. This study will be completed in early 2007.

Electricity Generation.

435. **Ms F. O'Malley** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources his views on restoring responsibility for electricity supply security to Eirgrid and additionally charging them with responsibility for achieving the target of having 30% of electricity produced from renewable sources by 2020 following the separation of Eirgrid from ESB and taking

account of the provisions of the EU directives, which allow that an independent system operator may run competitions for additional generation capacity. [33979/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I am satisfied that the legislative measures currently in place are sufficient to enable the Commission for Energy Regulation and the Transmission System Operator to fulfil their complementary independent and statutory roles in ensuring the continuity and security of supply in the electricity generation sector.

My Department will keep the current legislative provisions under review in order to ensure that the Commission, as the independent Regulatory Authority, and EirGrid, as the independent Transmission System Operator, are positioned and empowered to encourage the development of an electricity generation portfolio which delivers on the ambitious targets for renewable energy set out in the Green Paper on Energy Policy.

Security of supply in relation to electricity is a statutory matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation in accordance with the provisions of Article 28 of the European Communities (Internal Market in Electricity) Regulations 2005 (S.I. No. 60 of 2005). These Regulations give further legal effect to Directive No. 2003/54/EC concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity. The Regulations provide, inter alia, for the strengthening of independent regulation and the enhancing of security of supply provisions.

Specifically, Article 28 provides that it shall be the duty of the Commission to monitor the security of supply of electricity and that the Commission shall take such measures as it considers necessary to protect security of supply. In particular, the Commission can host a competition to acquire the necessary generation or it can direct the Transmission System Operator, ESB or any licensed undertaking to put in place any arrangements that the Commission considers necessary to protect security of supply.

In the performance of its monitoring and corrective functions, the Commission is advised by the independent Transmission System Operator, whose functions relating to security of supply are also underpinned by the European Communities (Internal Market in Electricity) Regulations 2005. EirGrid plc formally assumed the role of independent electricity Transmission System Operator (TSO) in Ireland and the Market Operator in the wholesale electricity trading system from 1 July 2006.

EirGrid's statutory role is to deliver quality connection, transmission and market services to generators, suppliers and customers utilising the high voltage electricity system, and to put in place the grid infrastructure required to support the

[Mr. N. Dempsey.]

development of Ireland's economy. In fulfilling this role, EirGrid is required to develop, maintain and operate a safe, secure, reliable, economical and efficient transmission system.

Telecommunications Services.

436. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources when Kilcullen, County Kildare will be included in the metropolitan area network broadband programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34077/06]

437. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources when Castledermot, County Kildare will be included in the metropolitan area network broadband programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34078/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 436 and 437 together.

The provision of telecommunications services, including 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, ComReg. However, it has been clear for some time that the private sector has failed to invest at the level necessary to keep pace with the demand for broadband. Consequently my Department's regional broadband programme aims to address the infrastructure deficit by building high speed open access broadband networks, in association with the local and regional authorities, in the major towns and cities. These Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) will allow the private sector to offer world-class broadband services at competitive costs.

In planning Phase Two of the MANs programme, a review of the availability of DSL broadband in the regions showed over 90 towns with a population of 1,500 and above that were not being offered a broadband option by the private sector, and these towns have been targeted for the provision of MANs under Phase Two. As Castledermot's and Kilcullen's population in 2002 was under 1,500, they were not considered for a MAN.

My Department also offered funding assistance for smaller towns and rural communities with a population of less than 1,500 people through the Group Broadband Scheme. The scheme is technology-neutral, allowing the community to select the most suitable broadband delivery platform for the area. To date, over 160 projects have been approved for funding under this Programme.

Despite Government investment in broadband deployment in the regions through the regional broadband programme initiatives (MANs and Group Broadband Scheme), there are still some

parts of the country where the private sector will be unable to justify the commercial provision of broadband connectivity. Options to address the gaps in broadband coverage are currently being considered.

438. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources when the phone exchange in Oulart and Ballaghkeen, County Wexford will be upgraded to be capable of providing a broadband service in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34454/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The provision of telecommunications services, including broadband, is a matter in the first instance for the private sector companies operating in a fully liberalised market, regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), the independent regulator. Challenges with regard to the enabling of Eircom exchanges are entirely a matter for Eircom.

439. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources his views on offering grants towards the cost of satellite broadband services for people in areas unable to avail of low cost broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34455/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The provision of telecommunications services, including 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, ComReg.

However, it has been clear for some time that the private sector has failed to invest at the level necessary to keep pace with the demand for broadband. Consequently my Department's regional broadband programme (MANs and Group Broadband Scheme) aims to address the infrastructure deficit.

Despite Government investment in broadband deployment in the regions through the regional broadband programme, there are still some parts of the country where the private sector will be unable to justify the commercial provision of broadband connectivity. Options to address the gaps in broadband coverage are currently being considered. Any such options would be technology centred.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

440. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the

years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34546/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): No tribunals have been conducted under the aegis of my department during the period referred to by the Deputy.

Telecommunications Services.

441. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the measures being taken to ensure that broadband is available to all who seek it and that the bandwidth here compares favourably with Ireland's European counterparts, both in availability and price; if it is the intention of the Government to invest more in the infrastructure both in relation to bandwidth and availability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34639/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The provision of telecommunications services, including 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, ComReg.

However, it has been clear for some time that the private sector has failed to invest at the level necessary to keep pace with the demand for broadband. Consequently my Department's regional broadband programme aims to address the infrastructure deficit by building high speed open access broadband networks, in association with the local and regional authorities, in the major towns and cities. These Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) will allow the private sector to offer world-class broadband services at competitive costs.

Twenty-seven MANs have been completed under Phase One. In planning Phase Two of the MANs programme, a review of the availability of DSL broadband in the regions showed over 90 towns with a population of 1,500 and above that were not being offered a broadband option by the private sector, and these towns have been targeted for the provision of MANs in Phase Two.

My Department also offered funding assistance for smaller towns and rural communities with a population of less than 1,500 people through the Group Broadband Scheme. The scheme is technology-neutral, allowing the community to select the most suitable broadband delivery platform for the area. To date, over 160 projects have been approved for funding under this Programme.

Despite Government investment in broadband deployment in the regions through the regional broadband programme initiatives (MANs and Group Broadband Scheme), there are still some parts of the country where the private sector will

be unable to justify the commercial provision of broadband connectivity. Options to address the gaps in broadband coverage are currently being considered.

Competition has a positive impact on the choice, quality and price of broadband, and one of my key priorities is to facilitate competition amongst service providers through the provision of broadband infrastructure. Broadband prices have fallen since 2003 and Ireland now ranks amongst the most price competitive in Europe with the third cheapest entry level ADSL for broadband in the EU-15 according to ComReg figures as at end June 2006.

442. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the measures he is taking to regulate the many aspects of Internet industries, such as web hosting, in view of the increasing use of and dependence by private persons and businesses on the Internet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34640/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I have no function in this matter. Issues such as web hosting are a matter of private contract between the relevant parties.

International Agreements.

443. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if the implementation of economic partnership agreements currently being negotiated between the EU and regional groupings of the 77 ACP countries could be linked to specific development indicators being met as opposed to being timebound in view of the fact that EPAs are to be operable from 2008 and are required to be fully implemented within 12 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33922/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Mr. C. Lenihan): The Cotonou Agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States and the European Union (EU) provides for the negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the Parties. The EPAs are first and foremost instruments for development that are intended to foster the smooth and gradual integration of the ACP States into the world economy, thereby promoting sustainable development and contributing to poverty eradication.

I am aware of the questions raised about the impact of EPAs on developing countries. Ireland's position, as repeated at the recent General Affairs and External Relations Council of 16 and 17 October last, is that development concerns must be to the fore in these Agreements.

[Mr. C. Lenihan.]

The need for a set of development benchmarks to monitor the EPA process has been raised by our ACP partners as well as a number of EU Member States, including Ireland, but to date no agreement on a formal set of evaluation criteria has been reached.

The review of the EPA negotiations, mandated by article 37.4 of the Cotonou Agreement, is now underway. I welcome the valuable opportunity this review will provide for reflection on both the process and substance of the EPA negotiations, including the question of development benchmarks.

I urge all stakeholders in the EPA process to take full advantage of this review. A thorough and comprehensive evaluation is in the interests of all of us committed to a truly pro-development outcome to this process. I look forward to the results of the review, which are expected at the end of the year.

Human Rights Issues.

444. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if the document Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities Ireland, which was adopted recently, is in the public domain; if not, when this document will be available for public inspection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34290/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): I understand that the Deputy has in mind the Opinion on Ireland adopted by the Advisory Committee, established under the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, during its plenary session on 3-6 October. In line with our commitment to fulfilling our obligations under this multi-lateral instrument, Ireland has given its consent that the Opinion can be made public via the Council's website upon its receipt. The document is currently being finalised by the Committee's Secretariat before it is officially communicated to the relevant Irish authorities later this week.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities specifies the legal principles States must undertake to respect in order to ensure the protection of national minorities within their borders. The Opinion adopted by the Advisory Committee is based on information provided in Ireland's Second State Report under the Framework Convention, based on submissions from relevant Departments and the Garda Síochána, submitted last December. The report covered legislative and administrative measures in place to protect the rights of national minorities in Ireland. It highlighted issues such as education, employment, health care, access to goods and services, accommodation and combating racism. Members of the Advisory Committee subsequently visited Ireland in May, meeting with

relevant Departments, independent state agencies and non-governmental contacts.

International Agreements.

445. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the benefits that might reasonably be expected to accrue to a least developed country such as Tanzania, which is a priority Irish aid country, should that country agree to sign up to an economic partnership agreement with the EU, in view of the fact that LDCs already enjoy duty free and quota free access to EU markets; the way these benefits are to be balanced with the negative effects that will arise out of an EPA agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34300/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Mr. C. Lenihan): The Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are trade agreements currently being negotiated between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states to replace current trading arrangements under which ACP states enjoy unilateral trade preferences into the EU. These arrangements are due to expire at the end of 2007.

The mandate for the negotiation of EPAs comes from the legally binding Cotonou Agreement, the central objective of which is that of "reducing and eventually eradicating poverty, consistent with the objectives of sustainable development and the gradual integration of the ACP countries into the world economy". I am aware of the questions raised about the impact of EPAs on developing countries. Ireland's position, as repeated at the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) of 16 and 17 October last, is that development concerns must be to the fore in these Agreements.

Tanzania, like other Least Developed Countries (LDCs), currently enjoys duty-free, quota-free access to EU markets under the Union's Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative. However, while EBA offers preferential access to EU markets for all LDC exports, except arms, it does not advance the process of regional integration in ACP regions. The concept of regional integration is fundamental to the EPA process. On their own, the small, segmented markets of the ACP countries are poorly positioned to take advantage of the global trading system.

For EPA negotiating purposes, ACP states are organised into six regional groupings. Tanzania currently negotiates as part of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) grouping. EPAs are intended primarily to foster trade between, as well as within, these groupings. Stronger regional integration, which will facilitate an increase in production and competitiveness, is the critical first step toward greater participation in international trade.

The Cotonou Agreement envisages that EPAs will come into force in 2008. Until that time, it is open to Tanzania, or any LDC within the ACP, to decide whether they wish to enter an EPA or not. Should they decide not to, they will continue to benefit from preferences under EBA. Ultimately the matter of whether a country chooses to enter into an EPA is a sovereign decision for each country.

I recognise that, for a country such as Tanzania to take full advantage of the trading opportunities afforded by EPAs, greater and more effective trade-related assistance will be required. In this regard, EU Ministers for Development meeting at the General Affairs and External Relations Council referred to earlier, pledged to ensure that a substantial share of Community and Member States' trade-related assistance, which will rise to €2billion by 2010, would be devoted to ACP countries and that Member States' contributions would be additional to EDF resources. Ireland is committed to increasing our funding substantially for Aid for Trade initiatives in the coming years.

Manchester Martyrs.

446. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he has had discussions with the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair or officials of that Government regarding the return of the remains of the Manchester Martyrs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34611/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): I understand that there is a group in Manchester campaigning for the repatriation of the men's remains. However, it has not sought the assistance of my Department in this matter. The issue has not been the subject of discussions with the British Government.

Passport Applications.

447. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will advise all travel agents to make prominent the regulation in relation to passports for children over 16 years of age; if notices will be displayed at all airports and sea-ports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33941/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): There are no special passport regulations for children over 16 years of age. The position in relation to passport facilities for all minors under the age of 18 years is as follows.

Since 1 October 2004, all minors (i.e. under 18 years) must possess their own passport and may no longer be included on their parents' passports. However, minors already included on a parent's existing valid passport may still travel on that passport to most countries up to their 16th birthday. However, I would emphasise that in the case

of the United States all persons, including minors, require their own individual passport (i.e. a printed passport or, for passports issued after 26th October, a biometric passport), to enter that country under the Visa Waiver Programme. Holders of handwritten passports require a visa to enter the U.S.A.

The requirement for all persons referred to above, irrespective of age, to have their own passport has brought us into line with emerging international best practice, and was made on foot of a recommendation from the International Civil Aviation Organisation which sets international standards for travel documents. It was designed in particular to improve the security of international travel for children. Details of the changes were communicated at the time to An Post, which operates the Passport Express service, to the UK Post Office Ltd., which operates an Express Passport Service in Northern Ireland, and to Garda Stations, from which passport application forms are available. The information is also clearly set out in the notes provided with each application form under the heading "Passports for minors".

The Passport Office places advertisements on a regular basis in the daily newspapers and other selected publications when material changes affecting the passport issuing process are made. These have included changes affecting minors. The information is also on the Passport Office's website at www.passport.ie.

Officials from my Department will be attending the Irish Travel Agents Association Annual Conference/Trade Show in Dublin on 11 November 2006, and I will ask them to convey again to the ITAA the current regulations in respect of all minors under the age of 18 years.

Foreign Conflicts.

448. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the situation regarding the Darfur region of Sudan and the need to protect men, women and children from attack and abuse. [33968/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): The Government continues to be gravely concerned by the crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan and is using all avenues to work for a resolution of the major humanitarian and political challenges that exist there. We have taken action at the UN, within the EU and bilaterally to try to persuade the Government of Sudan to accept a UN force in Darfur. Through Irish Aid, the Government is also providing extensive humanitarian assistance to those most in need.

Since I visited Khartoum and Darfur last July, the security situation has further deteriorated. As the UN Secretary General warned in his report of 5 October, Darfur is at a critical stage, with insecurity at its highest levels and humanitarian access at its lowest levels since 2004. Two rebel

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factions who refused to sign the May 2006 Darfur Peace Accord (DPA) are continuing hostilities. Furthermore, those parties who did sign this Agreement, including the Sudanese Government, have been guilty of widespread and significant ceasefire violations. I am particularly concerned at a renewed offensive by the Sudanese Army in Northern Darfur, which is causing further suffering and displacement. Due to the escalating violence, humanitarian organisations are being prevented from reaching war and drought-affected people. An estimated 224,000 people are currently cut off from food aid.

On 26 September, I raised Ireland's concerns about Darfur in a bilateral meeting in New York with the Sudanese Foreign Minister and in my address to the UN General Assembly. I used these occasions to underline that humanitarian aid must be delivered safely and without restrictions; that there must be a transition to a substantial UN peace-keeping force with a robust mandate in Darfur; and that long-term security in Darfur can only be guaranteed by the full implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, (DPA).

On 17 October, EU Foreign Ministers expressed continuing deep concern at the appalling security, humanitarian and human rights situation in Darfur and called for an immediate end to the ongoing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, with a special focus on vulnerable groups, including women and children. The Council urged all parties in the strongest terms to halt the violence, to protect civilians and to ensure the full, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance. We reminded the Sudanese Government of its collective and individual responsibility for protecting its citizens from violence and guaranteeing respect for human rights. We called on the non-signatories to commit to the DPA. The Council also confirmed the extension of the EU's support to AMIS, the African Union's ceasefire observation mission in Darfur, until 31 December 2006. On 20 October the Taoiseach discussed Darfur with other EU Heads of State or Government at the Informal European Council in Lahti, Finland.

The vulnerable people of Darfur require a rapid transition to a UN force with a strong mandate for the protection of civilians and provision of security for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. However, until that can take place, AMIS must be strengthened as far as possible, and therefore the EU has given it extensive political, technical and financial support. Ireland has provided €3 million, including €1.5 million pledged in July to ensure that the mission can fulfil its mandate through to the end of this year. Four personnel from the Permanent Defence Forces have also served with AMIS. Since 2004, Ireland has also provided over €16 million in humanitarian assistance to Darfur, including over €6 mil-

lion during 2006. Overall, Ireland has provided over €32 million to Sudan since 2004.

The EU, the US, the Arab League and senior African statesmen are continuing efforts to persuade Sudan to accept a UN force in Darfur. However, we should be prepared to take further steps if the Sudanese position does not change. Ireland and the EU already enforce a comprehensive arms embargo on Sudan, which has been in place since 1994. We also implement a travel ban and assets freeze on a Sudanese airforce commander, a Janjaweed leader and two rebels who have been designated by the UN Security Council as impeding the Darfur peace process.

Departmental Staff.

449. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of persons currently employed in his Department whose status has changed to that of disabled since the commencement to their employment with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34009/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern):

The target for the employment of people with disabilities in the Civil Service is 3%. Policy in relation to this target is the responsibility of the Department of Finance.

The term "people with disabilities" is set out in the 1994 Code of Practice for the Employment of People with a Disability in the Civil Service as meaning people with a physical, sensory or psychological impairment which may "have a tangible impact on their functional capability to do a particular job; or have an impact on their ability to function in a particular physical environment; or lead to a discrimination in obtaining or keeping employment of a kind for which they would otherwise be suited." As the Deputy will understand and appreciate, the compilation of statistics in this very sensitive area is dependent, to a large extent, on voluntary self-disclosure of a disability by staff. I am conscious that some officials, who would be considered as "disabled" under the above definition, might not welcome being categorised as a disabled person.

As a result, data held by the Department in relation to staff with a disability is not maintained in the format requested by the Deputy. I can, however, confirm to the Deputy that I am satisfied that the percentage of staff with a disability in the Department of Foreign Affairs, at 3.45%, is in excess of the overall target for the Civil Service.

My Department is also a participant in the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) project, which is administered by AHEAD — the Association of Higher Education Access and Disability — and supported by the Department of Finance. It aims to provide work experience of between three and six months for graduates with disabilities. There is currently one WAM work placement in oper-

ation. Finally, my Department also provides support to staff with disabilities through the work of the Department's Disability Liaison and Employee Assistance Officers.

European Council Meetings.

450. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will report on the September 2006 meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Finland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34529/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): From the 1st-2nd September I attended an informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers which took place in Lappeenranta, Finland. Such informal or 'Gymnich' meetings are held once every Presidency. The meeting was also attended by Ms Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU Commissioner for External Relations and Mr. Javier Solana, Secretary General and High Representative for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Ministers discussed the situation with regard to the Middle East Peace Process, following the conflict in Lebanon. There was consensus on the need for the EU to build on the positive role which it is playing in Lebanon, by looking at ways to revive the broader peace process in the region. Ministers also had an exchange of views on Iran, and heard an update from High Representative Solana on the progress of his discussions with the Iranian negotiator, Ali Larijani, aimed at finding a diplomatic solution to the impasse in the Iran nuclear issue. Finally, Ministers held a general strategic discussion on Russia, focusing in particular on Russian foreign policy and its implications for future EU-Russia relations, as well as issues surrounding the negotiation of a new legal framework to govern EU-Russia relations.

As the meeting was informal, there were no conclusions adopted in respect of the items discussed, with agreement that all of these issues should be followed up at formal sessions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of which there have been two in the intervening period.

Overseas Aid Policy.

451. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the way Irish aid policy takes into account issues surrounding climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34530/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Mr. C. Lenihan): As I have previously stated, I believe that climate change is probably the biggest environmental challenge facing humanity in the coming years. The evidence we see coming out, practically on a daily basis, based on global scientific observations, suggests that climate change is an immediate reality.

The White Paper on Irish Aid, which was launched on 18 September, and which Deputies will have the opportunity to discuss in the Dail shortly, addresses the issue of climate change in the context of the links between the environment and development.

The White Paper on Irish Aid refers specifically to the serious threats to development posed by climate change. The increased severity and frequency of droughts, floods and cyclones threatens to undermine our efforts to improve food security, reduce disease and safeguard livelihoods. Our strategy will be to assist developing countries to prepare for and adapt to changes in climate, and to promote knowledge about the impact of climate change and its integration into all development planning.

This approach fits in with our commitment to the EU Action Plan on 'Climate Change in the Context of Development Cooperation'. The Plan sets out activities to raise the policy profile of climate change, adapt to climate change, promote low carbon development and build capacity to plan for climate change in developing countries.

Ireland, as a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), has obligations to help developing countries adapt to the inevitable changes in environmental conditions brought about by climate change. Specific examples of support approved this year include:

- €450,000 for the United Nations Climate Change Capacity Development Project. The training includes:
 - Negotiations training for African delegates attending the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
 - Delivery of Africa specific training modules ranging from vulnerability assessment to the Clean Development Mechanism
 - Training for the Southern Africa Development Community policy makers to provide information and tools to plan for climate change and greenhouse gas emissions
- €225,000 for a consortium of international partners supporting the Climate and Development in Africa programme to conduct research which will inform improved decision making around climate change
- €90,000 for the Least Developed Countries Expert Group to provide technical guidance and advice to Least Developed Countries on adaptation strategies and plans to address climate change.

Foreign Conflicts.

452. **Mr. M. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will report on the current position in Thailand; the prospects which exist for a safe and secure transition in that country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34531/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): The situation in Thailand remains calm, apart from unrest in the south of the country which predates the military coup which took place on 19 September. A new interim Government was appointed on 9 October. The interim Prime Minister, General Surayud Chulanont, announced last week that a ban on political gatherings of more than five people, introduced since the coup, will be lifted. He said that martial law, which remains in place, will be lifted when the situation allows.

Ireland, together with EU partners, issued a statement immediately after the coup which condemned the take-over of power from the democratic government of Thailand by the Thai military forces and expressed the hope that Thailand will soon be able to return to democratic order.

A follow-up EU Statement issued on 28 September reiterated the great importance that the EU attaches to Thailand's speedy return to democracy and constitutional order, legitimised by free and democratic elections to be held as soon as possible. The statement called for martial law to give way, without delay, to the rule of ordinary law with full respect for human rights and civil liberties. Noting the military leadership's assurances that Thailand would continue to abide by the United Nations Charter and international treaties and agreements, the EU stated that the decisions and actions of the new military-appointed government would be evaluated by the EU in the light of Thailand's international obligations, inter alia in the area of human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, as well as the military leadership's specific assurance in this respect. It emphasised that it is for the people of Thailand as a whole to decide upon Thailand's future government.

I had been aware of the political difficulties in Thailand and, indeed, had an opportunity to discuss the situation there with the then Foreign Minister of Thailand, when he visited Ireland earlier in September. The staging of a coup was obviously unexpected at that point. I recognise that a difficult political situation had prevailed in the country for some time; that the coup was carried out without bloodshed; that the coup leaders agreed to abide by the United Nations Charter and international law; that they received the endorsement by King Bhumipol Adulyadej to create an interim Government; that some powers, at least, are being transferred to the newly-appointed interim Prime Minister and Cabinet; that a commitment has been given to holding

elections within a year, and to the restoration of full democratic government thereafter.

The Government, as a fundamental principle, cannot accept military coups as a legitimate way to resolve political difficulties in Thailand or elsewhere. While reassured in some respects by the commitments made by the coup leaders, I remain concerned about a number of issues. My concerns relate, in particular, to the protection of human rights and civil liberties, including freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, during the interim period; to the year-long delay envisaged before elections are held and democratic government restored; to the degree of control still retained by the coup leaders under the new interim Constitution; and the extent to which the people of Thailand and representative groups will be able to input into the drafting of the new Constitution. Along with EU partners, Ireland will continue to monitor the situation carefully and use all diplomatic and other channels to seek to ensure compliance with the commitments entered into by the military leaders and the new interim Government to bring about the earliest possible return to fully democratic political processes and Government, controlled by the people of Thailand as a whole.

We will continue to closely monitor the human rights situation, with a particular emphasis on the rule of law. I would welcome the lifting of martial law as quickly as possible and also a shortening of the proposed timeline of October 2007 for holding free and fair elections. Also the interim civilian government should be independent from military interference. It is of the utmost importance that there is a swift return to democracy.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

453. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34553/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): The Deputy asks for details of legal costs relating to tribunals operating under the aegis of my Department since 1997. The Department of Foreign Affairs has not established any tribunals in that period. However, on 28 May 2002 the Irish and British Governments appointed Justice Cory to conduct an investigation of allegations of collusion in a number of cases, arising from a commitment made at the Weston Park talks in 2001. The cost of the Inquiry was shared between the two Governments.

I advised the Deputy on 11 October 2006 that the total cost of the investigation to the State was €341,168.90. It has since come to my attention that a further payment of €1,639.53 came under this category. This brings the total cost to the exchequer to €342,808.43. It is estimated that of

this amount the total spent on legal fees was €226,069.59, of which €187,200.19 was paid in 2003 and €38,869.40 in 2004.

Sports Capital Programme.

454. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will assist a group (details supplied) with advice on funding and a refurbishment grant. [33921/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The 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.

The 2007 round of the sports capital programme was advertised on Sunday 15th and Monday 16th last with a closing date for receipt of applications of 24th November next. The organisation in question is free to submit an application if they have a project that meets the programme criteria. In this regard, I should point out to the Deputy that only sporting applications will be considered for funding under the programme.

455. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if assistance will be given to a club (details supplied) in Dublin 1 regarding advice on funding for a new premises at their location; and if he will work with other Departments on this matter. [34257/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The 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.

The 2007 round of the sports capital programme was advertised on Sunday 15th and Monday 16th October last with a closing date for receipt of applications of 24th November next. Officials in the Sports Capital Unit of my Department will give advice to prospective applicants on any aspect of the programme. However, I must point out to the Deputy that only sporting applications will be considered for funding under the sports capital programme and that the programme does not provide funding for the purchase of sites or premises.

National Development Plan.

456. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount spent to date under the culture, recreation and sport measure of the national development plan; the amount estimated to be spent by the end of the NDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34272/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): Under the Arts and Culture Facilities Sub-measure, funding is provided for commissioning new infrastructure or enhancements of existing infrastructure for the arts and in particular integrated arts centres, theatres, museums and galleries as well as arts studios and other arts production, creative and performance spaces. The spend to end 2005 under this sub measure is just over €18m. The anticipated spend to the end of the NDP is over €35m.

Under the Sports and Recreational Sub-measure, funding was to be provided to local authorities and where appropriate to voluntary and community organisations, towards the provision or upgrading of sport and recreational facilities, to meet the needs of the Regional Gateways, identified in the National Spatial Strategy. There has been no expenditure to date under the Sports and Recreational Sub-measure.

However, considerable investment in sporting infrastructure has taken place through the Sports Capital Programme operated by my Department. Since 2000, almost €437m has been allocated to 5059 sports facilities throughout the country. Under the Sports Capital Programme, significant funding will continue to be allocated to the provision of facilities at local level by sports clubs and community groups, to the development of a range of municipal multi-sports centres and to a number of national facilities.

Furthermore, the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme has provided some €60m to nineteen completed swimming pool projects, and a further sixteen projects are under construction.

It is envisaged that further expenditure in respect of the Sports Capital Programme and the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme will take place this year, details of which are set out in my Department's Estimates.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

457. **Mr. J. O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34545/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): Since the establishment of my Department in June 2002 no money has been spent on tribunal legal fees.

Sports Capital Programme.

458. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the reason the closing date for the sports capital funding under the national lottery is the end of November, when it has been

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February for the past number of years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34567/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The 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.

The 2007 round of the sports capital programme was advertised on Sunday 15th and Monday 16th October last with a closing date for receipt of applications of 24th November next. The reason for an earlier advertising of the Programme and an earlier closing date for the receipt of applications is that the new timeframe should result in a consequent earlier announcement of provisional grant allocations under the programme. In recent years the allocations under the Programme have tended to be made around the middle of the year and in many cases, the mid-year grant announcement has delayed the progress of projects, with the timing of the commencement of work often is often crucial, e.g. in relation to pitch development.

I believe an earlier closing date and an earlier announcement of provisional grant allocations will result in more organisations being able to develop their projects in the same year as they are announced and will lead to a more efficient programme in terms of the delivery of facilities and the drawdown of funding.

Repatriation of Archives.

459. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if there has been an investigation or analysis of the prospect of seeking the return to Ireland of archived documents held in the UK, which are of historical significance to the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34638/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): As I indicated then the National Archives of Ireland is engaged in a number of major digital publication projects. While these projects are now more advanced, they are not yet complete. When these are nearing completion, the National Archives has undertaken to investigate the possibility of a co-operative digital publication, involving those records held in the British National Archives. As I was able to facilitate the 1901 and 1911 Census Digitisation Project, I will certainly endeavour to facilitate any such co-operative programme of Kew records proposed by the National Archives of Ireland.

Decentralisation Programme.

460. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will con-

firm reports that Enterprise Ireland has taken out a long-term lease on an office block in East Point; the number of staff this office will cater for; the percentage of the Dublin-based staff of Enterprise Ireland this constitutes; if the Office of Public Works is continuing to progress plans to locate Enterprise Ireland staff to Shannon at the same time; if an office block in Shannon has been located or procured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33893/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government has decided that the Headquarters of Enterprise Ireland (EI), including 300 posts, will relocate to Shannon as part of the Decentralisation programme.

In addition, the Board of Enterprise Ireland has decided, based on sound business reasons, to bring all Dublin based staff, currently based in 4 separate locations, together into one Dublin location.

I understand that, in order to facilitate moving to a single Dublin office, Enterprise Ireland has taken a normal commercial 25-year lease on two office units in East Point. The lease has break clauses to enable the agency to effectively manage changes in accommodation levels. This new location will cater for 100% of EI Dublin based staff (approximately 600 people).

Enterprise Ireland, working closely with the Office of Public Works (OPW), has identified, but not yet acquired, a preferred site (to construct a new HQ building for EI) from the submissions received by the OPW in relation to the Shannon location. The preferred site is a 13-acre site owned by Shannon Development. In co-operation with Shannon Development and OPW, the site was valued and a feasibility study carried out. The site occupies a prime position near the centre of Shannon and is considered suitable for a major landmark building or civic structure.

It is not possible, at this stage, to say with certainty when the full move of EI's HQ will take place. Influencing factors regarding the timing of the move to Shannon include the level of interest in the Shannon location expressed by CAF applicants and suitable transfer arrangements being established. However, EI has recently announced that it intends to move its Regional Development Headquarters to Shannon as well as establishing a new unit in Shannon to work with the City and County Enterprise Boards. It is intended that this will be complete by mid 2007.

From January 2007, I have directed that Enterprise Ireland will be responsible for the development of indigenous industry in the Mid West Region. This will involve the transfer of a number of Shannon Development staff to Enterprise Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland will establish interim office accommodation in the region, to accommodate

both the Shannon Development staff and EI HQ staff, by mid 2007.

National Development Plan.

461. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the amount spent to date under the employment and human resources programme under the national development plan; the breakdown in terms of the amount spent in each region; the amount estimated to be spent by the end of the NDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34278/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The overall expenditure up to the 31st December 2005 under the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EHRD-OP) was €11,995,982,000. Of this amount, €3,496,347,000 was spent in the BMW Region and €8,499,640,000 in the S&E Region. The European Social Fund (ESF) expenditure in the Programme reached €718,531,000 by the end of 2005, with €276,127,000 spent in the BMW Region and €442,040,000 in the S&E Region.

The total amount estimated to be spent under the EHRD Operational Programme as a whole is €14,619,048,000 and of this, €4,414,600,000 will be spent in the BMW Region and €10,204,447,000 in the S&E Region. The total amount of ESF funding, estimated to be spent by the end of the Programme, currently is €817,376,000 with €321,185,000 in the BMW Region and €496,191,000 in the S&E Region.

The original financial projections for the EHRD-OP in the year 2000 forecast total expenditure of €14,198,041,000. The total spend for the Programme is now estimated to reach €14,619,048,000, an increase of €421 million over the original allocation, reflecting greater investment in human resource development through, in particular, education and training and social inclusion measures.

Job Losses.

462. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the steps he has taken to stop the displacement of jobs within an organisation (details supplied) in County Cork. [33889/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): By letter dated 3rd July 2006, Chorus Communication Ltd., notified me, in accordance with Section 12 of the Protection of Employment Act 1977, of up to 137 proposed collective redundancies from its workforce of 472. The grounds for collective redundancy cited were internal reorganisation and restructuring. The letter stated that the company had written to SIPTU inviting

them to discussions on the redundancies, as required by the 1977 Act, and on the wider issues arising for the union's members involved in the reorganisation.

Irish industrial relations law is designed to help support the parties to a trade dispute to resolve their differences rather than seeking to impose a solution on the parties. The State facilitates the bargaining process by providing a framework and institutions through which good industrial relations can prosper. Institutions such as the Labour Relations Commission, including its Rights Commissioner Service, and the Labour Court have been established to assist in the resolution of disputes between employers and workers.

Minister Martin met with company management and with representatives of the workers and SIPTU in September to discuss these matters and he was informed that direct contact between the company and SIPTU had resumed and that progress has been made in resolving outstanding issues surrounding the proposed redundancies.

More recently, in their attempts to resolve outstanding issues, I understand that the company and the trade union have attended a conciliation conference at the Labour Relations Commission. A further meeting is expected to take place shortly.

Company Closures.

463. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if his attention has been drawn to the dispute between the former Greencore workers and Greencore regarding pension claims and entitlements; the action or intervention that he has taken of intends to take in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33898/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The current dispute between former Greencore workers and Greencore relates to redundancy terms rather than pension issues.

On 26 April 2006, the Labour Court made a recommendation regarding redundancy terms for Irish Sugar workers at the Mallow plant. The recommendation provided that redundancy should be 5 weeks' pay per year of service, where a week's pay would be defined as actual finishing salary, excluding overtime, plus statutory redundancy entitlement, plus a bonus payment for an orderly wind-down. However, I understand that the company and the trade unions could not agree on the method of calculating finishing salary. The Court issued two clarifications, but these failed to resolve the dispute.

The National Implementation Body has worked with the parties concerned on an agreed procedure to resolve the issue in dispute.

The Labour Court has invited the parties to return to the Court with a view to resolving the

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dispute. However, the company rejected the Court's invitation. I very much regret the decision taken by the company in this regard.

I understand that the Labour Court has written to Greencore further clarifying its recommendation.

While responsibility for the settlement of a dispute rests, ultimately, with the parties themselves, I would urge the company to reconsider its decision not to attend the Labour Court for talks. The Court remains available to advance a resolution to the dispute. The experience and expertise of the Labour Court, in my view, offer the best avenue for resolving the issue under dispute.

Industrial Development Property.

464. **Mr. Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the position with regard to an IDA factory (details supplied) in County Kildare which is currently unoccupied; the prospects for a suitable occupant for the building being found; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34087/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The management of IDA Ireland's industrial property portfolio is day-to-day operational matter for the agency and not a matter in which I have a function.

In view of the Deputy's interest, I have made enquiries and I have been informed by IDA Ireland that it does not have an advance factory facility in Blacksparks Industrial Estate, Athy. However, IDA did construct a building at Woodstock Industrial Estate, Athy, County Kildare in 2000. I understand that this building is occupied by an Enterprise Ireland client company since 2004.

465. **Mr. Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the plans the IDA has for its lands at Kildare Town, Monasterevin and Castledermot; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34088/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The management of IDA Ireland's industrial property portfolio is day-to-day operational matter for the agency and not a matter in which I have a function.

In view of the Deputy's interest I have made enquiries in the matter. I have been informed by IDA Ireland that the lands in question, which are located in Kildare Town, Monasterevin and Castledermot, are being marketed on an ongoing basis to potential investors, both overseas and indigenous, as a location for new investment.

County Enterprise Boards.

466. **Mr. Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment his views on

the operation of county enterprise boards; the success of these boards to date in generating sustainable employment; if some boards have been noticeably more or less successful than others; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34089/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The 35 County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs) were established nationally in 1993 to provide support for 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 the development of micro-enterprises through the provision of both financial and non-financial assistance. Financial assistance is provided in the form of Capital Grants, Feasibility Study Grants and Employment Grants. Non-financial assistance, or soft supports, are provided in the form of business advice and information, management development training, mentoring facilities, E-business training, enterprise education and the promotion of female entrepreneurship. As a result of these activities there is both direct job creation through the provision of financial assistance and indirect job creation through the range of soft supports offered by the CEBs. While these soft supports may not directly generate jobs in an enterprise they can contribute positively to the wider policy objective of building an enterprise culture which, in time, may result in job creation without direct financial assistance from the State.

Over 30,000 net jobs were created in CEB assisted enterprises from 1993 to end 2005 of which nearly 2,000 net new jobs were created in 2005 itself. Given the remit of the CEBs there will be, of course, across the 35 Boards differences in their focus and their interventions but I am confident that the CEBs have been successful at both local and national level.

A fundamental review of the role and functions of the CEBs in the development of micro-enterprises was conducted during 2003/2004 by Fitzpatrick's and Associates, Economic Consultants. This review largely endorsed the activities and operations of the CEBs but recommended that, in going forward, CEBs should focus more on economic, rather than social or local development, objectives; that there should be a renewed focus on the core enterprise mission; that the issues of potential deadweight, displacement and duplication should be more systematically and rigorously addressed and that there should be a move away from direct grant aid to repayable finance as well as a greater provision of soft supports as an alternative to grant aid.

The recent Report of the Small Business Forum, which I set up to examine in broad terms the current environment for conducting small business in Ireland, has since endorsed the key

recommendations of the Fitzpatrick Report in relation to the future focus of CEB assistance.

My Department is working with the CEBs in relation to the implementation of the Fitzpatrick recommendations in an appropriate manner in order to determine how best the CEBs can refocus their supports and operations in line with those recommendations.

Decentralisation Programme.

467. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when he anticipates that the decentralisation of Enterprise Ireland to Shannon will take place; when he will publish the ministerial designation allowing the transfer of Shannon Development employees to Enterprise Ireland; the number of Shannon Development staff to be transferred; and if employees do not want to transfer away from Shannon Development to Enterprise Ireland they will be free to remain at Shannon Development. [34097/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): Enterprise Ireland (EI) working closely with the Office of Public Works (OPW) has identified, but not yet acquired, a preferred site for the construction of a new HQ building in Shannon. The preferred site is a 13-acre site owned by Shannon Development. In co-operation with Shannon Development and the OPW, the site was valued and a feasibility study carried out. The site occupies a prime position in Shannon and is considered suitable for a major landmark building or civic structure.

It is not possible, at this stage, to say with certainty when the full move of EI's HQ will take place. Influencing factors regarding the timing of the move to Shannon include the level of interest in the Shannon location expressed by CAF applicants and suitable transfer arrangements being established.

EI has recently announced that it intends to move its Regional Development Headquarters to Shannon as well as establishing a new unit in Shannon to work with the City and County Enterprise Boards. It is intended that these will be operational in Shannon by mid 2007.

The functions hitherto carried out by Shannon Development under delegated authority from Enterprise Ireland will revert to Enterprise Ireland on 1 January 2007. The transfer of functions will also involve the transfer of a number of staff from Shannon Development to Enterprise Ireland. The necessary arrangements to give effect to these changes are in train, including identification of the relevant posts and discussions with staff and their representatives. The transfer of staff will be effected by way of ministerial designation of the staff concerned and legislative measures, based on numerous precedents for transferring staff between public bodies, will be put in place to provide appropriate guarantees

regarding the terms and conditions of the staff who will transfer from Shannon Development.

Enterprise Ireland will establish interim office accommodation in the region, to accommodate both the Shannon Development staff and EI HQ staff, by mid 2007.

Redundancy Rebates.

468. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the restrictions on an employer who has implemented collective redundancy and received a two thirds rebate on the cost of redundancy, with regard to the employment of new staff to do the same or similar work; the monitoring or enforcement carried out to ensure that the legislation is complied with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34293/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): It is the policy of Government to pay a rebate only in situations where the strict criteria stipulating genuine grounds for redundancy under Section 7 of the Redundancy Payments Act, 1967, as amended by Section 4 of the Redundancy Payments Act, 1971 and Section 5 of the Redundancy Payments Act, 2003, are applicable.

Statutory Redundancy Rebates are paid to employers who qualify under the provisions of the Redundancy Payments Acts 1967 to 2003 out of the Social Insurance Fund. Employers pay contributions to the SIF in respect of redundancy through the PRSI system.

If an employer has had statutory redundancies and his business picks up (i.e. if he gets in a new order) at a later date, he is entitled to employ people as his requirements demand. He may re-employ those that he previously made redundant (it would be a new employment for them) or he can employ others to carry out the work. There is no specific time span that must elapse before he employs more people. The demands of the employment dictate when he can take on more staff.

As a result of the recent Social Partnership Agreement 'Towards 2016', a proposal has emerged which is designed to address exceptional cases of compulsory collective redundancy.

Under this proposal, a new body to be known as the Redundancy Panel will be established through an amendment to the Protection of Employment Act 1977. The only function of this Redundancy Panel, having been requested either by employee representatives or the employer and having invited submissions from both parties, would be to request the Minister to ask the Labour Court to issue an opinion as to whether or not the proposed dismissals involve a collective redundancy proposal, on a compulsory basis with the planned replacement of staff by direct employees employed by the employer effecting the compulsory collective redundancy, or the use

[Mr. Killeen.]

of replacement workers by the employer. The establishment of the new body will be provided for in new legislation due to be published in the coming months.

Industrial Relations.

469. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the regularity of the divisional appeals body which chairs unfair dismissals hearings, having given appropriate notice, holding such hearings in Mullingar; when the next such hearing will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34393/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The Employment Appeals Tribunal is an independent body under the aegis of the Department. Hearings of the Employment Appeals Tribunal are scheduled to take place every day, in Dublin and at various other venues.

The Tribunal sat in Mullingar on eight separate occasions during 2005, and to date in 2006 hearings have taken place there on five separate occasions. There are twenty-six cases awaiting hearing in County Westmeath. Of these cases, the longest waiting period is 46 weeks and the shortest is 4 weeks.

Hearings are scheduled six weeks in advance and at present there are no scheduled hearings fixed for Mullingar.

Under the Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement Towards 2016, the Government is committed to increasing the staffing resources of the Employment Appeals Tribunal in order to accelerate the processing of cases. I expect these extra resources to be in place early in 2007.

Competitiveness and Innovation Programme.

470. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the work that has been undertaken to date by his Department in response to the European Commission's Young Innovative Companies suggestions of May 2006; the intentions he has for introducing such a company status here; if his Department has had discussions with the Department of Finance or other Departments on this matter; if his Department has discussed this issue with the European Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34456/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): While I am not aware of the programme or proposals for a new type of company under the general title mentioned by the Deputy, I assume he has in mind the range of initiatives proposed under the Commission's Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme 2007-2013 which includes a module

for early stage financing for SMEs. The programme overall will operate under the auspices of the European Commission and will take effect from 2007. I understand that funding for Innovative Companies such as High Potential Start-Ups (already eligible for funding under Enterprise Ireland programmes) will be made available through financial intermediaries such as banks which may compete for funding schemes operated on behalf of the Commission by the European Investment Fund (EIF). The EIF operates under the aegis of the European Investment Bank.

Community Employment Schemes.

471. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will review the criteria and guidelines laid down by his Department and urgently review the mainstreaming of the community employment schemes, providing direct services to persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34457/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): Community Employment (CE) is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long term unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary basis. CE helps unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to a work routine and to assist them to develop both their technical and personal skills.

To this end and in order to support the delivery of essential services, the ring fencing and prioritisation of places for health related services, childcare and Drugs Task Force clients was introduced in 2002/2003. As a result of this ring fencing of places, service provision levels within these sectors was, and continues to be, maintained at a constant level. The total number of places spread across the 3 ring-fenced sectors is approximately 6,000, which represents 27% of current places. There are currently no plans to mainstream these Community Employment places.

Employment Appeals Tribunal.

472. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34550/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The Employment Appeals Tribunal is an independent body under the aegis of the

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment that was established to provide a speedy, inexpensive and relatively informal means for the adjudication of disputes on employment rights under the body of legislation that comes within the scope of the Tribunal.

Tribunal members are paid on a per-diem basis. No legal fees are paid with regard to the operation of the Employment Appeals Tribunal.

Job Creation.

473. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County Wexford in the years 1997 to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34571/06]

479. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County Carlow in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34647/06]

481. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County Kilkenny in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34649/06]

483. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County Tipperary in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34651/06]

485. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County Waterford in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34653/06]

487. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County Laois in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34655/06]

489. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County Offaly in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34657/06]

491. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County

Wicklow in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34659/06]

493. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County Mayo in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34661/06]

495. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County Donegal in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34663/06]

497. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by IDA Ireland in County Kerry in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34665/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 473, 479, 481, 483, 485, 487, 489, 491, 493, 495 and 497 together.

IDA Ireland is the agency with statutory responsibility for the attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI) to Ireland and its regions. The Forfás Annual Employment Survey records jobs gained and lost in companies supported by the Industrial Development Agencies. Data is compiled on an annualised basis and 2005 is the latest year for which such figures are available. The information sought by the Deputy is respect of each of the years 1997 to 2005 is set out in the following tabular statement.

For a number of years now IDA Ireland has been very successful in marketing Ireland to overseas investors and Ireland continues to win a disproportionately high share of mobile global investments. The level of FDI in Ireland, relative to the size of the economy, is one of the highest in the world. Today, over 1,000 overseas companies have substantial international operations in Ireland. At the end of 2005 there were over 132,000 people employed in IDA assisted companies. During the period from 1997 to 2005 a total of 19,134 jobs were created in these IDA assisted companies in the counties in question. These include many of the leading companies in information technology and communications, life sciences, international services, engineering and financial services.

The challenge for IDA Ireland is to sustain, embed and grow this investment. In responding to this challenge, IDA Ireland is focusing on the development of its employment base into high technology, high value added and high skill functions, including not only high-end manufacturing,

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but also areas such as high-end services and R&D.

Number of new jobs created in IDA supported companies in selected counties in each of the years 1997 to 2005.

County	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Carlow	38	72	10	3	2	4	7	0	1	137
Donegal	80	54	67	308	353	179	141	136	252	1,570
Kerry	140	168	354	550	379	151	84	100	104	2,030
Kilkenny	40	58	6	36	82	105	2	66	95	490
Laois	32	7	23	41	13	30	2	18	12	178
Mayo	131	492	159	678	357	97	109	145	88	2,256
Offaly	161	90	409	100	129	120	19	71	56	1,155
Tipperary	148	226	640	511	481	174	159	146	94	2,579
Waterford	593	702	189	322	500	575	554	248	309	3,992
Wexford	139	123	82	152	78	173	134	333	69	1,283
Wicklow	175	286	590	377	365	351	758	217	345	3,464
Totals	1,677	2,278	2,529	3,078	2,739	1,959	1,969	1,480	1,425	19,134

474. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Wexford in the years 1997 to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34572/06]

480. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Carlow in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34648/06]

482. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Kilkenny in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34650/06]

484. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Tipperary in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34652/06]

486. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Waterford in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34654/06]

488. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Laois in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to

date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34656/06]

490. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Offaly in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34658/06]

492. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Wicklow in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34660/06]

494. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Mayo in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34662/06]

496. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Donegal in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34664/06]

498. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland in County Kerry in each of the years 1997 to 2005 and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34666/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): I propose to take Questions

Nos. 474, 480, 482, 484, 486, 488, 490, 492, 494, 496 and 498 together.

The issue of job creation at county level is a day to day operational matter for Enterprise Ireland (EI). Employment figures are published for the previous year on a cumulative basis at the beginning of the following year, therefore the latest figures available are for 2005. According to the Forfás Employment Survey 2005 the total number of full-time jobs created by Enterprise Ireland client companies in the counties enquired of in the questions, are set out in the attached tabular statement. Over the period in question a total of 26,657 jobs were created by EI client companies. A further 1,248 were created by Shannon Development over the same period using powers delegated to them by Enterprise Ireland.

EI's activity is focused on the creation of new jobs through supporting new indigenous companies in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors and, the retention and creation of new jobs in existing companies. EI also enhances the innovation capability of Ireland at a national and regional level through the sup-

port of research in companies and third level institutions.

Enterprise Ireland has a wide range of supports for start up companies. As part of its strategy, Enterprise Ireland is working more intensively with high potential start-up companies in order to accelerate their growth, help build management capability, provide direct financial support, provide business advice, mentoring and assist the development of exports.

Through its network of 34 international offices, Enterprise Ireland assists companies to create and implement successful strategies for market entry, development and growth. Furthermore, EI's Productivity Improvement Fund supports client companies to adopt advanced technology and focus on skill developments to improve their productivity and competitive position.

At local level the development of Community Enterprise Centres is a crucial part of the drive to create new regional enterprise. In January 2006, I announced the extension of the Enterprise Ireland Community Enterprise Centre Scheme, which will provide €7m in Capital funding in the period 2006-2008. Twenty-four projects were approved under the new scheme.

Number of new jobs created in EI supported companies in selected counties in each of the years 1997 to 2005.

County	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Carlow	179	375	270	156	215	184	176	196	204	1955
Donegal	251	365	412	309	481	200	250	272	396	2,936
Kerry	128	167	318	342	96	124	64	83	36	1,358
Kilkenny	207	216	317	287	255	533	300	194	161	2,470
Laois	103	105	194	35	260	103	68	83	70	1,021
Mayo	286	252	334	220	249	225	181	184	400	2,331
Offaly	261	130	161	110	73	490	108	130	165	1,628
Tipperary	113	160	392	234	155	214	175	157	150	1,750
Waterford	464	443	605	300	416	424	416	337	150	3,555
Wexford	366	303	346	405	371	416	523	178	265	3,173
Wicklow	489	324	605	471	743	653	443	336	416	4,480
Totals	2,847	2,840	3,954	2,869	3,314	3,566	2,704	2,150	2,413	26,657

Number of new jobs created in Shannon Development supported companies in selected counties where there is a cross over with EI in each of the years 1997 to 2005.

County	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Tipperary	241	176	182	266	304	288	207	180	262	2,106
Offaly	60	73	77	65	40	75	103	154	40	687
Kerry	200	124	182	137	75	103	109	106	212	1,248

Industrial Development Property.

475. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the position with regard to building a plant (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34573/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The support of a client company by an enterprise development agency is an operational matter for the agency concerned and not one in which I have a direct function. While agencies may, from time to time, comment on a client's past performance they cannot comment on the future plans, if any, of a client.

Unemployment Levels.

476. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment his views on the high rate of unemployment in County Wexford compared with other counties; the action he will take to solve the unemployment crisis in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34574/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): Unemployment is measured through the Quarterly National Household Survey as published by the Central Statistics Office. The Survey does not provide data on specific towns and is available on a regional basis only. The most recent data, published in September 2006, shows that the unemployment rate for the South-East region, which includes Wexford, stands at 5%, a decrease of 0.6% over the year. The survey shows that there were 13,300 more persons in employment in the South-East region over the same period in the previous year.

I have been assured by the development agencies under the remit of my Department that they are endeavouring to attract new investment to the County, to encourage the start-up of new businesses, to grow existing businesses and to develop all aspects of the labour market.

FAS, through its Training Centre and Employment Offices, provides a wide range of training and employment measures in Wexford for the unemployed, employers and employees. These include — Placement and Guidance service, Community Employment, Local and Community Training Programmes, Supported Employment Programme, Apprenticeships, Competency Development Programme, Excellence Through People and Management Development.

Support for job creation and investment in individual counties and regions is a day-to-day operational matter for the development agencies as part of their responsibility under the Industrial Development Acts.

Over the last number of years IDA Ireland has been actively working to attract overseas companies in newer high-value sectors to Wexford. Their efforts have met with considerable success in recent years and two new projects were announced in 2005, PFPC announced a 200 person expansion of their operations in May 2005, while Waters Technology announced a 130 person expansion of their operations in the county.

Enterprise Ireland's activity in County Wexford is focussed on the creation of new jobs through supporting entrepreneurs in manufacturing and internationally traded services companies

who are setting up new High Potential Start-Up Companies, the retention and creation of new jobs in existing companies and in enhancing the innovation capability of Ireland at a national and regional level. Support is available for research in individual companies and in the third level institutions. The development of community based enterprise centres is a crucial part of the drive to create new regional enterprise. Enterprise Ireland has approved funding of over €1m in support of the development and management of Community Enterprise Centres in County Wexford.

In addition, the Wexford County Enterprise Board, which supports micro industry in the area, approved a total of 32 projects during 2005. Wexford CEB has made a significant contribution to job creation in Wexford. Since its formation in 1993 to the end 2005 the CEB has assisted client companies in the creation of 1,283 net additional jobs throughout the county.

I am satisfied that the policies being pursued by the agencies under of the aegis of my Department together with the Government's commitment to regional development will continue to bear fruit for the people of Wexford and the South East as a whole.

Industrial Development Property.

477. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the properties IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland are leasing in towns (details supplied) in County Wexford; the use each of the organisations got for the leased buildings; and the price each cost per month. [34575/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): IDA Ireland is the State Agency with responsibility for marketing Ireland, including individual areas, as a location for foreign direct investment and Enterprise Ireland is the State Agency with responsibility for developing indigenous industries.

As part of their operational responsibilities under the Development Acts IDA Ireland has in place a property portfolio to foster and encourage industrial development. From enquiries I have made with the Agency I understand that they are leasing four buildings in County Wexford, one at Whitemills in Wexford town and three at Moyne, Enniscorthy, of which two are occupied by an Enterprise Ireland client engaged in plant propagation. Enterprise Ireland has no property in Wexford or in the named towns. The details of IDA buildings are set out in the following table.

Building	Area (Sq.m.)	Status	Head Lease (Rent P.A. €)
Cl. Bldg. 1 Moyne Upper. Unit 1	313.83	Occupied	22,220.42
Cl. Bldg. 1 Moyne Upper. Unit 2	313.83	Occupied	22,220.42
Cl. Bldg. 1 Moyne Upper. Unit 3	313.83	Available	22,220.42
AF Bldg. 5 Whitemills I.E.	3,819.15	Reserved	290,000.00

Petrol Station Closures.

478. **Mr. Dennehy** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment his views on the recent trend for petrol stations to be closed and re-developed as housing developments, particularly in view of the implications of this trend for competition and consumer interests; and if he will discuss with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the measures which can be taken to address this. [34590/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): Consumers benefit from competition in the market and the Government is committed to fostering competition in all sectors of the economy. The national markets in which oil companies and petrol stations operate are no exception.

I am aware of instances where petrol filling stations have been sold for alternative use indeed this practice is not just confined to petrol filling stations and one could cite instances of hotels, pubs and shops which have ceased trading and been sold for residential housing. I am also aware of instances where existing retailers are adding motor fuel to their existing product offering. However, it is the right of any individual or corporation to sell its business and exit the market if it so wishes and it would be inappropriate for the Government to force incumbents to stay in a market. Once all planning and health and safety requirements are adhered to, the matter of replacement redevelopments, whether they are commercial or residential in nature, is a free market issue.

Question No. 479 answered with Question No. 473.

Question No. 480 answered with Question No. 474.

Question No. 481 answered with Question No. 473.

Question No. 482 answered with Question No. 474.

Question No. 483 answered with Question No. 473.

Question No. 484 answered with Question No. 474.

Question No. 485 answered with Question No. 473.

Question No. 486 answered with Question No. 474.

Question No. 487 answered with Question No. 473.

Question No. 488 answered with Question No. 474.

Question No. 489 answered with Question No. 473.

Question No. 490 answered with Question No. 474.

Question No. 491 answered with Question No. 473.

Question No. 492 answered with Question No. 474.

Question No. 493 answered with Question No. 473.

Question No. 494 answered with Question No. 474.

Question No. 495 answered with Question No. 473.

Question No. 496 answered with Question No. 474.

Question No. 497 answered with Question No. 473.

Question No. 498 answered with Question No. 474.

Social Welfare Benefits.

499. **Mr. N. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he will ensure that a person (details supplied) in County Cork retains their rent subsidy from the Southern Health Service Executive; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this person had been informed that their rent subsidy will be withdrawn as this person had applied for placement on a VTOS course in Fermoy, County Cork, but owing to limited spaces on the course, places were allocated to applicants with less education qualifications and the person was not placed; and if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that this person is in receipt of €199 per week one parent family allowance and €40 per week maintenance and that they will have to vacate their premises if their subsidy is withdrawn and become homeless. [34362/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The supplementary welfare allowance scheme is administered on my behalf by the Community Welfare Division of the Health Service Executive. A person who takes up a place on a VTOS course has their entitlement to rent supplement determined in the same way as any other person applying for rent supplement. Where a person’s only source of income is their VTOS allowance the rate of rent supplement payable

[Mr. Brennan.]

will not be reduced as a result of their participation on the VTOS course.

The Executive has advised that the rent supplement claim of the person concerned is currently subject to a routine review of entitlement. The Executive has further advised that, if there is any change in her entitlement to rent supplement, the person concerned will be notified of the position.

Social Insurance.

500. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if there is provision for EU accession country citizens who are injured or disabled while working here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33902/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The social security rights of people living and working in the EU are governed by EU Regulations 1408/71 and 574/72 which apply once a country becomes a Member State of the European Union. The social security entitlements of citizens from accession countries i.e. prior to full membership would fall to be determined under Irish legislation alone.

The EU Regulations co-ordinate the social security systems of the 25 Member States and are designed to ensure that people are not disadvantaged by moving within the EU to take up work. This is achieved primarily by setting out rules as to the social security system to which a person will pay contributions when, for example, s/he moves from one Member State to another to take up work, or where s/he lives in one State and works in another. In addition, the Regulations set out rules as to which State will pay benefit in the event of the contingencies arising, e.g. sickness, unemployment, old-age etc.

The general rule is that a person is insured in the State in which s/he works. Equally, the State of employment has, in general, responsibility for paying benefits when, for example, a person becomes injured or ill. The Regulations also provide that, when entitlement to benefit is being determined, account must be taken of insurance contributions paid in any other Member State where the person worked.

In general, a person who has worked in Ireland and who meets the qualifying conditions for Injury Benefit or Illness Benefit (formerly Disability Benefit) may continue to receive that benefit in accordance with Irish legislation regardless of the Member State in which the person is residing or staying.

Social Welfare Benefits.

501. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when rent support will be awarded to a person (details supplied) in County

Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33977/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The supplementary welfare allowance scheme is administered on my behalf by the Community Welfare division of the Health Service Executive.

The Health Service Executive has advised that, according to its available records, it has not received an application for a rent supplement from the person concerned.

The person concerned can make an application for rent supplement with the community welfare officer at her nearest Health Centre.

Social Welfare Code.

502. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason receipt of a contribution payment from Great Britain is not sufficient for consideration for living alone allowance here in view of the reciprocal arrangement that exists between the two countries; his views on whether this is discriminatory to persons who live alone here but are in receipt of a payment from Great Britain (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34002/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The living alone increase is an additional payment of €7.70 per week made to people aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments and who are living alone. It is also available to people under 66 years of age who are living alone and who receive payments under one of a number of invalidity type schemes. The increase is intended as a contribution towards the additional costs people face when they live alone. The increase is not a payment in its own right but a supplement to an Irish social welfare payment. As such, it cannot be paid to people without a social welfare entitlement or to those whose pension payments are made exclusively under the social security regimes of other countries. In relation to the latter, the needs of older people are often provided for in different ways by other countries. While the Irish system provides a basic pension, supplemented by allowances and other benefits, the approach adopted by other countries can be very different, with each country providing for needs of older people in the way it sees fit. The fact that a living alone increase is not paid by another administration merely reflects a different approach to providing for the needs of older people. The payment of a living alone allowance independent of an Irish welfare entitlement would not be appropriate.

It is of course open to recipients of pensions from other countries to apply for pensions under the Irish system and they can do this in a number of ways. Those with a mixture of social insurance contributions from this country, other EU countries or from countries with which Ireland has

reciprocal agreements may qualify for a pro-rata contributory pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for a non-contributory pension if they can satisfy a means test. Changes in the income disregard announced in Budget 2006, which saw this increased from €7.60 per week to €20 per week, will make it easier for people to qualify for a pension and receive the additional support provided under our pensions system for those who live alone.

Departmental Staff.

503. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of persons currently employed in his Department whose status has changed to that of disabled since the commencement of their employment with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34016/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The current position in my Department is that 149 or 3.14 % of the total staff of my Department are persons with disabilities.

The majority of people with disabilities who are employed in my Department were recruited by way of competitions, conducted by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). There are two competition methods which PAS use to recruit persons with disabilities; the standard open competition and confined competitions held specifically for persons with disabilities.

The format in which records are held in my Department is not amenable to analysis as to whether the person acquired the disability since commencing employment with the organisation or beforehand. In recent years, the Department has encouraged, via various channels, e.g. internal circulars and staff magazines, confidential self-disclosure of a disability.

This has resulted in a number of staff members advising the Department's Disability Liaison Officer that they have a disability or have acquired one, in some cases since they commenced employment in the Department.

The policy of encouraging self-disclosure is aimed primarily at identifying any particular needs of the person with the disability. This also adds to the corporate knowledge regarding disability issues, facilitating the development of effective and progressive departmental policies for staff with disabilities generally.

Social Welfare Code.

504. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs his views on abolishing the living alone requirement for pensioners to qualify for the free schemes; and if he will extend the free schemes to all pensioners including those who have family members living with them. [34091/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The household benefits package, which comprises the electricity/gas allowance, telephone allowance and television licence schemes, is generally available to people living permanently in the State, aged 66 years or over, who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to carers and people with disabilities under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments. Widows and widowers aged from 60 to 65 whose late spouses had been in receipt of the household benefits package retain that entitlement to ensure that households do not suffer a loss of entitlements following the death of a spouse.

People aged over 70 years of age can qualify for the household benefits package regardless of their income or household composition. Those aged under 70 must live alone or only with certain excepted people in order to qualify. Excepted people for the purposes of the scheme include qualified adults, dependent children under age 18 or under age 22 if in full time education, people who are so incapacitated as to require constant care and attention for at least 12 months; people who would qualify for the allowance in their own right, people who are providing constant care and attention to any member of the household who is so incapacitated as to require constant care and attention for at least 12 months.

A range of proposals have been made to extend the coverage of the household benefits package of free schemes. These proposals are kept under review in the context of the objectives of the scheme and budgetary resources.

505. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the conditions required for payment of social insurance contributions for wives of self-employed persons who are employed in running a family business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34291/06]

506. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the conditions required for payment of social insurance contributions for wives of self-employed persons who are involved in running a family business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34292/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 505 and 506 together.

Under Parts 2 and 3 of Schedule 1 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, employment by a spouse or self-employment in which the spouse of a self-employed contributor participates or assists in the business but is not a business partner is excluded from social insurance cover.

Spouses who operate a business as a partnership and share the profits may be insurable as self-employed contributors at PRSI Class S, pro-

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vided each has a reckonable income of €3,174 per year or more from all sources.

A person who works for a Limited Company that is owned by a spouse is not regarded as working for the spouse because the employment relationship is with the Limited Company rather than with the spouse who owns it. Such a person, depending on the circumstances of the employment may be insurable at Class A or Class S.

Social Welfare Benefits.

507. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 153 of 10 October, 2006 his views on whether the refuse collection fee should be the same throughout the country; if the Government cannot resolve this matter then should old and incapacitated persons receive the waiver within the household package with a common fee allocated to each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34466/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The setting of waste management charges and the introduction of waivers in respect of waste charges is, as stated by my colleague the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government, a matter for each local authority. The introduction of a national social welfare scheme to address the issue, for example as part of the household budget scheme, would be complex given the wide range of charging regimes and cost structures that exist in respect of waste management throughout the State. For example I am not sure that a common fee allocated to each local authority would be appropriate given the fact that charges do vary across local authorities and even within local authorities where there is more than one provider. In addition, some local authorities already operate waiver schemes. Any system put in place to assist vulnerable people who rely on private domestic waste collection would have to take account of and be sensitive to the different local arrangements.

I have asked my Department to continue to explore possible options for helping vulnerable people and to keep me informed of developments.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

508. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34556/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): No tribunal of inquiry has been estab-

lished under the aegis of my Department in the period in question.

Decentralisation Programme.

509. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of staff in his Department who have indicated willingness to decentralise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34604/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The latest information available from the Central Applications Facility (CAF) indicates that 1,526 employees of my Department are seeking to transfer under the Government’s Decentralisation Programme.

The CAF will remain open for new applications until the full decentralisation programme is complete.

Public Transport.

510. **Mr. McCormack** asked the Minister for Transport if he has responded to the request from a company (details supplied) to issue licences for two new routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33880/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The Road Transport Act, 1932 provides the legislative basis for entry to the public transport market by private bus operators. In accordance with this legislation, private bus operators apply to my Department for Passenger Licences to operate coach and bus services within the State.

The two applications referred to by the Deputy were received in my Department, the first on the 18th July, 2006 and the second on the 1st August, 2006. Both applications were queued for processing based on the established practice that licence applications are dealt with on first come, first served basis.

Both applications are currently being processed in accordance with the Road Transport Act, 1932, in particular, section 11(3)(a) which states that the Minister must consider whether the service proposed is in the public interest having regard to the passenger road services and other forms of passenger transport available to the public on or in the neighbourhood of the route of the proposed service.

My Department has been in contact with the Company’s representative regarding these applications, the details of which remain confidential in the interest of protecting the commercial confidentiality of the applicant. All licences once issued are available upon request from my Department.

National Development Plan.

511. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport the amount spent to date under the economic and social infrastructure operational prog-

ramme under the National Development Plan; the breakdown of the amount spent in each region under the plan; the amount estimated to be spent by the end of the NDP, with a breakdown for each region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34283/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Final data in respect of the period up to 30 June 2006 will be available following the normal meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme which is scheduled to take place in Dublin on Friday next, 27th October. The data in question will be supplied to the Deputy following adoption at that meeting.

In the meantime, I am in a position to provide data of actual expenditure from 1 January 2000 up to the end of December 2005 under the Programme, together with related forecasts of expenditure to the end of the Programme as presented to the 14th meeting of the ESIOIP Monitoring Committee on 28 April 2006. The material in question is provided in the following table.

Measure	Actual Spend 2000-end 2005	Latest forecast of expenditure for 2000-2006
	€ m	€ m
ESIOIP Total	23,701.48	28,605.48
BMW Region	5,435.48	6,764.14
S&E Region	18,266.00	21,841.34

Parking Regulations.

512. **Mr. Dennehy** asked the Minister for Transport if he has satisfied himself that proper regulation exists to ensure that blue badge parking permits for disabled people are only provided to appropriate people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34587/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations, 1997 empower local authorities, the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Disabled Drivers Association, to grant a disabled person's parking permit to a person who is suffering from a disability that is of a nature that prevents him or her from walking or causes undue hardship to the person in walking.

Only vehicles displaying such a permit can use the designated parking bays that are signed through the use of a wheelchair user symbol.

Eligibility for a parking permit is a matter to be determined on a case by case basis by the relevant issuing bodies.

Energy Resources.

513. **Mr. Dennehy** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that driving a 13 miles per gallon 4x4 vehicle

rather than a 25 miles per gallon for a year will waste more energy than leaving a refrigerator open for seven years, leaving a television on for 32 years or leaving a light bulb on for 34 years. [34589/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I am aware of the relative energy usage and emissions performance of various categories of road vehicles and this is taken into account by Government in the development and implementation of sustainability policy.

Aviation Policy.

514. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Transport if he raised the matter of a bilateral aviation treaty between Ireland and the US with his counterparts at the recent meeting of EU Ministers; if the matter was not raised, the reason for same; and if the matter was raised, the response from his counterparts. [33877/06]

515. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Transport if he is currently in discussions with his US counterparts on the matter of a bilateral aviation treaty between Ireland and the US; and if so, the progress made in these negotiations. [33878/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 514 and 515 together.

I can confirm that the EU US Open Skies deal was discussed at the Transport Council on 12 October 2006. The Council underlined the importance it attaches to the conclusion of the EU US air transport agreement. It reaffirmed its unanimous satisfaction with the text of the draft agreement negotiated in November 2005 but regretted the further delay in the US position on the ownership and control issue.

The Council requested the Commission to continue its efforts, on the basis of further contacts with the United States to secure a satisfactory and balanced outcome with the necessary safeguards, including the transitional provisions, with a view to a decision at the December Transport Council. This would fulfil the commitments set out in the conclusion of the June 2006 EU US Summit in which both parties reaffirmed the commitment to reach agreement by the end of the year.

I again drew attention to the negative consequences of failure to finalise the agreement for those Member States that do not have open skies agreements in place already. I emphasized therefore the urgency of concluding this matter in December. In the meantime the existing arrangements in the Ireland US bilateral agreement will continue to apply. I am not currently engaged in discussions with my US counterpart on the existing bilateral agreement.

Motor Insurance.

516. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Trans-

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port if insurance details are cross checked with insurance companies for online renewal of motor tax applications to ensure that false insurance details are not provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33911/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I understand from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government that applicants who apply on-line to renew motor tax are requested to enter the name of their insurer, the insurance policy number and the date of expiry of cover. The information supplied by the applicants is forwarded to the Gardaí on a weekly basis. This facilitates a Garda check on these details if required.

As part of its plans for implementing the 5th Motor Insurance Directive No. 2005/14/EC, my Department is seeking to establish an interface between insurance companies and the National Vehicle and Driver File. This interface will facilitate the verification of insurance details during motor tax renewal transactions.

Parking Regulations.

517. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the position regarding plans to provide residents only permit parking on match days in the Croke Park area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33916/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 442 of 10 October 2006 on this subject.

The issue of reserving parking on public roads to local residents is complex and is much broader than in the context of match days at Croke Park or other stadia. The legal issue that must first be established is whether or not it would be appropriate to provide for the application of parking restrictions of this nature on a public road. The matter has been referred to the Attorney General for advice.

Taxi Regulations.

518. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to introduce an appeal mechanism into the system of taxi regulation, in view of the recent review published by the Department of An Taoiseach on the need for some systems of appeal from the adjudication of regulators. [33939/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The question of the introduction of an industry level appeal mechanism in relation to regulatory decisions under the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 has been raised by representatives of certain taxi groups at recent meetings with officials of my Department. My Department drew the attention of the representatives to the consultation process that is underway regarding regulatory appeals mechanisms generally (Consultation Paper on

Regulatory Appeals, Department of the Taoiseach, July 2006). The taxi representatives have undertaken to consider the consultation document and to put forward proposals in respect of the taxi industry.

Public Transport.

519. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport if he will support the demand for two north south LUAS or Metro lines to be built by 2016 as set out in the DTO Platform for Change to redress the imbalance between the northside and the southside of Dublin which has two LUAS lines. [33978/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) is currently undertaking extensive work in relation to the Metro and Luas rail projects for Dublin included in Transport 21.

The position as regards Metro and Luas projects of direct relevance to the north side of Dublin is as follows:

In relation to Metro North, which will run from St. Stephen's Green to Swords via Dublin Airport, the RPA has completed an extensive public consultation process for the route alignment. I announced the selected route on 19th October last. This route includes a number of modifications arising from the RPA's consideration of strong feedback during the public consultation process.

Metro West is intended to link Tallaght with Clondalkin, Lucan and Blanchardstown and connect with Metro North at Ballymun. The RPA have made good progress on identifying possible alignments and I understand that the RPA will commence public consultation on route options shortly.

In line with the timeframes set out in Transport 21, Metro North and Metro West are scheduled for completion in 2012 and 2014 respectively.

I am currently considering the inspector's report from the Public Inquiry into the Railway Order application for a Luas extension from Connolly Station to the Point Depot.

The RPA are continuing consultations on the various route options for linking the two existing Luas lines in the city centre; Transport 21 provides for the further extension of this line to Liffey Junction by 2012.

The Dublin Transportation Office's "A Platform for Change" continues to provide a strategic framework for the development of the Greater Dublin Area's transport system. In that context further feasibility studies and planning work will also be undertaken over the period of Transport 21 on other projects not included in Transport 21, but contained in "A Platform for Change". However, funding to bring such projects to construction is not included in the ten-year envelope.

State Airports.

520. **Mr. J. Breen** asked the Minister for Transport if he will provide funding from the Exchequer in the amount of €9 million to a route support fund for Shannon Airport to part balance the heavy funding provided to Dublin Airport at the seeming expense of Shannon Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34026/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): None of the State airports, including Dublin Airport, receive any Exchequer funding.

The funding of future developments at each of the three airports will be a matter for commercial consideration by the new independent airport authorities when Shannon and Cork Airports become fully independent in accordance with the framework provided in the State Airports Act 2004.

521. **Mr. J. Breen** asked the Minister for Transport the state of negotiations to establish an extension of the US customs and borders protection facility at Shannon Airport; when they might expect to be included; the date such a facility might be opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34041/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): In co-operation with the US Authorities, the Dublin Airport Authority is examining proposals to extend the existing US pre-inspection facilities to full pre-clearance of immigration, customs and agriculture requirements for all US bound flights from Shannon and Dublin airports.

These proposals are the subject of on-going discussions among the various parties.

Air Services.

522. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport if he with his Ministerial colleagues will take the opportunity arising from the delay in the arrival of open skies to allocate the necessary resources to implement the Mid West Tourism and Economic Development Plan, which once implemented will prepare the region for open skies when final agreement is reached between the US and EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34262/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): In announcing the agreement reached with the US authorities in December 2005 in relation to a transitional arrangement for Shannon Airport in the context of the proposed EU/US 'open skies' I indicated that I would prepare, in consultation with my colleagues, the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, a tourism and economic development plan for Shannon and the West of Ireland.

Preparation of the plan is at an advanced stage and together with my colleagues I will be giving careful consideration to the input from the Mid West Regional Authority. The Deputy will appreciate that at this stage of the process it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any specific aspects of the plan.

523. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Transport the procedures in place should an elected representative be unhappy with the response of the Irish Aviation Authority on a specific or general matter regarding monitoring the height of incoming aircraft; if there is opportunity to raise the issue at Dáil Éireann level in the interests of democratic accountability. [34336/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) is an independent body set up under the provisions of the Irish Aviation Authority Act 1993. Responsibility for the monitoring of the height of incoming aircraft is a matter for the IAA under the functions conferred on it under the Act.

My Department has no role or function in this area.

Rail Network.

524. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Transport if a report has been issued by his Department in relation to submissions on the Kildare Route Project. [34356/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The report of the Inspector, Mr. Pat Butler S.C., of the public inquiry (24th January 2006-2nd February 2006.) in relation to the Railway Order for the Kildare Route Project was published on 23 May 2006.

It is available on the Department of Transport website at www.transport.ie and also from the Government Publications Office.

On the 13th August last, I announced my decision to grant the Railway Order for the Kildare Rail Project, in line with the recommendations of the Inspector.

In making my decision, I was obliged under Section 43 (1) of the Transport (Railway Infrastructure) Act 2001, to consider the report of the Inquiry as well as the submissions I received in respect of the project, CIÉ's application for a Railway Order, and the draft Order and documents that accompanied the application.

All of the submissions received in my Department were forwarded to the Public Inquiry. As part of the Inquiry, the Inspector considered these as well as additional submissions received by him, and his deliberations on all the submissions are documented in his report.

The draft Order is currently with the Office of the Attorney General for legal drafting.

When that process is complete, the Order will be submitted to the Minister for the Envir-

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onment, Heritage and Local Government in relation to his consent for the provisions of the Order affecting roads, and I will sign the Order immediately thereafter.

Road Network.

525. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Transport when it is planned to remove the tolls from the M50; the plans in place to introduce variable tolling at entry or egress points instead of a central toll; if future toll would be for revenue gathering purposes or as a traffic management exercise; and if he will guarantee that no tolls will be implemented until people living in west Dublin have a choice of an efficient bus, rail or LUAS solution for crossing the Liffey, rather than having to drive. [34357/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The planning, design and implementation of national road improvement projects, including the M50 upgrade, is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) and the local authorities concerned.

Also, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll by-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors in respect of national roads, including the M50, is vested in the National Roads Authority (NRA) under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000). There are no plans to remove tolls from the M50.

Road Safety.

526. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport when the provisional licences will be replaced by a learner permit. [34365/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006) the Road Safety Authority has responsibility for the oversight of the operation of the driver licensing system. Section 11 of the Road Traffic Act 2006 provides for the introduction of learner permits. This provision will be commenced when a supply of learner permits is available to licensing authorities to issue. It is a matter for the RSA to arrange for the supply of learner permits to licensing authorities.

527. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport if, in view of the Road Traffic Act 2006, he will clarify if mandatory driving lessons will be introduced; if so, when; the number of hours instruction that will be involved; and the time period over which instruction should occur. [34366/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006) the

Road Safety Authority has responsibility for the oversight of the operation of the driver licensing system. The Road Safety Authority will be examining the driver licensing system and will make recommendations as to what further reforms might be introduced in the interests of road safety.

528. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport if compulsory initial practical training for motorcyclists will occur; and if it will extend to those bikes under 125cc such as mopeds and scooters. [34367/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006) the Road Safety Authority has responsibility for the oversight of the operation of the driver licensing system including the preparation of proposals for draft regulatory provisions relating to driver licensing and testing. In this context the Road Safety Authority is responsible for bringing forward proposals for the introduction of compulsory initial practical training for motorcyclists.

Public Transport.

529. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Transport the steps he is taking to ensure that buses providing public transport services in rural areas are made accessible for people with physical or sensory disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34404/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Mr. Gallagher): The accessibility of public transport in rural areas for people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments will be progressed in the context of the implementation of 'Transport Access for All', my Department's Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act 2005.

As outlined in 'Transport Access for All', Bus Éireann and some private operators have already introduced low-floor buses on a number of stage carriage and rural routes that were previously served by inaccessible coaches. The Department envisages that by 2015 practically all vehicles to be used for these stage carriage and rural services will be wheelchair accessible and incorporate facilities to assist people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments.

My Department's Sectoral Plan also refers to the Rural Transport Initiative (RTI) which has been funding thirty-four community transport groups around the country on a pilot basis to address the particular transport needs in their rural areas through the provision of local transport services. The provision of transport for older people and people with disabilities is a core feature of the RTI and this will continue to be the case as the RTI is mainstreamed post 2006. Proposals in that regard are currently being formu-

lated following the recent conclusion of a public consultation process in the matter.

Disabled Drivers.

530. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Transport if disabled parking disks will become available for the parents of autism sufferers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34468/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations, 1997 empower local authorities, the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Disabled Drivers Association, to grant a disabled person's parking permit to a person who is suffering from a disability that is of a nature that prevents him or her from walking or causes undue hardship to the person in walking.

The qualifying criterion centres on the issue of a person being unable to walk at all or, if ambulatory, having significant mobility impairment. Eligibility has to be determined on a case by case basis and it is not proposed to extend the application of the scheme across the board on a blanket basis to parents of autism sufferers.

Ministerial Appointments.

531. **Mr. M. Higgins** asked the Minister for Transport the reasons for failing to fill the vacancies that have existed for some time on the board of CIE and on the board of Iarnród Éireann; if he will redress the regional imbalance in filling such vacancies; and if the west of Ireland could be allowed representation on such boards by filling the vacancies which exist by nominations from within the region. [34514/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Section 6 of the Transport Act 1950 and the Worker Participation (State Enterprises) Order 1980 governs the appointment of members of the Board of CIÉ and provide that the CIÉ Board shall be comprised of 12 Directors of which 4 are required to be Worker Directors. The filling of one vacancy on the CIÉ Board is under consideration.

The position in relation to Iarnród Éireann is that the appointment of members to the Board is a matter for the Chairman of CIÉ, subject to my consent, in accordance with Section 11 of the Transport (Re-Organisation of Córas Iompair Éireann) Act 1986. There are currently no vacancies on the Board of Iarnród Éireann.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

532. **Mr. J. O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Transport the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34558/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The information requested by the Deputy is set in a table.

Title of Inquiry	€
	€
Inquiry into non-fatal accident of Aer Lingus DC3 near Birmingham on 1st January, 1953	37,094 paid in 2002

Grant Payments.

533. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will ensure that funding is granted to an organisation (details supplied) in Count Sligo for equipment; the amount that will be granted; when it will be sanctioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33959/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): A substantial number of applications has been received by my Department over the last few weeks under the 2006 Programme of Grants for Locally-Based Community and Voluntary Organisations. These are currently being assessed and decisions in respect of all applications will be made by me following this assessment process. It is not possible at this early stage to indicate when a decision can be made on an individual application or what that decision will be, but each applicant Group will be informed of progress on their application as soon as possible.

Community Development.

534. **Mr. Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he has evaluated the success of the operation of the RAPID programme to date in the centres where it is in place throughout the country; if some centres in the programme have shown more significant progress than others; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34080/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I would refer the Deputy to my reply to question number 41 on 14 June 2006 which sets out my comprehensive views on the evaluation commissioned by Pobal on behalf of my Department and published earlier this year. The evaluation is available on www.pobal.ie/live/RAPID/225.html.

Grant Payments.

535. **Mr. Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of refurbishment grant applications received by his Department from County Kildare under the programme of grants for locally based community and voluntary organisations in 2006;

[Mr. Ó Fearghaíl.]

and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[34081/06]

536. **Mr. Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of equipment grant applications received by his Department from County Kildare under the programme of grants for locally based community and voluntary organisations in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[34082/06]

537. **Mr. Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of training and education research grants received by his Department from County Kildare under the programme of grants for locally based community and voluntary organisations in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[34083/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 535 to 537, inclusive, together.

A substantial number of applications has been received by my Department over the last few weeks under the 2006 Programme of Grants for Locally-Based Community and Voluntary Organisations. These have been sent for initial assessment. I expect that I will be in a position to provide a full breakdown of these applications in the near future. My Department will forward the information sought by the Deputy at that stage.

National Development Plan.

538. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount spent to date on young people's facilities and services fund under the National Development Plan; the total amount estimated to be spent by the end of the NDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34277/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): The Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF) was established in 1998 to assist in the development of facilities (including sport and recreational facilities) and services in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem existed or had the potential to develop.

In the period from 2000 to date, approximately €123m has been spent, including expenditure on projects mainstreamed to the Department of Education and Science as well as the Springboard Initiative under the aegis of the Department of Health and Children.

It is envisaged that total YPFSF expenditure under the National Development Plan will amount to approximately €135m, including some

expenditure which will not be incurred until after the end of 2006.

Teanga Ghaeilge.

539. D'fhiafraigh **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cad í an straitéis atá ag a Roinn chun go leor céimithe Gaeilge a bheith ar fáil chun poist mar aistri-theoirí Gaeilge san Aontas Eorpach a líonadh ó glacadh leis an nGaeilge mar theanga oifigiúil san Aontas Eorpach. [34376/06]

540. D'fhiafraigh **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil scéim faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2004 glactha aige i leith choláistí Ollscoil na hÉireann agus institiúidí tríú léibhéal eile atá ag fáil deontas nó eile ón Státhiste. [34379/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Tógfaigh mé Ceisteanna 539 agus 540 le chéile.

Dírím aird an Teachta ar an bhfreagra a thug mé ar Cheisteanna Uimh. 6, 8 agus 9 den 5 Deireadh Fómhair 2006.

Mar a thug mé le fios sa bhfreagra sin, d'fhoilsigh Foras na Gaeilge ar a shuíomh idirlín an chéad phainéal d'aistri-theoirí faoin gcóras creidiúnaithe nua i mí Iúil na bliana seo. Bhí iarrtha agam ar an bhForas a leithéid de chóras a fhorbairt ionas go mbeadh fáil ag an bpobal agus ag comhlachtaí poiblí ar aistri-theoirí ard-cháilithe den scoth. Reachtladh scrúdú i mí Aibreáin mar chéad chéim den phróiseas agus is as sin atá an painéal bunaithe. Beidh scrúdaithe eile a reachtáil amach anseo ag tráthanna rialta chun cur leis an bpainéal seo. Is cinnte gur cúnaimh tábhachtach praiticiúil atá anseo do chomhlachtaí poiblí a úsáideann seirbhísí ó aistri-theoirí príobháideacha. Ar ndóigh, tá an Foras gníomhach chomh maith maidir le heolas faoi dheiseanna fostaíochta mar aistri-theoirí agus araile ar leibhéal na hEorpa a scaipeadh ar phobal na Gaeilge sa tír seo.

Ní mór a lua sa chomhthéacs seo gur cheadaigh mé deontais le déanaí do raon institiúidí tríú léibhéal as ciste €1m a bhunaigh mé d'aonghnó i mbliana chun tacú le soláthar sainchúrsaí tríú léibhéal trí Ghaeilge. Tá an scéim nua, atá á riaradh i gcomhar leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta agus an tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas, dírithe ar líon na gcéimithe le scileanna sonracha Gaeilge i réimsí ar leith a mhéadú, i gcomhthéacs Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla agus an Ghaeilge a bheith mar theanga oifigiúil san Aontas Eorpach.

Maidir le scéimeanna Teanga de, tá 35 scéim daingnithe agam go dáta le comhlachtaí poiblí agus foilsithe. I measc na gcomhlachtaí poiblí seo tá na hollscoileanna agus na hinstitiúidí tríú léibhéal seo a leanas: Ollscoil na hÉireann Gaillimh, Institiúid Teicneolaíochta na Gaillimhe-Mhaigh Eo, Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad, Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath agus Ollscoil Luimnigh.

Sa bhreis ar sin, tá mo Roinnse ag plé faoi láthair le os cionn 60 comhlacht poiblí eile — institiúidí tríú leibhéal san áireamh — maidir le dréacht-scéimeanna teanga a ullmhú. Tá na scéimeanna uile atá aontaithe go dtí seo ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin an Choimisinéara Teanga.

Benchmarking Awards.

541. **Mr. Haughey** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will grant benchmarking pay awards to employees of Pobal; if he has provided funding to Pobal for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34394/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): The pay, terms and conditions of employment for staff employed by Pobal are a matter in the first place for the Board of Pobal.

My Department indicated to the company in 2003 that it had no objection to the payment of the first phase of the benchmarking increase in relation to staff working on the delivery of my Department's programmes. No objection was raised by my Department to the payment of further phases of the benchmarking award after my Department had verified that satisfactory progress had been made under Pobal's (then ADM) change and modernisation action plan.

No additional funding specifically for the payment of the benchmarking awards has been provided.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

542. **Mr. J. O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34547/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I refer the Deputy to my reply to question No. 201 of October 11 2006.

Fóram na Gaeilge.

543. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. O'Shea** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cén dul chun cinn atá déanta ag Fóram na Gaeilge ó thús na bliana agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [34561/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I gcomhréir leis an ról chomhairleoireachta a tugadh d'Fhóram na Gaeilge ag am a bhunaithe, iarradh agus fuarthas tuairimí ó chomhaltaí an Fhórait maidir le hinmholtacht phlean straitéiseach 20 bliain a fhorbairt don Ghaeilge mar aon le tosaíochtaí gaolmhara gearr-théarmacha. Mar atá mínithe

cheana féin agam don Teach mar fhreagra ar Cheisteanna faoin ábhar seo, tá inmholtacht ráitis shoiléir ón Rialtas i ndáil le ról agus tábhacht na Gaeilge tagtha chun cinn mar ábhar tosaíochta faoi leith. Tá dul chun cinn suntasach déanta le tamall gearr anuas chun an ráiteas sin a thógáil céim chun tosaigh agus tá súil agam a bheith in ann tuilleadh a rá faoi go luath.

Ní miste dom a lua chomh maith gur chas Fóram na Gaeilge le déanaí le mo chomhghleacaí, Nollaig Ó Treasaigh, T.D., Aire Stáit ag Roinn an Taoisigh agus ag an Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtra-cha, chun cúrsaí maidir leis an nGaeilge i gcomhthéacs na hEorpa a phlé.

An Teanga Ghaeilge.

544. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. O'Shea** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil tuarascáil d'aon sórt faighte aige faoin staidéar teangeolaíoch a bhí dírithe ar úsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht ar cuireadh tús leis i mí Aibreáin 2004 chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar na limistéir oifigiúla Ghaeltachta. [34562/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Tuigtear dom go bhfuil an staidéar a luann an Teachta maidir le húsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht beagnach críochnaithe. Faoi mar a bhí aontaithe leis na comhairleoirí atá i mbun an togra, tá tuarascálacha eatramhacha, ina bhfuil eolas maidir le dul chun cinn an staidéir go ginearálta, faighte ag mo Roinnse ó thráth go céile mar chuid den phróiseas oibre.

Mar a mhínigh mé don Teach cheana féin, beidh sé riachtanach do mo Roinnse torthaí an staidéir a scrúdú go cúramach nuair a bheidh an obair uile críochnaithe agus ní ghlacfar le aon chinneadh sa chás go dtí go mbeidh an próiseas sin thart.

Dormant Accounts Fund.

545. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will approve funding for a project (details supplied) in County Roscommon under the dormant accounts fund; if he will meet with the group in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34583/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): In conjunction with the Minister, Éamon Ó Cuív T.D., and Tim O'Malley T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children with special responsibility for mental health, I announced yesterday that the Government has approved the allocation of almost €1 million from the Dormant Accounts Fund to support twenty suicide prevention projects. The key objective of this funding is to provide interventions and supports to strengthen community based initiatives,

[Mr. N. Ahern.]

particularly, although not exclusively, those targeting young men under 35 years of age.

In this regard, the project in question has been approved for a grant in the sum of €55,600. I do not have any plans at this point to meet with this project.

Departmental Expenditure.

546. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount spent on the rural development measures of the national development plan to date; the amount

Programme	Spend 2000-2005	Estimated expenditure for the duration of the NDP
	€m	€m
Rural Development Fund	1.546	2.496
Western Investment Fund	15.331	21.331
Area Based Rural Development Initiative	43.333	75.6
Farm Relief Services	2.395	4.13

547. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the amount spent to date on the agriculture and rural development measure of the national development plan to date; the amount estimated to be spent by the end of the NDP; and

Measures	Expenditure 2000-2005	Estimated Expenditure 2006
	€m	€m
CAP Rural Development Plan (Early Retirement Scheme, Compensatory Allowances, REPS and Forestry) and other on-farm/forestry "rural development" supports contained in the regional operational programmes	3700	800
Other agricultural measures — improvement of cattle and equine breeding infrastructures, improvement in equine quality, international equine institute, animal carcass disposal and Teagasc advisory services	70	13
Training	74	12
Research	52	10
Food	144	350
Total	4,040	1,185

Grant Payments.

548. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if a decision has been made in respect of additional entitlements from the national reserve under section C in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [33930/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted an application for an allocation of entitlements from the 2005 Single Payment Scheme National Reserve under Category C.

estimated to be spent by the end of the NDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34951/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): There are four rural development measures of the National Development Programme administered by my Department: The Rural Development Fund; The Western Investment Fund; The Area Based Rural Development Initiative; and the Farm Relief Services Programme.

The spend to the end of December 2005 and the anticipated spend to the end of the NDP is as follows:

if she will make a statement on the matter. [34273/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The position for the 2000-2006 NDP measures under my Department's remit is set out in the following table.

Category C caters for farmers who sold their milk quota into the Milk Quota Restructuring Scheme and converted their enterprise to 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 to 2002. The person named was deemed unsuccessful under this category as the conversion from dairying to another farming sector is already reflected in the value of his Single payment entitlements.

A formal letter setting out my Department's decision has issued to the person named and he has appealed this decision to the Independent Payment Appeals Committee who will carry out

a full review of the case and will correspond directly with him following the outcome of their review.

549. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when REP scheme payment will be issued to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33958/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): Additional documentation which was requested from the person named on 03/08/06 was forwarded to the local AES office on 29/09/06. Processing of the annual application is now complete and payment will issue within the next 10 days.

550. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork has not received headage or single payment in 2006. [33980/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): An application under the 2006 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 5 May 2006. Processing is incomplete as documentation in relation to the change in the registration details has not been submitted.

I have now had arrangements made for an official of my Department to make direct contact with the person named with a view to satisfactorily resolving this matter.

EU Reports.

551. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if the report of the EU Commission on the energy crop grant scheme, published at the end of September 2006 will be made available. [34021/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The Report from the EU Commission to the Council on the review of the energy crops scheme (document reference number 13217/06) is freely available to the public on the Council website at the following address *www.register.consilium.europa.eu*.

Grant Payments.

552. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Wexford will receive their single farm payment as all requested information has been supplied; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34172/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted an application under the Consolidation measure of the Single Payment Scheme on 30 May 2006. The

application is currently being processed and an advance payment will issue shortly.

553. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the reason the 2005 single farm payment has not been made to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the farm has been legally transferred into the applicants name; when payment will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34173/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named has made an application to inherit entitlements under the 2005 Single Payment Scheme. A form of undertaking in regard to compliance with the 10 month rule was issued to him recently for completion. The Single Payment application will be fully processed as soon as the completed form is returned to the Inheritance Section of my Department.

554. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the position of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow who is waiting for their single payment; if same will be awarded. [34252/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted an application under the 2006 Single Payment Scheme on 5 May 2006. This application has been accepted and fully processed. Advance payment will issue shortly.

555. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if and when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be allocated a grant for a slated shed, if she will provide an account of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34405/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person concerned is an applicant under the Farm Waste Management Scheme. Further documentation in support of his application for payment for the slated shed has been requested from the applicant by my Department. Payment will issue when it is established that the investment works concerned meet all the conditions and requirements of the Scheme.

Approval was refused by my Department in respect of his grant application for the underground tank as work was found to have commenced on this portion of the investment works prior to the issue of approval.

Afforestation Programme.

556. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if she will provide an estimate of the acreage under State forestry in County Donegal. [34406/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The area under State Forestry (i.e. planted by the Forest Service and subsequently by Coillte since its establishment in 1989) in County Donegal is some 36,397 hectares or 89,940.63 acreage.

557. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the acreage under privately owned forestry in County Donegal. [34407/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The most recent statistics, which are for the year 2005, indicate that there are 53,243.03 acres of private forestry in County Donegal.

Question No. 558 withdrawn.

Customs Controls.

559. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food her plans to introduce Department of Agriculture dog teams to help police ports and airports to prevent the importation of diseases that could damage our agriculture industry in a manner similar to the 25 teams of dogs that are available in Auckland to preserve the integrity of the New Zealand agriculture sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34543/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): My Department is examining the position with regard to extending controls it already operates to implement the EU's ban on the personal import of meat and meat products, milk and milk products and on live birds by travellers from outside of the EU. My Department conducted an *ad hoc* trial involving the deployment of a sniffer dog resource in conjunction with a UK professional dog handler company and the co-operation of Customs dog handler personnel at Dublin Airport. The experience gained in this trial is now being reviewed in the Department with a view to deciding whether the deployment of sniffer dogs is justified.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

560. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997 under the aegis of her Department. [34544/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The Beef Tribunal is the only tribunal under the aegis of my Department. With regard to that tribunal, legal fees comprised 80.47% of the tribunal costs. The amount of money spent on legal fees in each of the years since 1997 is as follows:

Year	Amount
	€
1997	725,146.38
1998	3,225,254.90
1999	525,598.07
2000	3,101,597.11
2001	491,222.42
2002	961,607.17
2003	36,150.90
2004	616,993.22
2005	52,405.31
2006	147,403.62
Total	9,883,379.11

Decentralisation Programme.

561. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food her plans to decentralise Bord Bia and Bord Glás to Enniscorthy, County Wexford; the number of people in her Department who have agreed to move; when she expects the move will take place; the way this date compares with the original date to when her Department was to move; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34566/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): To date 26 Bord Bia staff members have indicated a willingness to relocate to Enniscorthy. Applications have been made by 47 persons from outside Bord Bia for positions in Enniscorthy under the decentralisation programme, of whom 19 are based in Dublin. Issues relating to the transferability of staff between State Agencies and between the Civil Service, Public Service and State Agencies generally are being examined centrally by the Department of Finance who deal with general human resource and industrial relations issues arising from decentralisation. Bord Bia is not one of the organisations given early mover status under the Government's decentralisation plan and a precise timeframe has not been established.

Grant Payments.

562. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the reasons the appeal application for consideration of *force majeure* under the single farm payments for a person (details supplied) in County Offaly has been mislaid; if the application can be found within her Department; if swift consideration will be given; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34582/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): I have asked my officials to investi-

gate this matter urgently and a full response will issue to the Deputy very shortly.

Decentralisation Programme.

563. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position on decentralisation to Edenderry, County Offaly; the timeframe in which it is to be completed; if premises have been sought; if an advance party will be put in place; the number of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34359/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As I told the Deputy last week, the organisations to decentralise to Edenderry are the Further Education & Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education & Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). These organisations are State agencies under the aegis of my Department. The overall number of posts involved is in the region of 90. All three agencies are public service agencies rather than civil service agencies. The Deputy will be aware of the work that is ongoing at the central level in relation to the decentralisation of the public service agencies, which will impact on the timeframe for the move of FETAC, HETAC and the NQAI. The Office of Public Works has responsibility for the site acquisition and the procurement of the accommodation and this process is currently in train. It is not intended at this stage to put an advance party in place.

Question No. 564 answered with Question No. 111.

Schools Building Projects.

565. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Science the status of the planned sports hall for a school (details supplied), the funding for which was promised in 2002; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33860/06]

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. Progress on the proposed works will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme from 2007 onwards.

566. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Science the progress on the extension and other works at a school (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33861/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The proposed extension and refurbishment project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an early stage of architectural planning and is one of the 43 schools that I announced in March 2005 to start the architectural planning process. In September of this year, my Department wrote to the School Authorities seeking a revised stage 3 submission (detailed design with costings) from the School's Design Team. When the stage 3 submission is received in my Department, my Officials will arrange a meeting with the School Authorities and the Design Team in order to evaluate the documentation. It is envisaged that unless there are very exceptional circumstances involved, the meeting will be sufficient to authorise the project to progress to the next stages of architectural planning. Progression of the project to tender and construction will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

567. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Science the progress in the provision of a new school building for a school (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33862/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The building project for the School referred to by the Deputy was listed among the 43 schools that I announced to start the architectural planning process in March of 2005. Substantial work on the early stages of the design process have already been completed. My Department's officials have already had a preliminary meeting with the Local Authority Planners of Kilkenny Co. Council in order to address any possible conditions which the Local Authority may have in relation to the planning application and the School Authorities have been informed of the outcome of the meeting. My Department has lodged the planning application for the School in question and a date for a decision on the planning application is due this month. A meeting was held in my Department's offices in Tullamore with the School's Design Team in September of this year regarding the stage 3 submission (developed sketch scheme) for the project. When the complete stage 3 submission is received in my Department, my Officials will arrange a meeting with the School's Design Team in order to evaluate the documentation. It is envisaged that unless there are very exceptional circumstances involved, the meeting will be sufficient to authorise the project to progress to the next stages of architectural planning. Progression of projects to Construction will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

School Transport.

568. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Science if all of the school buses used in the transport of children to a school

[Mr. McGuinness.]

(details supplied) in County Kilkenny are fitted with seat belts. [33863/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): Bus Éireann has advised that all of its buses, and the majority of contractors' buses, operating as part of the School Transport Schemes have been fitted with safety belts. The remainder are on schedule to be fitted with safety belts by the target date of December, 2006. This is in accordance with the package of measures to enhance the safety of school transport operations announced by Minister Hanafin and myself in July, 2005. The specific information requested by the Deputy is not readily available.

Psychological Service.

569. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools in south Tipperary currently serviced by the National Educational Psychological Service; and the number of schools in south Tipperary not currently serviced by NEPS. [33881/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Deputy is aware that all primary and post primary schools have access to psychological services either directly from assigned psychologists based in the National Educational Psychological Service or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments, details of which are available on my Department's website and which is administered by NEPS. There has been some movement of staff over the summer months in NEPS and seven new psychologists have been appointed to the service. The induction period for the newly appointed psychologists will be completed at the end of this month (October). The school lists nationally will be revised accordingly in early November and the element pertaining to Tipperary will be sent directly to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

570. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of primary school pupils in south Tipperary being taught in classes greater in size than 24 pupils; and the number of classes that exist in south Tipperary's primary schools that exceed the average pupil teacher ratio of 24 pupils per class. [33882/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, major improvements have been made in staffing at primary in recent years. At the beginning of the current school year there are no less than 4000 primary teachers now, compared with 2002. The average class size in our primary schools is 24 and there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary

level, including resource teachers etc. As the Deputy will be aware the average class size in South Tipperary last year was below the national average. Children in Tipperary with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas are getting more support than ever before to help them to make the most of their time at school. Indeed, with the thousands of extra primary teachers hired by this Government, recent years have seen the largest expansion in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. Furthermore, the Government is committed to providing even more primary teachers next year to reduce class sizes. As the Deputy knows all primary schools are staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. 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 28 children in the school. Next year (2007/2008 school year) this is being reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

The most recent figures in relation to the number of children in classes with more than 24 pupils relate to the last school year. In the 2005/2006 school year there were 158 Ordinary Classes in National Schools in Tipperary South Riding with more than 24 pupils per class. Class sizes in Tipperary have improved significantly under this Government. When this Government came into office, there were 247 Ordinary Classes in National School in Tipperary South with more than 24 pupils per class. A further initiative that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the current school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned in the 2006/07 school year compared to 170 in 2005/06. This Government has shown a clear determination to improve the staffing in our schools and we will continue to prioritise this issue going forward.

Special Educational Needs.

571. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science when home tuition will be approved for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [33884/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The application referred to by the Deputy is currently being considered by my Department and a response will issue as soon as this process has been completed.

School Transport.

572. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science if the school transport provided to

children (details supplied) in County Mayo will be altered to make the collection of these children safer. [33888/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): My Department has requested Bus Éireann to submit a report on the service available to the pupils referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied. When this report is received and reviewed my Department will notify the parents of the pupils concerned.

Higher Education Grants.

573. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the grant assistance top-up schemes available to help third level students from disadvantaged areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33932/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): A key area covered in the report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education — which was asked to advise on the development of a co-ordinated framework to promote access by disadvantaged students — is the Special Rates of Maintenance Grant (also known as the Top-Up Grant). Eligibility is determined by reference to an income threshold and receipt of a long-term social welfare payment as set out as follows: 1. An applicant must qualify for the ordinary maintenance grant; 2. Total reckonable income in the relevant tax year must not exceed the lower income limits as set out in the relevant Maintenance Grant Schemes and, where applicable, net of Child Dependant Increase payments; and 3. As at the prescribed date — i.e. 31 December each year — the source of income must include one of the eligible long-term Social Welfare payments. For the 2006/2007 academic year the non-adjacent, ordinary grant plus the top-up has been increased to €5,970 and the adjacent rate to €2,390 i.e. a Top-Up of €2,860 and €1,145 respectively.

Financial Assistance is also available from my Department through the Student Assistance Fund which is ESF-aided and administered by the National Office for Equity of Access to Third Level Education (National Office). This Fund assists students who, having commenced a third-level course, experience financial hardship and, therefore, may be unable to continue their third-level studies. Applications for funding should be made by the individual student to the Access Officer in their institution. The Fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis. The Millennium Partnership Fund is a community-based fund that supports retention and participation among under-represented groups of students in further or higher education. Partnership Companies and Community Groups manage the Fund locally. The following Area Partnership Company is in the Deputy's constituency area:

Meitheal Mhaigheo, Lower Main Street, Foxford, Co. Mayo; (094)-9256745. The Fund is managed on behalf of my Department by Pobal in consultation with the National Office for Equity of Access to Third Level Education. Applications for Millennium funding are made annually by the Partnership Companies and Community Groups through Pobal, the state company established to promote social inclusion, reconciliation and equality in Ireland.

574. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if an application for a top-up grant in respect of third level education will be resolved for a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33933/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Officials in my Department have been in contact with County Kilkenny Vocational Education Committee concerning the student referred to by the Deputy. I understand the candidate was awarded the full non-adjacent rate of the grant. However, the candidate did not qualify for the Special Rate of Maintenance grant for the 2006/07 academic year as the income does not include one of the approved Social Welfare payments.

School Staffing.

575. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will facilitate the requirement for staff for the tutoring of maths, English and art under the school completion programme for a school (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33934/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The allocation of teaching hours is a matter for the Post Primary Teacher Allocation section within my Department. The allocation to VECs of Co-Operation hours with Other Institutions has been completed for 2006/2007. My Department is currently undertaking a review of the allocation of teaching hours to VECs under the Co-Operation Hours with Other Institutions. VECs will be invited to apply for teaching support hours for existing and new centres for the 2007/08 school year early in the new year. In the event the unit referred to by the Deputy wishes to apply for teaching hours for 2007/2008, they should contact Kilkenny VEC in order to establish if the VEC is willing to support this unit and if so, the VEC should prepare an application for consideration by my Department.

School Transport.

576. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be picked up at an alterna-

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tive location for the school bus; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33948/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): Under the terms of my Department's Post-Primary School Transport Scheme, a pupil is eligible for school transport if s/he resides 4.8 kilometres or more from the post-primary centre in the catchment area in which s/he resides. The scheme is not designed to facilitate parents who choose to send their children to a post-primary centre outside of the catchment area in which they reside. However, children who are fully eligible for transport to the post-primary centre in the catchment area in which they reside may apply for transport on a concessionary basis to a post-primary centre outside of their own catchment area — otherwise known as catchment boundary transport. These children can only be facilitated if spare seats are available on the bus after all other eligible children travelling to their 'own' post-primary centre have been catered for. Such children will have to make their way either to the catchment boundary or to the nearest pick up point within that catchment area. My Department has requested the Transport Liaison Officer (TLO) for County Clare to investigate the eligibility status of the pupil referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied. The Deputy may wish to contact the TLO directly regarding the names and addresses of the other eight students although it appears that they are only eligible for transport on a concessionary basis from the catchment boundary. However, when all of the relevant information is available the TLO will be in a position to advise further on the matter.

Special Educational Needs.

577. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); and if in view of this case she intervene and change the criteria for dyslexic students as a matter of urgency to prevent such students struggling and falling behind in second level education. [33964/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Second level pupils with dyslexia are normally integrated into ordinary classes. In such situations they may receive additional tutorial support from the remedial/learning support teacher, guidance counsellor and subject teachers. There are currently a total of 534 whole-time equivalent remedial/learning support teachers and 684 whole-time equivalent guidance teachers in place at second level. My Department also allocates additional teacher support and special needs assistant support to second level schools and Vocational Education Committees to cater for pupils with special educational needs, includ-

ing, where appropriate, pupils with dyslexia. To qualify for additional teaching support, under this category, children must be assessed by a psychologist as being of average intelligence or higher and having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the second percentile on suitable, standardised, norm referenced tests. In accordance with the terms of circular letter M10/94, pupils with dyslexia may also, depending on an educational assessment, meet the criteria for exemption from the learning of the Irish Language on the grounds of having a learning disability. Depending on the degree of the condition, they may also be eligible for special arrangements in the Certificate Examinations.

Question No. 578 answered with Question No. 140.

Physical Education Facilities.

579. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of general purpose rooms for primary schools for which funding was sanctioned by her Department in each year from 2001 to 2005; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34006/06]

580. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of sports halls for primary schools for which funding was sanctioned by her Department in each year from 2001 to 2005; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34007/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 579 and 580 together.

My Department's planning guidelines for new schools include, where appropriate for PE Halls, general purpose rooms and outdoor hard play areas such as basketball courts.

Such provision is typically included in the accommodation brief for large-scale school building projects. Between 2000 and 2005 a total of 355 large-scale projects were delivered in primary schools by my Department as part of an overall investment of €2 billion in modernising primary and post-primary school accommodation throughout the country. In addition, my Department has also sanctioned a further 119 such projects in primary schools for progression to tender and construction.

While not underestimating the level of capital funding and other resources required to rectify decades of under-investment in school infrastructure, the multi-annual capital envelopes will enable my Department to adopt a multi-annual framework to the provision of modern facilities in school buildings including general purpose and sports facilities.

Vocational Education Committees.

581. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when her Department will complete its review of allocations to vocational educational committees under co-operation hours with other institutions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34017/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department allocates additional teaching hours to VECs to support the delivery of education programmes in a range of facilities. Such allocations are made under the heading Co-Operation Hours with Other Institutions and are made in response to specific applications which are submitted by the VECs in advance of the commencement of the school year to which they relate.

The Co-operation arrangements extend over a range of educational services and needs including areas such as Community Training Workshops, Traveller Training Centres, Prisoner education, Probation and Welfare, Special Education, Youth Services, Music schools and others.

The scheme is currently under review by my Department. This review, which is in progress across all VECs, is a wide-ranging review covering many diverse areas of provision. Some of these areas are, of their nature, complex and require detailed research. Notwithstanding this, however, it is my Department's intention to complete this review to the furthest extent possible before the commencement of the 2007/08 school year.

School Accommodation.

582. **Mr. Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has received an application for a capital grant from the board of management of a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if there is progress in granting the application due to overcrowding. [34045/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The initial application from the school sought to have its accommodation needs met by way of a devolved grant under the Additional Classroom Accommodation scheme 2006. While acknowledging that the school had an immediate deficit of mainstream accommodation which was addressed by way of approval to rent a mainstream classroom, my officials' preliminary appraisal of the school's long-term accommodation need indicated that a more thorough assessment of the projected long term staffing, on which the school's overall accommodation needs will be based, was required with a view to providing the necessary building project under the traditional building programme. In this regard, my Department will be meeting with Cork County Council in the coming weeks to discuss potential and anticipated developments in the general area in which the school is located. Following on from

the findings of this meeting my Department will give further consideration, in consultation with the school authorities, to the likely accommodation needs of the school.

Schools Building Projects.

583. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath has been placed in band two, despite the fact that the documentation, records and facts submitted to her Department clearly indicates that this school should be placed in band 1.1 as it clearly fulfils the criteria for such a placement; if, in the context of the proposals as submitted, further consideration will be given to upgrading this school to band 1.1 as the process of building a significant extension to the school is expected to take a considerable length of time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34061/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The application from the school in question is very recent. A preliminary examination of the application suggests that the project attracts a Band 2 rating. However, in common with all applications for large scale capital investment, a rigorous assessment will be carried out on the schools long term needs. The result of the examination will determine the ultimate Band rating which will apply mindful of the definition applying to a rapidly developing area as published in the prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects.

584. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science the progress made since March 2006 on the project agreed to at a school (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; if she intends to provide funding for a post primary facility at this location to augment the services provided by the primary facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34074/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The building project for the School referred to by the Deputy was listed among the 43 schools that I announced to start the architectural planning process in March of 2005. Substantial work on the early stages of the design process have already been completed.

My Department's officials have already had a preliminary meeting with the Local Authority Planners of Kilkenny Co. Council in order to address any possible conditions which the Local Authority may have in relation to the planning application and the School Authorities have been informed of the outcome of the meeting.

My Department has lodged the planning application for the School in question and a date for a decision on the planning application is due this month.

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An information meeting was held in my Department's offices in Tullamore with the School's Design Team in September of this year regarding the stage 3 submission (developed sketch scheme) for the project.

When the complete stage 3 submission is received in my Department, my Officials will arrange a further meeting with the School's Design Team in order to evaluate the documentation. It is envisaged that unless there are very exceptional circumstances involved, the meeting will be sufficient to authorise the project to progress to the next stages of architectural planning.

My Department has at present no plans to provide a Post-Primary facility at this location.

Progression of projects to Construction will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

Early Childhood Education.

585. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Science if and when she will mainstream the early start programme to all disadvantaged schools. [34155/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Early Start pre-school project operates in 40 primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Galway, Drogheda and Dundalk.

Targeted early childhood education provision is a key element of the School Support Programme (SSP) under the new action plan for educational inclusion DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). As a result of the identification and review processes, 873 schools have been invited to participate in the new Programme. These comprise 670 primary schools (338 urban/town schools and 332 rural schools) and 203 second-level schools.

The objective in relation to early childhood education is to concentrate actions initially on those children aged from three up to school enrolment, who will subsequently attend the 190 urban/town primary schools serving the most disadvantaged communities. My Department will work in partnership with other departments and agencies to complement and add value to existing childcare programmes in disadvantaged communities, with a view to ensuring that the overall care and education needs of the children concerned are met in an integrated manner. The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education will provide advice on the future development and direction of pre-school measures for children in disadvantaged communities and the findings of a number of evaluation reports on Early Start prepared by the Education Research Centre will be taken into account in this regard.

In December 2005, the Office of the Minister for Children was established to maximise the co-ordination of policies for children and young people and will have a range of functions previously under the Departments of Health and Children; Justice Equality and Law Reform; and Education and Science. A new Early Years Education Policy Unit has been established within my Department and will be co-located with the Office of the Minister for Children. This Unit will oversee the preparation of plans for phased implementation of the early childhood education dimension of DEIS in the targeted school communities and this will be pursued within an overall strategic policy framework developed by the Office of the Minister for Children.

Literacy Levels.

586. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the budget allocation for the reading recovery programme. [34156/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department's budget allocation for the Reading Recovery programme for the current year is €600,000.

School Services Staff.

587. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on whether each school should have a secretary and a caretaker. [34159/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department provides funding towards the cost of secretarial and caretaking services in primary schools under two separate schemes. One scheme is the 1978/79 scheme for the employment of full-time secretaries and caretakers in primary schools, under which my Department meets the full cost of salary. This scheme is being phased out as posts become vacant and no new posts are being created. This scheme has been superseded by a more extensive grant scheme now referred to as the Ancillary Services grant.

The Ancillary Services grant scheme provides additional funding for primary schools towards the cost of secretarial and caretaking services. The scheme is flexible by nature, giving Boards of Management discretion as to the manner in which secretarial and caretaking services are provided. In this regard, it is a matter for individual Boards of Management to decide whether to employ a secretary and/or a caretaker. There are no proposals at present to change this position.

Computerisation Programme.

588. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Science her proposals to improve the provision and quality of computers in schools. [34160/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Deputy will be pleased to know that a census of school ICT facilities carried out in May and June of last year by the National Centre for Technology in Education found that the ratio of computers to students has improved significantly in recent years.

As the Deputy will be aware, major investment has also been provided for developing school networks and bringing broadband to our schools in recent years. The roll-out of broadband to all schools has been undertaken in partnership with industry, in the context of the joint Government/IBEC — TIF (Telecommunications and Internet Federation) Agreement. The broadband connectivity is being provided via a Schools National Broadband Network supported by HEAnet, in order to provide managed Internet access, email, security controls and content filtering. A broadband support service is being managed by the NCTE to assist schools with advice and information relating to the roll-out and ongoing use of their broadband connectivity within the schools network.

I am aware of the benefits that good use of ICT can bring to our children's education and will bear this in mind in considering what areas should be the future priorities for the ICT in Schools Programme.

North-South Education Consortium.

589. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the current phase of the north south student teacher exchange. [34161/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I presume the Deputy is referring to the North-South Education Consortium. Officials in my Department and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland are currently examining proposals from the Consortium on establishing a North-South Educational Trust and on the development of a Single Programme Framework for North-South funded activity in the Education and Youth sectors.

These proposals are based on the results of a wide-ranging consultation process involving over 50 key stakeholders in Ireland and Northern Ireland, young people involved in exchange activities, an online survey and an e-voting initiative which involved stakeholders, including representatives from Government Departments and delivery agencies.

Special Educational Needs.

590. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason resource assistance is not provided to students with dyslexia, whose assessment is at the third percentile, with such assistance being confined to students at the first and second percentile (details supplied); the consultation she had with the Dyslexia Association

regarding setting these levels; if she will extend the provision of resource assistance to children on the third percentile; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34169/06]

638. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will revise the criteria under which students with dyslexia qualify for resource assistance to include those who score at the third percentile or above in order to include children who need such assistance to progress in school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34521/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 590 and 638 together.

My Department has given a very high priority to the provision of resources to address the learning difficulties of children with low levels of achievement in reading such as those referred to by the Deputy. As the Deputy is aware, my Department implemented a general allocation system in all primary schools with effect from the start of the 2005/2006 school year. The general allocation scheme is designed to ensure that each school has learning support/resource teaching support available to meet the needs of children with high incidence special needs including dyslexia.

There are now over 5,000 teachers in our primary schools working directly with children with special needs, including those requiring learning support. This compares to fewer than 1,500 in 1998.

A comprehensive circular (Circular SP ED 02/05) issued to schools in September 2005 in relation to the organisation of teaching resources for pupils who need additional support. Schools are advised in the circular to establish a staged approach to assessment, identification and learning programme planning for pupils with special educational needs. This advice is in keeping with advice that has been provided to schools in previous circulars and in the Learning-Support Guidelines and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) model of service. A staged approach to identification and intervention is also advocated in the Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia and is in keeping with the terms of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004.

Guidance for schools is provided in the circular for each step of the staged process. Three worked examples of how the staged model can be put into operation in different school settings are provided.

It is not advocated that schools should establish a uniform system of screening, identification and diagnostic testing in relation to the selection of pupils for additional support. Rather they should use the guidance in the documents that have been provided to develop policies and procedures to

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suit the circumstances of the school and the needs of the pupils. Further guidance and advice in relation to the establishment of whole-school procedures can be sought from NEPS by schools who have an assigned NEPS psychologist and from the Primary Curriculum Support Programme trainers who are providing in-service support for all schools on the implementation of the Learning Support Guidelines.

Second level pupils with dyslexia are normally integrated into ordinary classes. In such situations, they may receive additional tutorial support from the remedial/learning support teacher, guidance counsellor and subject teachers. There are currently a total of 534 wholtime equivalent remedial/learning support teachers and 684 wholtime equivalent guidance teachers in place at second level.

My Department also allocates additional teacher support and special needs assistant support to second level schools and Vocational Education Committees to cater for pupils with special educational needs, including, where appropriate, pupils with dyslexia. To qualify for additional teaching support, under this category, children must be assessed by a psychologist as being of average intelligence or higher and having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics, which places them at or below the 2nd percentile on suitable, standardised, norm referenced tests.

In accordance with the terms of circular letter M10/94, pupils with dyslexia may also meet, depending on an educational assessment, the criteria for exemption from the learning of the Irish Language on the grounds of having a learning disability. Depending on the degree of the condition, they may also be eligible for special arrangements in the Certificate Examinations.

My Department did not consult with the Dyslexia Association in setting the Percentile levels. It is anticipated that the general allocation model will be reviewed after three years of operation and it is open to the Dyslexia Association to furnish its view to my Department at that point. I have no plans to alter the present system at this time.

591. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to include children who suffer from the learning disability dyslexia and have scored third percentile in their assessment to qualify for resource assistance; if an assessment will be provided for a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34253/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department has given a very high priority to the provision of resources to address the learning difficulties of children with low levels of achievement in reading such as those referred

to by the Deputy. As the Deputy is aware, my Department implemented a general allocation system in all primary schools with effect from the start of the 2005/2006 school year. The general allocation scheme is designed to ensure that each school has learning support/resource teaching support available to meet the needs of children with high incidence special needs including dyslexia.

The school in question was allocated one learning support/resource teaching post and 12.5 part time hours as part of this initiative. Primary children, including the pupil in question, do not need an assessment to access these learning/resource teaching supports. It is expected that the needs of the pupil referred to by the Deputy can be catered for within this allocation.

A comprehensive circular (Circular SP ED 02/05) issued to schools in September 2005 in relation to the organisation of teaching resources for pupils who need additional support. Schools are advised in the circular to establish a staged approach to assessment, identification and learning programme planning for pupils with special educational needs. This advice is in keeping with advice that has been provided to schools in previous circulars and in the Learning-Support Guidelines and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) model of service. A staged approach to identification and intervention is also advocated in the Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia and is in keeping with the terms of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004.

Guidance for schools is provided in the circular for each step of the staged process. Three worked examples of how the staged model can be put into operation in different school settings are provided.

It is not advocated that schools should establish a uniform system of screening, identification and diagnostic testing in relation to the selection of pupils for additional support. Rather they should use the guidance in the documents that have been provided to develop policies and procedures to suit the circumstances of the school and the needs of the pupils. Further guidance and advice in relation to the establishment of whole-school procedures can be sought from NEPS by schools who have an assigned NEPS psychologist and from the Primary Curriculum Support Programme trainers who are providing in-service support for all schools on the implementation of the Learning Support Guidelines.

I understand that the pupil in question is currently in 6th Class. Second level pupils with dyslexia are normally integrated into ordinary classes. In such situations they may receive additional tutorial support from the remedial/learning support teacher, guidance counsellor and subject teachers. There are currently a total of 534 wholtime equivalent remedial/learning support teachers and 684 who-

letime equivalent guidance teachers in place at second level.

My Department also allocates additional teacher support and special needs assistant support to second level schools and Vocational Education Committees to cater for pupils with special educational needs, including, where appropriate, pupils with dyslexia. To qualify for additional teaching support, under this category, children must be assessed by a psychologist as being of average intelligence or higher and having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the 2nd percentile on suitable, standardised, norm referenced tests.

In accordance with the terms of circular letter M10/94, pupils with dyslexia may also meet, depending on an educational assessment, the criteria for exemption from the learning of the Irish Language on the grounds of having a learning disability. Depending on the degree of the condition, they may also be eligible for special arrangements in the Certificate Examinations.

The position regarding assessments is that schools have access to psychological assessments for their pupils, either directly through the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA) administered by NEPS. Schools that do not currently have a NEPS psychologist assigned to them may avail of the SCPA scheme. This Scheme allows the school to commission assessments from members of a panel of psychologists in private practice approved by NEPS. The fees for these assessments are paid directly by NEPS to the psychologist. Details of this process and the conditions that apply to the scheme are available on my Department's Website.

Education Schemes.

592. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount spent to date under the back to education initiative under the National Development Plan; the amount estimated to be spent by the end of the NDP; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34280/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): Provision was made in the National Development Plan 2000-2006 through the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme for funding for Lifelong Learning — Back to Education Initiative. The Back to Education Initiative provides new opportunities for learning through the provision of flexible part-time and full-time programmes that consolidate and build on existing further education services. It provides a progression route for school leavers and a re-entry route for those who wish to update their skills. The Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) and

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) programmes comprise the full time educational options under this initiative.

Expenditure on the Back to Education Initiative, full and part time, between 2000 and June 2006 amounted to €571.4 million. It is expected that an additional €30.05 million will be spent on this by the end of December 2006. A total of €50.8 million of this expenditure on BTEI was spent on the part time BTEI initiative from 2002, when it commenced, up to the end of June 2006 and it is expected that an additional €7 million will be spent on this part time initiative by the end of December 2006.

Education Infrastructure.

593. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount spent to date under the education infrastructure of the National Development Plan; the amount estimated to be spent by the end of the NDP; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34282/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Since the commencement of the National Development Plan 2000-2006, my Department has invested in excess of €2,800 million on educational infrastructure. The investment covers primary schools, post primary schools and higher education institutions. It is anticipated that at the completion of the Plan, expenditure on educational infrastructure will have exceeded €3,000m.

School Transport.

594. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of school children who are provided with school transport; the issues under consideration to improve safety for all such users of the transport services provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34304/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): The annual average number of pupils carried on primary and post primary school transport services since 2003 is 136,500, including about 8,000 children with special educational needs.

In July, 2005, Minister Hanafin and myself announced a package of measures to enhance the safety of school transport operations. The measures included:

- the phasing out of “3 for 2” seating on post-primary services, which has been completed;
- the phasing out of “3 for 2” seating on primary services by end December, 2006, which is well advanced;

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- the immediate fitting of approved seat belts on the Bus Éireann school bus fleet, which has been completed; and
- the fitting of approved seat belts on private buses in the school transport scheme by a target date of December, 2006, which is also well advanced.

In August, 2006, I launched a safety information campaign to make parents and children aware that it is now the law to wear seat belts on school buses, where provided. The campaign also aims to encourage children to behave in a safety-conscious manner on, and in the vicinity of, school buses.

These messages are being conveyed by way of television, cinema and radio advertisements and through a DVD which will shortly be distributed to each primary and post-primary school.

Other measures to enhance safety which my Department is currently examining include the possibility of extending the warning flashing light pilot scheme to buses in a number of areas in 2007 with a view to a full roll out nationally.

With regard to child protection, Bus Éireann has informed my Department that it is envisaged that formal vetting procedures will come on stream later this year for new bus drivers and at a later stage for all existing drivers, including Bus Éireann, contractor and taxi drivers engaged under the school transport scheme.

In relation to driver training, the content of Bus Éireann's driver training courses continues to be updated and improved. The company intends to circulate a updated Drivers Manual to its school bus drivers very shortly. In addition, a training course is currently being developed by Bus Éireann for all contractors' school bus drivers, which will help to bring the training of these drivers up to a similar standard as those employed directly by Bus Éireann.

595. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on changing a school transport route in County Mayo to a later time in the mornings as the pupils are arriving too early at the school; if the matter will be investigated and changed for the next academic year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34305/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): My Department has requested the Transport Liaison Officer (TLO) for County Mayo to submit a report on the service referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied. My Department will liaise with The TLO regarding the issues referred to by the Deputy.

Schools Building Programme.

596. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Edu-

cation and Science when a new school will be built in Saggart as outlined in the Saggart Local Area Plan; if her Department will take a proactive approach in setting up such a school; if she acknowledges that further housing rezoning will necessitate additional classrooms to the eight class facility outlined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34306/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department is in receipt of an application for additional accommodation from the existing primary school in Saggart. However, the school site cannot accommodate the extent of extra accommodation required for this developing area. Consequently, it is the Department's intention to develop additional provision on a greenfield site. The issue of the site is being progressed in consultation with South Dublin County Council and the relevant landowners. When this matter has been finalised, progress on the proposed project can be considered under the School Building Programme.

Early School Leavers.

597. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the rate of dropout from schools in County Meath compared with other counties; the plans in place to address this problem; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34307/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The average Leaving Certificate retention rate for Co. Meath was 80.9% while the national average Leaving Certificate retention rate was 77.8%. These rates are not adjusted to allow for factors such as persons opting to pursue their senior cycle education in private institutions (estimated 2,050), emigration and death (estimated 260). The adjusted national average Leaving Certificate retention rate for the 1996 cohort was 81.3 per cent (compared to 81.8% for the 1994 cohort). The adjusted figure by county is not available.

The average Junior Certificate retention rate for Co. Meath was 96.0%, while the national average Junior Certificate retention rate was 94.6%.

Given the clear link between early school leaving and continued socio-economic disadvantage in adult life, the Government is determined to do all that is possible to ensure that every child gets all the opportunities and support they need to enable them to complete their education and my Department has adopted a broad-based approach to tackling the problems of early school leaving. This approach includes legislative change, such as the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) as the single national body with responsibility for school attendance. Curricular reforms have been introduced such as widening the educational experience available to

students through such programmes as the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, and the Leaving Certificate Applied. Senior cycle reform has the potential to promote greater inclusion and effective participation, to provide greater curriculum balance and choice and to contribute to a more positive learning culture in schools. Preventative measures have also been put in place such as the School Completion Programme and the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL). The School Completion Programme directly targets those in danger of dropping out of the education system and discriminates positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving. The Home School Community Liaison Scheme establishes partnership and collaboration between parents, teachers and communities in the interests of children's learning.

Enhancing attendance, progression, retention and attainment are central to DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) the action plan for educational inclusion. The action plan represents a shift in emphasis away from individual initiatives, each addressing a particular aspect of the problem, with the new plan adopting a multi-faceted and more integrated approach. This is the first time that an integrated educational inclusion strategy has been developed for 3-18 year olds in this country.

The plan provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which will bring together and build upon, a number of existing interventions for schools with a concentrated level of disadvantage. 670 primary schools, comprising 338 urban/town and 332 rural, and 203 second-level schools, have been included in the School Support Programme. The new action plan is being introduced on a phased basis — starting in 2006 — and will involve an additional annual investment of €40m on full implementation. It will also involve the provision of some 300 additional posts across the education system.

The key principle of early intervention underpins both the early childhood education measure and many of the literacy and numeracy measures being adopted under the new action plan.

The new action plan will place a renewed emphasis on the involvement of parents and families in children's education in schools. The Department and the NEWB will work together to ensure that an integrated approach to children at risk is adopted. The School Completion Programme will be integrated into the new School Support Programme under the action plan.

Progression from primary to second-level is recognised as a crucial transition period in a child's education. Under the action plan, a continuing emphasis will be placed on the development of effective transfer programmes by building on the existing work of the Home School

Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme. Other areas such as extending access to Schools' Business Partnerships, school meals, guidance counselling and student councils will also be facilitated through the action plan. In addition, increased integration will be promoted between the work of second-level schools and centres catering for young early school leavers, particularly Youthreach centres and Senior Traveller Training Centres.

Also central to the success of the action plan will be an increased emphasis on planning at school and school cluster level, 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.

Tax Code.

598. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of VAT paid by primary schools in the last year for which figures are available. [34308/06]

599. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of VAT paid by second-level schools in the last year for which figures are available. [34310/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 598 and 599 together.

I understand that all matters relating to the charging and payment of VAT by second-level schools are more appropriate to the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

The Deputy may wish to address his concerns in this matter to the Revenue Commissioners directly.

School Staffing.

600. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number and type of posts of responsibility which currently exist at both primary and second level; the average allowance for such posts at each sector; if new posts are being planned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34312/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The details regarding the number and type of posts of responsibility and salary rates for primary, Voluntary Secondary and Community/Comprehensive schools are outlined in the attached table.

The information outlined for the second level schools is the data that currently exists from the payroll database. The managerial authorities of schools are currently submitting details of new appointments to posts of responsibility for the 2006/2007 school year to my Department.

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Details of the allowances for posts of responsibility are also available on my Departments' website www.education.ie by accessing "education personnel" and "payroll".

Under the terms of "Towards 2016 Ten Year Framework Social partnership Agreement 2006-2015" the representatives of the managerial authorities and teacher unions agree to enter discussions to revise existing promotion procedures applying in all schools in each of the sectors. The

revised arrangements in each sector will be based on criteria that will be formulated and agreed for that sector and will apply to all appointments taking effect from the commencement of the 2008/2009 school year.

Breakdown of PORs in schools

The following table details the estimated number of PORs in primary, voluntary secondary, community and comprehensive schools. Data in relation to VEC schools is not held within the Department.

Type of P.O.R.	Rates (€) @ 01/12/05	Rates (€) @ 1/6/2006	Numbers 2006/07 Voluntary Secondary	Numbers 2006/07 Community and Comprehensive	Numbers 2005/06 Primary
Principal	8,662-39,513	8,879-40,501	420*	107*	3,450*
Deputy-Principal	3,506-25,231	3594-25,954	402*	109*	2,629
Vice-Principal	2,739-14,871	2,807-15243	1	Nil	10
Assistant-Principal	7,927	8125.0	2397*	731*	1,146
Grade A Post	6,196	6351.0	8	3	1
Special Duties Teacher	3,506	3594.0	3678*	1086*	7,270
Grade B Post	2,739	2807.0	8*	3	11
Director — Adult Education	3,506-21,069	3594-21596	14	40	N/A
Principal — Adult Education	1,511	1549.0	21	50	N/A
Programme Co-Ordinator/AP Post	7,927	8125	148	52	N/A
Programme Co-Ordinator/Special Duties Post	3,506	3594	104	8	N/A

* Inclusive of posts held on a personal basis

State Examinations.

601. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the current cost for operating the leaving certificate applied course both from a teaching and examination point of view. [34313/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The teacher allocation to a second level school for a particular school year consists of the allocation warranted by the enrolment at the end of the preceding September, as determined by the current Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR), together with approved ex-quota posts (e.g. Principal, Deputy Principal, Remedial/Learning Support and Guidance).

In general a ratio of 18:1 is applied in respect of recognised pupils on established Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, repeat Leaving Certificate and Transition Year Programmes and an enhanced ratio is applied in respect of recognised pupils on the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Post leaving Cert courses and Leaving Cert Applied.

With regard to the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, the first group of 20 participating pupils, irrespective of the programme year,

attracts an allocation of 1.5 whole-time teacher equivalents. This allocation applies in the case of the first group even where the actual take-up of approved places is fewer than 20. Each additional group of 20 participating pupils attracts an allocation of 1.25 WTE.

My Department publishes data on the number of pupils following specific programmes in its annual Statistical Report. Although the report for the 2005/06 year is still in preparation, I can advise the Deputy that the provisional number of pupils pursuing the Leaving Certificate Applied programme in the 2005/06 school year was 7,414.

The State Examinations Commission has operational responsibility for the Certificate examinations. In view of this, I have forwarded the Deputy's query in relation to the examinations system to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply.

602. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the cost of supervising exam halls for leaving and junior certificate exams each year; if this cost is borne by schools or directly by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34314/06]

603. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the cost of examining leaving

and junior certificate exam papers each year; the number of students who have taken these exams over the past five years; the average cost per exam per student; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34315/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 602 and 603 together.

The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations, including organising the holding of examinations, ensuring the preparation of examination papers and other examination materials and making arrangements for the marking of work presented for examination.

In view of this, I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

School Curriculum.

604. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to review sex education in schools following the publication of recent surveys on sex and sexuality among young Irish people, in view of evidence of wide scale support from parents for better sex education within a social context at both primary and second level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34316/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I too was interested in the findings of the Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships launched by my colleague, the Minister for Health and Children.

The survey, unsurprisingly, highlighted major changes in sexual behaviour and attitudes in Ireland in recent decades. It also drew attention to challenges that must be faced from both a public health and an education point of view.

From my own Department's perspective, the survey clearly highlighted the value of sex education.

I was pleased to note the finding that 18-24 year-olds were the most likely of all the age groups to have received sex education and the most likely to use contraception.

As the Deputy will be aware, many positive developments in relation to the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education have taken place in recent years, and these have been further strengthened through making Social Personal and Health Education a mandatory programme for junior cycle since September 2003. The impact of this would not have been reflected in the survey.

RSE is now a core part of SPHE at primary and at junior cycle level. While a senior cycle SPHE course is currently being developed, all schools are already required to have an RSE programme at senior cycle.

At primary level, the SPHE programme covers areas such as taking care of my body, growing and changing, relating to others and safety and protection. At an age-appropriate stage, children learn about differences between the male and female body, the changes that occur at puberty, and how the reproductive systems work. By the end of sixth class they are also expected to be able to understand sexual intercourse and birth within the context of a committed loving relationship.

The RSE Support Service provides information evenings for parents. These aim to inform parents about the RSE programme and to help them to communicate more effectively with their children about sex and relationships. The Support Service has also worked with the National Parents' Council Primary to develop a six-week RSE parent training programme.

At second level, the RSE programme covers areas such as Sexually Transmitted Infections, human fertility, family planning and sexual orientation.

All schools are expected to teach all aspects of the RSE programme, regardless of their ethos. They are also required to draw up an RSE policy through a collaborative process of consultation with parents, teachers and members of the Board of Management.

Schools are supported in the implementation of RSE by the SPHE and RSE Support Services. They provide guidelines on policy development, curricula and teacher guidelines, information for parents, teaching resource materials and teacher training. Schools are also encouraged to use the resources produced by the Health Promotion Unit.

So, there have been many positive developments in the area of Relationships and Sexuality Education in recent years. Nonetheless, this is an important and rigorous study and I have asked the RSE support service to consider its findings carefully.

Capitation Grants.

605. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the current capitation grants to primary and second level schools; the reason these grants have not kept up with the rate of inflation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34317/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department's scheme of capitation grants provide funding towards the general operating costs of schools which would include heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, painting, teaching aids and other miscellaneous charges. The capitation grant has been increased substantially in recent years.

The standard rate of capitation grant for primary schools has increased from €57.14 (£45) in 1997 to €145.58 in 2006. This represents an

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increase of almost 155% in the capitation grant over that period.

This grant is in addition to the Ancillary Services Grant which provides additional funding for primary schools towards the cost of secretarial and caretaking services. The standard rate of grant per pupil under this scheme has also been substantially increased — from €102 per pupil in 2002 to the current rate of €139 per pupil.

There has also been significant improvements in the level of funding for voluntary secondary schools in recent years. Since January 2005, the standard per capita grant has been increased by a cumulative €24 per pupil and now stands at €298 per pupil.

Secondary schools have also benefited under the school services support fund initiative. Introduced with effect from the 2000/01 school year, the school services support grant has been increased since January 2005 by a cumulative €28 per pupil bringing the annual grant from €131 per pupil to €159 per pupil. These grants are in addition to the funding of up to €40,000 per school that is also provided by my Department to secondary schools towards secretarial and caretaking services. A secondary school with 500 pupils, for example, now receives annual grants of up to €270,000 towards general expenses and support services. This represents an increase of 83% since 2000.

The significant increases in the funding of both primary and post primary schools which I have outlined are a clear demonstration of my commitment to prioritise available resources to address the needs of schools.

Third Level Education.

606. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of additional places being provided for Irish medical students in 2007 to 2010; the cost to the State for funding each student; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34318/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): On the 1 February 2006 the Minister for Health and Children and I published the report of the Fottrell Working Group on Undergraduate Medical Education and Training. As part of these reforms I am increasing the annual number of undergraduate places for Irish and EU students from 305 to 485. I am also introducing a separate graduate entry stream which will provide 240 additional places per annum. These increases, which will be phased in over a five year period, will increase the annual number of medical places from 305 to 725.

At undergraduate level an additional 70 places have been provided this academic year, with a further 40 places being provided in 2007 and a further 35 places in each of 2008 and 2009. This will be achieved by replacing existing non-EU

places, and making appropriate compensatory payments to the medical schools.

It is anticipated that the Higher Education Authority will shortly issue a competitive call for proposals to provide the new graduate entry programme, with a view to additional places being provided on this programme from 2007. The submissions from this call for proposals will include the costs associated with the graduate entry programme.

Traveller Education.

607. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the last time an analysis was carried out regarding outcomes from the current investment in traveller education; if there are plans for a review; if such a review would be carried out in consultation with traveller representative groups; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34319/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): The Inspectorate of my Department conducted an evaluation of 23 Traveller pre-schools in 2000/2001. This evaluation focused on management and ownership, finances, curricular practices, training of teachers and links between schools and parents. A report of the evaluation was published in April, 2003.

In 2004, the Evaluation Support and Research Unit of the Inspectorate co-ordinated an evaluation of provision for Traveller education in 30 primary schools and 6 post-primary schools in 2004. Traveller parents and children were interviewed as part of the process. The Advisory Committee on Traveller Education which includes Traveller representative groups was briefed on progress. The survey examined achievement outcomes in literacy and numeracy and analysed data in relation to attendance. A report of this survey was published in 2006.

In 2005, my Department initiated a review of expenditure in Youthreach centres and Senior Traveller Training Centres. As part of the review, the Inspectorate conducted an evaluation in two Senior Traveller Training Centres in 2006 and it is intended to evaluate a further seven. These evaluations will take place during the current school year. A composite report of these evaluations will be published. Another component of the review consisted of a consultation process where Traveller Representative Groups were consulted for their views as were a sample of staff from a number of the centres, Traveller learners and their parents.

In addition, the Regional Office Directorate has managed the compilation of an up to date comprehensive statistical report on Travellers which will be available before the end of the year.

The Advisory Committee on Traveller Education has completed its Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy.

The Committee consisted of the key stakeholders in Traveller education including representatives from Pavee Point, Irish Traveller Movement, the National Traveller Women's Forum and the National Association of Traveller Centres. This report will be launched next month.

Teachers' Remuneration.

608. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the average or statutory salary for a classroom assistant in a primary or second level school. [34320/06]

Circular Pay 0112/06 — Revision of Salaries for Special Needs Assistants from 1 June 2006.

Scale Points	1.5% Sustaining Progress 01-Dec-05	2.5% Sustaining Progress 01-Jun-06
	€	€
1	21,574	22,113
2	22,587	23,152
3	23,597	24,187
4	24,610	25,225
5	25,625	26,266
6	26,637	27,303
7	27,647	28,338
8	28,655	29,371
9	29,670	30,412
10	30,679	31,446
11	31,694	32,486
12	33,606	34,446
13	33,606	34,446
14	33,606	34,446
15	34,963	35,837

School Services Staff.

609. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the average or statutory salary for a school secretary. [34321/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department provides funding towards the cost of secretarial services in primary and secondary schools under two separate schemes. One is the 1978/79 scheme under which my Department meets the full cost of salary. These staff members are paid directly through my Department's payroll. Tables outlining the salary scale applicable to Clerical Officers in both

primary and post-primary schools from 1 June, 2006 is below and are also available on my Department's website at www.education.ie. under "Education Personnel" and "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 secretarial services. The grants provided are not directly linked to any particular pay scales. The scheme is flexible in nature giving Boards of Management and schools discretion as to the manner in which these services are provided.

Table 1: Revised salary scales for school secretaries (national /secondary/community & comprehensive schools)

Grade	1/1/04	1/7/04	1/12/04	1/6/05	1/12/05	1/6/06
	€	€	€	€	€	€
Grade III	19,733	20,128	20,531	21,255	21,574	22,113
	20,660	21,073	21,494	22,253	22,587	23,152
	21,584	22,016	22,456	23,248	23,597	24,187

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Grade	1/1/04	1/7/04	1/12/04	1/6/05	1/12/05	1/6/06
	€	€	€	€	€	€
	22,512	22,962	23,421	24,246	24,610	25,225
	23,438	23,907	24,385	25,246	25,625	26,266
	24,364	24,851	25,348	26,243	26,637	27,303
	25,289	25,795	26,311	27,238	27,647	28,338
	26,211	26,735	27,270	28,232	28,655	29,371
	27,139	27,682	28,236	29,232	29,670	30,412
	28,061	28,622	29,194	30,226	30,679	31,446
	28,992	29,572	30,163	31,226	31,694	32,486
	30,738	31,353	31,980	33,109	33,606	34,446
Maximum point of scale	30,738	31,353	31,980	33,109	33,606	34,446
	30,738	31,353	31,980	33,109	33,606	34,446
	30,738	31,353	31,980	33,109	33,606	34,446
Long Service Increment	31,981	32,621	33,273	34,446	34,963	35,837

Table 2: Scale for secretaries in Schools with 40 or more whole time equivalent teachers (national /secondary/community & comprehensive schools)

Grade	1/1/04	1/7/04	1/12/04	1/6/05	1/12/05	1/6/06
	€	€	€	€	€	€
Grade IV	24,112	24,594	25,086	25,971	26,361	27,020
	25,868	26,385	26,913	27,862	28,280	28,987
	27,644	28,197	28,761	29,775	30,222	30,978
	28,967	29,546	30,137	31,201	31,669	32,461
	30,247	30,852	31,469	32,578	33,067	33,894
	31,972	32,611	33,263	34,438	34,955	35,829
	33,223	33,887	34,565	35,784	36,321	37,229
	34,490	35,180	35,884	37,151	37,708	38,651
	34,490	35,180	35,884	37,151	37,708	38,651
	34,490	35,180	35,884	37,151	37,708	38,651
1st Long Service Increment	35,658	36,371	37,098	38,407	38,983	39,958
	35,658	36,371	37,098	38,407	38,983	39,958
	35,658	36,371	37,098	38,407	38,983	39,958
2nd Long Service Increment	36,832	37,569	38,320	39,671	40,266	41,273

One Teacher Schools.

610. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the location and number of one teacher schools at both primary and second level. [34322/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): For the 2006/2007 school year, there are 13 one-teacher schools at primary level. This figure does not include hospital or special schools. The names and addresses of the schools are in the table below. There are currently no one teacher schools at second level.

School

Baltard N.S.
Doonbeg
Kilrush
Co. Clare
Roll No: 15968 I

S.N. Oileán an Chnoic
Leitir Mealain
Co. na Gaillimhe
Roll No: 15518 A

School

S.N. Naomh Bríde
Mughros
Carna
Co. Galway
Roll No: 18263 I

Naomh Mhuire Boys N.S.
Lanesboro
Co. Longford
Roll No: 18306 A

Ratheskin N.S.
Kincon P.O.
Killala
Co. Mayo
Roll No: 13866 N

Mantua N.S.
Castlereah
Co. Roscommon
Roll No: 02327 S

S.N. Mhuire Gan Smál
Eanach Mor
Gurteen
Co. Sligo
Roll No: 18711 J

Gartan N.S.
Gartan
Letterkenny
Co. Donegal
Roll No: 13755 E

S.N. Oilibhear Pluincead
Shannonbridge
Co. Offaly
Roll No: 17187 N

St. Michaels N.S.
Church Road
Ardnaree
Ballina
Co. Mayo
Roll No: 12792 F

Scoil Cholmcille
Oilean Thoraigh
Bunbeg
Co. Donegal
Roll No: 05164I

Fealeview N.S.
Abbeyfeale
Co. Limerick
Roll No: 14516O

School

SN An Sraith
Claremorris
Co. Mayo
Roll No: 15073L

Site Acquisitions.

611. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the situation in relation to planning permission by developers and conditions being imposed for the provision of school sites; if a precedent exists outside of strategic development zones; if discussions have been held with the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government regarding changes in legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34323/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): In common with all large scale structures, planning permission is required for school developments. The client for the project applies for the planning permission. The client may the Department, the VEC or the Board of Management of a school depending on where ownership of the site lies. Conditions attaching to planning permission are set by the local authority or An Bord Pleanála if initial observations/objections are carried to that stage.

In relation to the availability and acquisition of school sites, the Department is pursuing an ongoing programme of site acquisitions for school building purposes in many locations throughout the country. Local Authorities are obliged by statute to refer draft local area development plans to the Department for observation and comment so that lands can be zoned for future education use. There are numerous such sites reserved for education purposes particularly in the rapidly developing areas around Dublin so as to ensure that there will be sufficient land set aside and available for the future development of education infrastructure. Furthermore, under the provisions of the Strategic Development Zones (SDZ) it is generally the position that sites must be reserved for schools and also that the schools must be developed in line with the housing and other developments.

In addition, the School Planning Section of my Department is 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 cooperation has the effect of minimising the Departments land requirements and thus reducing site costs while at the same time providing local communities with new schools with enhanced facilities.

The Deputy will be aware that the provisions of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, do

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not place any onus on developers to provide school sites other than at market rates. I am keeping an open mind as to whether legislative change might be of assistance or prove the best way forward here. In this regard, my Department has commenced exploratory discussions with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. I would remind the House, however, that any changes in this area would require careful consideration in the context of constitutional protection for private property and indeed in weighing up how any reduction in the price per acre of any land given for schools development might impact on the unit costs and affordability of houses developed on the remaining lands.

Schools Refurbishment.

612. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the plans in place to enforce the recent recommendations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, with regard to education, that state, for example Article 59 b, to ensure that budgetary allocations are also directed at improving and upgrading school buildings, recreational equipment and facilities, and sanitary conditions in schools. [34324/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): This Government is determined to ensure that every child is educated in a suitable and comfortable environment. Under the largest school building programme in the history of the State we are spending nearly €500 million on school buildings in 2006, compared to just over €90 million in 1997.

Between 2000 and 2005 my Department invested over €2 billion on educational infrastructure on over 6,500 individual school projects. This investment is catering for the construction of new schools, large scale extensions and refurbishments, a wide range of projects under the Summer Works Scheme and a variety of other schemes. This process of modernising our school buildings is addressing the issues raised by the Deputy and will continue to do so.

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, nonetheless we are making huge progress.

I can further assure the Deputy that the €3.9 billion being provided over the five years 2006-2010 for capital projects at all levels of the education sector from primary to third level will provide for even more improvements to be made.

School Accommodation.

613. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will apologise for her Department's slow response to educational need

in rapidly growing areas of east Meath, such as Laytown, Bettystown and Mornington; the meaning of her comments on the radio that parents were the cause of the problem; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34325/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The problem in Laytown was not caused by the lack of planning for school provision as evidenced by the fact that a new school received recognition last year nor was it caused by the lack of an appropriately zoned site as evidenced by the Local Area Development Plan.

The problem was created, on the one hand, by objections emanating from the community to planning permission to effect the short term accommodation solution which would allow its children to commence school this year and, on the other hand, by the site for a permanent structure not being made available to the Patron for this purpose.

If neither of these scenarios arose, the normal procedures would have allowed the short term solution to have been in place at the commencement of the new school year and the long term solution to be working its way towards delivery.

In the space of two weeks after site acquisition being handed over to it by the Patron, the Department acquired the site for a new primary school and it has already appointed a Project Manager to oversee this project in conjunction with the development of the existing senior school up to 24 classrooms and the provision of a new post-primary school. The target delivery date for the new primary school is September 2008.

Schools Funding.

614. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the structures regarding the allocation of funding and resources to primary and second level schools; if there are any regional structures in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34326/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The funding arrangements made by my Department at primary and second-level reflect the different management and ownership arrangements for primary, voluntary secondary, comprehensive and community and VEC schools and colleges. Such funding and resourcing arrangements are structured in accordance with long standing agreements with the management authorities for the different schools. At the core of all arrangements is a reliance upon capitation as the principle determinant of funding. All schools submit a return of pupil enrolments based on the number attending as at 30th September each year and funding arrangements and teaching resources are generally determined on this basis. Considerable flexibility in the use of these resources is provided to schools thus allowing them to prioritise expenditures, as appropriate.

In the case of VEC schools and Community Colleges, allocations are made to VECs as part of a block grant, which also covers the VEC head-office overheads and other activities apart from the second-level programme. The Department does not earmark allocations for individual schools or for the various activities of VECs. The way in which the grant is distributed among schools is a matter for each committee in line with their priorities and perceptions of need.

Apart from the VEC sector to which I referred to earlier, there are no other regional structures in place in relation to the resourcing and funding of schools.

Model Schools.

615. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of model schools currently in operation; the specialties these model schools cover; if any new model schools have been set up in recent years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34327/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Model Schools are recognised primary schools which are maintained from State funds and are under the patronage of the Minister for Education and Science. They are ordinary primary schools offering the national curriculum.

There are nine Model Schools in the country. Three of the schools are located in Dublin and the other six are located in Athy, Bailieborough, Dunmanway, Galway, Limerick and Monaghan.

There has not been a Model School set up in the recent past.

Schools Building Projects.

616. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science if an analysis has been carried out in relation to value for money in building new schools; the cost of a new temporary classroom in 2006; the cost of a permanent classroom in 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34328/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department is mindful of the importance of value for money in the delivery of building projects and is satisfied that the tendering process undertaken in respect of each major building project including new school projects ensures that the best value for money is obtained. The School Building Unit has a basic building cost in place which is a guide in monitoring the trends that emerge from the tendering process.

My Department's policy no longer facilitates the purchase of temporary accommodation. Instead, my Department has in place a Permanent Accommodation Scheme which gives schools devolved authority to address their accommodation needs with a permanent struc-

ture. The rate in 2006 under this scheme is €120,000 for a classroom and €60,000 for a resource room in the primary sector.

617. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the plans and procedures in place to energy proof new school buildings and school refurbishments to ensure that they are energy efficient in view of rising heating prices; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34329/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Modern school buildings are built to a very high standard and specification, and this includes ensuring that they are designed to meet both current and forthcoming requirements for energy proofing. These standards and guidance are available on my Department's website.

My Department is also working closely with Sustainable Energy Ireland in relation to the use of alternative sources of energy in schools.

Vocational Education Committees.

618. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of vocational educational committee offices currently in operation here; the remit of these offices; the population covered by each office; the staffing levels in each office; the payroll costs associated with this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34330/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 33 VECs established under the Vocational Education Acts, 1930 to 2001. Each VEC has its own corporate status. As statutory bodies their functions are as defined in their governing legislation.

In general, VEC boundaries correspond to the County/City Councils and the population covered is that of the county/city area. VECs provide a broad range of educational services. In addition to providing post-primary education, further and adult education, VECs also have responsibilities in areas such as community education, training for early school leavers, basic literacy courses, traveller education, the provision of youth services etc. Staffing resources are allocated by my Department towards the delivery of the educational and other programmes referred to above.

The other information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in my Department and would involve an inordinate amount of administrative time to compile.

Question No. 619 answered with Question No. 203.

National Forum on Education.

620. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to implement the recommendations on regional bodies made by the

[Mr. Gogarty.]

National Forum on Education 200; if any costings have been carried out regarding the feasibility of such a plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34332/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Regional Office Service, which is an integral part of my Department, was established nationwide under the direction of the Directorate of Regional Services on foot of the recommendations made in the Cromien Report which was published in October 2000.

This structure consists of ten Regional Offices under the auspices of the Directorate of Regional Services. The role of this Division is to support a socially inclusive society by representing my Department on appropriate regional and local bodies, communicating information on education issues to and from my Department and providing any other educational services that can best be undertaken regionally.

There are currently no plans to create any additional regional educational structures within my Department.

Departmental Funding.

621. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will support the funding needs for a course for adults with a disability at Trinity College, Dublin; and if she will make this a priority issue. [34358/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I understand that a submission has been prepared by Trinity College for a course leading to a certificate in Contemporary Living and has been forwarded to the Higher Education Authority which is the funding authority for universities. My Department is awaiting the results of the HEA's consideration of the submission.

Third Level Fees.

622. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a person who has been granted asylum or leave to remain here is entitled to be treated as an Irish or EU national when it comes to third-level education with particular reference to third-level fees and entitlements to the grant system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34368/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Under the terms of the Higher Education Grants scheme grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those which relate to nationality, residency, means and previous academic attainment.

The Nationality requirement as set out in Clause 4.5 of the Higher Education Grant Scheme 2006 states candidates must: hold E.U. Nationality; or have Official Refugee Status; or

have been granted Humanitarian Leave to Remain in the State; or have permission to remain in the State by virtue of marriage to an Irish national residing in the State or be the child of such person, not having EU nationality; or have permission to remain in the State by virtue of marriage to a national of another EU Member State who is residing in the State and who is or has been employed, or self-employed, in the State, or be the child of such a person, not having EU nationality; or be nationals of a member country of the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland.

Candidates who do not satisfy the nationality requirement as outlined are ineligible for funding under the terms and conditions of the Scheme. There are no plans at present to extend the nationality clause of the student support schemes. Any extension to the scope of the maintenance grants scheme can be considered only in the light of available resources and in the context of competing demands within the education sector.

Under the terms of my Department's Free Fees Initiative the Exchequer meets the tuition fees of eligible students. The main conditions are that students must be first-time undergraduates and hold E.U. nationality or official refugee status and have been ordinarily resident in an E.U. Member State for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to an approved third level course.

The residency requirement applies to all E.U. nationals, including Irish nationals, in accordance with the judgement of the European Court of Justice that access to vocational training must apply equally to all E.U. nationals. In the case of students with official refugee status, time spent from date of official lodgement of application papers for refugee status is included for the purpose of meeting the three year residency requirement.

There is a distinction between the criteria that determine eligibility under the Free Fees Initiative, and the criteria by which individual third level institutions establish what rates of tuition fees should be charged, in cases where a student does not qualify for free fees. The universities are autonomous bodies and, as such, may determine the level of fees to be charged in any case where the Free Fees Initiative does not apply.

Schools Building Programme.

623. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a representative from her Department has met this school year with representatives of schools (details supplied); the position of the application for a new community school on the school building programme; if her attention has been drawn to the difficulties in the school as a result of staff allocation, larger class sizes, inadequate allocation for core subjects and delays in site purchase; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34369/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Officials from the School Planning and Building Unit met with County Leitrim Vocational Educational Committee earlier this year to discuss various building projects including the building project at the school referred to by the Deputy. The Property Management Section of the Office of Public Works, which acts on behalf of my Department in relation to site acquisitions generally, has been requested to source a site for the school. When the site acquisition process is finalised, the project will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation programme 2006-2010.

Teacher allocations to second level schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. Each school management authority is required to organise its time-table and subject options having regard to pupils needs within the limit of its approved teacher allocation.

The rules for allocating teaching resources provide that where a school management authority is unable to meet its curricular commitments within its approved allocation, my Department will consider applications for additional short term support i.e. curricular concessions.

An application for curricular concessions was received by the school referred to by the Deputy and an extra 0.45 wholetime equivalent teacher post was allocated. An independent appeals mechanism is available to school authorities who wish to appeal the adequacy of their teacher allocation. The school referred to by the Deputy availed of this appeals mechanism and was allocated a further 0.55 wholetime equivalent teacher post. The decision of the Appeals Committee is final.

As the Appeals Committee operates independently of my Department in taking its decisions, the Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate to intervene in any such decision.

Cúrsaí sa Ghaeilge.

624. D'fhiafraigh **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta ar chuir údaráis an Choláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath, in iúl di nach raibh siad le cúrsa céime sa Ghaeilge istíche a chur ar fáil i mbliana in ainneoin é a bheith fógartha agus in ainneoin go raibh daoine cláraithe don chúrsa, tar éis dóibh an cúrsa dioplóma sa Ghaeilge Fheidhmeach a chríochnú níos luaithe i mbliana. [34372/06]

626. D'fhiafraigh **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta cad iad na dualgais atá ar choláistí Ollscoil na hÉireann i leith an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn, i leith cúrsaí Gaeilge agus cúrsaí i nGaeilge a chur ar fáil, agus cad iad na dualgais atá ar a Roinn chun a chinntiú go bhfuil siad ag cloí leo sin. [34378/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Beartaím ceisteanna Uimh. 624 agus Uimh. 626 a thógáil le chéile.

Mar is eol don Teachta cheana féin, is ag na hollscoileanna féin atá sé de cheart agus de chúram cúrsaí a sholáthar ar an gcéad dul síos. Faoi réir Acht na nOllscoileanna, 1997, is institiúidí neamhspleácha iad ollscoileanna agus níl baint ar bith ag mo Roinn leis an ngnáth-obair laethúil acu.

Tá cuspóirí agus feidhmeanna ollscoile leagtha amach in Alt 12 de Acht na nOllscoileanna, 1997. Forálann Alt 12 (e) go gcuimseoidh cuspóirí ollscoile: “to promote the official languages of the State, with special regard to the preservation, promotion and use of the Irish language and the preservation and promotion of the distinctive cultures of Ireland”. B'fhéidir gur eol don Teachta go soláthraíonn An tÚdarás An Ardoideachas maoiniú ar leith do líon áirithe Tionscnamh Sprioctha. Ar na nithe a dtacaítear leo faoin Tionscnamh Sprioctha don Ghaeilge tá múineadh ábhair seachas an Ghaeilge trí mheán na Gaeilge agus forbairt úsáid na Gaeilge ar fud an choláiste ag mic léinn agus foireann araon.

625. D'fhiafraigh **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta ar chuir údaráis Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Thamhlachta, Baile Átha Cliath, in iúl di nach raibh siad le cúrsa céime sa Ghaeilge a chur ar fáil i mbliana in ainneoin an éilimh ar aistritheoirí agus ar chéimithe Gaeilge ó glacadh leis an nGaeilge mar theanga oifigiúil san Aontas Eorpach. [34374/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Leagadh amach nós imeachta reachtúil in Achtanna na nInstitiúidí Teicneolaíochta 1992-2006 atá le comhlíonadh ag Institiúidí Teicneolaíochta nuair a bhíonn formheas á lorg do chúrsaí nua beartaithe. De réir na nósanna imeachta reachtúla, breithnítear cúrsaí nua i gcomhthéacs an Chláir Oibriúcháin Bhliantúil agus an aighneacht Bhuiséid don bhliain ina bhfuil sé beartaithe tús a chur leis an gcúrsa.

Ní raibh cúrsa céime sa Ghaeilge san áireamh ag Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Thamhlachta sa Chlár Oibriúcháin ná san aighneacht Bhuiséid a cuireadh faoi bhráid mo Roinne-se don bhliain acadúil 2006/2007.

Question No. 626 answered with Question No. 624.

Schools Building Projects.

627. **Mr. Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Science her future plans for a building (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34395/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): No decision has been taken on the

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future use of the building to which the Deputy refers.

628. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the most up to date information her Department has on the schedule for the construction of the new school building for a school (details supplied) in County Dublin. [34400/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department recently applied for planning permission for the school in question. It is expected that construction will be commencing in early 2007.

Physical Education Facilities.

629. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the arrangements she intends to put in place to provide proper facilities for physical education at a school (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34401/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The PE Hall project at the school referred to by the Deputy is part of an extension/refurbishment application from the school and has been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria put in place following consultation with the Education Partners. The project is being considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

Schools Building Projects.

630. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the provision of a new school at Gortahork, County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34410/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Property Management Section of the Office of Public Works, which acts on behalf of my Department in relation to site acquisitions generally, has been requested to source a site for a new national school in Gortahork. When the site acquisition process is finalised, consideration will be given to the progression of the project in the context of the Schools Building and Modernisation programme 2006-2010.

Capitation Grants.

631. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will review the capitation grant for second level schools taking into account that this has only increased by 12% in three years, which is under the rate of inflation;

and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34451/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There has been significant improvements in the levels of direct funding to second level school in recent years.

In addition to the improvements in the standard per capita grant that now stands at €298 per pupil from January last, voluntary secondary schools have also benefited under the School Services Support initiative. Introduced with effect from the 2000/01 school year, the support services grant for secondary schools has been increased from €127 per pupil in 2003 to €159 per pupil from January last. These grants are in addition to the per capita funding of up to €40,000 per school that is provided by my Department to secondary schools towards secretarial and caretaking services.

I am committed to further improving the funding position of second level schools in the light of available resources.

Third Level Grants.

632. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science if there is leniency or flexibility in relation to their date of birth or age and the timing of their 23rd birthday in relation to grants for mature students. [34453/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Under the terms of my Department's Third Level Maintenance Grant Schemes, a mature student is defined as a candidate who is at least 23 years of age on the 1st of January of the year of entry or re-entry to an approved course. Students who are not 23 years of age on the 1st January of the year of entry to third level education cannot be assessed as mature students.

School Staffing.

633. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason an extra teacher has not been appointed to a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34516/06]

665. **Mr. Healy** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will approve the application of a school (details supplied) for an extra teacher in view of the overcrowding in classes at the school and the fact that a vacant classroom is available as is ancillary accommodation and equipment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34646/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 633 and 665 together.

The staffing of a primary school for a particular school year is determined by reference to the enrolment of the school on the 30th September

of the previous school year and by reference to a staffing schedule. This staffing schedule for the 2006/07 school year is outlined in Primary Circular 0023/2006 which was issued to all primary schools. Based on an enrolment of 77 pupils on the 30th September 2005, as submitted by the Board of Management, the staffing for the 2006/2007 school year is a Principal 2 mainstream class teachers.

To ensure openness and transparency in the system an independent Appeal Board is now in place to decide on any staffing appeals. The criteria under which an appeal can be made are set out in Department Primary Circular 0024/2006.

The staffing of the school for the 2006/2007 school year was considered by the Appeal Board on 25th May, 2006. The Board, having considered the appeal with regard to the criteria outlined in Circular 0024/2006, was satisfied that a departure from the staffing schedule is not warranted in this case. The Board of Management of the school was notified in writing of the decision of the Appeal Board on 26th May, 2006.

The Appeal Board operates independently of the Minister and my Department and its decision is final. I am sure the Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to intervene in the operation of the independent Appeal Board.

School Services Staff.

634. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24 is not in receipt of payment from her Department, with all of the ancillary pay scales and benefits in view of the fact that their school has 17 full time teachers, and is only receiving an ancillary grant towards the post of caretaker; if she will immediately investigate this situation and determine whether the caretaker in this instance will now be paid directly by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34517/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department provides funding towards the cost of secretarial and caretaking services in primary and secondary 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 has been superseded by a more extensive school support grant scheme towards the funding of ancillary services in schools including secretarial and 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. This is the scheme under which the school referred to by the Deputy is now funded in respect of caretaking services. There are no plans

to pay the caretakers funded under this scheme, directly through my Department's payroll.

Schools Building Projects.

635. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in regard to the proposed extension to a school (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34518/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I can confirm to the Deputy that an application for capital funding has been received from the school to which he refers under the Department's Small Schools Scheme for 2007. The closing date for applications is 27 October next. Following the closing date, all applications will be assessed. The list of successful applicants is due for publication by the end of 2006 as outlined in the circular letter governing the scheme.

Adult Education.

636. **Mr. Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Science the assistance available from her Department for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 who is pursuing a post graduate course, on a part time basis, and who has been advised that they will not qualify for the back to education allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34519/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The statutory framework for the maintenance grants scheme, as set out in the Local Authorities (Higher Education Grants) Acts, 1968 to 1992, provides for means-tested higher education grants in order to assist students to attend full-time third level education.

An approved course, for the purposes of the third level Student Support Scheme is, generally speaking, a full-time undergraduate course of not less than two years duration or a full-time postgraduate course of not less than one-year duration pursued in an approved third-level institution. The institutions approved under the Scheme, are, generally speaking, publicly funded third level colleges offering full-time courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Part-time courses are not approved courses under the terms of the Department's Maintenance Grant Schemes. Any extension of the scope of the Maintenance Grant Schemes to provide for students pursuing part-time courses, on a similar basis as currently exists for full-time students, could only be considered having regard to overall resource constraints and other competing demands in the education sector.

Section 473A, Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997, provides tax relief, at the standard rate of tax, for tuition fees paid in respect of approved courses at approved colleges of higher education including certain approved undergraduate and postgradu-

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ate courses in E.U. Member States and in non-EU countries. Tax relief at postgraduate level extends to approved full/part-time postgraduate courses in both private and publicly funded third level colleges in the State, approved full/part-time postgraduate courses operated by colleges in any EU Member State providing distance education in the State and approved full/part-time postgraduate courses in both private and publicly funded third level colleges in EU and non-EU Member States.

The application form (I.T. 31 Form) to claim tax relief on tuition fees is available from the Revenue Commissioners. Further information is available from Local Tax Office's or the Central Telephone Information Office at (01) 8736100 or Lo-Call 1890 60 50 90 or alternatively from Revenue's Internet site at www.revenue.ie.

Children's Health.

637. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the measures she and her Ministerial colleagues will take to address the growing level of obesity in school children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34520/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Our schools promote, support and encourage healthy eating and physical exercise in a range of ways.

All second level schools have been required to provide Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) as part of the junior cycle curriculum since September 2003. The aims of this programme include preparing students for responsible decision-making and promoting their physical, mental and emotional health and well-being. It aims to make students aware of the elements of a balanced diet and the importance of healthy eating for physical and mental well-being and also to develop awareness of the importance of rest and exercise for health and well-being.

Physical education is also part of the curriculum and plays a key role not just in giving students an opportunity to exercise during the school day but also in encouraging a positive attitude towards physical activity which students will hopefully carry with them into adult life.

Quite apart from curricular provision, schools can implement measures to encourage physical activity during school breaks and schools already play a major role in promoting the involvement of students in sporting activities in the wider community. Sports organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association, Basketball Ireland, the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) provide extensive opportunities for schools to participate in sport.

Together, the above initiatives ensure that students not only get opportunities to exercise at school but also learn about balanced nutrition and making good food choices. I believe that

schools are playing their part in terms of promoting a healthy diet and adequate physical exercise for students. However, it is important to remember that students spend just 20% of their waking hours at school so schools can only do so much with regard to promoting exercise and healthy eating and the main role must rest with parents.

Question No. 638 answered with Question No. 590.

Departmental Funding.

639. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department has received an application for funding for running costs from a club (details supplied) in Dublin 1; if she will take account of the vital role played by this club in a disadvantaged area of Dublin's inner city; and if she will give full consideration to the needs of the club as a special project for youth. [34539/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): A request for funding under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme on behalf of the project referred to by the Deputy has been received in my Department.

Due to the high level of existing commitments in the Youth Sector and to the large number of applications received it has not been possible to accede to this request this year. I understand that application forms for the 2007 round of grants will issue shortly and that it will be open to the project to re-apply.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

640. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of her Department. [34549/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are no tribunals of inquiry relating to my Department to which the Tribunals of Inquiry or Commissions of Investigation legislation would apply.

However, as the Deputy will be aware, my Department is responsible for sponsoring the legislation governing the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. The terms of reference of the Commission are set out in the 2000 Act and amended by the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Amendment) Act 2005. The purpose of the Commission is to investigate child abuse in institutions in the State, to enable persons who have suffered such abuse to give evidence to committees of the Commission, and to provide for the preparation and publication of a report containing the results of the Commission's investigation and any recommendations it considers appropriate for the prevention of child

abuse. A sum of approximately €34 million has been expended from Exchequer funds on the Commission inquiry up to the end of September 2006. This includes the Commission's pay and administrative costs legal costs and the Department's legal fees. The Government made an order in May 2005 extending the term of the Commission up to 23 May 2008. The Commission has indicated that it will conclude its inquiry before that date.

Home-School Liaison Scheme.

641. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of people employed by her Department in Limerick City in the home school community liaison scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34559/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) is a major mainstream preventative strategy targeted at pupils at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of background characteristics which tend to affect adversely pupil attainment and school retention. The scheme is concerned with establishing partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning. It focuses directly on the salient adults in children's educational lives and seeks indirect benefits for the children themselves.

There are currently 14 primary schools and 4 post-primary schools included in the HSCL scheme in Limerick City which have the services of 12 co-ordinators to work with school staff, parents and relevant community agencies in advancing the educational interests of children. Each co-ordinator acts as a link between home and school, encouraging parents to become more involved in their children's education. The co-ordinator organises locally based activities aimed at encouraging greater contact between parents and teachers and liaises with local voluntary and statutory groups in the area. A Co-ordinator usually services more than one school in an area.

Under DEIS, the new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, HSCL services will be extended to the 203 post primary and 338 urban/town primary schools, serving communities with the highest concentration of disadvantage, that do not currently have the service. The whole rationale behind the new DEIS programme is to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools benefit from all of the available supports.

Education Welfare Service.

642. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of education welfare officers assigned to Limerick City; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34560/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Mr. B. Lenihan): The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was established under The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 as the single national body with responsibility for school attendance. The Act provides a comprehensive framework which promotes regular school attendance and tackles the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving. The general functions of the Board are to ensure that every child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education.

The Board is developing, a nationwide service, on a continuing basis that is accessible to schools, parents/guardians and others concerned with the welfare of young people. For this purpose, Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) have been deployed throughout the country to provide a welfare-focused service to support regular school attendance and discharge the Board's functions locally.

The total authorised staffing complement of the Board is 94 comprising 16 HQ and support staff, 5 regional managers, 12 Senior EWO's and 61 EWOs. Five regional teams are in place with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

In deploying its service staff, the NEWB has prioritised the provision of services to the most disadvantaged areas and the most at-risk groups. This deployment includes areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme where an intensive full level of service is provided. Since September 2005 every county in Ireland is served by an educational welfare service.

In addition to the NEWB personnel there are some 490 staff, within the education sector, deployed in education disadvantage programmes whose work involves an element of school attendance and significant scope exists for integrated working between these personnel and Educational Welfare Officers. My Department is anxious to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from these substantial personnel resources. Consequently work is ongoing to develop appropriate protocols for all agencies and services to work together in collaboration and to ensure that optimum use is made of the resources deployed including NEWB resources. It is anticipated that the outcome of this work will inform my Department on staffing requirement for the NEWB into the future.

This government is determined to do all that is possible to ensure that every child gets all the opportunities and support they need to enable them to achieve their potential and participate fully in education. I will be keeping the issue of the NEWB's staffing under review in light of the rollout of services, the scope for integrated working and any proposals that the Board may put to me in relation to clearly identified priority needs

[Mr. B. Lenihan.]

and in the context of Government policy on public service numbers.

In relation to the Deputy's specific question concerning the deployment of welfare staff in Limerick City, the deployment of service delivery personnel is an operational matter for the NEWB who have informed me that there are two Educational Welfare Officers currently assigned to Limerick City.

Psychological Service.

643. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools in County Kerry covered by the National Educational Psychological Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34563/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Deputy is aware that all primary and post primary schools have access to psychological services either directly from assigned psychologists based in the National Educational Psychological Service or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments, details of which are available on my Department's website and which is administered by NEPS. There has been some movement of staff over the summer months in NEPS and seven new psychologists have been appointed to the service.

The induction period for the newly appointed psychologists will be completed at the end of this month (October). The school lists nationally will be revised accordingly in early November and the element pertaining to Co. Kerry will be sent directly to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Special Educational Needs.

644. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of applications received in her Department for special needs assistants on 4 May 2006 for all schools in County Wexford; the number of these applications that were successful and the number refused; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34568/06]

645. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of applications her Department received for resource hours for pupils for the years 2002 to date in 2006 in County Wexford; the number of these applications that were successful and the number that were unsuccessful; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34569/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 644 and 645 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the information requested is not available within my Department.

The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through the local special educational needs organiser (SENO), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special needs supports such as resource teaching hours and special needs assistant (SNA) support for children with low-incidence special educational needs, based on applications in respect of individual pupils. The SENOs convey decisions on the applications directly to schools.

The NCSE is in the process of establishing a system of data collection in the context of the requirements under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004.

I can confirm to the Deputy that I will continue to prioritise the issue of special needs education and, in co-operation with the NCSE, ensure that all children with special needs are adequately resourced to enable them to meet their full potential.

Schools Building Projects.

646. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application for a prefab for a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34570/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a formal letter of approval to rent a mainstream temporary classroom issued to the school in question last week.

Departmental Funding.

647. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in relation to an application for emergency funding by a school (details supplied) in County Offaly for a turning area to alleviate severe health and safety issues at the school; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there have been two recent accidents in the vicinity of the school; when a decision is expected to be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34584/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the School Building Unit of my Department has recently approved funding for the works in question.

School Absenteeism.

648. **Mr. Dennehy** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has satisfied herself that sufficient measures are being taken to reduce truancy rates in schools; her views on the increasing trend for teenagers to take up part time jobs dur-

ing the school week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34585/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Mr. B. Lenihan): This government is determined to do all that is possible to ensure that every child gets all the opportunities and support they need to enable them to complete their education.

Measures designed to improve school attendance include the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board, under the Education Welfare Act, in 2002 with a remit to monitor school attendance, help parents to get a school place for their child and run promotional campaigns on the importance of attendance and finishing school. The Act provides a comprehensive framework promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving.

The Board is developing a nationwide service, on a continuing basis that is accessible to schools, parents/guardians and others concerned with the welfare of young people. For this purpose, Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) have been deployed throughout the country to provide a welfare-focused service to support regular school attendance and discharge the Board's functions locally.

The total authorised staffing complement of the Board is 94 comprising 16 HQ and support staff, 5 regional managers, 12 Senior EWOs and 61 EWOs. Five regional teams are in place with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. In deploying its service staff, the NEWB has prioritised the provision of services to the most disadvantaged areas and the most at-risk groups. This deployment includes areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme where an intensive full level of service is provided. In addition the NEWB has established the country's first national educational helpline which is manned by trained Educational Welfare Officers and provides practical help to parents and schools on educational issues including attendance.

In areas of disadvantage the School Support Programme under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the new action plan for educational inclusion will bring together, and build upon, a number of existing interventions in schools with a concentrated level of disadvantage. The new 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. Under DEIS a key component of the work of the Home/School/Community Liaison Coordinator is promoting school attendance to parents while the School Completion Programme fosters the development of strong links between primary and post-primary schools to assist pupils with the transfer to and retention at second-level.

In addition to the NEWB personnel there are some 490 staff, within the education sector, deployed in education disadvantage programmes whose work involves an element of school attendance and significant scope exists for integrated working between these personnel and Educational Welfare Officers. My Department is anxious to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from these substantial personnel resources. Consequently work is ongoing to develop appropriate protocols for all agencies and services to work together in collaboration and to ensure that optimum use is made of the resources deployed including NEWB resources.

Under the terms of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, one of the functions of the Board is to conduct and commission research into the reasons for non-attendance on the part of students and into the strategies and programmes designed to prevent it.

Ongoing research includes developments on Codes of Behaviour and Attendance Strategies for Schools. One research project currently under way will inform guidelines for schools on developing strategies on attendance and these will include the issue of truancy.

Part-time working while at school is not of itself a negative thing and there is protection for young people under the Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act 1996 which precludes young people, between the ages of 16 and 18 and who are still at school, from working after 10pm on any night when there is school the following day. The experience gained by young people can prepare them for the transition into the full-time labour market and facilitate access to better paid employment in the longer term. It is desirable to strike a balance that facilitates study and work while recognising the skills acquired by young people in their part-time work.

Education Welfare Service.

649. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of staff required by the Educational Welfare Board to provide the services as anticipated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34620/06]

650. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of staff available to the Educational Welfare Board in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34621/06]

651. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the staffing levels available to the Educational Welfare Board; the number of staff available in each county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34622/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Mr. B. Lenihan): I propose

[Mr. B. Lenihan.]

to take Questions Nos. 649 to 651, inclusive, together.

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was established under The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 as the single national body with responsibility for school attendance. The Act provides a comprehensive framework which promotes regular school attendance and tackles the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving. The general functions of the Board are to ensure that every child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education.

The Board is developing a nationwide service, on a continuing basis that is accessible to schools, parents/guardians and others concerned with the welfare of young people. For this purpose, Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) have been deployed throughout the country to provide a welfare-focused service to support regular school attendance and discharge the Board's functions locally.

The total authorised staffing complement of the Board is 94 comprising 16 HQ and support staff, 5 regional managers, 12 Senior EWOs and 61 EWOs. Five regional teams are in place with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. In deploying its service staff, the NEWB has prioritised the provision of services to the most disadvantaged areas and the most at-risk groups. This deployment includes areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme where an intensive full level of service is provided. Since September 2005 every county in Ireland is served by an educational welfare service.

In addition to the NEWB personnel there are some 490 staff, within the education sector, deployed in education disadvantage programmes whose work involves an element of school attendance and significant scope exists for integrated working between these personnel and Educational Welfare Officers. My Department is anxious to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from these substantial personnel resources. Consequently work is ongoing to develop appropriate protocols for all agencies and services to work together in collaboration and to ensure that optimum use is made of the resources deployed including NEWB resources. It is anticipated that the outcome of this work will inform my Department on staffing requirement for the NEWB into the future.

This government is determined to do all that is possible to ensure that every child gets all the opportunities and support they need to enable them to achieve their potential and participate fully in education. I will be keeping the issue of the NEWB's staffing under review in light of the rollout of services, the scope for integrated working and any proposals that the Board may put to me in relation to clearly identified priority needs.

In relation to the Deputy's specific question concerning the deployment of welfare staff in Co. Kildare. The deployment of service delivery personnel is an operational matter for the NEWB. I have been informed by the board that Co. Kildare is part of the NEWB Leinster South Region which consists of eight individual locations with 15 staff assigned to the region in total. Of this number, 1 EWO is assigned on a full time basis to County Kildare. There is of course a school attendance element to the work of all the Home School Community Liaison officers that serve schools in Kildare, as well as to that of staff in other programmes aimed at tackling disadvantage.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

652. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the schools in County Kildare which currently have the most unfavourable pupil/teacher ratios; when she expects to address this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34623/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in my Department and would take an inordinate amount of administrative time to compile.

As the Deputy will be aware, major improvements have been made in staffing at primary in recent years. At the beginning of the current school year there are no less than 4000 extra teachers in our primary schools, compared with 2002.

The average class size in our primary schools is 24 and there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level, including resource teachers etc.

Children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas are getting more support than ever before to help them to make the most of their time at school. Indeed, with the thousands of extra primary teachers hired by this Government, recent years have seen the largest expansion in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. Over the next two school years even more teachers will be put in place both for the above priority areas of disadvantage and special education and also under a reduction in the mainstream staffing schedule.

As the Deputy knows all primary schools are staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. 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 28 children in the school. Next year (2007/2008 school year) this is being reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

A further initiative that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the cur-

rent school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year, as is the case in Kildare. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned in the 2006/07 school year, compared to 170 in 2005/06.

This Government has shown a clear determination to improve the staffing in our schools and we will continue to prioritise this issue going forward.

Special Educational Needs.

653. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she expects to provide for the full requirements in regard to speech and language therapy at all schools throughout County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34624/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I wish to advise the Deputy that responsibility for the provision of speech and language therapy services rests with the Health Service Executive. However, I can confirm that my Department has sanctioned 59 special classes for children with specific speech and language disorder. Each class can cater for up to 7 children and the children have access to a speech and language therapist.

In May 2002, the Department approved the provision of 175 additional therapy training places to tackle shortages of physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists as identified in the report “Current and Future Supply and Demand Conditions in the Labour Market for Certain Professional Therapists”, which was undertaken by Dr. Peter Bacon and Associates in 2001.

Within this provision there was an increase of 75 places on new courses in Speech and Language Therapy courses. These increased intakes will result in a significant increase in the number of Speech and Language Therapists graduating from the third level sector.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

654. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she expects to bring pupil/teacher ratios in County Kildare into line with best practice throughout the country, in view of the fact that this is a developing area with unsatisfactory pupil/teacher ratios at present; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34625/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, major improvements have been made in staffing at primary level in recent years. At the beginning of the current school year there are no less than 4000 extra teachers in our primary schools, compared with 2002. The average class size in our

primary schools is 24 and there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level, including resource teachers etc.

Children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas are getting more support than ever before to help them to make the most of their time at school.

Indeed, with the thousands of extra primary teachers hired by this Government, recent years have seen the largest expansion in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. Over the next two school years even more teachers will be put in place both for the above priority areas of disadvantage and special education and also under a reduction in the mainstream staffing schedule.

All primary schools are staffed on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. 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 28 children in the school. Next year (2007/2008 school year) this is being reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

A further initiative that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the current school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year, as is the case in Kildare. Over 280 such posts were sanctioned in the 2006/07 school year, compared to 170 in 2005/06. I understand that 28 posts of the posts sanctioned for the 2006/07 school year were for the Kildare area.

This Government has shown a clear determination to improve the staffing in our schools and we will continue to prioritise this issue going forward.

School Accommodation.

655. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the degree to which adequate accommodation is available at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; if and when it is anticipated that accommodation requirements will be met in full; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34626/06]

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 authorities of the school to which the Deputy refers. The application has been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale projects. Progress on the proposed works is being considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme from 2007 onwards.

[Ms Hanafin.]

In the meantime, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that additional temporary accommodation was approved to cater for the school's immediate needs.

Schools Building Projects.

656. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the finalisation of plans and preparations for the provision of the proposed new school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34627/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a site has recently been acquired for the provision of a new building for the school in question.

Progress on the building project is now being considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme from 2007 onwards.

Site Acquisitions.

657. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the basis on which the site for a proposed new school (details supplied) in County Kildare has been acquired; if there are particular conditions attached; if it is expected that outstanding difficulties will be resolved in the near future or failing that, the alternative arrangements that will be made to bring about the speedy relocation of the school from its present restricted and unsuitable site; when it is expected that all documentation appertaining to the transfer of the site and the preparation of plans for the new school are likely to be finalised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34628/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, the provision of a new school for the area in question is a priority for the Department and it is actively trying to resolve site issues in relation to this provision. He will also appreciate, however, that due to the commercial sensitivities attaching to site acquisition, I am unable to comment on the specifics of individual sites.

Special Educational Needs.

658. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason funding for autism courses for parents of children with autism has been withdrawn by her Department; her plans to reinstate same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34629/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Deputy will be aware that my Department supports a multi skills approach in regard to the education of children with autism

where a range of teaching methods are available e.g. Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACH), Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

My Department supports the training and professional development of staff working with children with special educational needs through the Special Education Support Service (SESS) which was established in 2003. The service as appropriate, consolidates co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in a variety of educational settings. Generally this support is provided by direct training input or sanction for school staff to attend courses recognised and funded through the SESS.

As part of its response to the growing demand from teachers for support and training, the SESS is currently developing teams of trainers to deliver training in four specific areas, one of which is Autism. This training will be delivered locally through the Education Centre network and/or through whole-staff in-school support. School Authorities will continue to work with parents to ensure a consistent home/school approach to the education of children with autism.

While funding had been previously been made available to parents to attend certain courses on an ad hoc basis, my Department is currently reviewing its position in this regard and a decision in relation to future funding of parental courses will be considered in the context of this review.

Site Acquisitions.

659. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the progress in regard to the provision of an alternative site and accommodation for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34630/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The management authority of the School in question, Co. Kildare Vocational Education Committee, is currently progressing plans to re-locate the School and extend the capacity to 1000 pupils. A formal planning application has been lodged with the Local Authority.

In September of 2006, the Vocational Education Committee notified my Department that the site had just received full planning permission for the education campus and, assuming that the decision is not appealed to An Bord Pleanala, then when the statutory time period elapses, the site will be legally transferred immediately to Kildare Vocational Education Committee.

School Accommodation.

660. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in regard to accommodation requirements at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34631/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department funded an extension at the school in question and this was completed in 2005.

661. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in regard to accommodation at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34632/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The building for the School referred to by the Deputy is at an early stage of architectural planning. The School in question was listed in my announcement of April 2005 to progress through the architectural planning process and was given approval to proceed to stage 3 (Developed sketch scheme with costings) of architectural planning in May of this year.

When the stage 3 submission is received in my Department, my Officials will arrange a meeting with the School's Design Team in order to evaluate the documentation. It is envisaged that unless there are very exceptional circumstances involved, the meeting will be sufficient to authorise the project to progress to the next stages of architectural planning.

Progression of projects to Construction will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

662. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in regard to the provision of the extra facilities required at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34633/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Department has no application for large scale capital investment from the school to which the Deputy refers although it was requested by the Department to submit one.

In the meantime, additional temporary accommodation has been provided to cater for its immediate needs.

School Placement.

663. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of pupils attending a new school (details supplied) in County Kildare; the number of applications for school placements that have not been met in the current year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34634/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As the Deputy is aware the new school to which he refers opened in September 2005. The school was given approval to enrol two Junior Infant Classes per year and, when fully occupied, will operate as a two-stream 16-classroom school. This incremental development is common to all newly established schools to ensure that a shortage of accommodation at the school is avoided by an over enrolment in the early stages and crucially, to ensure that the enrolments and staffing levels in other schools in the area, where older pupils would inevitably be drawn, are not adversely affected.

Notwithstanding this position and as an exceptional matter, the school authority has been given approval to enrol three junior infant classes for the 2006/07 school year only, on the grounds that this will not impact negatively on the other schools in question.

Approval has also been given to enrol an additional 40 pupils in the classes that could not obtain places in other schools in the area. Pupils moving into the area in the course of the school year can also enrol in the school on the same basis. In this way all eligible pupils seeking places should be accommodated.

Special Educational Needs.

664. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a special autism unit (details supplied) in County Kildare has not become fully operational in view of the fact that the unit has been built for more than three years; the nature of the issues outstanding in regard to the project; when she expects the opening to take place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34635/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As previously advised, Officials from my Department, the National Council for Special Education and the Health Service Executive met with members of the Board of Management of the school in June 2006 in order to progress the opening of the unit.

The NCSE is continuing to liaise with the school on an ongoing basis in order to progress the situation.

Question No. 665 answered with Question No. 633.

Garda Deployment.

666. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for Defence the cost to the Exchequer of the ongoing security operation at Shannon Airport by the Army including an annual breakdown since 2002; and his views on whether the operation is necessary and is money well spent. [34093/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O'Dea): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the cost,

[Mr. O'Dea.]

excluding basic salaries, of ongoing Garda policing arrangements at Shannon Airport is as follows:

Year	Expenditure
	€
2002	486,603
2003	762,999
2004	975,091
2005	738,018
2006 (as of September)	1,309,008
Total	4,217,719

Pursuant to the Garda Síochána Act 2005, it is the function of the Garda Síochána to provide policing services for the State with the objective of, *inter alia*, preserving peace and public order, protecting life and property and preventing crime.

In this context, the Garda authorities are required to allocate resources in an appropriate fashion to, *inter alia*, protect critical State infrastructures in accordance with assessed threat, so it is the latter which ultimately determines the associated costs.

I am satisfied that Garda policing arrangements at Shannon Airport remain both necessary and appropriate.

Military Awards.

667. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Defence if he will award a 1916 heroic medal to the family of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33960/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O'Dea): The 1916 Medal was awarded only to persons who rendered active service during the 1916 Rising as members of a prescribed organisation such as Óglaigh na hÉireann, the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army, Fianna Éireann, the Hibernian Rifles and Cumann na mBan.

The Deputy will appreciate that, with the passage of over 90 years since the 1916 Rising took place, it has become impossible at this remove in time to obtain adequate supporting evidence and verification of the membership, service and activities of individuals to establish entitlement to the award of the 1916 Medal.

The material supplied by the Deputy in the case in question has been considered in my Department but it is regretted that it does not provide a basis for awarding the 1916 Medal.

Defence Forces Property.

668. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence the situation with regard to the open

space areas surrounding a road (details supplied) in County Kildare; if negotiations in relation to the taking in charge of these areas have taken place with Kildare County Council; the outcome of such negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34084/06]

669. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence the situation with regard to the open space areas surrounding an estate (details supplied) in County Kildare; if negotiations in relation to the taking in charge of these areas have taken place with Kildare County Council; the outcome of such negotiations. [34085/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O'Dea): I propose to take Questions Nos. 668 and 669 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the Government decided on 1 July 2003 that lands at Magee Barracks, Kildare, would be among State lands released for inclusion in the Sustaining Progress Affordable Housing Initiative. The question of taking in charge by Kildare County Council of the areas referred to by the Deputy will fall to be considered in the context of the transfer of such lands under the Initiative.

670. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Defence if officials of his Department have had recent engagement with Kildare County Council in regard to the council's proposal to provide sheep-grids on all access roads to the Curragh Plains; his Department's view on these proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34086/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O'Dea): Kildare County Council approached my Department in 2001 concerning a proposal being considered by the Council at that time to install sheep grids and horse gates on all public access roads to the Curragh. In developing this proposal the Council identified 23 locations where grids or gates would be required and sought a contribution from my Department towards the costs of any such works. The estimated cost was in excess of €1 million.

The Department informed Kildare County Council that it was not agreeable to providing such funding. Responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of public access roads to the Curragh rests with Kildare County Council. In addition, it is the position of the Department that the question of the keeping of sheep on the Curragh is a matter for the sheep rights owners. There has been no recent engagement with Kildare County Council with regard to this proposal.

Departmental Expenditure.

671. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Defence the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of

money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34548/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea): As there were no tribunals under the aegis of my Department, no legal fees were expended by my Department in respect of tribunals.

Departmental Files.

672. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Defence further to his reply to Parliamentary Question No. 414 of 6 April 2006 the outcome from his Department’s investigation of the prospect of releasing information on military service pensions files and the 1916 to 1923 medals files, both of which are up to 90 years old; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34645/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea): The Government has decided that the Department of Defence files relating to the successful pension applications of persons who took part in the 1916 Rising and the War of Independence should be made available to all. On 9 April, 2006, An Taoiseach announced that he was establishing a working group, to be chaired by his Department, on the requirements to preserve, archive and digitalise those records, having due regard to any privacy requirements. This group has since been established and is addressing the matter.

It is the intention of the Government that the records will be made available in good time for the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising in 2016.

Pension Provisions.

673. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position in relation to the local government employees spouse and children’s contribution scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34338/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Provision for spouses’ and children’s pensions is provided for in Part III of the Local Government (Superannuation) (Consolidation) Scheme 1998. Chapters 5 and 6 of Part III of the 1998 Scheme cover the revised spouses’ and children’s pension arrangements which were introduced with effect from 1 September 1984.

Membership of the spouses’ and children’s pension scheme is compulsory for all employees becoming pensionable on or after 1 January 1986. The scheme is contributory and all members are obliged to contribute at the rate of 1.5% of their pay or net pay, depending on the category of employee concerned, throughout their membership. Additional contributions may fall to be deducted from an employee’s retirement lump

sum or death gratuity to cover service not already paid for. There is no provision whereby a member may withdraw from membership. The scheme contains a definition of “child” and any person coming within the terms of this definition is entitled to a children’s pension. A member’s children, together with any children adopted by him or her or any step-children of his or hers are covered for benefit.

The Local Government Scheme is in line with all other public sector spouses’ and children’s pension schemes in terms of the benefits and conditions outlined above.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

674. **Mr. Dennehy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will support measures to make all official air travel by Government Ministers carbon neutral in that offsetting measures would be taken to mitigate the impact of travel on the environment. [34607/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Although not directly linked to any specific greenhouse gas emissions, the Government is already making an annual contribution equivalent to \$3.25 million to assist developing countries in addressing climate change. This funding, which commenced in 2005 and will continue for a minimum of four years, is a separate matter to carbon allowances which the Government may purchase through the various mechanisms provided under the Kyoto Protocol.

In response to a request from the Council of Ministers, the European Commission is currently developing proposals to reduce the impact of greenhouse gas emissions from aviation by bringing the sector into the EU Emissions Trading Scheme.

House Sales.

675. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of new and second hand houses sold in the most recent 12 month period for which he has data distinguishing for new houses and second hand houses; and the number in different price ranges, in particular in the price ranges €350,000 to 400,000, €400,000 to €450,000, €450,000 to €650,000 and over €650,000. [33899/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): My Department does not collect data on the number of houses sold each year. However, an analysis of loans paid in the year 2005, indicates the proportional distribution of new and second hand houses in each of the price ranges requested in the Question.

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Loan	Up to €350,000	€350,001 to €400,000	€400,001 to €450,000	€450,001 to €650,000	Over €650,000
New	83.6%	6.5%	3.3%	4.8%	1.9%
Second hand	74%	8.2%	4.7%	8.0%	5.1%

Environmental Policy.

676. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the recent finding by the European Court of Justice, case C183/05, which condemns Ireland for not taking effective measures for protecting natural flora and fauna; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33904/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The matter referred to has not yet been determined in a judgment of the European Court of Justice. However the Advocate General's opinion on this case was delivered on 21 September 2006.

In the case, the Commission put forward three complaints against Ireland of which one was withdrawn. The remaining two were

(a) the absence of specific measures for the effective implementation of the system of strict protection required under Article 12(1) of the Habitats Directive;

(b) the existence in Irish law of provisions which are inconsistent with both Article 12 and Article 16 of the Habitats Directive.

Regarding (b), Ireland has made all the necessary changes to address the Commission's concerns by way of the Habitats (Amendment) Regulations 2005. My Department is currently reviewing and addressing the implications of the Advocate General's opinion regarding (a).

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

677. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if sanction to tender has been given for Coolgreany sewerage scheme, County Wexford; when it is expected that work will commence on this scheme; the period of construction and the expected cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33962/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Coolgreany Sewerage Scheme has been approved for funding in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 under the Serviced Land Initiative at an estimated cost of €1.5m.

My Department is currently examining Wexford County Council's Contract Documents for the scheme. Once approved, the Council will be in a position to invite tenders so that works can start as soon as possible.

Housing Projects.

678. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if there are housing projects or schemes for people with a disability particularly on the northside of Dublin. [33963/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): My Department provides capital funding to assist voluntary and co-operative housing associations to deliver high quality housing for low income families as well as for vulnerable groups such as elderly people, people with disabilities, the homeless and travellers. Earlier this year I substantially increased the capital funding limits for voluntary and co-operative housing projects. My Department's involvement with the capital funding schemes relates primarily to the provision of funds for individual projects. The administration of the scheme, and the certification that particular projects comply with the terms of the scheme, are the responsibility of the local authority.

Some housing projects, which require a higher ratio of carers to residents than a caretaker to allow for independent living, may be provided through a shared funding arrangement between the housing authority concerned and the relevant Health Service Executive. Assistance towards the cost of care and support services provided in sheltered housing over and above those normally required in housing management are a matter for the Health Service Executive concerned.

There are currently some 629 voluntary bodies with approved status from my Department, who may seek assistance to provide accommodation for any, or a number of, eligible categories of persons. Since the commencement of the scheme, over 10,000 units of accommodation have been provided. Details of the number of accommodation units specifically provided for the various eligible categories of persons are not available in my Department.

Environmental Policy.

679. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the progress made on the development of a species action plan, a fluvial audit of the Nore, a translocation programme, development of rehabilitation measures and the establishment of a captive breeding programme for *margaritifera durrovensis*; his plan to adapt approaches developed in the Owenriff for wider implemen-

tation in margaritifera catchments mainly in the context of the river basin management plans required under the water framework directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33996/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): A draft species action plan for the freshwater pearl mussel, including the Nore pearl mussel (*Margaritifera durrovensis*) is being prepared. This work is at an advanced stage and I expect that the draft plan will be released for public consultation early in 2007. Work is also progressing on conservation assessments for freshwater pearl mussels throughout the State, and the outcome of this work will feed into the species action plan.

Plans to conduct a fluvial audit of the River Nore will be considered in the context of the Southeast River Basin Management Plan in the context of catchment-wide water resource management under the Water Framework Directive.

My Department has been advised that the rehabilitation of the River Nore to a standard sufficient to support the survival of even adult *Margaritifera durrovensis* would be a long term process, and that that the extant population of Nore pearl mussels should be removed from their existing locations in the main channel of the river. As a result, work has been concentrated on establishing a captive breeding programme and researching appropriate translocation sites.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department, in collaboration with the National Roads Authority and the Central Fisheries Board, established a captive breeding programme for the Nore pearl mussel at the Central Fisheries Board fish farm at Roscrea during 2005. Although glochidia (the mobile larval stage of the species) were brooded in 2005, they did not survive. Some glochidia have survived in 2006 and it is hoped that some juvenile mussels will develop, to be released into artificial river substratum in 2007.

The draft report of the findings and recommendations from the work carried out by the Owenriff Working Group will be produced in early 2007 and will be considered by the agencies responsible for the implementation of the Water Framework Directive in Ireland. In addition, a Group, co-ordinated by the Western River Basin District Project, is undertaking a study as part of an assessment of potential impacts from forestry and forestry related activities on the aquatic environment and the development of a programme of measures and standards to mitigate impacts. Forestry is not the only factor that can place pressures on *Margaritifera*, however, measures to address forestry-related pressures are furthest advanced.

Traveller Accommodation.

680. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for

the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the status of the funding application (details supplied) in Dublin 17; if his Department is seeking or awaiting further information from Dublin City Council in relation to this funding application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34003/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Dublin City Council has sought approval from my Department for the provision of traveller specific accommodation, consisting of six houses, at Old Belcamp Lane. My Department raised certain Financial and environmental concerns about the proposal in discussion with the City Council. My Department now anticipates a further meeting with Dublin City Council with a view to resolving these concerns and making an early decision on the application for funding.

Housing Grants.

681. **Mr. Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when his Department will sanction an application by Carlow County Council for the construction of an extension to the house of persons (details supplied) in County Carlow which has been with his Department for some time for approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34028/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Carlow County Council submitted proposals to my Department in July 2006 for an extension to the house for the persons in question. In order for my Department to properly examine the proposal the Council were requested to submit drawings and a layout for the extension. This documentation is awaited from the Council.

Recreational Facilities.

682. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount, the name and location of every public playground here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34037/06]

691. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of playgrounds supplied by local and State authorities in the past 10 years. [34333/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 682 and 691 together.

Information on the number, names and location of public playgrounds in Ireland is not available in my Department. However, Service Indicators in Local Authorities 2005, published earlier this year by the Local Government Management Services Board, reported on perform-

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ance across 42 indicators covering the broad range of local authority activities. Two of the indicators relate to playgrounds and these enable comparisons to be made across local authorities on their performance in this area. Specifically, the indicators show the number of children's playgrounds per 1,000 population

- provided directly by the local authority, and
- facilitated by the local authority.

I am arranging for copies of this publication to be placed in the Oireachtas Library.

Ready, Steady Play: A National Play Policy, which was published in 2004, provides a framework for the development of public play facilities in Ireland, with the overall aim of ensuring that children have access to a range of quality play opportunities to enrich their childhood. As part of the implementation of this policy, my Department has allocated funding of over €8 million to County and City Councils for the development of new, or refurbishment of existing, playgrounds over the period 2004-2006.

Local Authority Staff.

683. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to review the arrangements in relation to the employment by local authorities of an archivist; if it is intended to formally recognise records management as a function of local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34056/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): It is a matter for the manager of each local authority, under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, to make such staffing and organisational arrangements as may be necessary for the purposes of carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he/she is responsible.

As outlined in the reply to Question No. 570 of 10 October 2006, the management, custody, care and conservation of their records and archives is a function of local authorities under section 65 of the Local Government Act, 1994 and more recently section 80 of the Local Government Act 2001.

Local Authority Funding.

684. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will assist local authorities with capital costs in relation to the establishment or maintenance of archives; if it is intended to go beyond temporary funding options for such archives; the local authorities have applied for either permanent or temporary funding; if it is a requirement that archive

facilities be attached to a library; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34057/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department currently assists local authorities with capital costs in relation to leasing temporary accommodation for the purposes of processing archives. This funding is intended to subsidise the leasing of short-term accommodation used by a local authority in this regard. It is not proposed to extend this funding to the provision of permanent archive accommodation beyond the current Public Library Capital Programme, which allows for the development of local authority archive facilities as part of new public libraries. An archive facility may be attached to a new public library but this is not a mandatory requirement.

To date nine local authorities have applied for funding for archive accommodation.

Recycling Policy.

685. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will amend the means by which the Local Government Fund allocation for each administrative area is calculated to provide for the additional cost of providing additional recycling facilities, such as the extension of door to door dry and composting recycling facilities; if he has had requests from local authorities for such support; if so, the local authorities which have submitted these requests; the outcomes of these requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34058/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Government support for local authority recycling measures is generally provided from the Environment Fund. Since 2002, some €90 million has been allocated to assist local authorities in the provision of greatly expanded recycling facilities. This has facilitated an increase in Bring Banks from 837 in 1998 to 1,929 in 2004 and in Civic Amenity sites from 30 in 1998 to 69 in 2004. In 2006, additional Exchequer funding of €10m has also for the first time been made available. This reflects the importance which the Government attaches to supporting local authorities in the provision of these very important facilities.

Funding is allocated on the basis of the resources available from the Environment Fund and an assessment of proposals received from the local authorities and relates to the bring bank network and civic amenity sites including facilities for biodegradable waste.

Funding towards the cost of collections for dry recyclable is provided by producers of packaging waste through a compliance scheme, Repak. Increases in subsidy rates for such collections over the next five years have recently been agreed between local authorities and Repak in

discussions brokered by my Department. I am confident that these new increased subsidy rates will ensure that Ireland continues to successfully meet EU-set targets for packaging waste recycling. The rate of recovery of packaging waste rose from just 15% in 1998 to over 56% in 2004. Ireland's EU-set target of 25% for recovery of packaging was met in 2001 and the 2005 target of 50% was exceeded a year in advance. Ireland's target recovery rate for 2011 is 60%.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

686. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the upgrading of the sewerage treatment plant at Tarbert, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34059/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Funding for a Preliminary Assessment of Phase I of Kerry County Council's Villages Sewerage Scheme Refurbishment proposals, which includes Tarbert, has been approved under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007.

My Department is awaiting submission of Kerry County Council's report on the Preliminary Assessment. I understand that the Council is also developing a countywide strategy to optimise the delivery of wastewater services to up to 90 towns and villages, including Tarbert. Any proposals emerging from this strategy will be considered by my Department in conjunction with the recommendations of the Preliminary Assessment.

Social and Affordable Housing.

687. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will provide this Deputy with a copy of a report (details supplied). [34090/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The advice referred to by the Deputy was not the subject of a report but was provided to my Department, at short notice, by way of participation in discussions in relation to increasing and accelerating the delivery of affordable housing in the Greater Dublin Area, in advance of the establishment of the Affordable Homes Partnership in August 2005. This built on previous work undertaken by the consultant concerned on behalf of the Managers of the 4 Dublin local authorities, which had culminated in the publication of a report, Social/Affordable Housing in the Dublin Region, in January 2005.

National Parks.

688. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for the

Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he expects the draft management plan for the Burren National Park to be published, in view of Clare County Council proceeding with an integrated plan to protect the environment of the Burren. [34096/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): A new management planning process is being put in place on a phased basis for all six of our National Parks, including the Burren National Park. Management Plans have already been published for Wicklow Mountains and Killarney National Parks. Preliminary work on the Burren National Park Management Plan will begin this year with a view to publication during 2007.

My Department is in regular contact with Clare County Council regarding the Council's proposal for a major visitor management initiative in the wider Burren area, including the Burren National Park. The Council proposal, entitled "Environmental Protection of the Burren through Visitor Management Initiative", is expressly linked to the environmental protection of this unique and sensitive landscape and is being undertaken in partnership with a wide range of stakeholder groups including my Department.

My Department, has agreed to become a partner in this initiative and has committed €210,000 in capital funding over three years. This is in addition to the resources that will be expended by my Department directly on national monuments, nature conservation and National Park management in the area. My Department will also participate on the steering and advisory groups which will oversee this proposal.

Road Network.

689. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount spent to date on non-national road measures under the National Development Plan; the amount estimated to be spent by the end of the programme; the breakdown of each for the Border Midland Western and south and east region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34269/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The National Development Plan 2000-2006 commits expenditure of €2.43 billion to non-national roads in the Plan period — €1.08 billion in the BMW Region and €1.35 billion in the SE Region. My Department has provided grant assistance of almost €2.584 billion to local authorities in both regions over the period 2000 to 2005 — €1.057 billion in the BMW Region and €1.527 billion in the SE Region. It is estimated that grant expenditure in 2006 in both regions will be approximately €557 million — €229 million in the BMW Region and €328 million in the SE Region. Overall non-

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national roads investment over the period of the National Development Plan 2000-2006 is estimated to be over €3 billion.

Local Authority Housing.

690. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount spent to date on the local authority housing measure of the National Development Plan to date; the amount estimated to be spent on this measure by the end of the NDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34285/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Under the Local Authority Housing Measure of the National Development Plan 2000-2006, cumulative expenditure to end December 2005 was €4.11 billion. Latest forecast expenditure for the 2000-2006 period is €5 billion.

Data in respect of the period to 30 June 2006 will be available following the next meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme, which is due to take place on 27 October 2006. I will arrange for the mid year 2006 figures to be provided to the Deputy following this.

Question No. 691 answered with Question No. 682.

Recreational Facilities.

692. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the plans in place to enforce the recent recommendations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child which in Article 62, states that the Committee is concerned that little political and financial importance is given to the creation of recreational facilities and that increasing housing demands may further hamper the developments of playgrounds and public space and in Article 63, which states that the Committee recommends that the State party place more emphasis on the creation of facilities for children to enjoy leisure, recreation and cultural activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34334/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Our planning framework takes extensive account of the needs of children and, in particular, the provision of recreational facilities and child care. At national and regional levels, the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines identify improved social, amenity and cultural infrastructure as being key to achieving the objective of improving quality of life and providing better places for people to live in. In turn, these aims are translated into concrete policies and actions in county and city development plans, as well as through local area plans. The provision of community,

sport and other recreational facilities and amenities have a key role in delivering this.

In order to drive development in the regions, the NSS proposes that areas of sufficient scale and critical mass will be built up through a network of gateways and hubs. Under the NSS, the need for more effective co-operation between local authorities and developers is emphasised to ensure integrated provision of social and community infrastructure such as parks, sporting and cultural facilities and schools along with development of new housing and other areas in the gateway cities.

Moreover, the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) translate the broad strategic aims and policies set out in the NSS into regional-level plans and then into local development plans, local plans and local authority decision-making. My Department also monitors the preparation of these city and county development plans to ensure consistency with the NSS and RPGs.

Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, local authorities must have regard to requirements regarding recreation and amenities in preparing their development plans. Earlier this summer, my Department issued draft Guidelines for the Preparation of Development Plans for public consultation. These Guidelines emphasise the objectives for the provision of public open space and recreation space including space/places for children to play and the preservation, improvement and extension of amenities and recreational amenities. I hope to publish the finalised Guidelines early next year, taking account of the many submissions and comments received.

Furthermore, the Ready, Steady Play: A National Play Policy publication, issued in 2004, provides a framework for the development of public play facilities in Ireland, with the overall aim of ensuring that children have access to a range of quality play opportunities to enrich their childhood. As part of the implementation of this policy, my Department has allocated funding of over €8 million to County and City Councils for development of new or refurbishment of existing playgrounds over the period 2004-2006.

Local Authority Funding.

693. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will report on his meeting with an organisation (details supplied) in County Galway; the undertaking and commitments given to the organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34370/06]

694. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will inform Galway County Council that funding is available from his Department, on request, to finance the up-grade of the Tubber Road, Gort, to facilitate the provision of a second access

to Gort Town from the proposed new N18; if he will further inform the County Council that the Government supports the provision of the second access as per his statement to an organisation (details supplied) when he met them in Gort recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34371/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 693 and 694 together.

I met with the Gort Regional Alliance for Community and Environment during a visit to Galway on 6 June last. One of the issues raised was the access to Gort from the proposed new N18 by-pass. The access road to Gort town from the proposed by-pass would be a national road and accordingly responsibility would be a matter for Galway County Council in conjunction with the National Roads Authority which operates under the aegis of my colleague the Minister for Transport. My Department has no function in relation to national roads.

The improvement and maintenance of non-national roads in Galway, including the Tubber road, is a matter for Galway County Council to be financed from its own resources supplemented by State grants provided by my Department. The initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be financed from these grants is also a matter for the Council. In July 2006, my Department invited local authorities to submit applications for consideration for funding in 2007 under the EU Co-Financed Specific Improvements Grant scheme. It is open to the Council to select and prioritise the Tubber road for consideration for funding in 2007 under that scheme.

All applications for funding under the scheme will be considered by my Department, having regard to the need to prioritise projects, compliance with EU eligibility criteria, competing demands from other local authorities and the funds available for the scheme in 2007. It is also open to the Council to fund works on this road from its Discretionary Improvement grant or from its own resources.

I intend to announce non-national roads grant allocations for 2007, including allocations to County Councils for EU Co-Financed schemes, early next year.

Control of Dogs.

695. **Mr. Haughey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the 10 breeds of dogs controlled under the Control of Dogs Regulations 1998; his views on introducing new regulations to ensure that such dogs are microchipped; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34396/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Control of Dogs Regulations 1998 place controls on the following ten breeds of dogs: American Pit Bull Terrier; English Bull Terrier; Staffordshire Bull Terrier; Bull Mastiff; Doberman Pinscher; German Shepherd (Alsatian); Rhodesian Ridgeback; Rottweiler; Japanese Akita; Japanese Tosa and to every dog of the type commonly known as a Ban Dog (or Bandog).

The controls, which must be observed when the dog is in a public place, require that these dogs, or strains and crosses thereof, must be kept on a short lead by a person over 16 years of age who is capable of controlling them and that they be securely muzzled. Furthermore, the Control of Dogs Act 1986 gives specific powers to the courts to order that a dog, which the court considers dangerous, must be kept under proper control or be destroyed.

The Control of Dogs Regulations 1998 require the owner or other person in charge of a dog to ensure that the dog at all times wears a collar bearing the name and address of the owner on an attached plate, badge or disc. The regulations contain penalties for non-compliance with this requirement or for defacing or rendering illegible the above particulars. These arrangements followed consideration of all practicable options for ensuring identification of dogs, including that of micro-chipping, and are being kept under review.

Planning Issues.

696. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the reason an association (details supplied) is not a prescribed body with similar rights to An Taisce; when same will happen for this association; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34402/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Section 33 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides that regulations regarding applications for planning permission may be made requiring, inter alia, that planning authorities must notify prescribed bodies of the receipt of applications for certain classes of development. Article 28 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 lists the bodies prescribed for this purpose, and these include An Taisce in circumstances where it appears to the planning authority that the proposed development might impact on matters such as areas of special amenity, protected structures, national monuments or nature conservation.

The list of bodies prescribed for the purposes of planning applications was last reviewed in the making of the 2001 Regulations. Planning regulations, including the list of prescribed bodies, are kept under continual review to ensure that they

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deliver an effective and efficient planning service leading to quality planning decisions.

I would also add that in the context of new Planning and Development Regulations to be finalised shortly I intend to add the Irish Rural Dwellers Association (IRDA) to one of the panels of nominating bodies for the appointment of members to An Bord Pleanála.

Polling Stations.

697. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if measures are being put in place to make a polling station (details supplied) in County Galway wheelchair accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34403/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Under the Electoral Act 1992, the selection of buildings to be used as polling stations at an election or referendum is a matter for the returning officer. The Electoral (Amendment) Act 1996 provides that local authorities, in making polling schemes, shall endeavour to appoint polling places which allow the returning officer to provide at each place at least one polling station that is accessible to wheelchair users. The Act also requires that the returning officer shall, where practicable, provide polling stations which are accessible to wheelchair users. In addition, the returning officer must, where practicable, give public notice of all polling stations which are inaccessible to wheelchair users not later than eight days before polling day.

If an elector will have difficulty gaining access to his or her polling station, he or she may apply in writing to the returning officer for authorisation to vote at another polling station in the same constituency. If a person has a physical disability or physical illness which prevents him or her from going to the polling station, the person can vote by post if he or she applies to be included in the postal voters list which is drawn up each year as part of the register of electors. In order to be entered on the postal voters list, the person must apply to the appropriate local authority by 25 November each year.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

698. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the proposed sewerage scheme for Gweedore, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34409/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Gweedore Sewerage Scheme is being advanced in conjunction with the Letterkenny Sewerage Scheme and

both schemes have been approved for funding under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007. My Department is awaiting Donegal County Council's updated Tender Documents for the combined project.

Litter Pollution.

699. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he last raised the issue of litter in urban areas with local authorities here; if he has sent, in the last year, a circular to local authorities regarding their responsibilities under the Litter Act, 1982 and other Local Government legislation; if he has satisfied himself that local authorities are carrying out their responsibilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34458/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Local authorities submit data to my Department every six months on their anti-litter enforcement actions under the Litter Pollution Acts. These statistics are available in the Oireachtas Library and show that local authority performance on enforcement of the litter laws is being sustained at a high level. In recent years, more litter wardens have been employed and there has been a substantial increase in the number of prosecutions taken and on-the-spot fines issued.

Furthermore, the trends emerging from National Litter Pollution Monitoring System, which measures the extent and severity of litter pollution countrywide, are generally positive and show a modest but steady reduction in litter levels. Full details of data obtained for the Monitoring System are available on www.litter.ie. The positive trend shown by the Monitoring System is also reflected in the Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) League results, which record that cleanliness levels in 53 participating towns and cities are generally improving.

Minister of State Batt O'Keeffe, who has responsibility for litter prevention and control, has in the last year written to local authorities in regard to litter matters. In addition, my Department issues circulars to, and liaises on a regular basis with, local authorities in relation to anti-litter initiatives and actions. Every opportunity will continue to be taken to urge local authorities to enforce the litter laws as rigorously as possible and to pursue litter awareness-raising and education initiatives.

National Parks.

700. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of people currently employed in connection with the Wicklow National park; their respective roles and positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34459/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): There are currently 25 staff employed in Wicklow National Park as shown in the following table. The positions of Divisional Manager, Regional Manager, District Conservation Officer, Head Conservation Ranger and General Operatives also carry responsibilities beyond the management of the Park.

Grade	Number Serving
Divisional Manager	1
Regional Manager	1
District Conservation Officer	1
Head Conservation Ranger	1
Conservation Ranger	3
Guides (including 1 seasonal)	7
General Operatives	8
Storekeeper Clerk	2
Caretaker (part-time)	1
Total	25

Recreational Facilities.

701. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his Department has received an application for funding from Dublin City Council for the development of playground facilities at Willie Pearse Park, Crumlin; if his Department has granted funding to Dublin City Council in the past five years for the development of playground facilities at this park; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34522/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department

has not received any application for funding from Dublin City Council for the specific development of playground facilities at Willie Pearse Park, Crumlin.

Ready, Steady Play: A National Play Policy, which was published in 2004, provides a framework for the development of public play facilities in Ireland, with the overall aim of ensuring that children have access to a range of quality play opportunities to enrich their childhood.

As part of the implementation of this policy, my Department has allocated funding of over €8 million to County and City Councils for the development of new, or refurbishment of existing, playgrounds over the period 2004-2006. Within that period, Dublin City Council was allocated €268,000 for the provision of playground facilities including €120,000 in 2006 to meet the cost of purchase and delivery of play equipment. The location of the playgrounds which benefit from these moneys is a matter for the local authority to decide.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

702. **Mr. J. O'Keefe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the proportion of the cost of each tribunal made up of legal fees, and the amount of money spent on legal fees in respect of tribunals in each of the years since 1997, under the aegis of his Department. [34551/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department meets the costs of the Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments. As of 20 October 2006, the total amount of legal fees paid was €38,133,741.94. This represents 64.3% of overall expenditure on the Tribunal to that date. Annual expenditure on legal fees from 1997 to 2006 was as follows.

Year	Tribunal legal team	Third party legal costs	External counsel representing the Tribunal
	€	€	€
1997	Nil	Nil	Nil
1998	1,860,873.29	Nil	Nil
1999	2,494,830.32	Nil	Nil
2000	2,497,862.81	Nil	Nil
2001	3,323,935.76	Nil	Nil
2002	3,088,509.75	Nil	Nil
2003	4,173,099.75	Nil	Nil
2004	4,217,339.51	Nil	Nil
2005	5,899,774.14	44,499.60	11,817.00
2006 (to 20/10/06)	4,081,209.00	6,141,413.42	298,577.59
Totals	31,637,434.33	6,185,913.02	310,394.59

Decentralisation Programme.

703. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will report on the decentralisation plans in his Department; when his Department will be fully decentralised to County Wexford; the way this date compares with his original date for decentralising; if his Department has rented office space in County Wexford to accommodate staff; the percentage of staff who have agreed to be decentralised; the number of staff who moved to other Departments in the past two years; the number of staff who plan to move to other Departments in the next number of months; and if so, what Department. [34576/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Question No. 573 of 17 October 2006. As outlined in the most recent progress report (September 2006) of the Decentralisation Implementation Group, the indicative timescale for completion of my Department's headquarters in Wexford is the third quarter of 2008 while that for New Ross is the last quarter of 2009; the indicative dates in June 2005 for these locations were the third quarter of 2007 and early 2009 respectively.

At this stage a total of 157 staff have confirmed their availability to decentralise with the Department to both locations, representing 40% of the posts to transfer to these locations. 78 of these staff are now working in the Department and the process of arranging for the transfer of the other staff to the Department is continuing. The process of staff moving from my Department to other Departments, in accordance with the arrangements established under the decentralisation programme for such moves, is ongoing; to date 30 staff have moved under these arrangements.

Waste Management.

704. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of dedicated recycling centres in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34577/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department operates a recycling and recovery capital grants scheme which has contributed significantly to the delivery by local authorities of much enhanced recycling and recovery facilities; these enable the public to increase recycling rates and maximise the value of the recyclable materials.

The following table lists the numbers of local authority Civic Amenity Sites and Bring Banks. In addition to these facilities there are also a number of private sector recycling facilities located throughout the country concerning which my Department does not collate information.

Local Authority	Civic Amenity Centres	Bring Banks
Carlow	3	44
Cavan	2	28
Clare	4	53
Cork	9	181
Donegal	3	55
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown	2	68
Fingal	3	84
Galway	4	100
Kerry	5	91
Kildare	2	39
Kilkenny	1	42
Laois	1	38
Leitrim	2	38
Limerick	3	48
Longford	0	25
Louth	1	41
Mayo	2	89
Meath	2	22
Monaghan	1	25
North Tipperary	2	39
Offaly	2	46
Roscommon	3	38
Sligo	1	37
South Dublin	2	50
South Tipperary	2	74
Waterford	3	47
Westmeath	2	48
Wexford	2	140
Wicklow	4	74
<i>City Councils</i>		
Cork	1	38
Dublin	2	129
Galway	0	14
Limerick	1	19
Waterford	1	23
Totals	78	1,927

Election Management System.

705. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the cost to store the electronic voting machines in County Wexford in the years 2002 to date in 2006; when the machines will be moved out of Wexford to a central location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34578/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Information provided by the Returning Officer for the Wexford constituency indicates that storage costs

in respect of the electronic voting machines and ancillary equipment are: €19,799 (2003/4 — lease began in October 2003); €17,170 (2005); and €17,050 (to date in 2006). Payments to Returning Officers in respect of their electoral duties are made by the Department of Finance from the Central Fund. Arrangements are being made to centralise storage of the voting machines as soon as possible.

Local Authority Funding.

706. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of funding Wexford County Council received for rural roads for each year from 2000 to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34579/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The improvement and maintenance of non-national roads in County Wexford is a matter for Wexford County Council to be financed from its own resources supplemented by State road grants provided by my Department.

Details of the total non-national road grant payments from my Department to Wexford County Council from 2000 to 2005 and the initial 2006 allocation are set out in the following table:

	€
2000	10,276,554
2001	11,248,648
2002	12,239,796
2003	12,592,418
2004	12,819,963
2005	14,478,240
2006 (allocation)	16,733,657

Responsibility for national roads is a matter for the relevant local authority and the National Roads Authority which operates under the aegis of my colleague the Minister for Transport.

Departmental Staff.

707. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of persons currently employed in his Department whose status has changed to that of disabled since commencement of their employment with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34591/06]

708. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the criteria for persons with disabilities for seeking employment opportunities within his Department; the application procedures that apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34592/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 707 and 708 together.

The status of 17 persons has changed in this regard since they commenced employment in my Department. In so far as the recruitment of persons with disabilities is concerned, I refer to the reply to Question No. 578 of 7 March 2006.

Social and Affordable Housing.

709. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to develop Gormanstown Airfield as part of the Government affordable housing initiative; if the site is in the ownership of the Department of Defence; the discussions which have taken place on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34641/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Lands at Gormanston, County Meath were among those identified to be released to the Affordable Housing Initiative under the Sustaining Progress agreement. It is intended that the lands will be leveraged for the Initiative by way of a land exchange, similar to that used in certain other projects, subject to the completion of the necessary feasibility and other preparatory work.

While the lands are currently in the ownership of the Minister for Defence, work is advancing on the arrangements for the transfer of the lands to the Affordable Homes Partnership, who have been assigned lead responsibility to proceed with this project.

Local Authority Housing.

710. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of local authority housing units which, having been returned to the local authority, are boarded up; the average length of time within each local authority area that such housing units remain boarded up; the action he proposes to take in order to reduce the time such housing units spend boarded up, or to prevent them lying unoccupied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34667/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The detailed information sought in the Question is not held in my Department. Available information indicates that at 31 December 2005 there were almost 2,500 vacant local authority dwellings, exclusive of vacant dwellings which are subject of planned refurbishment/remedial programmes.

It is the responsibility of the local authorities concerned to ensure that their houses are relet

[Mr. N. Ahern.]

to households on their waiting lists as quickly as possible after they are vacated. Some houses may

of course require some refurbishment before they are re-let and this is a matter for individual authorities.