



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

**DÁIL ÉIREANN**

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

Thursday, 26 October 2006.

Requests to Move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 31 ... ..	813
Order of Business ... ..	815
Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2006: First Stage ... ..	820
High Level of Suicide in Irish Society: Statements ... ..	821
Citizens Information Bill 2006: Second Stage ( <i>resumed</i> ) ... ..	876
Ceisteanna — Questions	
Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism	
Priority Questions ... ..	886
Other Questions ... ..	895
Adjournment Debate Matters ... ..	910
Adjournment Debate	
Cancer Services in Waterford ... ..	910
Health Services ... ..	913
Alternative Energy Projects ... ..	915
Fire Emergency Provisions ... ..	918
Questions: Written Answers ... ..	921

## DÁIL ÉIREANN

*Déardaoin, 26 Deireadh Fómhair 2006.  
Thursday, 26 October 2006.*

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

*Paidir.  
Prayer.*

### Requests to move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 31.

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

**Mr. Healy-Rae:** I wish to seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of urgent national importance, namely, the need for the Ministers for Education and Science and Transport to introduce lessons on safe driving techniques as part of the second level school curriculum, for example, in transition year. Such lessons are needed because many young people have died on our roads. We can help to save lives by trying to educate young people about the dangers of driving cars. We have to try in every way to stop the carnage on our roads immediately.

**Mr. Durkan:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. McCormack:** Did the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism write that?

**Mr. F. McGrath:** I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to discuss a matter of national importance and concern, namely, the urgent need to assist families in Fairview, Marino, Drumcondra and Santry whose homes have been damaged as a result of the construction of the Dublin Port tunnel. I am calling for the immediate repair of the 273 houses which have been damaged in recent times. The damage includes 200 cracks, 39 hairline cracks, eight seriously damaged windows and doors, two seriously damaged roofs, three major plumbing problems, three major glazing problems and 18 other serious complaints. We need to ensure that all families in my constituency get the maximum compensation for the damages which have resulted from the construction of the Dublin Port tunnel.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** But of course.

**Mr. Durkan:** The tunnel has not even opened yet.

**Mr. M. Ahern:** Ivor is out fixing the windows.

**Mr. F. McGrath:** Ivor is staying silent on the issue.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Murphy, without interruption please.

**Ms C. Murphy:** I wish to request the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of urgent national and local importance, namely, the need to review radically the availability of child care and to examine the factors which are driving the cost of child care provision. Despite the introduction of a grant of €1,000 in respect of children under the age of six in last year's budget, many families continue to complain that it was a drop in the ocean, at best, and that they face serious pressure in covering costs. We need to consider new options including a further extension of maternity leave, the role that can be played by the voluntary sector and the fact that the costs of child care providers are being passed on to parents. There is a need for a full debate on the issue.

**Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** I wish to seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a specific and important matter that requires urgent consideration, namely, the need to congratulate and commend the Dublin Fire Brigade for its heroic actions last night, when it prevented a major tragedy by saving up to 70 people from a burning hostel in the north inner city; the need for the Government to provide extra ambulances to meet the demands of Dublin's growing population; the need for it to carry out a fire risk assessment for Dublin in line with its legislative obligations, which is something it has failed to do over many years, where particular attention should to be given to private rented hostels; and the need for everyone to cooperate fully with the fire brigade especially at this time of year, around Hallowe'en.

**Mr. Costello:** I wish to seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to discuss a matter of urgent public concern, namely, the recent seizure of four large quantities of drugs which were destined for the Irish drugs market; the fact that each of the heroin seizures was equal to or in excess of the total amount of heroin seized in over 700 Garda operations in 2005; and the fact that the problem of illegal drugs is out of control.

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

### Order of Business.

**The Tánaiste:** It is proposed to take No. 14, statements on the seventh report on the high levels of suicide in Irish society; and No. 2, Citizens Information Bill 2006 — Second Stage, resumed. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the following arrangements shall apply in relation to No. 14, that the statements of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for the Fine Gael Party, the Labour Party and the Technical Group, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case, the statements of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case and Members may share time. The Dáil on its rising today shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 1 November 2006.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** There are two proposals to be put to the House. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 14, statements on the seventh report on the high levels of suicide in Irish society, agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with the adjournment of the Dáil until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 1 November 2006 agreed? Agreed. I call Deputy Kenny on the Order of Business.

**Mr. Kenny:** I note that an edited version of the O'Neill report on Leas Cross has been published by a magazine. When is it expected that the report will be published officially? Can he confirm that the families of those who suffered and died in Leas Cross have been contacted by the Department?

When are we likely to see the independent inspectorate Bill? It is included under the health Bill 2007, but the Minister for Health and Children was unclear last week regarding when it might be published.

What operation will be put in place next week to enforce criminal law relating to fireworks? This week fire crackers have been thrown at petrol stations and at cars.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** This does not arise on the Order of Business and I suggest the Deputy finds another way of raising the matter.

**Mr. Kenny:** The Garda has made valiant efforts but this matter relates to the enforcement of existing laws. This is important given the potential gravity of such attacks and the fear engendered, particularly in the elderly.

**Ms McManus:** Has the Minister received legal advice regarding the publication of the report on Leas Cross nursing home?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** This does not arise on the Order of Business. Deputy Kenny has asked a question and we cannot have a debate on the matter now.

**Ms McManus:** This is on the same issue. Will the Tánaiste indicate why the Minister for Health and Children has not used her powers under the Health Act 2004 to have the report published long before now?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Tánaiste will answer Deputy Kenny's question.

**The Tánaiste:** The Minister for Health and Children has been anxious to publish the report on Leas Cross nursing home. Problems with the legal advice given to the Health Service Executive have delayed its publication. I note that a magazine today carries excerpts from the report under the headline: "This is the report the Government does not want to publish." That is not true. The Government fully supports its publication as soon as the HSE resolves the legal issues in the matter and I understand that this will happen in the coming weeks.

As I indicated last week, the health Bill will be published in 2007 and it will put the inspectorate on a statutory basis. That inspectorate is operating, resources are being supplied to the area and new people are being recruited to carry out functions protecting the elderly from abuse. The absence of a statutory basis is not inhibiting the social service inspectorate from getting on with its work.

No legislation is needed on fireworks, but I echo the Deputy's remarks that the law is the law and must be respected. People are queuing up north of the border with the intention of bringing them south. If a customs officer stops them, which I hope happens, there will be a criminal prosecution and their cars are liable to be confiscated. I warn people that the law is tougher than it was and the consequences of breaking it are serious.

**Mr. Durkan:** It did not seem that way last week.

**Mr. Rabbitte:** I have a transcript of the press conference given by the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government with special responsibility for housing and urban renewal, Deputy Noel Ahern, on 30 August. He said that property speculators "should be taxed out of existence" and that they should play the commodities market on the London stock exchange in oil, cocoa beans or whatever else, rather than houses. Will the Government bring forward proposals to tax property speculators out of existence?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is legislation promised?

**Mr. Rabbitte:** While I am dealing with the populist wing of Fianna Fáil, may I ask the Tánaiste about the announcement made to Ursula Halligan last Sunday by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, that he had discovered money lenders were operating in our society and that he would introduce legislation to cap interest rates?

**The Tánaiste:** The only wealth tax promise made was that given by the Deputy to the readers of *The Irish Times*. We have promised no such legislation. The Deputy will have the opportunity, on the occasion of the Finance Bill next year, to table his amendments relating to increases in capital gains tax, which he also raised in a separate snippet in *The Irish Times* last year.

Regarding the remarks on property speculation, it should be noted there is more than one socialist in this House.

**Ms McManus:** That is right; we are over here.

**Mr. Stagg:** The Tánaiste is not one of them.

**Mr. Durkan:** We did not recognise the Tánaiste.

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

**Mr. Rabbitte:** I had the opportunity in Kenmare to clarify that the Tánaiste's press clipping service is not always reliable.

Will the Government advance legislation to cap interest rates applied by money lenders?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is legislation promised?

**Mr. Rabbitte:** I heard the statement with my own ears and saw it with my own eyes.

**Mr. Brennan:** The Labour Party did not speak up for the victims of money lenders.

**Mr. Rabbitte:** There is no point equivocating at this point. The Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, is very adept at releasing statements every weekend and he is rarely pursued in this regard. We can exchange banter all day. Is legislation to cap money lending rates on the way?

**The Tánaiste:** As the Deputy knows, the Consumer Credit Act 1995 deals with this area and there is no proposal before Government at present to alter that position. However, the Deputy can be reassured that the Government always keeps its legislation under review and if there is a practical way to improve that legislation with a view to protecting people from loan sharks, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs will bring proposals before Cabinet.

**Mr. Stagg:** Will the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, allow the Tánaiste to say this? He has been debunked. Will he do anything about this issue?

**Mr. Brennan:** I will get back to the Deputy on that.

**Mr. Sargent:** I wish to raise another aspect of the black hole that is promised legislation. We have been promised the tribunals of inquiry Bill, although there was a hiccup recently with exchanges between the Tánaiste and Taoiseach. Is it back on track? Is it promised or has it been withdrawn? Mr. Frank McBrearty would look forward to legal representation and we may well have a debate on the matter if this legislation is put in place.

The Building Control Bill 2005 reached Committee Stage and was to come before this House on Report Stage but seems to have also gone into a black hole. Can we have an indication of when we will see that Bill in the Dáil?

**The Tánaiste:** The Bill in question is ordered for Second Stage. The Deputy may be suffering from amnesia as it was members of the Opposition who demanded it not proceed recently.

**Mr. Crawford:** Has the Tánaiste done any more regarding the attachment of fines Bill? He said it was not right when it was brought in by Fine Gael, but that he would deal with it shortly. It is now on the agenda as the enforcement of fines Bill.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** That was raised by the Deputy's colleague yesterday.

**The Tánaiste:** Work is proceeding on that Bill in the Office of the Attorney General. It is not possible to say when it will be published but work is proceeding on the legislation.

**Mr. Costello:** Legislation on fireworks in this jurisdiction is diametrically opposed to legislation in Northern Ireland. New penalties have been introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2006 regarding the possession and use of fireworks, but they are likely to be ineffective without an effort to co-ordinate the legislation on both sides of the Border. Does the Tánaiste have any proposals in that regard?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is legislation promised?

**The Tánaiste:** No legislation is promised. Legislation north of the border is a matter for authorities in that jurisdiction.

**Mr. Rabbitte:** What of the Good Friday Agreement?

**The Tánaiste:** I appreciate the Good Friday Agreement and a single regime for both parts of this island would be my preference. I am not yet in a position to legislate for Northern Ireland.

**Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** At least I can agree with the Tánaiste on that latter point. I refer to two Bills that have been signalled for publication in the autumn session. They are the medical practitioners Bill and the national development finance agency Bill. Can the Tánaiste advise if they will be brought before the House this session?

**The Tánaiste:** Both Bills are listed for publication this session.

**Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** Will they be brought before the House this session?

**The Tánaiste:** That is a matter for agreement among the whips. The Bills will be published.

**Mr. Bruton:** When will we see a fresh strategy statement from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform? Will it deal explicitly with the issue of re-offending rates? A recent report from St. Patrick's Institution shows that re-offending rates are alarming. While that report was disputed, we have seen no data from the Department on the issue. Will the Minister produce a strategy statement that will include targets on re-offending and detection rates? The levels of both are alarming.

**The Tánaiste:** No legislation is promised.

**Mr. Bruton:** Surely there is an obligation on the Minister to report to the Dáil on a strategy statement.

**Mr. Durkan:** Can the Tánaiste give information on whether the pharmacy (No. 2) Bill, which is urgently and anxiously awaited by the profession, might be brought forward at an earlier date than currently indicated?

The postal miscellaneous services Bill was promised this time last year but was suddenly and mysteriously removed from the Order Paper. Will the Tánaiste carry out an investigation to determine where it might have landed, and whether it might be restored to the Order Paper before all the post offices are allowed to drift and die on the vine?

**The Tánaiste:** The pharmacy (No. 1) Bill will be published this session but it is not possible to say when the second one will be published. The postal miscellaneous services Bill is no longer promised legislation and is no longer on any list.

**Mr. Durkan:** It was promised a year ago. Surely the Tánaiste's memory goes back that far — high office cannot have expelled it from his memory.

**The Tánaiste:** It is unpromised now.

**Mr. Durkan:** Would the Tánaiste like to promise it again? He is in a magnanimous mood.

**The Tánaiste:** No.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** It has been de-promised.

**Ms McManus:** Much media attention has recently focused on a particular celebrity inter-country adoption. Can the Tánaiste tell us when the adoption (Hague Convention, Adoption Authority) Bill will be produced? It keeps turning up on the legislative programme but we never actually see it.

**The Tánaiste:** It is intended to publish this early next year.

**Mr. Broughan:** Has the Tánaiste any intention of introducing the sale of alcohol Bill before the general election? There are a number of important Bills in the Minister's portfolio—

**An Ceann Comhairle:** This was dealt with yesterday.

**Mr. Durkan:** There is no harm in raising it again.

**Mr. Broughan:** Unfortunately, I was not here yesterday. Has the Tánaiste any strategy for bringing forward key legislation?

When will the single energy market Bill for electricity be introduced? Energy consultants McKinnon and Clarke have this morning told us that Ireland has the third highest electricity prices in Europe.

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

**Mr. Broughan:** The Tánaiste is supposed to be interested in competitiveness — it is something he often talks about. We are becoming distinctly uncompetitive under this Progressive Democrats Tánaiste.

**The Tánaiste:** The single energy market legislation on electricity will be published this session. The sale of alcohol legislation which will codify the entire licensing law is expected in early 2007.

### **Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2006: First Stage.**

**Mr. Crowe:** I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2002 to restore the obligations in relation to the provision of social and affordable a housing which existed under Part V of the Planning and Development Act



2000 prior to the amendment of that act in 2002.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is the Bill being opposed?

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt):** No.

Question put and agreed to.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

**Mr. Crowe:** I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

### High Level of Suicide in Irish Society: Statements.

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley):** I welcome this opportunity to discuss the report of the Joint Committee on Health and Children, *The High Level of Suicide in Irish Society*, and to outline the measures which are being taken by my Department, in conjunction with the Health Service Executive and the many community and voluntary organisations involved, to address the issue of suicide in Irish society.

The joint committee sets out detailed recommendations that have been based on written submissions to it, as well as presentations by a range of statutory and voluntary groups, academics and researchers. These recommendations, 33 in all, include practical interventions and research priorities. Suicide is a serious problem in this country. Data from the Central Statistics Office indicates that between 2000 and 2003 there were, on average, 495 deaths by suicide in Ireland annually, peaking at 519 in 2001. In 2004 there were 457 registered deaths by suicide and in 2005 there were 431. This represents a rate of 11 per 100,000 population. Of particular concern is the rate of youth suicide in Ireland, which was the fifth highest in the European Union for 15-24 year olds in 2004. Sadly, the rate is even higher in Ireland among young men in their 20s and early 30s.

Deliberate self-harm is also a significant public health problem. According to the National Suicide Research Foundation, more than 11,000 cases of deliberate self-harm present to Irish accident and emergency departments each year. Deliberate self-harm rates are highest among women and the younger age groups, peaking for girls aged between 15 and 19 years and for young men aged between 20 and 24. The joint committee recognised the need for the provision of nurse-led liaison psychiatric services in A&E departments. I am pleased to inform Deputies

that the National Office for Suicide Prevention made additional resources available in 2005 to put in place experienced psychiatric nursing staff in A&E departments to respond to deliberate self-harm presentations. Further investment is being made in 2006 to ensure all A&E departments have a service to respond to such presentations.

The joint committee report suggests that suicide is a societal problem and that those that are, or who perceive themselves to be, disenfranchised or marginalised are at greater risk. The report identifies the close relationship between suicide and mental illness, especially those with psychotic illnesses who have a 10%-15% risk of dying by suicide. The role of alcohol in suicide and suicidal behaviour is highlighted. These findings are echoed in *Reach Out — A National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention*, which was launched in September 2005.

The joint committee recommends that young people be consulted about mental health services and service development. This area was also identified in *Reach Out*. The National Office for Suicide Prevention is exploring ways of reaching young people through e-mail, texting and instant messaging, in order to develop a sustainable programme of action which can be funded in late 2006-07 onwards. The national office will consult young people, voluntary organisations and those using technology to reach out and provide services. This work is currently being scoped and will be reported on later this year.

As regards the putting in place of a sustainable anti-stigma and positive mental health promotion campaign, which is also recommended in the joint committee report, I am pleased to inform the Dáil that the National Office for Suicide Prevention is planning a national mental health promotion campaign to take place early in 2007. The aim of this campaign is to address the stigma relating to suicide and mental health which are serious barriers to seeking help. The campaign will be whole population based initially, but as it develops over time more targeted and local campaigns will be initiated. The National Office for Suicide Prevention has looked at the Scottish "See Me" campaign which is beginning to have an impact on public views of mental health.

The joint committee recommended a target of reducing Ireland's overall suicide rate by 20% by 2016. As part of the *Reach Out* strategy, consideration was given to the setting of

*11 o'clock*

an overall target for the reduction of our national suicide rate as an outcome measure of this strategy. At this stage, it has been decided that a specific target will not be set because the priority is to establish the accuracy of suicide mortality in Ireland. The range and inter-play of factors that influence the suicide rate mean that a direct cause and effect relationship between prevention programmes and a

[Mr. T. O'Malley.]

change in the overall population rates is virtually impossible to establish.

Nevertheless, there are undoubted advantages to setting targets for an overall reduction, not least that it focuses the attention of those working at all levels of suicide prevention. An overall target for the reduction of suicide rates will be set by the Government, on the advice of the Minister for Health and Children, when suicide rates have been accurately determined.

As we are all aware, there was in the past a reluctance to even discuss the issue of suicide. Thankfully, this situation has now changed. In Ireland, the level of discussion and openness on mental health issues, including deliberate self-harm and suicide, has increased significantly in recent years. This is a very welcome development. However, we must ensure that public discussion and media coverage of suicide and deliberate self-harm remains measured, well-informed and sensitive to the needs and well-being of psychologically vulnerable and distressed individuals in our society. In particular, we need to continue to work as a society to create a culture and environment where people in psychological distress feel able to seek help from family, friends and health professionals. A strategic framework is required to assist all of us in identifying actions we can undertake in a co-ordinated way, through partnership between statutory, voluntary and community groups and individuals, supported by Government.

Reach Out builds on the work of the National Task Force on Suicide and takes account of the efforts and initiatives developed by the former health boards in recent years. It recommends a combined public health and high risk approach. This approach to suicide prevention is also advocated by the International Association for Suicide Prevention and is in keeping with the European action plan for mental health which was signed and endorsed on behalf of ministers of health of the 52 member states of the European region of the World Health Organisation at the ministerial conference on mental health in Helsinki, Finland in January 2005. The Health Service Executive is taking a lead role in overseeing the implementation of the strategy, in partnership with those statutory and voluntary organisations that have a key role to play in making the actions happen.

Following the publication of the strategy, the HSE established the National Office for Suicide Prevention. The role of the national office is to coordinate suicide prevention activities across the State, consult widely in relation to the planning of future initiatives, and ensure best practice in suicide prevention.

The report of the expert group on mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*, which was launched in January 2006, highlights the importance of mental health promotion in the preven-

tion of mental health problems through the development of coping and problem-solving skills, help-seeking and resilience. It also recommends that mental health promotion should be available for all age groups to enhance the protective factors and decrease risk factors for developing mental health problems. The recommendations in the report have been accepted by Government as the basis for the future development of the mental health services. In the region of €800 million will be spent on mental health services in 2006, up from €433 million in 2000.

This year an additional €26.2 million funding was provided to further develop our mental health services. This included €1.2 million specifically for suicide prevention initiatives. In addition, earlier this week the Government approved the allocation of almost €1 million from the dormant accounts to fund 20 projects providing suicide prevention supports. The key objective of this funding measure is to provide interventions and supports to strengthen community based initiatives, particularly, although not exclusively, those targeting young men under 35 years of age. The intention of the funding is to support locally-based initiatives supporting suicide prevention. The projects approved are varied and include the provision of early intervention measures for those at risk and also the provision of services for those bereaved through suicide.

This Government shares the public concern about the levels of suicide. I thank the members of the Joint Committee on Health and Children for their work in preparing the report on the high level of suicide in Irish society. We all have our part to play in helping those who may experience and face adverse events in life, and emotions and feelings so strong that they consider taking their own lives. We must aim to provide accessible, sensitive, appropriate and, where required, intensive support.

**Dr. Twomey:** Suicide is an emotional subject and every Member fully understands the trauma families suffer as a result of a death by suicide. It would be difficult to predict our own response if any of us received the call many families receive. To be informed of the sudden death of a father, mother, brother, sister, son or daughter is a terrible event and death by suicide is accompanied by raw emotion that can often be difficult to understand or discuss. All too often, a close family member discovers the victim of the suicide, something that will never leave him or her. Last week before the Joint Committee on Health and Children, we were told of a five year old child discovering his father hanging in the garage. That will never leave that young boy.

Those left behind often spend the rest of their lives asking questions of themselves, if something they said led to this catastrophic event for the

family. Regrettably, sometimes angry words have been exchanged between parents and a child before this terrible occurrence.

As the Minister of State pointed out, the Oireachtas committee published a report on the high level of suicide in society and every Member of the Houses should read it. It gives important background information on suicide. It states:

Despite the disparity of backgrounds and experience of those who came before the Committee, a number of common opinions emerged from the evidence presented. These included the fact that:

1. Suicide, the act of voluntarily or intentionally taking one's own life, is a growing global problem. In itself, suicide is not an illness but rather it is a term used to describe the act of the taking of one's own life.

2. The causes of suicide are multi-faceted and entail an interaction of biological, psychological, social and environmental risk factors occurring in an individual who may have various socio-demographic vulnerabilities interfacing with life-long susceptibilities that are then usually subject to a precipitating event, with catastrophic consequences.

That might sound academic but it points out that there are social factors and vulnerabilities in an individual's life that can lead him or her to taking that life. The easy part to understand is that such an act has catastrophic consequences for the individual.

Suicide and suicidal behaviour are societal problems and society must alter social policy to deal with risk factors. Effective action to prevent suicide behaviour requires the co-operation of the whole community, with inputs from the Departments of Education and Science, Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Health and Children and Social and Family Affairs, as well as employers and voluntary agencies and organisations committed to positive health promotion.

It was recognised in 1897 that many suicides occur when the attachments between an individual and society are strained or fragmented. This association was made more than 100 years ago and Irish society, like the rest of the world, has changed dramatically in the period since, particularly in the past decade. Given that people have become much more detached from interactions in their communities, it should not come as a surprise to learn that the risk of suicide has increased significantly. New policies are needed to address the risk of suicide, especially among young people.

The report focuses on two further key issues, namely, suicide clusters and the role of alcohol. Suicide clusters are a well-known phenomenon. I had a shocking experience of it in my constituency of County Wexford where, over a brief

period, the bodies of five victims of suicide were taken from the River Slaney. The media must take extreme care in reporting suicides. If vulnerable persons perceive that the reporting of a suicide appears to elevate the victim, a rash of copycat suicides may occur in the same area. Clusters of suicides will continue unless we can persuade the media to adopt a sensible policy on reporting suicides.

The second key issue is alcohol. Many people forget that alcohol is a depressant. As the report states, it produces a "significant fall in mood". It also notes that an "individual may not have a history of suffering from depression for this to come about", adding that alcohol is "disinhibiting". I have been made aware of cases in which individuals who had attempted to take their own lives were discovered and their lives saved. They may have been found hanging in a garage or shed. Usually, they had consumed a large quantity of alcohol and had no recollection of making preparations to take their lives. For reasons connected either to the disinhibiting or mood altering effects of alcohol or events in their lives, they took the decision to end their lives without being conscious of doing so. In other words, they did not start out with the intention of taking their lives.

Alcohol consumption has increased by 40% in the past decade. It may be coincidental but the increase in suicide over the same period was also roughly 40%. Given the significant contribution alcohol makes to the suicide rate, it must be a focus of attention because it is an area in which we can make a difference.

The Minister of State indicated that more information would be sought and baselines established before the Department would set reduction targets. Other countries have successfully reduced suicide rates through targeted programmes, particularly those focused on young people. Apart from young people, the other group most vulnerable to suicide is elderly people, particularly those living alone. Of the 500 suicides per annum, at least half involve young people. When one adds a further 250 young people who lose their lives on the roads each year, one finds that every year 500 young people are killed in two areas where prevention measures are required.

Between 50,000 and 60,000 young people sit their junior certificate every year. Statistically, by the time a class of 15 year olds reaches the age of 25 years, one tenth of its number will have died either in road traffic accidents or as a result of suicide. It is shocking that we are not tackling these two key causes of death among young people. Rather than waiting to set baselines, we should take immediate action.

To return to the issue of alcohol, young people's alcohol consumption has changed dramatically in the past 15 or 20 years. They consume much larger amounts of spirits and aim to



[Dr. Twomey.]

get intoxicated quicker. This could have a significant knock-on effect on the two growing trends of suicidal and parasuicidal behaviour. Many of those who engage in parasuicidal behaviour do not realise that while they did not set out to kill themselves, their actions may have serious consequences. I have worked in accident and emergency departments in Dublin and Cork. Frequently, young people would tell me on admission that they had taken 20 or 30 paracetamol tablets. They would be dismissive at first but would become anxious when they learned that paracetamol could potentially kill them as it would cause their liver to shut down. They thought paracetamol was relatively safe and would not result in death. While technically parasuicidal, their behaviour could have serious consequences. In many cases, young people who did not intend to kill themselves have been discovered dead.

We need to be alert to parasuicidal behaviour, which frequently occurs when young people consume large amounts of alcohol and row with their friends. Many 15 and 16 year olds are not psychologically prepared for the emotional relationships they enter and may, when they drink too much, make a cry for help by taking paracetamol with devastating results. The Minister can no longer sit on this issue because far too many young people are losing their lives.

The all-party report of the national task force on suicide was published in January 1998 when Deputy Cowen was Minister for Health and Children. The seventh report on the high levels of suicide notes that one of the reasons the task force report failed to have an impact on suicide rates was that resources were not allocated to target them. Two years after the publication of the task force report, suicide rates peaked and continued at high levels for a further three years. If the necessary resources had been forthcoming in 1998, how many of the lives lost in subsequent years could have been saved?

We can no longer sit on the fence. It is unacceptable for the Minister of State to indicate action will be taken when suicide rates have been accurately determined. Suicide rates are too high to take a bookkeeper's attitude on the need to have precise figures. Cross-departmental action is required to dramatically reduce the suicide rate. The Department of Education and Science must establish suicide prevention programmes in schools. I do not know what age children should be involved in these programmes. Ten years ago, we probably would have favoured starting with transition year students but these students have become much more aware of what is happening in the wider world. For this reason, it may be necessary to move the goalposts and focus suicide prevention efforts on 12 and 13 year olds.

The recommendations of the task force on alcohol have been ignored by the Government. This is something for which it must take responsibility. If the huge increase in the consumption of alcohol by young people is a contributing factor to the incidence of suicide, the Minister should take that on board and implement the strategies required immediately. The Opposition wants the Government to do its job in this regard. It is not good enough just to list what is being done when it is clear that despite all the programmes, not enough is being done to protect people.

The statistic I mentioned earlier might not be 100% accurate but it is the case that in every classroom of 30 or 40 students who are about to sit their junior certificate examination, at least two or three of those students will not see their 25th birthday because of death either by suicide or in a road traffic accident. These are the two main crises for young people at present. The Government has all the reports it needs on these issues. It is now time for it to do its job by tackling these problems and really making a difference to people's lives.

The issues surrounding death by suicide among elderly people are far different. It is usually caused by loneliness, where people are living alone and have become detached from society. They no longer feel wanted by society. It is a separate issue. Society has changed dramatically; there is not the same respect for elderly people and they are not valued as much. In some respects we have sidelined the elderly from involvement in their communities and in family life over the past decade due to the fast pace of modern life. This is the next issue on which the Minister must focus his attention. Again, however, it must be dealt with across all Departments, not just the Department of Health and Children.

**Ms McManus:** I welcome this debate. It is probably the first time there has been a full debate in the House on suicide, despite the fact that all Members, in the course of their work, have encountered families whose lives have been blighted by the suicide of a loved one. Few of us have been trained in how to deal with that type of crisis so we can only imagine what is involved and empathise with and support those families as best we can. Indeed, many of us have family members who have committed suicide and have had to cope with that terrible crisis. Many parents never fully recover from the loss of a child who has died in this way.

This is an important debate. It is important that we know the extent of the problem. It is striking that in the past we thought Ireland had a low level of suicide. Certainly, the evidence is that the level was lower than it is now. In the 1960s there were approximately 164 suicides per annum; now the figure is approximately 450 per annum. That

is a big increase. We can debate the reason for that but I suspect that in the past the figures were suppressed because of the stigma attached to suicide. I recall that there was general smugness in Ireland with regard to a country such as godless Sweden, which had a considerably higher level of suicide. The reality, of course, is that we often covered up cases of suicide, often for the benign reason of protecting people and minimising the damage.

It is better that we know the truth. It is healthier for the community to know the extent of the problem. I welcome the fact that there is better data collection now. Nevertheless, it is clear that we do not know the full extent of the incidence of suicide, and the Minister has used this as an excuse. There are hidden suicides, something we need to explore and study. There is circumstantial evidence that some car crashes are deliberate. We have seen instances of risky behaviour in cars, particularly by young men, and have learned to our cost in recent times where that can lead. There is a general view that some car crashes resulting in the death of young male drivers might in some cases be deliberate rather than accidental. Accurate research and accurate data collection is most important for getting to grips with this issue.

This is referred to in the report:

We have a body of statistics about suicide in Ireland that are likely to underestimate the true state of affairs. While accurate data collection is the ideal, avoiding unnecessary duplication of collecting information is also important. The best possible use of the existing data held by statutory and professional agencies relating to suicide deaths in Ireland supplemented when possible by information from the bereaved family and the deceased's social network would also help to build up a picture of the deceased. However, our relentless problem of suicide requires us to engage in preventative programmes and set targets for a reduction in self destructive behaviour in parallel as a matter of urgency.

The committee's report makes a key point, namely that while we collect this more accurate data we should not delay in setting targets. However, the Minister has just told the House that because we do not have accurate data and do not know the cause and effect of measures, targets will not be set. The report says that is the wrong way to proceed in tackling this issue. Perhaps the Minister will reconsider and have a little courage.

There is no lack of reports and information. There are two significant reports available, the Oireachtas joint committee report and the strategy report. These contain good information and proposals. The Oireachtas committee employed Dr. Siobhán Barry, an expert in psychi-

atric illness and suicide, and consulted with people and families who had been bereaved. The partnership between the expert and the people who are directly affected is fundamental to ensuring that we reach out to those at risk and to those who have lost loved ones.

The strategy outlined by the Minister lasts to 2014 but does not set clear targets. That is a key weakness in the Government's approach. Deputy Neville will probably discuss the example of Scotland. When the authorities in Scotland were tackling the high level of suicide they set out targets and were effective in reducing that level. On this morning's "Morning Ireland" a person in charge of dealing with the accident and emergency crisis stated that setting targets was crucial to tackling the problems in that area. If targets are not set, what are we working towards other than a series of aspirations that become more woolly as they become more ineffective? This is a crucial point.

This report and others point to the reasons for the increase in the incidence of suicide, apart from the fact that we have better knowledge about the problem. There is a loss of values and a loss of a sense of security among young people. We must take on board that Irish society has changed rapidly and become more unequal and divided. There is a greater sense of marginalisation as a result of our prosperity. Those who, for whatever reason, are left behind feel even more isolated. There is a raft of research to support the case that poverty and social exclusion have a detrimental effect on people's health, that social determinants of health are hugely significant and that poor people have shorter lives and, on average, are more liable to become ill than those who are better off and employed. The position is similar in respect of mental illness, which is a significant factor in suicide.

The Minister of State is a member of a party which believes that inequality is a good thing. His party's new leader has espoused the cause of inequality but when it comes to health, that is a load of baloney. Inequality is anything but good. In circumstances where good measures are in place in societies where the divide is not so wide, health outcomes are generally much better. In the US, of which the Minister for Health and Children is so fond and with which she is besotted, the health service spends enormous amounts of money but does not deliver better health outcomes. This is largely because US society is so unequal. Those at the bottom of the ladder in America cannot access health care and suffer much greater ill health.

Consideration must be given to societal issues. A fair society is a healthier society. Until we grasp that concept and begin to promote the principle of a fair society, we will continue to be obliged to climb the hill with a burden on our backs.

[Ms McManus.]

Another issue to which I wish to refer is that of the victims of abuse. It is part of a painful legacy that is also coming to the surface that there is a higher level of suicide among victims of abuse. We must ensure that full counselling and psychotherapy services are put in place to try to ameliorate the damage and destruction done to peoples psyches by abuse. This gives rise to a general point regarding counselling and psychotherapy, namely, that it is difficult for people facing emotional crises in their lives, particularly if they do not possess adequate financial resources, to seek help of the kind to which I refer. Such help is not incorporated into our health service in the way it should be and it is not accessible via the medical card system. There are many voluntary organisations which are trying to meet the huge need for counselling. For many people, counselling can open a door to happiness and relieve them of enormous emotional burdens that they often carry in isolation. Whether we can rely on counsellors' judgment and evaluate whether they are good at what they do is another matter. In my opinion, this area should be professionalised. However, that is a matter for another debate.

I welcome any beneficial moves in respect of mental health that the Minister of State intends to make. I will not begrudge anything being done by the Mental Health Commission, the establishment of which was an extremely positive development. It is vital that mental health should be given higher priority within the health service.

I wish now to deal with the issue of alcohol abuse, to which the requisite attention has not been paid. The Government has at its disposal all the information it needs in the form of the second report of the strategic task force on alcohol. We are aware that there is a strong link between alcohol and some suicides. Members raise issues in the Dáil and table questions about, for example, the alcohol products (control of advertising, sponsorship and marketing practices/sales promotions) Bill. I inquired about the latter in 2003 and I was informed that publication was expected in early 2004. The legislation has disappeared from the horizon. The reason for this is that the Minister for Health and Children capitulated to the alcohol industry.

The second report of the strategic task force on alcohol indicates that Ireland has a major problem in respect of alcohol abuse. Chapter 2.21 of the report states:

A recent study showed that adults in Ireland had the highest reported consumption per drinker and the highest level of binge drinking in comparison to adults in other European countries... The study showed that binge drinking is the norm among Irish men; out of every 100 drinking occasions, 58 end up in binge drinking. Among women, 30 occasions out of 100 end up in binge drinking. Binge drinking

was conservatively defined in this study as drinking at least one bottle of wine, or 7 measures of spirits, or 4 pints of beer or more, during one drinking occasion... While young Irish men reported the highest consumption of alcohol and had more binge drinkers than any other group in the population, binge drinking was common in all age groups up to 64 years.

There are two points to be made. First, we have a real problem as regards the abuse of alcohol and, second, it is clear from the research that this problem does not merely exist among young people. We espouse a culture which ensures that practically every part of our social lives revolves around the pub and that the young are educated into the culture of alcohol abuse by older people. We are creating a range of problems, including those which relate to liver damage and mental conditions.

We are aware that there are many problems associated with the abuse of alcohol but the Government is not dealing with this matter. That is disturbing, particularly because the link between alcohol and suicide is well known. However, it is also disturbing because young people are being exposed to the opportunity to suffer great ill health, such as that caused by liver damage, in the future by a culture that we do not seem to be able to control or redirect in any way.

The summary of recommendations in the report of the task force is extremely clear and states that we should increase taxes, restrict greater availability, deal with advertising, reduce exposure of children to alcohol, etc. Regrettably, however, the recommendations remain in the report and have not been taken on board elsewhere. That is one of the examples of the Government's acute failure to deal with this issue.

Everyone understands that difficult decisions must be made. When the Government introduced the smoking ban, I found myself in the extraordinary position, at public meetings in my constituency, of defending it against a Minister who also represents the constituency and who was highly critical of the ban. However, that was my choice and I would make it again.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Deputy's time is exhausted.

**Ms McManus:** And I had only just got started.

**Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** I propose to share time with Deputies Connolly and Gormley.

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

**Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** I welcome the report of the Oireachtas committee and the continuing focus of Members on the high level of suicide in society. This is a serious issue and it ranks with



the appalling toll of deaths on our roads as the leading cause of deaths of young people and as a source of terrible grief for individuals, families and entire communities.

There is widespread concern and a greater awareness of the scale and depth of this problem. However, it is sad that this has not been reflected in concerted and effective action by the Government. That much is clear from the committee's report, which is to be commended for outlining the situation in factual and blunt terms. In his opening address, the Minister of State avoided these criticisms.

The report is especially critical of the state of our mental health services. It points out that people with mental illness are known to be at greater risk of death by suicide but "the type of mental health service one can access is a matter of luck". That is a terrible indictment. It states that funding for mental health services is "allocated in a random manner with scant regard for need". Perhaps most damning of all in the context of suicide, the report asserts that "the provision of mental health services for adolescents is high on aspiration but low on action". All of these findings by the joint committee must be taken on board by the Government. What is required is not aspiration, but action. The findings represent a severe indictment of the State's management of our health services, as is the conclusion that despite 11,000 admissions per annum to accident and emergency departments following suicidal behaviour, we have not yet put swift and appropriate standardised interventions in place to treat this high risk group and thus reduce repeat acts.

I welcome the target set by the report to reduce the overall suicide rate by 20% by the year 2016. I also welcome the detailed and costed recommendations for action. This is the most important element of the report and I urge the Government to act swiftly and comprehensively to implement these constructive proposals.

There is a particular focus on our education system in the recommendations and a range of measures is proposed. We need to see this problem in the overall context of an education system at second level which places enormous pressure on students. Children are going from a progressive, child-centred, primary education system into secondary schools where an exam-driven pressure cooker environment is the order of the day. Along with the natural personal and family pressures faced by adolescents, they face the social challenge of their peers and the educational challenge of a highly competitive leaving certificate which is driven by the scramble for places in third level education. This occurs in a consumer society in which young people are increasingly being judged by how they look, what they wear and what they possess. Anti-social behaviour and bullying in our schools are very serious and growing problems. To be in any way troubled as a

young person in this context is to be open to the risk of mental illness, self-harm and ultimately suicide. We must address all of this with the full participation of young people themselves.

Sinn Féin has identified suicide as a distinct priority requiring concerted co-operation between the Government, the health services, the voluntary sector and communities. Our youth section, Ógra Sinn Féin, has campaigned on this issue. We have also included suicide prevention as a key element in our policy document entitled, *Healthcare in an Ireland of Equals*.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** The Deputy has spoken for six minutes.

**Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** I do not want to encroach on the time of other speakers. I ask the Minister of State to note the points I have made.

**Mr. Gormley:** It is very important that we discuss this topic at length in the House. We have spoken about it in committees, but this is the first time we have done so in the Chamber. At a time of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity, why is there an increase in suicide? There are several answers to the question. If one reads the report, one can get an indication of that. Going back 100 years, Durkheim stated that many suicides occur when the attachments between an individual and society are strained and fragmented. We have an economic system and parties, such as that of the Minister of State, which advocate a certain economic orthodoxy that places the emphasis on the individual as opposed to society. Margaret Thatcher once famously said that there is no such thing as society, only the individual. That is very dangerous and we can see the consequences of that kind of thinking.

So much of life has now become a commodity. The rearing of children, child care and looking after older people are now commodities. People are paid to do things and the idea of volunteerism is now gone. The extended family is gone and the type of society that we now have is based on capitalism and the market. We can call it an industrialised society or a consumer society, but it amounts to the same thing; the individual seems to be under enormous pressure. That has led to an increase in suicide, despair, depression and alienation from society as the individual sees it.

One of the ways we allow the market a free reign in this country is in regard to alcohol. It is now possible to buy alcohol in a local supermarket as it is freely available. I was listening to an interview being conducted with women who were in Killarney for a hen weekend. They consumed shots which allow the same amount of alcohol into the system in two seconds as that of a pint over a longer period of time. People are under real pressure to go out and binge drink as they are so busy with their lives.



[Mr. Gormley.]

The Government had the opportunity to introduce the alcohol products Bill and we know that alcohol is related to suicide, but the Government farked it. It shelved the Bill and it caved in to the alcohol industry. If the problem of suicide is to be tackled, a little bit of joined-up thinking is needed and the alcohol products Bill should be put back under promised legislation. Let us get at the root causes of this problem.

**Mr. Connolly:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on this report. I was a member of the sub-committee that produced the report and I would like to see action on it. Suicide is a very difficult subject and is difficult to address. There are approximately 450 suicides per annum and 11,000 attempted suicides. It is a major challenge for society. Some studies suggest that suicide is under-reported by about 16%. There is an economic and human cost to suicide at a direct and indirect level. Suicide costs about 0.5% of the country's GNP, 72% of which is in human terms and 28% of which is due to loss of production. Each suicide costs around €1.5 million, which is a crude way to measure it.

We do not really know why people commit suicide, but we know that some are in high risk categories and groups. It is known that certain factors are associated with suicide and all speakers have referred to alcohol and drugs. The 1990s saw a 41% increase in alcohol consumption and a 44% increase in suicide. This shows the direct link between alcohol and suicide. It is strange to see there has been no corresponding increase in mental illness so suicide is not directly linked to mental illness either.

Ireland has experienced an economic boom since the 1990s. We have become caught up in the fast lane and as a result of the Celtic tiger we have succumbed to the relatively recent vices of consumerism and materialism. We have lost touch with each other and we have lost our interpersonal skills. I appeal to people to talk and to share the problem. So many distraught relatives are left wondering why they did not pick up on the symptoms and why they missed the signs. Distraught parents are often left wondering how they missed the signs and why their child did not share their thoughts with them. Professional help is available. I appeal to anyone suffering from suicidal ideation to share their thoughts with somebody they trust who could direct them towards professional help.

I appeal to the Health Service Executive to address the shortage of counsellors. Many obstacles are put in the way of people looking for help. I appeal to senior people in the health service to facilitate staff who wish to train as counsellors. Many workers such as nurses have front line experience in the delivery of health care and such

people should be encouraged to take an active part in society.

A seminar on suicide was held recently in Dro-mahair, County Leitrim and the hall was packed. The VEC and the local health services joined together to host a seminar in Monaghan town and again we were playing to a packed house. Suicide is one of the biggest killers of young people, particularly young men. Parents are almost afraid to look sideways at their children yet every so often they are accused of tossing material goods at children as if they are buying their affection. It is wrong to accuse parents because this is part of the society in which we live; it is like blaming electricity for our ills. Society moves forward, we are a consumer society and we must learn to adapt to this society. It can be frustrating for parents to be accused of being over-materialistic, not being caring enough or not giving time to people.

I appeal to young people, in particular young males. They find it very difficult to share their thoughts with other people. Young girls are better communicators and they communicate with each other. They will express their feelings to each other and this takes them out of a quandary. If a problem is shared then it is halved. Because of male ego, young guys will not share their thoughts and they will not talk. This is one of the reasons for the high incidence of suicide among young males.

**Mr. Moloney:** I thank the fellow members of the sub-committee of which I was Chairman. I thank Deputy Neville in particular and wish to recognise his expertise. I thank Deputies O'Connor and Connolly, Senators Browne and Glynn and Gina Long and in particular, Dr. Siobhán Barry.

I note the report presented to the Oireachtas and the remarks of Deputy McManus where she made the point that this is the first time this subject has been debated on the floor of the House. I hope that the next time it is debated here we will have met many of the targets and achieved much of what we have set out to do.

I speak as someone with an interest in the issue of suicide who hopes to see changes. The figure of in excess of 450 people taking their own lives must be regarded as a huge wake-up call to us all. The aim of the committee was to try to bring about change and to ensure there would be a reduction in numbers in the future. The committee's report was not designed to be publicity-seeking. The committee deliberated over a number of months and came to certain conclusions.

I do not wish to differ with the Minister of State, Deputy Tim O'Malley, because I respect his position. However, I remain convinced that we must set targets. We will lose valuable time if we wait for more information to be collected. I

say this not as a professional person because in the pecking order of responsibilities I presume I might come on the lowest rung.

I come to this debate as a country funeral undertaker. Over the years I have seen the hardship caused to families and communities by the act of suicide. I see despair and frustration, a lack of guidance and a wonderment of where we went wrong and where the system fails. I have been involved with six suicide funerals in my home area in the past six weeks. From speaking to the families I noted that a common thread in four of those funerals was that the person had been undergoing treatment, had been discharged from treatment but there had been no follow up to check how the patient was coping. There was no follow up with the family to find out how the patient was reacting to treatment or how he was dealing with going home for the weekend. Until the dreaded day came, there was no specific contact with the hospital authorities. In my view there should be targets in that area. The biggest gap is that there is very little follow up care. I do not wish to seem critical or to blame anybody.

The committee's report, unlike most reports, has stated that we should work towards achieving a 20% reduction in the rate of suicide by 2016. This can be achieved. I am relying on the professionals who came before our committee over a three to four month period. I would welcome the opportunity to read into the record of the House the 33 recommendations of the committee's report. I subscribe fully to a target figure and a price tag on those targets. We must recognise the significant problem and work on the recommendations. We do not have to accept all the recommendations but we should recognise the changes required.

We have a flourishing society with all the consumer goods we need but the one thing we cannot check is the reason people are taking their lives by suicide.

The committee's report concluded that suicide is largely a societal problem, not an illness in itself. As a consequence society needs to alter social policies to deal with the risk factors. We must decide how to change the societal background to ensure we achieve those reductions. Our report highlights that the close relationship of suicide and mental illness makes it imperative to make psychiatric services more accessible.

I do not wish to seem sentimental because, far from it, I am totally at ease with myself on this matter. My father suffered from alcoholism for a number of years. He was dry for 20 years before he died. During the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, people were reluctant to seek help for alcohol-related illnesses because if one did not have the funding for a private hospital one went to the local mental hospital. People were reluctant to check into a mental hospital for fear of that stigma. We have moved from that era with the

arrival of acute psychiatric units in hospitals. I welcome that development. I see the trend of people presenting at these units.

We must establish a pattern of treating people with suicidal tendencies. Levels of treatment must be raised to those in the alcohol treatment sector. This can be done and the report goes a long way towards suggesting this move.

One of the most important sections of the report highlights the disparity of funding in the mental health services. Services for adolescents

12 o'clock  
have tended to be poorly developed. Adolescents with psychotic illnesses

have a risk of between 10% and 15% of dying by suicide. That glaring fact is presented in the report. By homing in on that statistic and providing the necessary back-up support, we could reduce those figures greatly. The risk is greatest within the first five years after the onset of a psychotic illness. We need urgent programmes of early intervention for detection and treatment in the area of mental services. Only days ago, I heard of a person who arrived at an accident and emergency unit displaying suicidal tendencies. Our hospital systems are not geared to fast-tracking such a person through an accident and emergency unit. We must examine the problem of suicidal patients presenting at such units.

The recommendations in the report are well grounded and factually based. If we wait for further evidence we will not be dealing effectively with the issue. I too attended the conference on suicide held in County Leitrim. It was a two-day conference, going on until late in the evening and attended by more than 400 people. The common theme was that parents and families of those who take their lives by suicide feel absolutely helpless and deprived of guidance and direction. We must set down parameters for reducing suicide levels and fix targets. People must be held accountable or responsible for realising these targets.

We must go back to the old system where each county appointed a person responsible for bringing in measures to reduce the level of suicide in the county concerned. If this were done, I would have no difficulty accepting the recommendations of the task force report that the responsible person in each county should report to a suicide prevention officer at national level. Unless trends are established and patterns gauged and understood, we will not reduce suicide levels.

I would like to see a pilot programme or Government funded scheme to invite families bereaved by suicide to speak confidentially to professionals who would try to see if there is a set pattern leading to suicide. This would be a first step towards setting targets to reduce levels of suicide.

I fully subscribe to all the recommendations in the report. We must set targets and funding should be set aside in this regard. We have come to recognise the huge difficulty of deaths in road traffic accidents and we have set targets and pro-

[Mr. Moloney.]

vided budgets for this purpose. We must do the same for suicide. The public must be shown that suicide figures can be reduced. This matter has been tackled in Scotland. If the Scottish model can work, I am certain we can do the same in this country.

As chairman of the sub-committee which compiled the report, I made a commitment that it would not sit on a shelf and gather dust. This report is much too important. We want to reduce the levels of suicide and we hope to see that reduction very soon.

**Mr. Neville:** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I welcome the report of the Joint Committee on Health and Children on high levels of suicide. The report made a thorough examination of the issue. I thank those who presented to the joint committee and I commend the expertise and work of the committee itself.

Suicide is a difficult issue for communities and families but especially for families who suffer a bereavement by suicide. No words can ever console or begin to explain to a family who suffer such a bereavement. The question most often asked is "Why?", and it is the hardest question to answer because the reason is different for every case of suicide. Different aspects of life, experience, pressure, difficulty or the state of a mental illness come to impact on a victim of suicide. It is always difficult to persuade families bereaved by suicide to accept that no one is to blame when a suicide occurs. No blame attaches to anyone in a case of suicide. People who take their own lives are not intent on ending their lives so much as ending the pain they are suffering. They see no other way out of their suffering than to take their own lives.

Much of what has been said today touches on the need to intervene in the lives of people in crisis and to promote the view that to recognise one's difficulties and despair and obtain help is to take a positive approach. A young person labelled with a psychiatric difficulty, depression or a need for counselling often loses status among his peers. If a young person goes from the midlands to speak to a counsellor in Dublin, for example, others will not know about his problem but the young person will label himself. He will self-label and know he is in trouble. The key to dealing with mental ill health and suicide is to destigmatise these areas. Programmes are needed to destigmatise suicide and mental ill health.

International experts say more than 80% — one study says as many as 87% — of people who take their lives suffer from a psychiatric illness. Young people who commit suicide are often suffering from undiagnosed depression. They feel depressed and suffer from a sense of failure and low self-esteem. They do not put a label on their condition or understand what is happening, but

they need assistance. Much of the assistance needed by young people is psychotherapeutic rather than psychiatric, although psychiatric treatment is often necessary. I do not subscribe to the view that drugs can be eliminated. They are important in the treatment of mental illness. I accept that they are over-prescribed because we do not have the multi-disciplinary teams of psychotherapists and other therapists who are required to deal with suicidal tendencies. We must destigmatise suicide so that people do not feel ashamed if someone in their family has attempted suicide or has a psychiatric illness.

The report mentions deliberate self-harm. The treatment of deliberate self-harm in our hospitals is patchy. In the former Eastern Health Board area, 47% of those who deliberately self-harm are admitted to hospital but only 9% are admitted in the former South Eastern Health Board region. There is no uniformity in our understanding of deliberate self-harm. Some 10% of those who deliberately self-harm go on to take their lives. Treating deliberate self-harm and attempted suicide is a key issue in reducing suicide.

There is a need for research in all areas of suicide but there is urgent need to research the level of deliberate self-harm. Each year, over 11,000 such people present at accident and emergency units. We do not know how many people who deliberately harm themselves visit their GPs and are treated at that level. Neither do we know how many do not seek treatment at all but simply hide the failed attempt to take their own lives. Some may not even tell their families what has occurred. It comes back to the stigma surrounding suicide. Because families do not want it known that a relative is in crisis, they often do not seek assistance, including a psychiatric assessment for those who commit self harm. If suicide is de-stigmatised more people will seek the necessary help.

During the course of our discussions on this document, the relationship between alcohol abuse and suicide became evident. The report shows that in the 1990s there was an increase of 41% in alcohol consumption and 44% in suicide. There is a correlation between alcohol consumption levels and suicide. It would not be correct, however, to say that alcohol is the cause of suicide because many factors are involved, including changes in society.

Much concern has been expressed about binge drinking by young people. A person suffering from mild depression or any mild psychiatric illness who consumes alcohol, which is a depressant, can become chronically depressed as a result. Another big issue surrounding alcohol is that it can reduce inhibitions in those who may have suicidal tendencies. We need to understand the role of alcohol in causing mood changes in people who are already experiencing difficulties. Such people may reach a moment of deep crisis



brought on by a combination of alcohol abuse and the personal difficulties they are facing.

Eating disorders cause higher mortality levels than any other illness in Ireland. There is some debate over whether such disorders constitute psychiatric illness but a certain psychiatric element is involved. We have no proper services to deal with eating disorders, although good models exist for treating and curing such disorders. Yesterday, I had a long discussion with the Marino therapy centre which undertakes excellent work in this area. The Minister of State should examine the successful model employed by that centre with a view to evaluating how it can be used elsewhere. It should be introduced in each HSE region because eating disorders such as bulimia, anorexia nervosa and binge eating are on the increase.

A key to reducing suicide and mental illness is the provision of modern, world-standard psychiatric services for children and adolescents. I could spend the next 30 minutes telling the Minister of State what is wrong but we know what is required. If we had such services we could reduce the levels of suicide through early intervention. We could also reduce psychiatric illness from occurring later in life because such intervention provides a better chance of curing it. According to Professor Patricia Casey, 90% of depressed young people can recover as a result of early intervention. Delayed intervention, however, allows depression to become chronic, thus causing severe problems for those involved. I cannot overstate the vital need for early intervention to cure psychiatric illness in children and young people generally.

Two weeks ago, a child and adolescent psychiatric service gave us a presentation. The officials told us that in parts of the country young people are waiting three years for a consultation. I did not think the delays were that long. Last April, the Minister of State informed me that while there were no waiting lists in some areas, in others the delays ranged from six to 12 months, and two years in Kerry. I accept the Minister of State's word but I think immediate intervention is now required to cope with these delays.

The Government has facilitated several Dáil debates on suicide. In addition, Fine Gael and the Technical Group have introduced such debates in Private Members' time. Some people are of the view that in previous years the statistics on suicide were incorrect but I do not accept that for several reasons. First, our system of collecting such statistics, on form 104, is more accurate than in most other countries. Second, very low levels of suicide were recorded among Irish emigrants abroad. Third, there was a low level of suicide in Ireland also and the figures from the 1960s are quite accurate.

There is under-reporting of suicide but that is unavoidable because we do not know about every

case. Car crashes were mentioned in this regard and internationally it is accepted that between 6% and 12% of all single-occupancy car crashes are suicides. We are talking of perhaps 10% to 20% in Ireland but while we recognise the problem it should not be overstated. It is accepted that the level of under-reporting of suicide ranges from 10% to 15%, which would mean we are averaging approximately 500 suicides a year. The National Suicide Prevention Office has an annual budget of €1.2 million and the National Safety Council, which promotes road safety, receives €29.4 million, yet there are more suicides than road deaths. That tells a tale concerning the level of investment in suicide prevention.

**Mr. O'Connor:** I welcome the opportunity of making a brief contribution on the report of the Joint Committee on Health and Children into the high level of suicide in Irish society. I am sensitive to the fact I am following the contribution of my colleague, Deputy Neville, whose work in this area is impressive. He has done tremendous work in this regard and I was proud to have been a member of the Sub-Committee on the High Level of Suicide in Irish Society, under the chairmanship of Deputy Moloney, which included Deputy Neville and Senator Browne.

Every day, politicians deal with all sorts of issues from broken footpaths to broken drains. We also deal with delicate issues such as suicide. In the four years during which I have been a Member of the Oireachtas, I have never been so affected by our business as when I was sitting on that sub-committee listening to the presentations. We have tried to understand the issues involved, although I am not sure if one could ever fully understand them. We all have personal stories to tell concerning friends and families who have been deeply affected by suicide. The House should take its time in debating such important matters. Suicide is prevalent in society but it does not seem to receive headline attention. There is a responsibility on all of us to send a positive message.

I welcome the interest shown by the Minister of State on this issue. In two weeks he and I will attend a function in the city centre at which the Tallaght Travellers Youth Service, under the banner of CYC, will launch an important report on suicide among the Traveller community. I look forward to joining my friends and colleagues from Tallaght on that occasion.

Tallaght is the third largest population centre in the country and, naturally, faces similar challenges to those experienced elsewhere. I have been keen to praise the various initiatives which have taken place in my constituency. With my colleague, Deputy Crowe, I had the amazing experience of attending a conference organised in west Tallaght by the men's group of An Cosán which gave an opportunity to people who had



[Mr. O'Connor.]

been deeply affected by the issue to participate in discussions about suicide in a quiet atmosphere and among neighbours and friends. Kathleen O'Connor, a chaplain in Tallaght hospital, has taken a number of initiatives in that regard.

Other contributors to today's debate, including Deputy Moloney, raised the issue of people who were challenged by suicide being treated as normal patients in accident and emergency departments.

Since becoming involved with the Sub-Committee on High Levels of Suicide in Irish Society, I have received correspondence from a number of interested parties explaining how they cope with the issue. It is strange that suicide is not treated as a headline story but I will continue to do what I can to help those who are affected by the issue. Through church services and other initiatives, I am constantly reminded of the effects of suicide. Recently, I raised with the Minister of State a number of issues which had been brought to my attention. Arising from the report of the sub-committee, I asked him how his Department intended to monitor its target to reduce suicide rates by 20% over the next ten years, the actions being taken on the report's recommendations on the immediate implementation of certain steps and the arrangements being made to ensure the Departments of Health and Children, Education and Science and Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the OPW co-operate in reducing the current high levels of suicide. I also pointed out the need for a health promotion programme among young people in particular. Experts on suicide, such as Deputy Neville, have highlighted this aspect of the problem and I have often encountered stories of young people who decided to end their lives.

According to the available evidence, once a person makes a decision to commit suicide, he or she makes arrangements, such as locking doors or composing a note, which clearly indicate careful planning.

Suicide among young people generates much attention but elderly people also commit suicide. Last year, the wife of one of my friends went through considerable trouble to achieve what she set out to do by using a number of different methods. That is an issue I find difficult to comprehend.

I am glad the Minister of State has indicated that the Government is fully committed to the initiatives on suicide prevention and the development of mental health services to prevent further tragic losses of life. I hope that principle will guide us on the matter and that the recommendations of the sub-committee will be implemented.

**Mr. Hayes:** The issue of suicide has frightened many families and individuals across the country

but it is an issue which has to be addressed. Like others in this House, I have had to attend the funerals of suicide victims and have witnessed first-hand the pain and numbness of family and friends who were bewildered about the reasons for the tragedy.

The increase in the rate of suicide over the past few years has shocked us all and has led to calls from every corner of the country for action to be taken. In the first half of the 1960s, an average of 64 people per year died through suicide. By 2004, that figure had increased sevenfold to an average of 455. That figure alone underlines the horrific problem we have. Suicide accounts for three out of every ten deaths in the 15 to 24-year-old age group and is the most common cause of deaths among young males. I compliment Deputy Neville on his tireless work in pursuing the policy agenda of suicide prevention. When the subject was not as popular some years ago, as a young Senator, Deputy Neville took up this cause. I am proud that he is a member of my party. He has brought the subject to the fore as president of the Irish Association of Suicidology. His work is acknowledged by everybody in the House. I compliment and salute him on his great work in this regard.

In recent years, the suicide rate among young males up to the age of 35 has starkly increased. Such a sharp increase forces us to ask what has gone wrong in our society. Are we failing to provide the vital support services that may have prevented needless loss of life? There has been talk of social fragmentation being partially responsible for the rise in suicide rates — the breakdown of family and community. Many factors including the prevalence of drugs and alcohol are involved. Another factor is the decline in religious beliefs which clearly forbid suicide. Depression is strongly linked to suicide and we must ask whether we have first class mental health services available for those who may be at risk from suicide or are suffering from depression. Despite our new-found wealth, we have failed to provide the necessary mental health services that would help to stem the tide of suicide.

Like others in this House, I have met many constituents who have come to me in tears over the conditions a son or daughter must endure in a mental health facility. It breaks their hearts to leave their child in an unwelcome intimidating and isolating environment, which is how they perceive mental health hospitals here. Facilities for people suffering from depression should be first class. Facing into a bleak hospital cannot help anyone to recover from depression and adds great strain to parents and loved ones who are likely to be at their wits' end with worry. I compliment the many people who work in those services. They have been frustrated for years over the lack of funding for those hospitals. The reality

for those suffering from depression is that we live in a tough and fast-growing world. People are on the move and they find themselves under severe pressure. This makes their world very tough and in many cases brings on depression, which is a growing problem for many.

We have often heard about the dire problems in accident and emergency units and the dreadful circumstances in which many accident and emergency staff must carry out their work. However, it is not often mentioned that accident and emergency units admit 11,000 patients each year following suicidal behaviour. A significant number of those patients will eventually die by suicide. What referral services are available in accident and emergency units for patients who are admitted following attempted suicide? What support services exist for their families? These issues need to be addressed urgently in an overall attempt to iron out the many difficulties that make accident and emergency units so grim.

Measures must also be taken to address drug and alcohol abuse, particularly given the link between them and suicide. To date, the Government has failed to implement its own alcohol policy, the report of the strategic task force on alcohol. This is a miserable record to stand over. The 40% increase in alcohol consumption has taken place in tandem with a huge increase in suicide rates here. This development cannot be dismissed as a coincidence and needs to be explored in detail.

This week, the Garda seized a vast quantity of heroin in Dublin. The seizure was wonderful news. However, the question remains as to how such a vast quantity of illegal drugs made its way into the country. In every village, town and city drugs are freely available. Have we, as a Parliament, tackled the issue? Why are the drugs coming in and from where are such vast quantities coming? The dogs in the street can advise where drugs can be got. Have we tackled this huge problem that exists?

People are driving cars after taking drugs. This week, the Taoiseach told me that no test existed although he would gladly implement one if it were possible. Tests are available and while I appreciate the Taoiseach's concern on the matter, I hope a test will be introduced shortly for people driving cars after taking drugs. There is a link between this issue and the accidents involving young people. If nothing else comes about following all the bad road accidents that have occurred, it should be the introduction of a test for drugs.

A very good policy document was proposed by the Labour Party and Fine Gael some months ago and I ask the Government to study it. Those proposals represent a way to help the people affected by suicide.

**Cecilia Keaveney:** I am delighted to contribute to this most important subject. I am sure many

other Members will take the opportunity to add their voices to an issue that should be of great concern to us all. Based on the statistics, I am sure all Members have been touched by this issue in their communities. I endorse the compliments that have been paid to Deputy Neville for his work in this field. We both attended a conference on suicide in Bled, Slovenia, some years ago. Whatever knowledge I had before going there, after two or three days when every aspect of the subject was outlined, I came back much more aware and also horrified.

Since then the committee of which I am chairman has issued a number of reports, including ones on cannabis use, cocaine use and music therapy. We issued a report outlining why alcohol should be included in the substance misuse strategy. Throughout this work, suicide is repeatedly mentioned. Suicide is associated with alcohol and drugs. Potential help is available through non-verbal artistic therapy interventions, although I will not suggest it as a be-all and end-all.

I accept the Minister of State has a great interest in the mental health sector but he should note it is the Cinderella of the health services. The pressures of life, including the speed of life, depersonalisation and relocation without the backup of one's family, are such that we have become a "mé féin nation". The "mé féin nation" is one in which people no longer have the support mechanism of normal conversation, which would normally work out many of the problems stored in people's heads. When problems are stored in people's heads, they feel over time they cannot live with them. Ultimately, through one mechanism or another, they commit suicide.

The successful economy has not helped, which is a terrible thing to say. In a successful economy, we should prioritise the difficulties that arise. In a successful economy people have more money, the pace of life increases and the amount of recreational time available to one decreases. There should be an associated move in the health system to deal with prevention and interventions that are specific to the mental health sector.

We have considered the issue of alcohol. In spite of having created a report, listened to evidence and read the papers, we need to address certain anomalies. The headline of a recent article in the *Irish Examiner* reads, "Alcohol abuse is Europe's 'third biggest killer'". The article states: "The commissioner will not propose any legislation at EU level but says the member states should enforce their existing legislation better and learn from one another's successes." This is a case of the Commission abdicating responsibility. We are told in Ireland that we cannot deal with alcopops, for instance, because they comprise an EU issue, yet the Commission is saying member states need to deal with the problem themselves. This matter requires redress.

[Cecilia Keaveney.]

A recent headline in the *Irish Independent* reads, "Booze-saturated Ireland at top of alcohol abuse poll", and the subheading states, "Politicians failing to tackle binge-drinking epidemic, warns expert". The Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs produced its own report which recommended that alcohol be included in the substance misuse strategy. This is not to say every suicide is linked directly to alcohol, but it should be noted that some of those who were half-considering suicide were egged on to do so because alcohol broke down their inhibitions.

The joint committee produced a report on cannabis. Representatives of the committee were in New Zealand where cannabis use is epidemic. In Ireland certain individuals scoff at our being worried about a drug as "soft" as cannabis. Anybody who believes it is "soft" should read our report. Not everyone who takes cannabis will end up psychotic, committing suicide or in desperate circumstances. The problem is that the cannabis on the streets is stronger than it was in the 1960s during which time the people contending it does not present a problem may have been using it.

It is a fact that people are starting to use cannabis at a younger age than was the case in the past. They are starting to use it between the ages of 12 and 20. Anybody who knows anything about the drug will know that one's brain is only forming in these years and that the drug distorts its capacity to develop. When young people taking cannabis reach their mid-20s, they present with psychotic illnesses. We all know schizophrenia and such illnesses can only be controlled and never reversed. We are letting this happen and allowing people to become more vulnerable to the threat of suicide.

There are very many car accidents on our roads at present. One question that remains to be answered concerns the percentage of accidents involving just one driver that result from suicide. Is it more acceptable for one to have died in a car accident than to have committed suicide? This question raises a scary issue. We all know a car can be as lethal a means of taking one's life as any. Suicides contribute to some of the road deaths we hear about on the news on a daily basis.

Music therapy and arts therapy have become a bit of an obsession with me. Deputies were asking what can be done in terms of therapy. In many cases, a person with suicidal tendencies may be very lonely or may have been abused and his or her ability to communicate with others may have broken down. In the main, if people were able to communicate with each other, they would not be forced to take their own lives. We need non-verbal forms of interaction and intervention and one such means is the creative arts. Recommendation No. 4 of the joint committee's report on this

matter, which was released in September, is that the Department of Health and Children should recognise the inclusion of creative therapies in mental health policy, develop a strategy as a matter of urgency to define creative art therapies and recommend how service providers in the Health Service Executive can employ professionals in this field. I have had a huge reaction to this report from people on the ground who are dealing with individuals with mental illness.

Practitioners are saying creative therapy does work. It is therefore time we defined it, put it on the professional payscale and rolled it out around the country. If it were defined and recognised professionally, there would not be a haemorrhaging of graduates from the University of Limerick to the North and other destinations across the world. They would be able to remain in our system. Why are they not considered in the same way as occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and physiotherapists? They are as important.

Our problem in Ireland is that, owing to the pressures success has exerted on our lives, we have great difficulty in making time for recreation and for maintaining our mental health. People are like swans in that they are paddling like hell underneath the water while maintaining a calm image above the surface. They are trying to present a normal image while trying to cope with the many pressures in their lives. We must focus in these years on reacting to the reality of life and this means putting mental health services centre-stage rather than regarding them as the Cinderella of the health service.

**Mr. Quinn:** I want to contribute to this debate because of the lack of information and awareness regarding the level of suicide and its impact on those who are sadly bereaved as a result. I, too, pay tribute to Deputy Neville, who, within the Oireachtas, has been to the forefront in trying to raise awareness of the problem. We have all been affected by suicide in some way or another. We know of victims and their bereaved families in our constituencies and we ask ourselves whether we could have done anything before they took their lives. As Deputy Keaveney stated, there are deaths in suspicious circumstances, such as inexplicable car crashes, on foot of which people ask whether the victim was unhappy or committed suicide. We ask ourselves what can be done about the problem.

It would come as a great shock to the vast majority to learn that more people are killed by suicide than in road accidents. Most people take the view that road accidents account for many more deaths than other tragedies. It puts the issue in context to learn that, over the past year, there were 11,000 admissions of individuals engaging in suicidal behaviour to our accident and emergency wards. These figures must be publicised because

we all know the Minister of State will not receive the budgetary allocation set out in the recommendations unless there is greater political awareness among citizens and politicians, irrespective of the party to which they belong.

It does not come as a surprise to some people that our recent economic success is one of the reasons for the increase in social alienation. However, it strikes those who thought money would solve all our woes as something of a contradiction. They do not understand why we are encountering new problems which are associated with a sense of alienation, for reasons which the report outlines in some detail, at a time when we are so wealthy, having been so poor.

I strongly suggest that the recommendations in the report, particularly those which involve a relatively small cost, should be implemented as soon as possible. I am most concerned about the extent to which counselling is made available to the survivors of a suicide. I refer to people who have to carry a sense of guilt, loss and hurt for the rest of their lives. An inexplicable burden is placed on such people in a manner that absolutely defies their attempts to understand it. They might have a sense of anger towards the person who took his or her own life. At the same time, they might have some sympathy or empathy with the fact that he or she felt the need to do so. They might also have a sense of guilt for not having been able to see it in advance. Such conflicting and difficult sets of emotions can affect the manner in which people interact with other members of the family, the people with whom they work and other members of society.

The Department of Health and Children should be concerned with health rather than with sickness. If we want to promote health, we should promote all aspects of health, including mental health. As Deputy Keaveney has just said, mental health problems will rise to the fore in our society as we increasingly solve physical illnesses with drugs, better treatment and better diagnosis. We should meet the cost of this problem in respect of the totality of human relationships. I refer not only to its cost in terms of economic productivity or personal happiness, but also to the social cost of people having to carry the burden of guilt, as they see it, and the dysfunctionality that flows from that. Many of the projects proposed in the recommendations in the joint committee's report would cost a relatively modest amount of money.

I am concerned about the phenomenon of suicide clusters, or copycat suicides. I do not know whether we have done much research in this area. I am not a specialist in the area at all. It seems to me, from reading the newspapers, that some inexplicable high-profile teenage deaths, particularly of young females, have been followed some time later by copycat events. We need more research about the factors which lead to such events so that people working in the education

sector, youth counsellors, youth workers and parents can start to read the alarm signs and understand the warning signs which begin to manifest themselves in the behaviour of students.

I am delighted that this report has been prepared. I compliment all those associated with it, including the Chairman of the joint committee, on its production. I hope that as a result of this useful debate, which is highlighting the problem, the Minister of State will be able to indicate to the House at some future stage the steps which will be taken, based on the report's recommendations, to help us to deal with some of these problems. We will not solve this problem — we will not be able to eliminate suicide — but we can certainly reduce the incidence of suicide. I accept that Ireland's suicide rate is the 18th highest of the 25 EU member states, but there has been a fairly dramatic increase. We have to start to address the alarming profile of suicide among young people in general, and young males in particular. In my experience, such events have a knock-on effect — they can have a terrifying impact on people in communities.

**Mr. M. Smith:** I dtosach báire, tá mé buíoch as ucht am a fháil chun cuidiú leis na moltaí atá os comhair na Dála i dtaobh an ábhar tábhachtach agus uafásach seo — iad siúd atá sásta deireadh a chur lena gcuid saolta. I thank the Acting Chairman for giving me an opportunity to contribute briefly to this debate on the many proposals which have been made to deal with suicide, which is a significant problem in this country. Many families have suffered the loss of one of their own in this tragic and terrible way. I have often said — I could be very wrong — that there is really only one illness. I refer to an illness that cannot be seen or x-rayed and for which there is no explanation. The parents, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters who are left behind following a suicide receive lifelong prison sentences of guilt, anger and great anxiety. That suicide is the biggest killer of young people in Ireland — it takes more lives than accidents and cancer — is obviously something that needs to be addressed in a fundamental manner.

The Central Statistics Office has recorded that of the 457 suicides in Ireland in 2004, 189 were of people under the age of 35. That represents a decrease of 11% on the figure for 2003. However, 268 people over the age of 35 committed suicide, which represents an increase of 16% on the 2003 figure. A staggering 78% of those who died by suicide in that year were male and 22% of them were female. New research has shown that over 300,000 people in Ireland suffer from depression. One in four men and one in two women will suffer from depression at some stage of their lives. Other speakers have highlighted the number of people who are treated for deliberate self-harm at accident and emergency units.



[Mr. M. Smith.]

I disagree with Deputy Gormley and others who have tried in some way to associate the development of the economy with the problems under discussion. The only way we can solve some of these problems is to dedicate resources to the personnel who are required to fill positions in counselling and psychiatric and general care. In a growing economy, such resources can be made available to meet the agreed priorities which need to be addressed in a dedicated and deliberate way. It is too easy to argue that these problems are created by the fact that people have jobs and are wealthier than at any time in our history. We are all familiar with the challenges which are associated with a developing economy. We have to cope, as best we can, with realities like the speed at which we have to travel and the competition in the world as a whole.

I represent the constituency of Tipperary North which, unfortunately, had the highest rate of suicide in Ireland in 2004. When I was sitting at a table in my local area with six people a few months ago, I learned that four of them had some family experience in this regard. That number has since increased to five, which is a staggering statistic that gives us a real sense of what this problem means to many families in a small area. Such clusters of suicides seem to occur in some areas following what might be called the first tragic event.

I am glad the joint committee's report emphasises the need for consultation with young people. It suggests that we should ask them about mental health services and service development. Deputy Keaveney rightly pointed out that in some way or other, we are not communicating with each other as we should, and as we used to do in the past. We are certainly more greedy, selfish and individualistic and do not consider what we can do on this issue through helping, discussing, listening and getting involved. If one was given a second chance to do something that could have stopped a suicide one would, of course, take it. Unfortunately we think of these things only afterwards.

The anti-stigma and positive mental health promotion campaign in the media and elsewhere is another important matter that must be dealt with. The secrecy has been removed, the walls have come down and many major institutions are no longer the places they used to be. Community development and support services have come closer to people's homes. The Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, Deputy Tim O'Malley, will understand that we in north Tipperary could use more help in this regard. We have nothing against our colleagues in south Tipperary but we must travel south for many services and more local support is something we wish to see as early as possible.

Much has been said about alcohol and mental illness but I wish to talk about helping people to

cope. Alienation from society can happen early in the lives of some people and adult education and support from the Department of Health and Children can help broaden the circle of thinking how education and health integrate in such matters. Some people with hidden talents feel alone and miss out on the dignity associated with doing a suitable job to the best of one's ability. I have had the opportunity to present certificates relating to different courses to individuals who never thought they could achieve what they did. They have taken a step on the ladder and need to move on to the next, which requires encouragement. In this context, the community services the Minister of State and others are trying to develop to integrate these matters are significant.

It is hard to believe someone would commit this act if they felt they were wanted, had a purposeful life, and were able to achieve, join a drama society, join Macra na Feirme, Foróige and the various available activities. It is hard to believe that kind of involvement could lead to such an action. There are other cases involving alcohol and mental illness where different forces are at work, but this particular category needs inclusion. I ask the Minister of State to consider this in the context of deliberations with his colleagues and ensure the full circle is looked at. If we complete the circle we can begin to reach some of the targets all of us want to achieve.

**Mr. Crowe:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on this debate and if we are in any way critical it is not to score points but to bring about a positive change.

Sinn Féin has identified suicide as a distinct priority requiring concerted co-operation between Government, the health service, the voluntary sector and communities. Our youth section, Ógra Shinn Féin, has campaigned on this issue along with other youth organisations. We have included suicide prevention as a key element in our health policy, Health Care in an Ireland of Equals, and many of our proposals are echoed in the report under discussion.

We propose to make suicide prevention an area of co-operation under an all-Ireland ministerial council to give the issue the strategic co-ordination it requires. Suicide does not recognise borders and people in both jurisdictions should address the issue. We also aim to frame and implement a fully resourced, comprehensive, all-Ireland suicide prevention strategy including actions to promote mental health among the general population delivered through schools, youth services, work places and the media. We propose mental health promotion actions targeting specific sections of the population incorporating diverse needs into tailored suicide prevention sub-strategies. We also propose mental health promotion and suicide prevention actions targeting groups identified as at higher risk along

with actions to assist individuals identified as at risk of suicide. We propose actions to assist those bereaved through suicide and investment in further clinical and community based research on suicide prevention. We aim to develop national mental health awareness and anti-stigma campaigns and would include parasuicide, people at risk of suicide and their families and bereaved families in policy making issues.

I am a patron of a group in my area called Teenline and, like many Members, I became involved through knowing individuals and families who have suffered through suicide. In Teenline we identified that while there is sex education and drug awareness in schools, education on this issue would also be beneficial. The Minister of State mentioned an outreach campaign and I have spoken to outreach workers on this matter and it was felt that it could be helpful. I spoke to a woman whose son committed suicide, an event which led to the creation of Teenline, who went to schools and talked to young people in their classrooms. She said afterwards two children thanked her, said they had seriously considered suicide and that she had made them think. She explained the effect the suicide had on her family, friends of the family and the community as a whole.

There is an argument that bringing the issue into schools only encourages young people to consider suicide. The same might be argued about sex education and that, similarly, would be nonsense. This also goes for drug awareness. Drugs are available in most villages and towns and making people aware of the harmful effects that go with the pleasurable ones is necessary. Discussions on this issue should be taken into schools. A previous speaker referred to accident and emergency departments. I raised this yesterday at the HSE meeting for the Leinster and Dublin areas. Part of the message we are trying to deliver is that help and services are available for young people if they want them. I spoke about an outreach worker who had talked to a young person online and through Teenline and then brought this person to Tallaght Hospital. However, when this young person was brought to the hospital he had to wait along with everyone else in A&E; there was no separate room that this young suicidal person could be brought to. The health system needs to recognise that advocates trying to help suicidal young people are part of the overall service, especially if they have developed a rapport with the young person. At the meeting yesterday, the HSE recognised this was needed. When will this be put in place? I urge the Minister of State to act on this urgently.

The Minister of State referred to funding for suicide prevention programmes arising from the dormant accounts fund. This funding is welcome and it will help the groups that receive it. However, many of the groups working in this

area rely primarily on voluntary contributions. We must move away from this and provide mainstream funding. There must also be appropriate training for the volunteers who will work in these services.

We must also encourage rapport between the different groups active in the area. There are groups in Belfast, Cork, and Dublin, and around the island. Best practice should be encouraged and greater rapport between the various groups would assist in this. The Minister of State referred to the number of young people who are affected. He said 11,000 young people cause themselves deliberate self-harm annually, and that Ireland has the fifth highest rate of suicide in the EU for 15-24 year-olds. The rate is even higher for men in their 20s and 30s, with men under 35 accounting for approximately 40% of all suicides.

Some weeks ago I spoke with the family of a young man who had found a suicide note which referred to bullying in school. One can imagine the impact this had on the family. They had been in touch with the school where the young man was being bullied, but no action seemed to be taken and the bullying continued. They later found the letter and the school was horrified. Schools must give an adequate response if young people are being bullied.

I look forward to the Reach Out campaign the Minister of State referred to and the actions that will flow from this debate.

**Mr. English:** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I compliment everyone involved in producing this report. I am not expert in this area. Like many Members, I look up to people like Deputy Neville and others who are experts and try to learn from them. We also try to learn from our friends and families — every family has been touched by suicide or mental illness.

Speaker after speaker has said how knowledgeable Deputy Neville is on this subject. Yet, if Deputy Neville were to introduce a Bill dealing with this, it would probably be voted down by those on the other side of the House. We should forget about politics and do what is right when it comes to an issue such as suicide prevention. If we can learn from each other then let us do so. I believe the Minister of State and many Members of the House have a genuine interest in this subject. If we believe Deputy Neville and others are so knowledgeable on this subject, then let us listen to them and do what they say. While I accept that politics will intrude in other areas, it should not intrude in an area such as this.

Previous speakers have compared the incidence of suicide with the level of death on the roads. They have contrasted the support and funding suicide prevention gets with that of road safety. There is also the issue of public perception. People are often angry over road deaths.

[Mr. English.]

The number of people dying on the roads is rising and its gets much publicity. The number of people dying by suicide is much the same but it does not get nearly as much coverage or provoke anger. People believe that most road accidents can be avoided, that accidents can be prevented and people do not have to die. This is a source of the anger, and we tackle it with more funding, public awareness campaigns etc.

People do not perceive suicide in the same way — they do not think it is preventable. Most people assume suicide will happen no matter what we do or how much money we spend on preventing it. That is not true. People need to realise that suicide can be prevented in many, but not all, cases. The public should have the same anger over suicide as it has over road deaths. If this anger existed, people would demand better services, more funding, and demand that the Government tackle it. We have an onus to lead the public and seek their help in tackling the problem. The message that suicide is preventable needs to be articulated.

Earlier this week I spoke about young people and their attitude to driving. They do not believe that an accident can happen to them. They believe they have the skills to drive at 100mph and not crash or kill someone. We are failing to get the message across to young people and others who drive recklessly that it can happen to them. The same applies for suicide. We need to let young people know that this can happen to them, their friends or their family. Young people who abuse drugs or alcohol do not believe they will become addicted. They do not believe that dabbling with drugs will lead to problems in five or ten years' time. Just as we are failing to get the message across in the areas of road deaths and suicide, so we are failing to get this message across too. Perhaps it is on this we need to hone in. How do we get through to young people? How can we talk to them on their level? I am a young person and suicide affects a high percentage of my age group. We will need a strong effort to put the message about suicide across.

When one asks young people about the problems of suicide and what the solutions are, they will talk about simple things. They seek counsellors in their communities and schools. Many schools have counsellors, or have access to them if they require, but young people do not believe they have someone they can talk to and seek advice from. While one can often talk about the roles of parents and teachers, we must accept that life is not the way it once was. Parents do not always have the time or understanding to give to their children. There must be someone in the community that young people feel they can talk to.

The community has a major role to play in preventing suicide. I was struck by a comment the

parish priest made when the five young girls were killed in the Navan bus crash. He said it takes a community to raise a child. That is what we forget these days. The community is dwindling and the community spirit we once had no longer exists to the same degree. Not everyone is involved. Years ago there was time to look out for young people growing up, to keep an eye out for them. The same support structures no longer exist. Sadly, that is how life is in many areas and we must try to rekindle that spirit. We must also provide more services to lend a listening ear to people who need help.

I welcome the report and its recommendations. Many of them involve listening to young people about their concerns related to mental health. We must not, however, spend too long listening; we know what the issues are. Young people have spoken to us all, the message has got through and the experts are aware of the problems. We must act as well. People talk about pilot programmes but I have a problem with them. We have all the research from various countries and we know what is right. We should just act. Pilot programmes are a delaying tactic. We should put the money in place across the board. If a pilot programme is needed in County Meath, it is needed everywhere else. We can learn from Canada, Australia and other countries that have been successful in tackling this.

Suicide is a major health concern for Irish youth and we must tackle it. I have been to enough funerals of young people who have taken their own lives, I have seen the horror and trauma it causes for their families and their communities. We have all experienced this but we still do not do enough to prevent it. We must wake up and do our best to stop this.

Suicide is not a disease in itself, it is the most traumatic, tragic and unfortunate symptom of a major illness in Irish society, the lack of care and regard for our fellow man and woman, the lack of a joined-up society populated by fully rounded and mentally healthy people. This is caused by pressures of life and modern society, an education system that puts pressure on young people, bullying and intolerance.

It is important that mental health is not confused with mental illness. Mental health involves the whole person, how he feels about himself and interacts with others. It is important to have friends, good relationships at work and mechanisms for coping with the stresses of life. We must realise that we are not all perfect. Young people are under pressure, they do not feel they are perfect but think they should be as a result of the messages from the media. Parents are often not in a position to offer the necessary gifts or powers to their children to help them to deal with these issues. We must help. In many cases, parents say they would like to attend parenting courses. A person who wants to adopt a child must undergo

an 18 month course but can have a child without any advice, lessons or counselling. It is time to examine this area. Are all parents equipped with the tools to pass on to their children what they need?

I am not here to blame the Government or the HSE, we must all do our part. The community must be empowered to act and given the necessary resources. We must put community spirit at the centre of planning and development so that we develop areas where people can grow up with the necessary help and where they do not feel they must all be the same. Pressure to conform and do well can cause serious problems.

Assist in Newfoundland and Mental Health First Aid in Australia are successful courses. Those dealing with potential suicide victims or others with mental health problems find these courses useful for identifying and preventing problems. Frontline staff across the board in health and youth services should be able to attend such courses to better equip them to spot potential problems.

We can continue to talk about this but we must act to prevent any further increase in the numbers of those who have decided to take their own lives for various reasons. Many of those reasons can be addressed, just like with road deaths.

**Mr. F. McGrath:** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the high level of suicide in Irish society. We all have friends, neighbours and family who have been directly affected by this sad situation. It is a nightmare for everyone, the person and his or her family. It seems to be getting worse in spite of all the wealth and extra resources in modern Ireland.

Suicide prevention starts with us, we are all part of the problem but can also be part of the solution. We must look at ourselves and ask if we are listening to each other enough. Are we paying attention to friends, family, neighbours and the community? We live in a fast moving age where everyone is busy and stressed. Is there a need to be so stressed and busy? We must pay more attention to people at home, in our jobs and in our local areas as part of the preventative strategy for suicide in this country. I commend those families and carers who have done a lot of good work in this area, particularly those who support young people.

More than 11,000 cases of deliberate self-harm were seen in accident and emergency wards around the country in 2004, with many more cases coming to the attention of other sections of the health service. This is the reality in Ireland in 2006. Each case is complex and involves many issues but a clear strategy is needed and when it is not working we should be brave enough to admit it and to look for new solutions. This is too serious an issue to turn a blind eye to and I urge

the House to unite on this issue and deal with suicide in a balanced and measured way.

People who were abused as children make up many of these figures. They are seriously damaged, with dark, hidden secrets. Often they do not declare their abuse until they are in their 30s. I have met many of them in constituency clinics. We must face up to this because the connection between abuse and suicide is clear. Bullying of young children in schools can also lead to suicide later in life. A good teacher can do a lot by watching children, dealing with bullying and addressing the harassment of children in schools who feel the world has turned its back on them.

Elderly people are suffering from depression, feeling that no one cares about them. When doing constituency work during the summer months, I often see elderly people cowering behind locked and bolted doors, afraid to answer a knock for fear of intimidation. They are trapped in their own homes and society must face this.

Other Deputies have mentioned drug abuse. I have been involved in anti-drug campaigns and have had to attend the funerals of many of my past pupils and have seen others end up in Mountjoy Prison because of drugs. We must ask, however, how they were sucked into this as children. It was usually as a result of low self esteem and problems in their personal and family lives. If we do not identify those children, and help them at four, five and six years of age, we can forget about them when they are 12 or 13 because we have already lost most of them; the damage is done. They will look for a buzz that will make them feel important and happy, hence the huge market for drugs. The children I describe are drawn from the thousands of dysfunctional and crisis families, many of which are violent. That is the drugs connection and it must be addressed on the ground.

We must also challenge well-off young people from middle class areas who work in high profile jobs and take a little cocaine at the weekend. They are part of the problem because they create a market for these types of drugs. It is unacceptable that people take cocaine at the weekend and go into their nice, yuppie jobs on Monday morning. It is unacceptable that Donna Cleary was sprayed with bullets in my constituency. There is a connection between violent crime and cocaine and drugs, low self-esteem and suicide.

It is important to note the facts and figures. Every year, approximately 450 people die as a result of suicide and the figure is increasing. I commend the Joint Committee on Health and Children for its work in producing this report and compliment Deputy Neville on his excellent work in this area. The report proposes many constructive, sensible solutions and politicians have a role to play in implementing them.



[Mr. F. McGrath.]

The Celtic tiger has created a society which moves so fast that a section of our population is overlooked. This brings to mind the words of the famous French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, who, addressing this topic in the 19th century, wrote: "Man is the more vulnerable to self-destruction the more he is detached from any collectivity, that is to say, the more he lives as an egoist." We must tackle the spiritual void at the heart of Irish society which is producing a form of escapism that leads to drugs, binge drinking, violence and suicide.

I commend those on the ground who have produced serious strategies and policies to address the issue of suicide in our schools. In many cases, part of the solution for a child from a dysfunctional family can be the support given by a primary school teacher or classroom assistant. Being available when needed often means deciding not to send a child home from school at 3 p.m. to face a crisis in the family home but instead keeping them in school and involving them in art, sport or music projects. This type of approach generates positivity and helps address low self-esteem.

Tragically, as several speakers noted, the suicide rate among males here is among the highest in Europe. While the economic boom has brought many fruits, it is dawning on us that growth for growth's sake may not sit well with a caring and inclusive society. Politicians, as leaders, must address this issue. Given the financial resources and income available to us, there are no acceptable excuses for leaving people behind. How should additional resources be distributed? The Government will have to face up to the fact that they must be allocated to the most needy because this is part of the solution. We cannot allow the people of whole areas to feel completely excluded. If intimidation is widespread on estates or blocks of flats in various parts of Dublin, Limerick, Cork or Galway, we can expect that some of the residents will suffer from depression and low self-esteem and believe the State does not care about them. This fact is part of the broader social debate which must be faced if we are to effectively address issues such as suicide.

While I have focused on young males and suicide, young females and elderly people are also vulnerable. I hope a sub-committee on the high level of suicide in Irish society will be established, as recommended by the Joint Committee on Health and Children's report. I commend Deputy Neville and many other Deputies for focusing on suicide. Irrespective of political differences, Members must come together to adopt sensible policies to address the problem. We must wake up and smell the coffee because it is unacceptable that 450 people are dying as a result of suicide every year.

Insufficient attention has been paid to the connection between child sexual abuse and suicide. The first question I often ask victims and survivors of this form of abuse is why they did not tell people what had happened to them earlier. The response is always mixed. They say they were afraid to do so, felt guilty or believed it was their fault. This frequently results in the victim suffering from depression and other problems. We must tell the victims of child sexual abuse that they are not at fault and the community wants to help them. Many groups and organisations are doing a great deal of work on sexual abuse. We must expose this problem, which persists in many of the large number of dysfunctional families in our community. Those who have been directly affected by childhood sexual abuse are familiar with the hardship associated with it.

This is an important debate and a wake-up call for us all. We must address the tragic crisis of suicide by adopting sensible policies in the areas of prevention, education and families. I do not use the word "crisis" lightly in the House but the situation is serious. The Minister of State, Deputy Tim O'Malley, has some sensible ideas and Members will support him, the HSE and all those on the ground who have a genuine interest in taking action to prevent suicide. The onus is on us all to do something.

**Mr. Durkan:** I welcome the opportunity to say a few words on the seventh report on the high level of suicide in Irish society. In common with other speakers, I am not an expert on suicide but, like them, I have dealt with scores of constituents whose family circle has been touched by the problem. We have all been contacted by people who are in distress for one reason or another.

I acknowledge the tremendous work done by my colleague, Deputy Neville, in pursuing the causes of suicide in an effort to prevent suicide and highlight those who are vulnerable to it. We all owe him a debt of gratitude. It is no harm to discuss the causes of suicide. Internationally, the number of suicides appears to track the number of deaths in road traffic accidents. This trend suggests that the level of development and affluence in societies may be a contributory factor.

We would learn a great deal if we could ascertain what drives people from depression into despair. We have all known people who have become depressed. It could be due to failure in an examination. Consider the pressure on young people in second level schools studying for the junior certificate and leaving certificate. That continues later in college.

Society has become extremely demanding and aggressive. It has set high standards and we must aspire to meeting those standards. However, not everybody in society is capable of keeping up with the pack. There is a tendency for people in that situation to feel squeezed out and incapable

of ever achieving a degree of fulfilment. When it reaches the stage that they get the impression, wrongly, that they cannot reach the degree of fulfilment which they believe others have, the depression becomes despair and they move on.

Young people need an anchor; they need something in society that is solid, that they can identify with and that they believe will give them encouragement and security regardless of how they measure up. This is most important. Several speakers have referred to bullying in school. It is an important issue and not enough is done about it. I have raised the issue many times in the House. There is a failure to follow up on bullying by reporting, recording and identifying it. Each school has its own way of dealing with the matter but that is not the solution. There should be a co-ordinated reporting system, whereby an investigation is undertaken into the causes. We must try to put ourselves in the shoes of a school child who has been the victim of bullying and consider the isolation, fear and absolute depression that must haunt that child.

Speakers have referred to teenage suicides. We have an extremely aggressive and impersonal society. Oddly, when there was no affluence in this country, its society was inclusive. We shared what we had with each other. That is not so easy now. A different society has emerged. It is an aggressive society with a hard edge. This is encouraged in many quarters as being necessary to succeed economically. That may well be the case but people have succeeded economically previously without excluding others.

I recall being a member of the health board some years ago. On the retirement of a matron of one of the much maligned rural hospitals we were asked to say a few words about her. At the time, the most important feature I could discern was that she brought a personal touch to an impersonal world. This was some years ago. She was an anchor for people. She always had an encouraging word for everybody. Instead of breaking down the character of a person or creating further doubt in their mind, she had the ability to say something or relate to them in such a way that they felt better. That is the best thing one could say about a health care worker.

Alarming, almost 75% of suicides are young males, yet more women suffer from depression. Approximately one in four women is affected by it. There is something wrong that we have not yet identified which causes the depression to progress to despair and leads to a person taking his or her life. We are familiar with the many current descriptions of society — the ready-made society, the disposable society, the customer-driven society, the consumer society, the oven ready society and so forth. If everything does not fit in properly, a problem arises.

Perhaps we should not be so keen to assure the young generation that everything will be pro-

vided and that the highest standards will always prevail. Our generation did not have a great deal but we were willing to share it. The trend now, however, is that when young people are faced with an obstacle in their life, they do not appear to have the ability to cope with it. At that stage, sadly, the depression becomes despair. This is a situation society must address.

All Members have dealt with cases in their constituency involving suicide. They are very sad cases. In most cases the psychiatric services have engaged with young people, particularly in second level institutions. However, if one offers one's assistance, advice or local knowledge, one will be quickly told it is a confidential matter and that one is not competent to discuss the issue. It is about time that this sector of the health service got a rude awakening. Local elected public representatives are, in many cases, in possession of far more information than somebody who graduated last year and has suddenly become an expert. I have been in this situation on more than one occasion. At this stage of my life, I am tired of being told that something is so confidential it cannot be discussed with me. That is a clear sign of an insular attitude, which is bad, defeatist and self-serving.

The degree to which there are vocations in society is not nearly as great as it was previously. That applies to all professions, including our own. In the past, the aim of helping others was the biggest single factor in convincing people to put themselves forward as public representatives. That is no longer the case. There is ample evidence to suggest that more and more people who come into politics see it as a job, and that at a certain time of the day that job switches off. Unfortunately, that is not the case. A time will come again when people will realise that a vocational commitment in the vital services is critical for service delivery and fulfilling the expectations of the individual. Society must become more inclusive and more supportive of individuals. It must be more willing to recognise that just because people have more money, they cannot afford to be in the fast lane all the time without negative consequences.

Mention must be made of drugs and drink. We have all met people in the aftermath of indulging in drugs and drink who are in a serious state not just due to hangovers but also to depression. I do not know the answer to this problem. We talk about the need for less consumption and less dependence on drink. Undoubtedly, there is a growth in the consumption of the shots youngsters drink nowadays to reach a certain level of inebriation in the shortest time possible. When I was young it would take a week to consume sufficient alcohol to produce the same degree of inebriation as can be achieved these days in half an hour. There is a vast difference now in the degree to which a person is prepared to achieve

[Mr. Durkan.]

a colossal level of inebriation by pumping hard drink into his or her system to achieve that level quickly. There is no question of them drinking pints of shandy because they would not get drunk very quickly if they did so.

We must consider the position *vis-à-vis* the club scene. People involved in the latter appear to engage to a major degree in “topping up” before entering a club or while they are there. The club scene carries on beyond the normal pub closing time. In many cases, colossal amounts of alcohol and drugs are being consumed on a nightly basis. This can have nothing other than a serious impact on the stability of those who are consuming them. If any Member consumed such an amount of alcohol or drugs in one day or during a two-hour period at night, he or she would not be able to work the following day.

I was a member of a health board when the major psychiatric hospitals underwent a massive change, namely, that of closing down and engaging in a changeover to community treatment. That was a great development. However, at the time I stated that the support required in the community in this regard would have to be of a good standard. That support is not as good as it should be and that is one of the main reasons certain people are, to a large extent, floating along from day to day. Careful consideration must be given to that matter.

**Mr. Stanton:** I am sad about the necessity to address this issue. I pay tribute to the joint committee and the author of the report, which is short, to the point, easily read and brings forward 33 recommendations that will cost €60.09 million. Will the Minister of State communicate with each Member and indicate what will be the Government’s reaction to each of those recommendations? He stated that the Government will spend €1.2 million on suicide prevention initiatives this year. The report calls for €60.09 million to be spent. I accept that there are various overlaps, but we must be clear on the areas of the report that will be addressed by the Government. We must be informed as to how much will be spent in each area and when such spending will take place. I call on the Minister of State, when replying or at a later date, to indicate to Members what will be the Government’s exact response to each of the 33 recommendations.

I am pleased that the Government, as the Minister of State indicated, has accepted the recommendations in the report. Does that mean they will be implemented? It is crucial that they should be implemented. We need to be informed as to the timeframes and the details involved in respect of each of the recommendations.

I worked for many years as a counsellor in a second level school. I dealt with younger people on a one-to-one basis in that capacity. It is

important that counsellors are available to young people in our schools. On previous occasions in the House, I have referred to the position of career guidance counsellors. Emphasis is often placed on the career guidance side of their work. In the United Kingdom, however, the job has been split and there are now careers officers and counsellors. Students often approach the relevant teachers under the guise of seeking career guidance advice when they really want to discuss a problem with which they are faced or a feeling they are experiencing. In such circumstances, a skilled counsellor will be able to identify that something is not right and will know what questions to ask. He or she will know how to refer the person with the problem on for further help. It is important that there should be a place to which such individuals can be referred.

I received calls from general practitioners in my area who indicated that, until recently, there were no beds available for young people who were at risk and who required psychiatric placements. I discussed this matter with the Minister of State in the House on a previous occasion. I am pleased that the HSE has some plans to provide beds for people in the 16 to 18 age group, which is crucially important.

The town from which I come, Midleton, County Cork, experienced, until approximately 18 months ago, an alarming incidence of suicide among young males. For a particular period, there was, on average, one suicide a week. In many of these cases, alcohol was a factor. We know that this is a complicated matter and the literature indicates that many reasons are put forward in respect of it. The list of such reasons includes mental disorders, mood disorders, unipolar depression, substance misuse disorders, personality and antisocial disorders, anxiety disorders and schizophrenia. It appears, however, that among adolescents depressive disorders, substance misuse disorders and conduct disorders play a crucial role.

I want to focus on the issue of substance misuse disorders, particularly as they relate to alcohol. Many of the people in the area I represent who committed suicide were, to a high degree, under the influence of alcohol either when or shortly before they took their lives.

I have stated on many occasions that we need to take a long look at our society and the economy we have created. Members are aware that there are housing estates in this country which are nothing more than concrete wildernesses and which have no social centres. Hundreds of houses are being built but places for people to meet and socialise are not being provided. I have continually called for the Government to provide leadership on this issue and to insist that social, community and youth centres and youth workers should be provided. However, the latter is not happening. We appear to be more interested in



the economy than in society. We must reverse the position in that regard.

I have been informed by young people that at night they walk up one side of the street and then down the other because that is the only place they can meet their friends. They have nowhere to go and nothing to do. They are merely waiting until they reach 18 years of age in order that they can gain entry to pubs. They informed me that they ask other people to buy alcohol for them and then go out into the fields or down alleyways to consume it. This matter must be addressed. We need to employ youth workers who can reach out to young people who are at risk, but this is not happening.

Bullying is an issue in schools, in the workplace and elsewhere. Both the bully and the person who is being bullied are at risk. We must also give consideration to aging white males. None of us white males can prevent ourselves getting older. Reference was made to the work of Durkheim and his theory of anomie which refers to people's sense of hopelessness and detachment from society. We know that this is relevant to any discussion on suicide.

We must take action in respect of firearms. We need to encourage people who own firearms for recreational purposes to keep them under lock and key and to make them unusable. At times it is not good enough to keep them under lock and key because the keys can be found. I have had personal experience of this. The word must be put out that firearms need to be locked up and disabled in some way.

The report also mentioned the importance of support for those bereaved by suicide. In his response, the Minister of State said that we need to carry out more research. The 2 o'clock report recommended a target to reduce the overall suicide rate by 20% by 2016, but the Minister of State said that this cannot be done straight away because the priority is to establish the accuracy of suicide mortality in Ireland. Nonetheless at the beginning of his speech, he outlined the problems that exist and how many deaths by suicide had occurred. He also said that due to the range and interplay of factors that had influenced the suicide rate, a direct cause and effect in the relationship between preventative programmes and a change in the overall population rates is virtually impossible to establish. I hope that this is not some form of cop-out because that would be terrible.

Recommendation No. 15 of the report states that the recommendation of the Inspector of Mental Health Services must be implemented within a five-year period of his or her report, or a resignation of the inspector or the Minister with responsibility for mental health services should be a matter of course. The report effectively states that if the recommendations of the Inspector of Mental Health Services are not implemented, we should see a resignation from

the Minister of State. It is that serious. That is why targets are important and must be set. If targets are set, as is the case for accident and emergency departments, all the agencies will move to address those targets.

Is the rate of suicide underestimated in our society? We only know of a certain number, and Members have mentioned single occupancy road deaths at night. We need to have people trained in order that others can approach and talk to them. There is a very interesting project in Middleton which involves the development of peer counselling and it seems to be working. Young people are trained in listening skills, which is not easy. When they are out with their friends they listen to what they say. If they hear someone say that life is not worth living or wonder why he or she gets up in the morning, they will pick this up straight away and ask how the person is feeling. They try to identify whether there is an issue. A young person in a training network who discovers that one of his or her friends may have an issue can help that friend seek assistance. Counselling, psychological and psychiatric services must be made available at the level needed and it is crucial that they are available straightaway.

I compliment the Minister of State on being here today for this debate. I am a bit disappointed that none of his senior Cabinet colleagues has come in to lend the weight of the Cabinet to this issue. I would have been happy if the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste or the Minister for Health and Children came in to address this issue because it is so important.

**Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil as an deis labhairt ar an gceist rí-thábhachtach seo agus comhghairdeachas a ghabháil leis an gcoiste as an tuairisc áisiúil atá curtha ós ár gcomhair, agus na moltaí atá sa tuairisc sin. Tá na moltaí réasúnta, agus is féidir linn, mar shocháí, díriú isteach orthu agus déileáil leis an gceist thábhachtach seo, ceist a chuireamar ar leataobh thar na blianta, agus is trua é sin. Tá muintir na tíre seo go ginearálta, agus daoine óga ach go háirithe, ag fáil bháis trí fhéin-mharú. Tá a lán daoine eile istigh in oispidéil ar feadh tréimhsí gairide agus fada toisc iarracht a dhéanamh ar fhéin-mharú. Tá a gclann acu, agus tá siad fágtha ina ndiaidh.

I was impressed by the list of those who gave evidence to the committee and those who made written submissions. A wealth of knowledge was expressed in the committee's report. If we cannot listen to what the committee has to say, we should listen to those who have tried to commit suicide and those who have inflicted harm on themselves. They are crying out for help. As a society, we need to look away from the materialist culture that has developed in recent years. We are all in a rush and we forget the basic steps that we must take as parents, friends, adults and young people.



[Aengus Ó Snodaigh.]

We must listen to each other and take the time to find out what is wrong if there is an indication that something is wrong. Too often, people have not taken the time to listen.

I commend the report and hope the Government will provide the required resources to deliver on the action that the committee has set out. In many cases, the committee has done our work by telling us how much its recommendations would cost. In many cases, the cost is minimal, and if it saves just one life then it is money well spent. This was the hidden history in Ireland for years. We now have an opportunity to speak about it and we need to address it. We need to give much more attention to this aspect of our society.

A helpline was set up a few weeks ago for teenagers in Ballyfermot who feel depressed and that they need somebody to whom they can talk. That action must be commended and I hope it can be extended to other areas around the country, especially those areas which are suicide black-spots. The money should be made available for it. The Minister of State noted that €1 million from the dormant accounts fund was allocated to 20 projects that provide suicide prevention supports. That must be doubled, trebled or even quadrupled. It is within the community and within families that many of the suicides can be prevented. This is where the additional supports and training are required in order to recognise the telltale signs and help address this tragic problem in our society.

Only two weeks ago my own children's football training was held up because a young man had committed suicide on the grounds. This was harrowing and tragic for the victim and for his family, but those who suddenly became aware of the suicide were also victims such as the young kids who saw what had happened the night before.

The figures provided by the Minister of State may be an under-estimation but they are the statistics with which we must work. They stand at more than 400 a year for a number of years. Every year, 400 families are suffering the tragic consequences. This takes its toll on parents, siblings, friends and acquaintances of the victims, whether young or old. It is not bound by any class but is something which affects all people on this island. As we are an island nation, there is a need to address this problem on an all-Ireland basis. We need to make the links with those in the Six Counties who are tackling suicide and trying to help prevent it. We must ensure the message goes out loud and clear that we are willing to listen as a society, that we are not too busy with our own work and trying to make ends meet to take the time to listen to those who are closest to us.

Simple steps can be taken. One of the first matters I raised in this House on being elected

was the issue of the Ballyfermot health centre. People with mental illness are expected to go to this centre for support and help. The building is a living disgrace. It would do nothing to encourage those who are suffering from depression or other mental disabilities to seek help. It is like an old aircraft hangar and it has not been painted in God knows how long. It is dilapidated and damp and is not suitable for its current purpose. The reply to my query four years ago was that there was a plan to replace it. A plan is not good enough because there have been no moves to replace it and there is no plan in place. It will be another three or four years before that mental health centre and the problems it is facing will be addressed. I presume the same is true throughout the country.

The Minister of State is probably correct about the amount of money being spent on this sector but we also need to address the facilities being used. I hope the HSE will look at these centres because people with problems of depression are being encouraged to go to these centres to seek help.

Prison suicides make headline news more than the suicides of young people or of those who commit suicide in their own homes or elsewhere. In this day and age, prisoners should not be committing suicide. There should be adequate supports within the prisons. Prison officers do their best but more supports are obviously needed.

People in general must be proactive in their approach to suicide. If a suicide black spot is known within a community where there have been a number of suicides within a short period, we must ensure that the proper supports and professional staff address the problem within an area before it gets worse. It is the case that sometimes suicides happen in clusters, especially among young people who may believe they have no alternative but to take their own lives. The message must go out that there are alternatives, that it does not matter what mistake was made or what the problem is, and that society is willing to help them to try to rebuild their lives.

The reasons for suicide may include simple reasons such as a personal mistake or that a person does not feel strong enough to face up to the pressures of work or examinations. We need to ensure that we, as a society, do not impose those pressures.

Other speakers referred to the role of alcohol which is a significant factor in teenage suicide and in those who are no longer teenagers. We need to continue to address the effects of alcohol, including its depressant effect. I have called on many occasions in this House for society and the Government to take a harder stance on the drug issue and on the effects of cocaine in particular. Cocaine has led to a number of suicides in my area. The number of suicides in Dublin South-Central has increased each year. The community

made efforts to establish the Teenline scheme which is now up and running.

We need to provide significant supports for those 12,000 people who committed self-harm and attempted suicide. I have visited a number of such people. In some cases, it was a cry for help because they thought nobody was listening while others believed there was no future for them. Thankfully, they have come through and rebuilt their lives.

It is not solely the duty of Members of this House, youth workers or those in the medical professions to be vigilant. Employers and employees need to be vigilant. Employers are too busy ensuring that profits are made and that there is compliance with health and safety regulations or with other regulations. They sometimes forget that they must look after the well-being of their employees. They need to ensure they understand the pressures being faced by their employees and that they are not put under undue pressure.

I commend the work of the committee. I hope that when the House returns to discuss this issue in another year's time, most of the recommendations will have been delivered by the Government.

**Mr. Carey:** I thank Members of the House who have taken an interest in the issue, in particular Deputy Neville, who has been very helpful to me with good advice on how to approach this problem in my own constituency. I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Tim O'Malley, for his unstinting support for me and the area I represent at a time when we had a cluster of suicides earlier this year which I thought, frankly, would never end. Without the concerted help of his Department, I am not sure we would have been able to bring together a strategy which it is hoped will make a difference.

Earlier this year, in a part of my constituency of Dublin North-West, over half the bereavements at one stage were as a result of suicide. These were, by and large, young male suicides, some of whom I knew and whose families I know. One of the most harrowing and frightening experiences anyone can have is to get a telephone call about a death. However, getting a telephone call to say the body of one's son has been found hanging from a tree in a field in the middle of nowhere and wondering what drove that favourite son, who seemed to be perfectly well adjusted but for some reason took his own life, is particularly harrowing. That tragedy continues.

In the case of devastating tragedy, it is an appalling indictment of our system that it takes so long for an inquest to be carried out and for a coroner's report to be presented. Some families have small insurance policies on their children in order to pay funeral expenses. I recently heard of a strategy used by at least two insurance companies whereby a policy claim is refused until the

family produces, not a death certificate or a coroner's report but a letter from a general practitioner to confirm that the deceased person was never prescribed medication for depression. This is appalling behaviour on the part of insurance companies and it should stop. When I intervened with an insurance company on behalf of one such family I was told to clear off and mind my own business. I was simply advocating on behalf of the family who had waited just short of a year for a coroner's decision and were then being put through the further harrowing experience of having to crawl to have their just entitlement paid to them.

Earlier this year I had a long involvement in helping the families of two young women who had been engaged, from time to time, in acts of self-harm. In these cases I found the psychiatric services wanting. Young adolescents are falling between the cracks of childhood and adult psychiatry. This observation is made in the report and has been made elsewhere. The issue was raised at a briefing meeting with the HSE some time ago and a commitment was made by HSE officials to provide a seamless delivery of psychiatric services for troubled teenagers. This needs to be done sooner rather than later.

Tragedy by suicide is probably the most appalling of all. It leaves a lasting pain, anguish and sometimes anger which affects a family and an entire community. Some communities and some authorities are more resilient than others. I agree with Deputy Stanton when he refers to lack of facilities. However, in my constituency we have put in place physical facilities such as youth centres, playgrounds and after-school services and other facilities such as youth workers and counsellors. Despite this, we still have a huge level of suicide. The report refers to the need for joined-up thinking in this regard.

There seems to be an ever-increasing level of suicide, although statistics show it is not as high as some of us perceive it to be because suicides occur in clusters. Whatever the figures, they would be shocking even if they were only half what they are. The fact that four times as many men as women died by suicide in 2003 is alarming. There is a statistical link between unemployment and suicide, especially in young men. However, I have found that many young men who are working or on training programmes also have fallen victim to suicide. Research shows that suicide rates are concentrated in the lowest social class where they are four times as high as in the high earning brackets. However, we may need to confront this statistic. There is now evidence that, irrespective of income bracket, one is likely to be confronted by the issue of suicide. In 2003, 30% of all deaths in the 15 to 24 age group were recorded as suicide. In the 25 to 34 age group the figure was 23%. Ireland has the second highest youth suicide rate of the 30 OECD countries. We

[Mr. Carey.]

need to make a targeted response, and many communities are doing this.

Psychiatric disorders or addiction problems are present in 90% of people who take their own lives. Earlier this morning, I had a meeting with the Finglas addiction support team, which is part of a network of people in the Finglas area who are putting together strategies to support families who must confront issues relating to alcohol and drug misuse. Availability of alcohol to young people and the ever-increasing availability of drugs of one kind or another are important factors. This morning I was told that one of the greatest worries youth workers in my area have is the easy availability of cocaine and the even easier availability of benzodiazepines mixed with alcohol, which is a lethal concoction. I ask the Minister of State to consider how further restrictions can be placed on the availability of medicines over the counter. There is anecdotal evidence that significant amounts of benzodiazepines make their way into Ireland in the luggage of people coming back from holidays in Spain and elsewhere, where they can be bought cheaply over the counter. If something can be done about this problem in our jurisdiction we should do it.

Deputy Ó Snodaigh referred to the availability of alcohol. Any of us who has experience of working with young people, whether in formal education or otherwise, knows that alcohol is available to young people at whatever age they want it. Parents have a greater responsibility than some of them care to admit to engage in alcohol education in the home. I do not advocate a young person having his or her first couple of glasses of wine around the family dinner table at the age of 13 or 14 years. That does little for alcohol awareness. I am a believer in the identity card system and the Garda watch card, which unfortunately can be too easily copied or ignored by unscrupulous operators of off-licences. I pay tribute to some larger supermarkets which operate a strict regime with regard to supplying alcohol to minors. However, in many years working in this area I have seen much evidence to suggest independent off-licence operators are less scrupulous in their insistence on identification being produced.

I referred to the need for continuing adolescent psychiatric support. I welcome the Government's initiative, as outlined by the Minister of State, Deputy Tim O'Malley, to establish liaison officers in each HSE area. There is no doubt that they are making a difference. As well as working within their own statutory remit, they can network with, for example, the Bethany bereavement groups which are providing a really good service. I have had some contact with Console, an organisation for which I have the greatest regard and which was instrumental in establishing the

Finglas suicide network. I thank Dublin City Council and other local authorities which have allocated local facilities for such organisations, including a drop-in centre. Prevention is better than cure.

Listening is more important than talking to those who are at risk of suicide. The more trained people who are available to listen the better things will be. I commend the report, as well as the Minister and the HSE for the initiatives they have taken.

**Mr. Healy:** I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for the opportunity to say a few words on this important, yet difficult, subject. I welcome the report of the committee and compliment its members on their good work. Over the years, Deputy Neville has shown a particular interest in this area and has given the benefit of his valuable advice to various Members. The report contains the results of much excellent work and makes 33 recommendations. I welcome the assurance of the committee's chairman, Deputy Moloney, that the report will not gather dust. I also welcome the Minister of State's announcement that some 20 projects across the country have received approximately €1 million in funding from dormant accounts. That is a welcome start and I hope that when we discuss this matter again in six or 12 months time, all 33 recommendations will have been implemented.

While I welcome funding for such projects, I note that no funding has been provided for clubs such as the No Name Clubs which do excellent work for young people around the country. They try to ensure that young teenagers can enjoy themselves in an alcohol-free environment. The work of these clubs is very important and I hope the Minister of State will examine how he might support them.

Suicide is a big issue and, unfortunately, over the years the numbers have increased. Back in the 1960s, there were approximately 160 suicides a year, while in the 1980s the number had risen to 220. In 2004, however, some 457 suicides were recorded, which is a huge figure. The problem is multiplying. In previous years, there was a problem of under-reporting but I hope that issue has been overcome to a large extent. Ireland is not alone in this respect because internationally the situation is also difficult, with an estimated one suicide occurring every 40 seconds. In Scotland, there are two suicides every day. A recent report indicated that Ireland has the second highest suicide rate of 30 OECD countries.

This problem has touched almost every family in the country over the years, causing difficulties for bereaved families. In one case that I know of personally, a whole family has been devastated by the experience. It is not a one-off matter; it is commonplace. Deputy Carey spoke of clusters of

suicides occurring in his constituency, but that has happened throughout the country in recent years.

I wish to say something about youth suicide. The environment in which teenagers grow up now is totally different from that experienced by previous generations. We live in a highly stressed and information-packed society. Competition for success in personal relationships and academic achievement is intense among young people. Teenagers are expected to participate in extra-curricular activities in addition to doing homework and household duties in a highly pressurised atmosphere. Today's world is different from the one in which we grew up. Ireland is now a highly materialistic society and young people expect to have access to significant resources. Many young people feel it necessary to undertake part-time work as well as attending school, which places further pressure on them. Such a lifestyle can expose young people to alcohol, particularly at night-time and, consequently, alcohol might begin to play a major role in their daily lives.

The loss of a friend through suicide can be traumatic for young people, whereas adults may be better able to cope in such situations. Nowadays, teenagers need to solve problems quickly and they seek instant solutions which are not practicable. Young people are living in a different society, which is highly pressurised and materialistic. That is the background to the problem of suicide.

Road deaths are highlighted every day but while suicide is a bigger problem, it does not seem to have attracted public attention to the same extent. Since the 1960s, there has been a 300% increase in alcohol consumption and there is no doubt about the correlation between that and suicide among young people. That is one reason I would like to see the advertising of alcohol banned completely. Legislation to effect such a ban should be introduced in due course.

I commend the Samaritans on the work it has done on this issue. This week, the organisation launched the developing emotional awareness and learning, DEAL, initiative in secondary schools. That type of approach is vital because statistics indicate that emotional difficulties are encountered among 20% of students. There is no doubt that the early targeting of young people by providing them the information and wherewithal to deal with problems is a positive step in terms of fighting suicide.

The text service which the Samaritans have provided since April highlights the fact that young people can find it difficult to raise their problems with parents, peers and professionals. I hope young people will be able to refer themselves to psychiatric services. Previous speakers have pointed out the difficulties that exist in terms of the gap between youth and adult psychiatric services and I too would like that issue to be addressed.

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley):** I thank Deputies for their contributions on an issue which clearly hits a nerve within society. The fact that 20 Deputies spoke indicates the importance with which the matter is regarded. I will attempt to address some of the main points raised in the debate.

I congratulate the Sub-Committee on High Levels of Suicide in Irish Society on the report it has put before us. I assure the House that my Department and the HSE will pay close attention to the report's recommendations, many of which have already been taken on board by the Reach Out programme launched in September 2005. We will give further consideration to any recommendations which have not yet been implemented with a view to acting on them.

The issue of alcohol consumption in Ireland was raised by almost every speaker. I will undertake to speak to my Cabinet colleagues on that issue because we now have scientific evidence on the relationship between alcohol and suicide. We will have to investigate the increase in consumption in society.

Several Deputies suggested that targets should be set for the Reach Out programme. The chairman of the sub-committee, Deputy Moloney, feels strongly that such targets should be put in place, although I am open minded about the matter. I will consult the head of the National Office for Suicide Prevention, Mr. Geoff Day, in that regard because, irrespective of whether a target is reached, its very existence means that progress can at least be measured.

References were made to the lack of psychotherapists and counsellors. We have established a number of training programmes in this regard, graduates of which will shortly supply the numbers of professionals needed.

I concur with Deputy Healy with regard to his support for self-referral. GPs should be able to refer patients directly to psychotherapists rather than sending them first to consultant psychiatrists because putting a depressed person through a series of hoops will only cause further problems.

We are aware of the problems caused by the points system for the leaving certificate but nobody has been able to devise a better system.

Questions were asked by several Deputies regarding how members of society can look out for each other. Long ago, when we did not have television, people conversed with each other more often and the community spirit was better. Unfortunately, that spirit has suffered in modern society. The Taoiseach is a strong advocate of volunteerism and the Cabinet is giving its attention to the issue. In the past, people in the country always helped each other but, nowadays, people can live in a huge estate or a concrete jungle without knowing their neighbours and, if the parents do not know anybody, we can be sure



[Mr. T. O'Malley.]

their children will feel the same sense of alienation.

One speaker suggested that each county should set a target or delegate responsibility to one person for suicide prevention. Around the country, liaison officers are already employed who do a great deal of valuable, if largely unseen, work by liaising with troubled families, schools and accident and emergency units. Most of the officers are either counsellors or psychiatric nurses and have special training in this area.

Some 11,000 people deliberately self-harm every year. Mention is often made about the lack of resources in this area but, until recently, when people presented to accident and emergency units after self-harming, medical professionals tended to treat them and then allowed them leave the hospital without any follow-up care. That may be an issue of best practice rather than simply a resource problem. Given that people who presented to accident and emergency units after being severely injured in accidents received follow-up care, is it not ironic that, until recently, there was no follow-up care for patients who self-harmed? Almost every accident and emergency unit now employs psychiatric nurses to liaise with patients.

Reference was made to the importance of early intervention by child and adolescent services. Several speakers noted that the recovery rate is 90% among those for whom early diagnoses are made. Medical evidence suggests that 95% of people with depression can be treated in the community. Those figures seem to indicate a lack of diagnosis of depression by GPs. We need more targeted education of general practitioners to ensure they identify people with depression, otherwise they will cause self-harm and end up in hospitals.

I do not claim the child and adolescent psychiatric services are all that they should be: they are not. However, resources have increased significantly. In 2005 we had 56 consultant psychiatrists and this increased to 70 in 2006. Obviously each consultant psychiatrist needs an associated team. It takes some time to gather those teams, including social workers, nurses, psychotherapists and counsellors, and we are working at forming those teams.

Deputy Hayes said we should have tests for those driving while under the influence of drugs. While the Government has investigated the matter, a solution is not easy to find. We would need to determine the level of cocaine, cannabis or ecstasy involved. Considerably more work remains to be done in that regard.

Deputy Keaveney spoke about music therapy and greater use of the creative arts for people. I intend investigating the matter further. There would be considerable merit in considering it for people who may feel depressed. The Deputy also

mentioned that some people refer to cannabis as a soft drug. It is not a soft drug. The latest information suggests cannabis causes major psychological problems and leads on to psychiatric problems.

I have been here since 11 o'clock listening to each of the 20 Members who spoke. I will be discussing the matter with my colleagues in the Cabinet to ascertain what we can do to alleviate the suffering and pain being experienced by all the families affected. This is not just a problem for Government and there is no point scoring involved. The Government and the Dáil must face up to the problem and ensure that it gets our best attention.

### **Citizens Information Bill 2006: Second Stage (Resumed).**

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

**Mr. O'Connor:** I wish to share time with Deputy Callely.

It is always a challenge speaking for a few minutes in a debate and then picking it up again a few days later. On Tuesday I said I have always had a good relationship with the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan. I hope admitting that does not destroy his career.

**Mr. Hayes:** He is shaking in his chair.

**Mr. O'Connor:** The Minister is doing very well as Deputy Hayes knows. While the Minister and I share a constituency boundary, it is not just that. I have considerable contact with him through my work as a local Deputy and through my work on the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs and as secretary of the Fianna Fáil group. Since he came to the Department of Social and Family Affairs I have always said he is doing tremendous work and to my sense is revolutionising the Department. He has seen the challenges and is listening to what people are saying.

**Mr. Stanton:** The halo is getting bigger.

**Mr. O'Connor:** Even the Opposition admits the Minister is doing a good job. If we were surveyed all of us would say the Department of Social and Family Affairs continues to be the best Department in terms of disseminating information. I have absolute proof of this in the business I do.

I am always sensitive about talking just about Tallaght. In the other contributions to this debate I have heard other colleagues talk about every street in their constituency, so I will talk about Dublin South-West — Tallaght, Brittas, Firhouse, Templeogue and Greenhills. The serious point is that in this century we still have a need to get information out. Many years ago I attended a function at Kimmage where a good Fine Gael

man, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, made the point that many public representatives, particularly Deputies, would have time for other matters if systems were working.

I have already complimented the Department and I am not rowing back on that. We get many queries for different Department, including the Department of Social and Family Affairs. They often relate to the system not working for the client. As the Minister has clearly indicated he wants to do, we must continue to provide a customer friendly service. Where people are unfortunate to have needs in respect of the Minister's remit, the Department should provide that type of service. We are all aware of cases when there are gaps in information and it is very important we continue to do all we can to ensure information is available.

Much progress has been made in recent times. Last week I told the Minister that the recent publication that the Department circulated to Deputies contained much good information. The staff working with me in Tallaght tell me that the information about contact points etc. continues to be improved, which is as it should be. When a constituent arrives at my full-time office in Tallaght village or at one of my eight clinics throughout my constituency seeking information, we should be able to get it easily. We should also work to allow them direct access to the information. While there will always be gaps in that regard, that is the ideal.

I will again talk about my town. I have often said here that the office of the Department of Social and Family Affairs in The Square is probably one of the best in the country and provides an excellent service. I compliment the Minister.

I note the presence of Deputy Callely, who was always very good to me when he was chairman of the Eastern Health Board.

**Mr. Stanton:** The Deputy might mention the Bill.

**Mr. O'Connor:** Everything I have said is about the Bill.

**Mr. Stanton:** It is all about Tallaght.

**Mr. O'Connor:** I have heard colleagues talk about every street in Cork, so the Deputy will need to bear with me. I do not mention Tallaght that often.

**Mr. Hayes:** The Deputy will go down in history as the man who mentioned Tallaght in this House more often than anyone.

**Mr. O'Connor:** The Deputy might write to me about that and I will include it in my next leaflet because Fine Gael voters in Tallaght might need to hear how good I am.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs office in Tallaght provides an excellent service. It is supplemented by the citizens information centre in Tallaght village. I have  
3 o'clock heard other colleagues talk about their local citizens information centres. The operation of the citizens information centre in Tallaght represents good use of public moneys. Those offices provide a range of information on social welfare, taxation, free legal aid, family matters, health, education, housing, employment, consumer affairs, refugee information and local information. A range of application forms are available, including those for passports, driving licences, driving tests, medical cards and optical benefits, and affidavits are also available.

**Mr. Stanton:** I ask the Deputy to give way. Does the Deputy have any opinion on the Bill?

**Mr. O'Connor:** I will engage with Deputy Stanton some day when I have more time and I would be happy to debate it. If the Deputies look up what I said on Tuesday and today, they will note I made many references to the Bill, which is excellent legislation.

Let me refer to the representations made to us on the Bill by the Disability Federation of Ireland. Those of us who attended its various briefings, at the Mansion House and elsewhere, will know it is very worthy of support. I am happy to support it.

It is very important that we continue to support all our disability groups. The Disability Federation of Ireland's response to the Comhairle (Amendment) Bill gave the Minister some work to do.

I thank the Ceann Comhairle for being patient with me. I am sorry my Fine Gael colleagues do not have the same patience but maybe I will work on them also and engage with them again.

**Mr. Stanton:** Come on, any time.

**Mr. Callely:** I thank my good friend and colleague, Deputy O'Connor, for sharing time.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Citizens Information Bill 2006 and I congratulate the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, on introducing it. The Bill is a fundamental part of the Minister's strategy to have an effective combination of supports in place to ensure the uniform provision of quality and relevant information, advice and advocacy services across the board under the brand of citizens' information.

The primary purpose of the Bill is to amend the Comhairle Act. I appreciate the tremendous work and effort of Comhairle and congratulate it thereon. I refer in particular to the very useful information it publishes throughout the year, especially in the publication entitled *Relate*.

[Mr. Callely.]

Thousands of individuals and representatives of organisations frequently tell me about the tremendous support, information and services they receive from Comhairle. In the course of my constituency work, I have found Comhairle to be outstanding and I offer my congratulations to all involved. I am very pleased that the Bill strengthens the functions of Comhairle and I firmly believe information and advocacy are very important. They are now more relevant than ever before.

We live in interesting and challenging times. In Ireland we enjoy a bubbling economy that is the envy of many of our European neighbours. We have enjoyed some very good years and I am confident that Fianna Fáil, when in Government, will continue to safeguard the progress made to date and plan a future with positive results for all, especially the more vulnerable. The efforts of successive Fianna Fáil-led Administrations to develop our economy, infrastructure and communities have borne fruit. Over the past ten years we have witnessed unprecedented economic growth and dividends have been invested in our social services and other supports and structures in local communities. I want the progress made recent years in our great country to continue and I want us to consolidate, maintain and build upon it. We should be proud that all our citizens, especially the vulnerable, can gain access to information and supports easily and freely.

We are often reminded that we live in an information society and this is true. This is why the Bill is timely; it will meet the needs of a rapidly changing society and keep abreast of the array of supports and services that are now in place. The information elements of the Bill are very relevant and designed to meet the needs of our rapidly changing society, in which the delivery of independent, accurate and user-friendly information to the public is so important.

Three groups in particular spring to mind when considering the benefits of this Bill, namely, the disabled, the elderly and the vulnerable.

One of the greatest achievements of western society in the 21st century has been the increase in life expectancy. Figures from the Central Statistics Office, collated from the results of the census, suggest the average age of our population is increasing and that there is a noticeable increase in life expectancy among the three aforesaid groups. The 1996 census showed that 11.5% of the Irish population was over 65 and recent projections suggest that, by 2031, this figure will have more than doubled.

The Government's commitment to the development of a comprehensive range of supports and services to all citizens, especially the disabled, elderly and vulnerable, can be demonstrated clearly by outlining the resources made available in recent years, along with the service

developments. This Bill and Comhairle's strategic plan serve as a suitable mechanism with which to provide relevant information to the entire population.

I support the Minister's view that the provision of independent, clear and accessible information has a central role in helping to break down barriers, ease anxieties, open up opportunities and, very often, clear the way for citizens, particularly the most vulnerable, to improve their circumstances and build better lives. The Minister, his Department and Comhairle have undertaken a formidable task and have made great progress in commencing the process in question to ensure that information is accessible and that the personal advocacy service is based on a legislative and sound footing.

I cannot over-emphasise the importance of being able to access relevant information freely, easily and in a user-friendly manner. Examples of successful initiatives and practices need to be shared. A mechanism should be put in place to accommodate some types of shared success stories by way of chat avenues, whereby groups or individuals could share in the benefits of successful outcomes.

Comhairle is the national agency responsible for the provision of information, advice and advocacy services for everyone. From time to time, it focuses on a specific group and at present it is prioritising the information needs of older people. It recognises that older people need specific information at specific points of transition and it provides tremendous information, including all the facts and figures. The October 2006 edition of *Relate* covers a multitude under the theme "Information Needs of Older People". Chapter headings include "From Work to Retirement", "Illness and Needing Care", "From Home to Long-Term Care", "Health Services", "Taxation" and "Equal Treatment". It is great stuff and my only problem is that it is one-way traffic. I suggest that the Minister consider piloting an initiative in which individuals or groups could benefit from successful outcomes arising from tapping into relevant information such as that in question, and that he consider the manner in which it is applied and the benefits that accrue.

We need Comhairle and all the relevant information but it would be of great benefit if we could accommodate an information-sharing or chat page, perhaps on the new citizens' information website. Perhaps it could be accommodated easily. Difficulties arise owing to gaps in services around the country. We need to be a little more proactive across various Departments and regions to ensure uniform eligibility criteria, assessment and provision.

I very much welcome the fact that the Bill provides for the introduction of a personal advocacy service for certain persons with a disability. I note that the Minister said in his Second Stage contri-

bution that “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.” However, what happens if the services are not in place?

We all acknowledge that there are gaps in service provision and that there can be “poles apart” variations around the country. There are many examples but from my experience I encountered gaps and variations in the provision of health and social services, along with services provided by the local authorities. To be fair, we have made great strides in the development of social services and in achieving social inclusion. However, with ever-changing goalposts, I often find that gaps and variations remain, not just at regional, departmental or agency levels but also at local level in terms of decision-making, even where there are clear qualifying criteria in place. Interpretations can vary from person to person within the same office and, given the existence of gaps at regional level, this causes some difficulties.

Many good things are happening in our services and in every community but we still have some way to go to ensure our services, supports and structures are such that there are equal opportunities for all. Issues in this area arise from a range of factors and they need to be addressed and resolved.

I share the Minister’s view that the new personal advocacy service will be invaluable in supporting people with disabilities. I understand the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, has already allocated €14 million for the provision of personal advocacy services. Those services, as set out in this Bill, 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 that service. As I envisage it, the position of personal advocate will be invaluable. Given that we currently enjoy almost full employment and great job opportunities with high earnings, there may be difficulties in filling those positions. While the allocation of €14 million is very welcome, we will need to monitor developments.

I note the Minister has put arrangements in place for the new personal advocate service. Those arrangements will be completed when the Bill is enacted. I ask the Minister to keep an open mind on this service because it might need to be somewhat flexible until it beds down, as one might expect with a new service. Overall, the development of the personal advocate service and advocacy services in general is very welcome. If these services are monitored and modified as required, this will be the breakthrough of the century. Can the Minister, Deputy Brennan, give the House details of the arrangements he has pre-

pared in advance of the enactment of this legislation?

While I appreciate I am running out of time, I would like to deal with one section of the Bill. I refer to section 7 and specifically to the new section 7E. Will personal advocates work on a one-to-one basis at local level? Can a personal advocate be a family member? I fully appreciate the principles the Minister wishes to achieve throughout the Bill, particularly in section 7. Equally, I feel we need to provide for a level of flexibility. While such a level of flexibility could be interpreted as being provided for in section 7E, I am not sure all the safety valves which are provided for are needed. The Citizens Information Board may have to arrange for the functions of a personal advocate to be performed by persons other than its members of staff. Such a decision would have to be referred to the Minister for Social and Family Affairs for approval. I ask the Minister, who has indicated he will make changes to the published legislation, to consider this issue. He has said he will amend the section that sets out the qualifications required to be a personal advocate in the personal advocacy service, for example. Family members and friends should be accommodated in this regard. I appreciate the amount of time I have been given and I am sorry I do not have more time.

**Mr. Hayes:** I am pleased to welcome the publication of the Citizens Information Bill 2006, which has finally made it to this House. In particular, I welcome the Bill’s provision for the introduction of a personal advocacy service, to be operated by the Citizens Information Board. This service should help to enable people with disabilities to access the health and social services to which they are entitled. Disability groups have been campaigning for a long time for an advocacy service to be introduced. I am pleased that their Trojan efforts have paid dividends. I hope the advocacy service will be established in an efficient and effective manner, so it can be up and running by the intended date of 2008.

Historically, services for people with disabilities have been woefully inadequate in this country. We are slowly addressing the inequalities that have emerged as a consequence of those poor services. The Government needs to consider carefully the fact that a significant proportion of people with disabilities in Ireland, unlike many other countries, are residing in institutions. In 2006, it is not good enough to isolate people from their families and friends in institutions where they can be vulnerable. If the necessary resources are made available, it is possible to enable people to live in their own communities. I hope this aspect will be given attention by the Government in the near future.

An independent advocacy service is important if we are to ensure people with disabilities are



[Mr. Hayes.]

fully catered for by service providers. The advocacy service will help people with disabilities to vindicate their rights and to receive equal treatment. It will allow people with disabilities who are unable to speak for themselves to have their views represented in respect of the services to which they are entitled. I welcome the Minister's initiative in broadening the definition of a "social service" in this Bill. It is useful to have such a definition enshrined in legislation. The definition could have explicitly referred to the areas of transport and access, however, as they are two important service components for people with disabilities. The Minister has yet to detail the geographic remit of the personal advocacy service. Will the service operate in regional offices? Will it be centralised in Dublin? If it follows the decentralisation model, it could be located absolutely anywhere. It would be useful to base the service in regional offices which feed into local structures. When service providers are located far from applicants, they can seem remote and intimidating. That is a problem we encounter in many of the areas with which we deal.

I am anxious to ensure the criteria for appointing a person as an advocate are appropriate. It is important that the best qualified and most appropriate individual should get the job. There needs to be trust and understanding between the advocate and the person whose interests they are representing. Ideally, the advocate would be well known to the person. An effective information campaign should be linked to this legislation to ensure the relevant people are aware of the new service, what it entails and how to apply for it. Organisations which represent the interests of people with disabilities will have a key role to play in the provision of information. Their views need to be taken on board by the Government and the Minister. People who are appointed as personal advocates must understand the needs and circumstances of the individuals whose interests they are representing.

I wish to speak about the dissemination of information about the new service. How does the Department intend to ensure that those who are eligible for the service are aware of its existence? Will special strategies be employed to reach people in residential institutions, for example? Will personal advocates receive training, briefings and in-service instruction? As changes are made in each budget, it is essential that personal advocates should begin with a good knowledge of the system. Similarly, they should be kept up to date as provisions and entitlements change, which they do on a regular basis. Members of the Oireachtas should be fully aware of the procedures for applying for a personal advocate position. People often contact their local Deputies in the first instance when they are filling in forms and dealing with Departments. Therefore, a comprehensive brief

about the new service would be useful for public representatives. I refer not only to Deputies but also to members of local authorities and people on all other kinds of representative bodies throughout the country.

This proposed legislation will lead to substantial logistical demands. Personal advocates are allowed to attend any meeting, consultation or discussion to represent the person there. Who decides when such meetings take place, however? If the advocate is not qualified, the meeting may not take place at all. Who notifies advocates of these meetings? Are they entitled to such notification? The advocate can, at any reasonable time, enter any place where day care or residential care and training is provided to the person they are representing. No mention is made of places of detention and hospitals, however. Who defines what time of the day is reasonable? Will the service providers have responsibility for such decisions? Will it be necessary for an appointment to be made and notice to be given? When the advocate attends a meeting, what can he or she do?

A statutory or voluntary body that provides social services is required to co-operate with the personal 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 functions 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? What checks and balances will be put in place to ensure that the system operates as it should in this context?

Another issue that needs to be addressed is monitoring the personal advocate's work and ensuring that all those with personal advocates are receiving equally high standards of service. This will be a difficult system to put in place, but it is vitally important. The advocate will occupy a very important role indeed and the entire premise for the system would be undermined if advocates were not performing to high standards. This is something that we really must get right in implementing this piece of proposed legislation.

This Bill provides for the establishment of a director of personal advocacy. Such a directorship will be an important but challenging task and it is, therefore, essential that the director's office is adequately resourced so that he or she can fulfil the functions without unnecessary impediments. Any director will benefit hugely from the expertise available through the disability support groups that exist. In the past provision has been made for new bodies to be established and then it transpires that they are swamped with work because of under-resourcing. We must ensure this does

not arise in this case. The area of services for people with disabilities cannot remain the Cinderella of the sector forever and we must, therefore, ensure that funding and personnel allocations are true to the spirit of this legislation.

There is much else that could be said on this area and, once again, I welcome this Bill to the House. It is not before time and I hope it is the start of a real and sustained effort to ensure that people with disabilities are afforded equal rights and fair treatment, not only in theory but also in practice. I look forward to the enactment of this legislation when the time comes and I hope that it will make a real difference to many lives in the future.

**Mr. Dennehy:** I join previous speakers in complimenting the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, on the initiative he has taken with the Citizens Information Bill 2006. Like Deputy Hayes, I have some questions but I understand that the delivery of customer-friendly information on rights and entitlements is the mainstay of the Bill which will enable us to move on and suggest how matters should be handled. Whether these rights are sought by an advocate or the individual it is important that we simplify existing procedures and make it easier, where possible, for people to know their rights. That is the intention of this Bill.

Deputy Hayes referred to making people aware of the availability of personnel, what is involved in the process and so on. We must recognise that the potential applicants are people who already have a difficulty operating in the mainstream communications network which is one of the reasons they need extra help.

In many groups with which we are involved people can be drafted in with many descriptions applied including CEO, information officer, coordinator and so on. In some cases they can almost take over the operation. I have respectfully suggested to many groups that those involved be the spokespeople in making their own cases and this is happening in more organisations, such as the Irish Wheelchair Association. It is important that an outsider does not take over the rights of group members or impinge on their entitlements.

We like to boast that we live in an information age and this has been said repeatedly in the context of this Bill. Sometimes we do not consider how this information age might adversely affect many members of the public. This applies not only to the disabled; there is a range of people directly affected by their lack of knowledge of modern technology and communications. Those of us who may have been given extra training can easily take such skills for granted and assume that everyone else is an expert. This is a mistake that is made repeatedly.

I ask the Minister for Social and Family Affairs to bear this in mind when we spread the message of the availability of this service. We speak of texting and e-mailing but probably 50% of the population is not *au fait* with such technology. There are some examples of how older people have been trained in the use of technology but I refer to the average person. We must remember when technology is implemented which we find useful in the dissemination of information that there are people still out of that loop.

I am worried by the trend of telling people to get information via e-mail, websites and computers when many have no access to a computer and even if they had would have no knowledge of how to use it. This is no reflection on mental prowess because older people have shown that they have the capability, given the opportunity, training and programmes geared towards them. We must consider those who have not received these opportunities. Young people are adaptable, will take on such changes with greater facility and love playing with video games and so on because they are reared in such an environment.

I am particularly concerned about access for the three groups referred to in the Bill. People with mental and other difficulties must be included and we must take note of their needs and ensure we reach them. This will not happen naturally but requires work.

Debate adjourned.

### Ceisteanna — Questions.

#### Priority Questions.

#### Sports Capital Programme.

1. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will prioritise applications for funding under the recently announced sports capital grant scheme made jointly by primary schools and a local sports club or clubs to provide a sports hall or other sporting facility on or adjacent to school grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35051/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** The sports capital programme administered by my Department allocates funding to sporting and community organisations, local authorities and, in certain circumstances, schools and colleges, throughout the country. Priority is given to projects essential to improve sports performance or participation and, of these, the highest priority is given to projects in disadvantaged areas.

The circumstances under which projects involving primary schools can be funded are where the application submitted for funding is a joint appli-

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

cation from the school and a local sports club or community group, or where the application shows a clear need for the proposed sports facility in the area as formally agreed with other local groups and-or the local authority. Primary schools can also be funded where the local community will have access to the proposed facility for a minimum of at least 30 hours a week throughout the year when it is not being used by the school or college itself, and where the application meets the general guidelines, terms and conditions which apply to all applications under the programme.

As the Deputy is aware, responsibility for funding school sports facilities rests with the Department of Education and Science, and the number of school-related applications to my Department's sports capital programme is relatively low. For example of a total of 1,338 applications in 2006, only 30 were school-related and, of these, 12 projects were successful and were allocated €1.4 million in funding. My Department has commenced work on the development of a long-term strategic plan for the provision of sports facilities. This work is being managed by a steering group, which includes a representative of the Department of Education and Science, and the issue referred to by the Deputy will be addressed during the process which will lead to a strategy for facility provision.

I advertised the 2007 round of the sports capital programme on Sunday 15 and Monday 16 October, with a closing date for receipt of applications set for close of business on Friday 24 November next. I assure the Deputy that any school-related applications received under the 2007 sports capital programme which meet the necessary conditions and which would clearly increase sports participation and fill an identified gap in the level of sporting facilities in that community will be given every consideration for funding.

**Mr. Deenihan:** I welcome the Minister's reply. I remind him that the 2005 report of the national task force on obesity contained a recommendation that children should have at least 60 minutes moderate physical activity daily. This and other recommendations of the report have not been acted upon. I conducted a survey of 1,400 schools in 2005 and found that only 23 had sports halls. Therefore, most schools are not in a position to provide physical education, especially in bad weather. Most principals who responded to my survey pointed out that the amount of time they could devote to physical education was weather-dependent.

There are approximately 300,000 overweight or obese children in Irish schools and this figure is increasing by 10,000 annually. While I understand that the Minister does not have sole responsibility for this, I ask him to ensure that priority be given

to applications from schools which satisfy the criteria he has laid out. Under this, sports halls could be provided and children would have the opportunity to exercise in bad weather. The local community could also use the facilities by night. It is a simple solution and one that would resolve some of the problems in schools. It is there to be done under the sports capital programme because the Department of Education and Science certainly does not seem to prioritise the provision of sports halls in schools.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** It is open to any school to make an application under the sports capital programme jointly with a club or clubs. As Deputy Deenihan will be aware, our concern is to ensure sufficient facilities in communities for use by everyone in the community. We have been successful in this respect to date. Since 1998, more than €470 million has been spent on facilities across the country and 5,721 projects have been assisted. We have had a beneficial impact in every city, town, village and parish in the country. We have touched young people's lives for the better in virtually every part of Ireland.

The deficiency or otherwise of sports facilities in primary schools is, in the first instance, a matter for the Department of Education and Science to resolve. On the other hand, as Deputy Deenihan points out, it may be possible to marry the interests of the community with its local school. We have sought to meet this aspiration where possible.

**Mr. Deenihan:** In appealing to the Minister to prioritise applications, including school involvement, I would point to recent surveys that show increased incidence of obesity. For example, a recent survey showed that four years ago the standard waist size of a 12 year old child was 26 inches and this has now increased to 30 inches and more. We are sitting on a potential time-bomb if this is not acted upon. The Minister can make a contribution and I appeal to him to do so through the sports capital fund.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** There is a good programme in operation in schools across the country, namely, the Buntús programme under the auspices of the Irish Sports Council. Our primary objective is to ensure sports facilities are made available and improved for all members of the community. Children in schools are as much at liberty to utilise community facilities as anyone else. I am conscious that an appropriate application may be submitted from a club or clubs in conjunction with a school. That will, in accordance with the normal criteria, be given due cognisance by officials in the Department.

#### Art Collections.

2. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport



and Tourism the situation in regard to art works previously on display in the Great Southern Hotels; if the collection has been returned to the State in its entirety; if he plans to proceed with an inventory of all art in the possession of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35071/06]

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** Following my intervention with the Dublin Airport Authority, the Great Southern Hotel group returned all the works in its possession to the OPW last month. This followed a period of research by the visual arts consultant appointed by the Arts Council, who made visits to each of the Great Southern Hotels to codify the works. The Arts Council is confident that all works in Great Southern Hotel group's ownership at that time were returned. Arrangements are being made for public display of the works.

A number of bodies and agencies have responsibility for purchasing and acquiring art works, including the OPW, the Arts Council, the National Gallery, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Crawford Gallery and local authorities. Each of these maintains an inventory of these works. For example, the OPW maintains a list of the works in its collection. The Arts Council also has a complete list of works, purchased through the joint purchase scheme, in its collection. The responsibility to maintain inventories and to develop appropriate policies in this regard resides with these organisations and all other State bodies which acquire art works. The bodies responsible for collecting works are best placed to maintain such works in a way that is consistent with their own policies.

The joint purchase scheme was established in the 1950s to encourage the acquisition of art works for display in public places, creating opportunities for the public to come into contact with art and providing essential opportunities for artists to have their work purchased. While the current inventory held by the Arts Council requires updating, it shows that up to the 1990s more than 1,600 works had been purchased under the scheme by 175 bodies. These bodies include, for example, the ESB, UCD, DIT, Sligo General Hospital, Aer Lingus, VHI, Bord Fáilte Éireann, Cork Corporation, Roscommon County Library and Kilkenny Design Workshops. Works were purchased on a 50:50 basis and at that time the Arts Council's contribution to the cost stood at almost €180,000.

It is understood from the council that of the 1,600 works purchased under the scheme, 143 were jointly purchased with CIE. These include works by Gerard Dillon, Patrick Collins, Louis le Brocquy and Basil Blackshaw. These were purchased primarily in the 1960s and 1970s, at a cost to the council of £7,233. The total cost of these works came to £14,466.71. The Arts Council is

undertaking research into the joint purchase scheme which will update the inventory of works purchased through the scheme, establish the current location of works and inform Arts Council policy on the amortisation of works and on its obligations to the disposal of works.

The Arts Council is independent on a day to day basis. I have made the council aware of my firm view that these works of art are part of our national heritage and belong, in effect, to the people of Ireland. They should not be disposed of for short-term pecuniary gain and should be regarded as part of the national collection and retained for continued public viewing and enjoyment. This is also the view to which the Dublin Airport Authority subscribed and I am happy with the final outcome in that situation.

**Mr. Wall:** I thank the Minister for that detailed reply. On the last occasion I raised this issue in the House, he did not have as much information and much work has obviously been done in the interim. I am delighted these paintings will go on display. The Minister stated that 143 paintings were purchased for display in the Great Southern Hotel Group. Have they all been returned?

This programme, involving the purchase of 1,600 paintings, had major benefits. Will the programme be reviewed in the context of continuing with that format, with various State agencies purchasing works in conjunction with the Arts Council?

In the archives of museums, there are many priceless objects that should be on display. Local authorities have a role to play in this area. Will the Minister develop this further, along with the joint purchase scheme? Local authorities, through heritage centres and local museums, should be given the option of displaying particular works of art.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** Arrangements are entered into with local authorities by the national cultural institutions from time to time to ensure items go on display in the regions and I encourage this.

The Dublin Airport Authority returned 91 works from the Great Southern Hotel Group to the State and they are now in its possession. Arrangements are being made for their exhibition. We are still pursuing the remainder and I will keep the Deputy informed of progress.

### **Tourism Industry.**

3. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the areas his Department is involved in regarding the promotion of good environmental practice within the tourism industry. [35070/06]

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** The New Horizons report of the tourism policy review group found widespread acceptance of the importance of good



[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

management practices in maintaining and enhancing the attractiveness of both the built and natural environments. However, rapid growth has resulted in pressures on the environment, including congestion, some inappropriate development and waste management systems that may not be consistent with the green image of Ireland.

For about 80% of our visitors, the scenic landscape is a factor in deciding to holiday here, which means that a major strategic challenge over the next ten years will be to manage the natural and built environments in ways that maintain and enhance their attractiveness.

The promotion of good environmental practice within the tourism industry is primarily a matter for the national tourism development authority, Fáilte Ireland. When I established the authority in 2003, I made it clear that it should have a strong focus on environmental issues. Historically, Bord Fáilte was well ahead of its time in this area but its focus shifted as the organisational remit became mainly centred on marketing.

The Department has pursued the matter with the authority and it established an environment unit towards the end of 2005, the functions of which are to promote good environmental practice within the industry and the protection of the environment. It also discharges Fáilte Ireland's role as a prescribed body in the planning process.

In September, Fáilte Ireland commissioned a review, to be completed by the end of 2006, of good environmental practice within the industry. This study will allow the authority to establish a baseline from which to measure how the tourism sector is currently performing in environmental management practices. Case studies of good practice within the sector will also be identified and used to promote higher standards generally.

The Department also led a session on tourism at the recent national conference, organised by Comhar, on sustainability in the National Development Plan, 2007-2013, which focussed on our recent performance and considered how we could improve and enhance future performance over the life of the next NDP.

**Mr. Gogarty:** The Minister referred to waste management. The New Horizons programme is working well and has fostered an element of stewardship among tourism bodies. What ongoing discussions is the Department involved in with the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the county managers of various local authorities?

Some time ago, I asked for an investigation into allegations that staff in a cruise company were telling customers that they could dump the contents of toilets into the lakes. That is a small part of the wider problem whereby pumping stations in many county council run areas are not working so boats cannot empty material into the

pumping station. When visitors find a pumping station that works, sewage facilities are often woefully inadequate and it is pumped back into the lake. Given the serious pollution of our waterways and the importance of this sort of tourism, what discussions are taking place with the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and county managers? What plans are in place to tackle this problem?

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** The Department is responsible for national tourism policy and in its work it seeks to influence the policies of other key Departments and agencies on matters that impact on the tourism agenda. It has little or no involvement in direct regulation of tourism.

On the tourism side, it works through its agencies as far as environmental issues are concerned; the key agency is Fáilte Ireland. As a Department, we are represented on various State environmental fora and we are actively involved in the steering group for the national spatial strategy. The Department has an input into the national spatial strategy and all of the regional planning guidelines, where it has taken a clear line in support of positive, balanced policies to conserve the basic physical tourism resource and allow for sustainable tourism development. We have also sought to ensure that concern for the environment was a key theme during the recent tourism product development scheme and that if there is to be a forthcoming scheme, it will have an even stronger environmental focus. A new scheme would ensure there would be a voluntary environment assessment.

Since we set up the environmental unit within Fáilte Ireland, it has produced position papers on environmental issues which impact on tourism as a means of influencing future development of the environment, including papers on litter, landscapes, wind farms and fish farms.

I reject Deputy Gogarty's contention that tourism is a polluter. There is no evidence that tourism, *per se*, is a significant source of damage to the environment and I reject any assertion to the contrary. It might be argued that tourism is responsible for a large number of one-off holiday homes but these are the product of local planning decisions and not driven by tourism policy or programmes.

The Department asked Fáilte Ireland to establish the environmental unit and it is now in place. We pursued this so vigorously because we understand that if the environment is damaged the industry will suffer because Ireland's green image is vital to it.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The time for this question has elapsed.

**Mr. Gogarty:** In the interests of fairness, may I make a quick intervention?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** As the Deputy is aware, six minutes are allocated for each question.

**Mr. Gogarty:** Is the Minister embarrassed by the lack of action by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and local authorities?

4. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his attention has been drawn to the 8% decline in real terms in visitor spend here between 2000 and 2005, that the number of pure holidaymakers has remained static over those five years, that there was a net decline in US visitors and that between 1999 and 2004 there were 3.3 million fewer bed nights in western regions; if his further attention has been drawn to a decline in car touring and a loss of general competitiveness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35052/06]

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** The Deputy presents an unduly dismal picture of tourism performance in recent years and I am glad to have the opportunity to put the position in context. In 1996, 4.7 million people visited Ireland and foreign earnings from these visitors amounted to €1.79 billion, excluding passenger fare receipts. In 2005, we hosted almost 7 million visitors who generated foreign earnings of more than €3.4 billion. Most recent available statistics suggest visitor numbers could grow at a rate of more than 10% this year.

The past five years have been one of the most turbulent periods for tourism and travel in recent history. Despite this, the number of overseas visitors to Ireland in this period increased by almost 11%, while the number of pure holidaymakers grew by more than 2%. Holidaymaker numbers have increased by 14% this year and domestic tourism is growing rapidly. Furthermore, if we exclude passenger fare receipts, which have fallen as fares to Ireland become more competitive, the revenue from these visitors increased by 32% since 2000. In real terms, this constitutes an increase of approximately 11% in on-the-ground spend.

After a record year in 2000, the North American market was hit hard by the attacks on 11 September 2001 and general outbound travel from the US decreased. The number of US visitors to Ireland fell by almost 19% between 2000 and 2002. However, our North American business has recovered in the intervening period with clear evidence of strong growth this year. Other European countries have not been as fortunate.

A number of initiatives are in place to improve the regional spread of tourism. In terms of the tourism regions along the western seaboard, I am pleased the measures taken seem to be working, with a 6.3% increase in bed nights in 2005. Tourism here has a competitiveness challenge and I have stated on many occasions that we cannot be

complacent. Nonetheless, in recent years our general record is one of which we can be proud.

**Mr. Deenihan:** I remind the Minister that according to Irish Tourist Industry Confederation figures, the average spend per tourist declined by 8% between 2000 and 2005. This has major implications for the hotel industry and rural tourism. In addition, as the Minister accepted, the number of US holidaymakers visiting Ireland has declined. Typically, US tourists are higher spending and they tend to visit the western seaboard. Between 2000 and 2004, the western region experienced an extraordinary decline of 3.3 million in the number of bed nights.

Surely the Minister is concerned about the level of car touring. Visitors who tour the country in cars visit villages and stay in rural hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation. The Minister did not refer to the pressure facing guesthouses and providers of bed and breakfast accommodation. To take just one activity holiday, is he aware that the number of golfing holidays to Ireland declined from 306,000 in 2000 to only 138,000 in 2004? Not all is well in the tourism sector. While many more tourists are visiting Dublin, this does not necessarily mean that the rest of the country is benefiting or that the tourists in question spend more.

Will the Minister comment on the competitiveness of the tourism sector? Does he agree that the increase in the cost of energy, particularly gas and electricity, waste disposal and refuse and water charges is affecting its competitiveness? A large number of operators are seriously considering their future. I ask the Minister to comment on the issues I raise, including the competitiveness of tourism here, which has been primarily affected by the imposition of Government stealth taxes.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** There is no denying that tourism is a good news story. The number of visitors has doubled since the 1990s, a development which most people will strongly welcome. I anticipate that this year will be the best year for tourism since the foundation of the State. Growth levels are expected to be very strong. We know that traffic from the United States, whose visitors, as Deputy Deenihan correctly points out, are the highest spenders, has increased by 10%. In general terms, there is clear evidence of substantial growth across every single market, be it North America, Britain or continental Europe. I anticipate that, for the first time, we will break the 7 million mark in annual tourist numbers.

It is true that there is a difficulty in western regions. This is due to short breaks, particularly urban-based breaks, being taken by many visitors as well as a shift from sea to air travel. These are key factors impacting on the spatial spread of tourism and tourism to rural areas, especially those which lack direct access by air and sea, and

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

they have contributed to a decline in nights spent in tourism regions along the western seaboard.

As I indicated, a rejuvenated, integrated marketing approach combined with enhanced air travel has led to a reversal of this trend in western regions, with the number of overseas visitors nights and holiday nights increasing in 2005 and delivering the highest recorded number of bed nights in the past five years.

It is true that the number of visitors touring by car has declined. For example, in 2005, 42% of all holiday makers used a car while on this island. This figure increases to 45% when confined to the North American market. There has, however, been a significant decline of 22% in the number of visitors bringing a car to Ireland, while the number of cars hired has increased by 2%. The decline in the use of cars by visitors can be attributed to a number of factors, including frequent and cheap air access, a decrease in the length of stay and an increase in the number of city breaks. Incidentally, the decrease in length of stay is a trend evident across Europe.

### Other Questions.

#### Tourism Industry.

5. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he has made representations to the Department of Finance to reduce VAT on tourism products in budget 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34875/06]

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** The Deputy will be aware that issues of taxation are a matter for the Minister for Finance and that I am not at liberty to discuss the possible contents of the next budget.

Ireland has a distinct model of economic development. A key part of this model is a low direct tax take on income which is balanced by a higher tax take on consumption. This approach has proven very successful and I would be slow to advocate that we move away from it. For our overseas visitors, however, there is a different perspective. They pay VAT and excise duties on items consumed here but do not have the benefit of the lower direct taxes. We are conscious of this, particularly given the competitiveness challenge facing tourism in the recent past. For this reason, my Department maintains an active dialogue with the Department of Finance on certain budgetary fiscal issues bearing on the costs of tourist consumption.

In the previous budget, I am pleased to note there was no increase in the VAT and excise lines that impact on tourism. This is a benign outcome on the broad tourism front. On a narrower front, there are a few fiscal issues that we continue to

pursue with the Department of Finance, one of which is the subject of a separate question later. All Ministers responsible for specific economic sectors would probably wish to improve the fiscal position of their sectors but, in the heel of the hunt, every budget has to strike a balance between a wide variety of different needs and priorities, of which tourism is only one.

Having said that, we should bear in mind that our tourism companies pay low rates of corporation tax, their employees pay relatively low rates of income tax, our hotels have benefited from generous tax incentives and this year's Exchequer allocation for tourism services is at an all-time high.

**Mr. Deenihan:** The Minister did not respond to my question on competitiveness in his previous response. The VAT rate is putting pressure on the competitiveness of our tourism industry. Our VAT rate of 13.5% on both accommodation and food is one of the highest in Europe. In Spain the rate is 7% on accommodation and food, in Portugal it is 5% on accommodation, in Greece it is 8% and in France it is 5.5% on accommodation. Throughout Europe the average rate is 10% on accommodation and food.

Excise duty on wine is also forcing up prices here. The excise duty on a bottle of table wine, for example, is €2.50. In Portugal, Spain and Greece, our main competitors, it is nil while in France it is 3c. The duty on a bottle of sparkling wine is €4.10 in Ireland while in France it is 6c. Our VAT and excise duty rates are making Irish tourism less competitive. I appeal to the Minister to make a special case to the Department of Finance to consider reducing them to some extent in the forthcoming budget.

The Minister referred to business tourism. I urge the Minister to make a special case for allowing people who come to this country for conferences to get a refund of VAT on their return. If people attend a conference in Belfast, for example, they will get a refund of VAT paid. Promoting business tourism in this country is at a major disadvantage because there is no refund scheme available for business tourists.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** Recently, I launched the review of the North American market. The survey was comprehensive and established that visitors to Ireland are generally happy with accommodation prices. Only 10% complained about accommodation prices. According to the review, the three issues about which people complained most were eating out in restaurants, golf and car hire. However, while people complained about Ireland's competitiveness in those areas, it is interesting to note that when comparing Ireland with other destinations, their complaints were not as robust. They understand that while Ireland has become more expensive, it is not fair to say it has



become more expensive than many other similar destinations.

Ireland will never be a low cost mass destination; it never was. Our product is for a more discerning, sophisticated customer and that has been the tradition. Nonetheless, the competitiveness issue is important and must be watched carefully. One in seven holidaymakers remains critical of Ireland's value for money and that negative trend has continued for the past few years. This relatively critical view of value for money is also reflected in how overseas tourists see Irish prices compared to prices in their own countries, with 16% of holidaymakers in 2005 considering Irish prices to be higher than expected. However, holidaymakers are less critical when comparing prices in Ireland with those of other competing destinations. Accommodation does particularly well in that regard.

It is important that everybody in the industry understands the need to try to keep prices down in so far as possible. It is not possible to discuss what will be in the budget. However, I have been in discussions with the Minister for Finance for some time with regard to business tourism. He has been examining whether it would be possible to do something about VAT for business tourists. The existence of VAT on conference business, overnight stays and so forth puts us at a disadvantage in comparison with some of our competitors. In that context, the building of the new national conference centre will be an enormous boost, particularly for Dublin. I anticipate that it will attract an additional 30,000 business visitors each year, which will be worth €30 million to €50 million to the Dublin economy.

It is particularly important that prior to the completion of the conference centre, at the latest, we should resolve the issue of VAT on business-related visits. Naturally, I wish the matter would be resolved earlier rather than later. We are having discussions in that respect.

**Mr. Wall:** Last week a concert was held in Dublin and the hotels racked up their prices for it. One hotel that I have frequented on a number of occasions was charging €195 for a single room. It is unthinkable that a hotel would increase the price of a room to that extent. The price was not negotiable. We are supposed to be competitive in this sector. If a business person comes to this city, seeks overnight accommodation and is confronted with that type of cost, it is hard to understand how the Minister can say accommodation is not an issue. We discussed the racking up of hotel prices with the Minister previously. Why is a mechanism not put in place to deter that practice, in the interests of tourism and business-related visits?

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** Registered hotels are obliged to notify the maximum rack rent they will charge for the following season to Fáilte Ireland. They are prohibited from charging above that

rack rent. The difficulty highlighted by Deputy Wall relates to hotels which for a long period of the year charge X amount and suddenly increase their price to X plus Y, up to the maximum amount of the rack rent which they have notified to Fáilte Ireland. Invariably this is done when demand is highest. It is a practice of which I disapprove but the hotels are legally entitled to do it, having notified the maximum rack rent. They are not entitled to exceed the maximum rack rent.

The reason visitors to the country have little complaint about the cost of accommodation overall is the variety of accommodation available. There is a choice of really good accommodation at reasonable rates throughout the country. This is appreciated by most people. Nonetheless, I accept Deputy Wall's point that there have been times, and it continues as a practice, where rates are driven up unreasonably because demand is high. It is part of the market.

**Mr. Wall:** Is the rack rent a percentage increase that can be imposed as long as the hotels notify Fáilte Ireland?

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** The hotel is entitled to notify the maximum rack rent and sets the rack rent itself.

#### **Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund.**

6. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the annual administration costs for Horse Racing Ireland and Bord na gCon; if he will provide these figures as a proportion of the annual fund for the dog and horse racing industries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34858/06]

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** The horse and greyhound racing fund was established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act 2001 for the purpose of giving support to both racing industries. In accordance with the provisions of the Act, 80% and 20% of the moneys paid into the fund each year are distributed between Horse Racing Ireland and Bord na gCon, respectively. In 2005, the total allocation from the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund was €68.35 million, of which Horse Racing Ireland received €54.68 million and Bord na gCon received €13.67 million. I have been informed by Horse Racing Ireland that its 2005 administration costs were €5.25 million, or 9.6% of its allocation from the fund. Bord na gCon has informed me that its 2005 administration costs were €3.28 million, or 24% of its allocation from the fund. For the purposes of clarification, administration costs are taken as including staff wages and salaries and other contiguous expenditure relating to the performance of the staff functions of the organisations.

**Mr. Gogarty:** As the Minister is aware, I have tabled similar questions on previous occasions in



[Mr. Gogarty.]

respect of the horse and greyhound racing fund. In light of the fact that the administration costs of these bodies, particularly those of Horse Racing Ireland, are only a small proportion of the overall fund, does the Minister agree, assuming Fianna Fáil is returned to Government, which is by no means certain, there is a case for abolishing the fund in 2008? The amount of funding going to the horse and greyhound racing sectors is a real abomination because there are numerous small sporting groups that are crying out for funds. Would it not be better to reintroduce a tax on betting which could fund the horse and greyhound racing industries? Bookies make so much money out of gambling on these two sports they would be well able to fund them properly and ensure that they survive. Does the Minister agree that those who actively participate in sport would be better beneficiaries of this money than already profitable industries?

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** We must accept that horse and greyhound racing are not just sports, they are industries and they support, directly and indirectly, approximately 15,500 people.

**Mr. Gogarty:** Then responsibility for them should be transferred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** The Irish horseracing industry has the most successful record internationally of any sport in which we are involved. This has been proved at various race meetings across the globe. We also have an enviable greyhound industry; I would venture to say that it is the finest in the world.

When an examination of the horseracing industry was undertaken, it was established that the thoroughbred breeding industry makes a gross contribution to the economy of €330 million per annum and pays tax of in the region of €37.5 million. Ireland is Europe's largest producer of thoroughbred foals and accounts for 42% of total output. It is the third largest producer in the world behind only the USA and Australia.

The horse and greyhound racing fund, which the Government put in place in 2001, is one of the reasons we are so successful in horseracing and greyhound racing. Under the provisions of the fund, the excise duty collected from high street shops was ring-fenced for the industries. The fund has been a resounding success.

Deputy Gogarty, in terms of the way he phrases his questions, and others who are critical of the industries concerned forget completely their economic contribution. For example, independent economic studies have put the value of the Galway and Punchestown festivals to their local economies at €60 million and €43 million, respectively. Racing attracts approximately 70,000 visitors to this country each year. The total value of Irish bloodstock sales last year was

approximately €250 million, all of which, as with any other agricultural activity, is fully taxable. In the breeding industry alone, employment is estimated at 2,400 in the stallion sector and 2,300 in the brood mare sector.

These indigenous industries deserve the support of the Government. I emphatically disagree with any suggestion that the horse and greyhound fund should be discontinued after 2008. If it is discontinued after that date and if there is a reduction in support for the industries concerned as a result, we would be under-investing in indigenous industries which, for the most part, are located in rural areas where it can be quite difficult to find alternative employment. I sincerely and unashamedly hope that the fund will be renewed after 2008 so that we can continue to develop these indigenous industries, both for those involved in them and for the glorification of Irish sport.

**Mr. Gogarty:** Encouraging the development of a healthy society would be far more profitable.

### Drugs in Sport.

7. **Mr. M. Higgins** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his attention has been drawn to recent suspensions handed down to Irish athletes by the Irish sport anti-doping disciplinary panel; his views on whether there is reason to be concerned at levels of doping among Irish athletes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34809/06]

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** Ireland's national anti-doping programme is administered by the Irish Sports Council, which is the statutory body responsible for the promotion and development of sport in Ireland. The programme, which was introduced in 1999, provides a high quality service which achieves its objectives of providing a fair and ethical sporting environment in Ireland through three primary approaches, namely, testing, education and research. The council carries out its anti-doping functions in accordance with strict, confidential procedures that are in line with the highest standards and in compliance with the World Anti-Doping Agency's code. In line with these stringent rules, I am not informed or consulted in any way in respect of any aspect of individual dope tests or their outcomes.

All top level athletes in Ireland are included in the testing pool. They are aware that they are liable for testing under the comprehensive Irish programme and are also aware of their responsibilities to their international federations. I am satisfied that there is a significant deterrent effect in operation and that athletes are aware fully of the dangers and risks involved in doping. The council, in operating a programme that aims to keep Irish sport entirely free from drugs, has, year by year, set itself challenging targets in order

to be seen to be operating at top international standards.

I have been informed by the Irish Sports Council that the rate of adverse analytical findings in Ireland is in line with international norms. There were two suspensions in 2005 due to adverse analytical findings emanating from the Irish anti-doping programme. One was handed down by an international sports federation and the other by the Irish anti-doping disciplinary panel. The latter related to an overseas player playing in Ireland. The suspension handed down by the panel was for a period of two months. To date in 2006, the panel has handed down one suspension. This was for a "whereabouts" violation and the athlete was suspended for a period of three months.

I am satisfied that our country's anti-doping programme is one of the finest in the world. This is acknowledged by the World Anti-Doping Agency, which has used the Irish programme as a model for other countries to follow.

As Minister responsible for sport, I have continually and consistently supported the Irish Sport Council's work in combating doping in sport. While the moral argument on doping is not in doubt and the practice of doping is regularly exposed, there is a need for sustained vigilance. The council ensures that there is no complacency in Ireland by operating an excellent anti-doping programme, which is recognised internationally as an outstanding model of its type.

**Mr. Wall:** Has agreement been reached with the GAA, the IRFU and the FAI in respect of the anti-doping guidelines laid down by the Irish Sports Council? I agree with the Minister's assertion that the number of athletes who have committed doping offences is minute. However, we must continue to be vigilant. Have the various problems relating to the three national organisations to which I refer been resolved and are the sports administered by those organisations subject to anti-doping laws in the same way as other sports?

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** Despite earlier difficulties, I am satisfied that we have achieved a degree of co-operation in respect of our doping laws and rules from sporting organisations throughout the country. This is best evidenced by the number of tests that have taken place in the past year. In 2005, 962 tests, an increase of 44 on the figure for 2004, were carried out. These included 147 user-pay tests. Out-of-competition tests accounted for 59% of testing under the national programme. A total of 38 sports were subject to testing and 76 tests took place overseas. The number of tests is high by international standards. The number carried out in 2005 demonstrates the success and comprehensive nature of the programme.

The programme successfully identifies those who use prohibited substances and reassures us that the vast majority do not use them. I am satis-

fied that we are well on the way towards achieving the kind of policing that might ultimately eliminate drugs in sport in Ireland.

### **Greyhound Racing Industry.**

**8. Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will support the establishment of one greyhound racing body for the whole island following the St. Andrews Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34867/06]

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** In June this year, I met with Ms Maria Eagle, the Northern Ireland Minister with responsibility for culture, arts and leisure, to discuss a number of issues common to both Departments, including pursuing opportunities for all-island co-operation in the development of the horse and greyhound racing sectors. Previous meetings have also been held at both official and ministerial level in recent years with both the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in Northern Ireland.

Several difficulties have been identified with regard to an all-island approach to racing. For instance, there is no central government role or funding system for greyhound racing in Northern Ireland and responsibility for horse racing spans across a number of Departments. However, my officials will continue to discuss the issues involved with their Northern Ireland counterparts in order to explore the potential for all-island co-ordination in the development of the horse and greyhound racing sectors. In that context, a successful outcome to the current political developments would be beneficial in moving on with the agenda.

**Mr. Deenihan:** In view of the fact that a significant number of greyhound owners and trainers come on a nightly basis from Northern Ireland to the tracks in the Republic to race their dogs, there surely must be a strong case in the new political climate for the establishment of an all-island greyhound racing body. There is currently just one track in Northern Ireland at the Brandywell and that may close in the future because of plans to build a new stadium without a greyhound racing track. That would leave the people of Northern Ireland without any racing track. A number of enthusiasts are leaving the industry in Northern Ireland because of the long distances they must travel. It is about 100 miles from Belfast to Lifford and about 60 miles from Belfast to Dundalk. Approximately 15% of the prize money offered by tracks in the Republic goes to the North.

From the point of view of regulation and control, it would be very important to have just one racing board. Is the Minister aware that in the blueprint for the development of the greyhound sector in the UK for the period 2005-10, the Brit-

[Mr. Deenihan.]

ish Greyhound Racing Board does not even mention Northern Ireland? Currently, nobody is really responsible for the greyhound industry in Northern Ireland and it is one of the areas in which great advances could be made if an all-Ireland board existed.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** When I met the Minister I explained to her that the greyhound racing sector in Northern Ireland was facing a number of hurdles, if I may be forgiven the pun. I suggested to her that because there was a division of responsibility for horseracing across a number of Departments and a general lack of funding, there could be no proper development of greyhound racing in the North.

I sympathise with Deputy Deenihan's view that there is a need for one authority. Bord na gCon believes that there is merit in considering a 32 county approach to greyhound racing and the board is well positioned to extend its regulatory responsibility to Northern Ireland. However, the industry in the North has not received any financial support from the off-course bookmakers' market or from central government. It is critical that the issue of funding for the sport in Northern Ireland be addressed prior to any move on an all-Ireland greyhound racing authority. Legislative changes would also be required and the 1958 Act and subsequent Acts would have to be amended to reflect any change in scope and responsibilities.

Of the three tracks in Northern Ireland, two are currently operational and are regulated by the Irish Coursing Club without any legislative basis, but with the consent of the track owners.

**Mr. Deenihan:** Only one of those tracks is operational.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** I understand that two of them are operational.

**Mr. Deenihan:** The track in Ballyskeagh is closed.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** While Bord na gCon's laboratory testing services are available to them, the uptake thus far has been disappointing. It is true that a significant number of dogs from the North race in the South and they pick up approximately 15% of the prize money every year. The breeding of greyhounds is regulated by the Irish Coursing Club for all of Ireland, although there has been a lack of co-ordination following the introduction of artificial insemination in the North, which remains unregulated in the South.

We would generally favour tracks in the North being subjected to the same standard of regulation as those in this State. I would like to see the industry being developed in the North and treated equally, subject to the inclusion of income streams derived in the North, or the tote, to fund that industry.

**Mr. Deenihan:** In view of the fact that a major development fund will be created if the Assembly is re-established, would consideration be given to building a stadium in Belfast similar to that which we have in Shelbourne Park, with the co-operation of both Governments? Due to the commitment to funding by the British Government to major projects in the North, this stadium could be one such possibility.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** If the political mechanisms are put in place in the North, it should be possible for us to have discussions with the new Northern Ireland Executive about developing the horse and greyhound racing industry in Northern Ireland. Tourism Ireland has proved to be a really important template in this respect as it has been very successful. As a Kerryman from the deep south, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to have an excuse to visit the North more often. If a high class greyhound stadium existed there, I am sure it would act as a magnet to the Deputy as well.

**Mr. Wall:** Has a door been left open since the meetings between the Minister and the Northern Ireland Minister? The Minister pointed out the problems that existed for horseracing, with responsibility being delegated across different Departments. The Minister also said that if the Executive reconvenes, then something can be done. Must we await further developments before the Minister in Northern Ireland gets back to the Minister here? Do we have to accept that no further progress will be made in the foreseeable future?

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** We have been trying to develop the issue. The Secretary General of my Department, Mr. Phil Furlong, had a recent meeting with Mr. Pat Toal of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland on the possibility of identifying structures which could be created to achieve a joint approach through horse and greyhound racing. We are continuing with our discussions, but the current stalemate in the political arena has prevented any major initiative. If political movement occurred, it would make it far easier for us to develop the industry jointly in the North.

I am not for one moment suggesting that we would take over the sports there. All I am asking for is a joint approach.

#### **Decentralisation Programme.**

9. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the anticipated date for the provision of permanent accommodation for his Department in Killarney, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34872/06]

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** As the Deputy is aware, my Department was designated by the decentralisation implementation group as one of the "early



mover” Departments. The tender process for the permanent building was completed some months ago and OPW selected the preferred bidder — PJ Hegarty & Sons. Planning permission has been granted. I am advised by the OPW that construction of the new building is expected to commence before the end of the year and the anticipated completion date is early 2008.

In the meantime, an advance group of 42 staff relocated to temporary accommodation at Fossa, Killarney, in September. The temporary premises is capable of accommodating up to 70 staff and following a bedding down period, consideration will be given to transferring further units of my Department on a phased basis, ultimately leading to the relocation of 130 staff to the permanent accommodation in early 2008.

**Mr. Deenihan:** Is the Minister satisfied with the quality of the current accommodation? Will he confirm whether there is a canteen on the premises and other facilities such as showering facilities? Has he received any inquiries from the staff regarding the improvement of facilities at the Rosenbluth location?

**Mr. O’Donoghue:** I am not familiar with the detail of the accommodation available. All I know is that it is very comfortable and very fit for the purpose required by the Department. I have received no complaint.

#### National Concert Hall.

10. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the extension to the National Concert Hall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34865/06]

**Mr. O’Donoghue:** On Thursday 13 April 2006, I announced that the Government had designated the Earlsfort Terrace site as the location of the new National Concert Hall. The Government also conveyed approval to finalise the purchase of the site from the UCD authorities as soon as possible.

Contracts for the purchase of the interest of University College Dublin in the Earlsfort Terrace site were executed on 20 September 2006. As UCD will be vacating the site on a phased basis, a leaseback arrangement will be put in place until late 2007, by which time the college will have fully vacated the premises.

The procurement of a new National Concert Hall will be progressed on a public private partnership basis, in accordance with the guidelines on public capital projects, subject to the Minister for Finance and I being satisfied with the outcome of an evaluation of the economic benefits of the project. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the evaluation has been completed and is being considered by officials in my Department and in the Department of Finance. Work on finalising the PPP paperwork and process is continuing.

I have asked my Department to establish a steering committee to oversee the redevelopment of the National Concert Hall and requested the Secretary General of my Department to chair this committee.

**Mr. Deenihan:** The Minister accepted that the PPP process with regard to the national conference centre was very complicated and cumbersome. Does he therefore regard a PPP as the best option for the National Concert Hall? I understand the Abbey Theatre will not go through the process.

This is an ideal opportunity to accommodate the Royal Irish Academy of Music in the new building arrangements in the concert hall. In the context of new space being provided, will he give consideration, in consultation with the directors of the National Concert Hall and the Royal Irish Academy of Music, to provision being made to relocate the academy from its current site to the concert hall site at Earlsfort Terrace?

I am sure the Minister is familiar with the academy’s accommodation which requires major upgrading and more space. I ask the Minister to consider the relocation of the academy because of the space available at the Earlsfort Terrace site and the positive synergy that could take place between the concert hall and the academy.

**Mr. O’Donoghue:** I agree with Deputy Deenihan that the PPP process is a complex one and this proved to be the case with regard to the national conference centre. We are reaching the finishing line in so far as the national conference centre is concerned. Subject to certain details being agreed, it may well be possible to go on site in the not too distant future with a view to constructing the new national conference centre — at least, that is my hope.

My Department officials have learned a considerable amount about PPPs since that process started. They are very well versed in how difficult and complex the process is and this experience will stand them to good stead when they are contemplating the various stages which must be undergone in connection with the construction of the new National Concert Hall.

We have not abandoned the PPP process for the Abbey Theatre. We have decided to divorce or segregate the design concept from the PPP so that we can have an international competition which will hopefully see a result next summer. We will then proceed to the PPP. The reason I wanted an independent design for the Abbey Theatre is because it is to be a signature building for Dublin. I have often stated that despite the fact we have one of the most creative and imaginative generations ever of Irish people, there is no piece of public architecture to give expression to that creativity and imagination. This will fill that gap.

The National Concert Hall is different because it is sited at Earlsfort Terrace which is an existing



[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

and listed building. I believe that a PPP will be appropriate in this case and that the design process which is built into the PPP will not damage the prospects of us having a very fine building because the building is already a very fine one.

There are no plans to accommodate the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Earlsfort Terrace. I assume this could be discussed in the context of there being a 2,000-seat hall and a smaller hall with a capacity of approximately 500, but I am not privy to any such discussions.

**Mr. Deenihan:** I ask the Minister to make inquiries and speak to his officials because there is a marvellous opportunity now for this type of development. Many international artists perform in the National Concert Hall. It would provide an opportunity for the artists and students to interact. The students would have the opportunity to perform on a regular basis in the new spaces to be created in the concert hall. This would be a unique opportunity to do something very special for music in this country.

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** Deputy Deenihan will be aware that it is not possible for me to give any commitment because it is a matter for the board of the National Concert Hall. However, I will bring his comments to the attention of the chairperson and members of the board of the National Concert Hall and communicate their views to the Deputy.

### **Sports Capital Programme.**

11. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on whether Ireland currently lags behind other countries in regard to sporting facilities, coaching and expertise that are available to elite athletes; his further views on whether this is hampering the ability of athletes here to compete at international level; the efforts he is making to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34821/06]

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** Since 1998, €900 million has been expended on sport both in the development of sports facilities and in funding sports programmes, which include supports for funding our elite sportspersons. This funding has ensured that Ireland no longer lags behind other countries in the facilities and supports provided for elite athletes. The ongoing significant investment in sport by the Government will ensure the facilities and supports required by our elite sportspersons will continue to be enhanced.

Following Government approval in July together with the Taoiseach I launched the Irish Institute of Sport and announced the appointment of its executive chairman to deliver optimal support services for Olympic and Paralympic athletes and sports. The institute will address such issues as strength and conditioning, psychology, performance analysis, sports medicine and sports

injury management, recruitment of elite coaches and athlete lifestyle support.

In the lead-up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Beijing in 2008, the institute will focus its support on 14 focus sports and approximately 90 Olympic and Paralympic athletes who are currently graded as either contracted world class or international class under the Irish Sports Council's international carding scheme. In line with the recommendations of the 2005 Athens review, the ISC undertook a full review of the international carding scheme in 2005, which includes annual funding for athletes, and a new scheme is in operation since January 2006.

The Government-approved proposals for the restructuring of the support structures of Irish elite sport will also see the National Coaching and Training Centre, based at the University of Limerick, reconstituted as a new entity called Coaching Ireland, with a specific remit focussing on coach development and education. Quality coaching is essential to the development of sport at every level. The agency and the facilities based at the University of Limerick will have a key role in the preparation of our elite sportsmen and women as indeed will the other third level universities and colleges which are making increasingly significant contributions to the achievement of sporting excellence.

The Irish Sports Council, whose budget has increased from €13.5 million in 2000 to almost €41 million in 2006, continues to make excellent progress in the delivery of its high performance programme. Arising from the Athens Review 2005, the ISC developed an operational plan which identified key performance indicators, timescales and costings and the roles of the various agencies in supporting Ireland's Olympic and Paralympic preparations for Beijing and London. The plan encompassed elements such as the introduction of targeted sport performance plans including prioritising junior, development and elite athletes; a review of the international carding scheme; proposals for the development of an Irish Institute of Sport; maintaining and enhancing the role of the Olympic and Paralympic performance committees to ensure optimum co-operation in the preparation and performance of the Irish team for the Beijing and London Olympic Games, and the strengthening of the Olympic Council of Ireland's administrative capability. The operational plan is updated on a regular basis with the key agencies to reflect the current status of the recommendations and significant progress has been made to date.

*Additional information not given on the floor of the House.*

Since 1998, €470 million has been provided for the development of sporting facilities at national, regional and local levels. Through this investment my Department is funding the development of a network of top quality facilities around the country designed to meet the training, coaching and

competition needs of our elite competitors in a wide spectrum of sports. Among the major projects which have been supported are the National Aquatic Centre, the National Rowing Centre at Inniscarra, the National Tennis Centre at Glasnevin, the National Boxing Stadium and the National Hockey Stadium at UCD. We intend to continue to develop additional facilities of this nature and the Government's decision to proceed with phase 1 of the sports campus at Abbotstown is further evidence of our commitment to ensuring our sportspersons have available to them facilities in which they can train and compete. The Institute of Sport will be located at the sports campus at Abbotstown, forming an essential part of the new national sports campus. Until the facilities there come on stream the institute will service athletes' needs through existing facilities.

The ISC has established focus sport funding and performance plans have been agreed with targeted Olympic and Paralympic sports. The performance plans focus on sustainable performance and development of junior, developmental and senior squads for 2008, 2012 and 2016. High performance coaching gaps have been identified and key coaching appointments have been made. The ISC has carried out rigorous quarterly monitoring and evaluation of the performance plans.

The ISC also works in partnership with the Olympic Council of Ireland, the Paralympic Council of Ireland, and the relevant Olympic governing bodies of sport in the preparation and participation of Irish competitors at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Significant progress has been made to date in the preparation for Beijing 2008, including the establishment of athletes' commissions and preparation of acclimatisation strategies. The OCI also held a teamship conference for athletes, coaches and support personnel in January 2006 and a second conference is planned for December 2006. The OCI has arranged for multi-sport camps to take place in the University of Limerick in April and November 2007.

I am satisfied there exists a co-ordinated approach to the preparation of our elite sportspersons for participation in international competitions and I am confident this co-ordinated structure will ensure the maximum return for Beijing 2008 and London 2012 and will provide a legacy in high performance sport.

**Mr. Wall:** Has a budget been allocated for Mr. Kelly, the new CEO, to appoint the necessary personnel under his direction? Where sits his committee in relation to the Olympic Council of Ireland and the Irish Sports Council and what interlinkage exists between the three agencies?

**Mr. O'Donoghue:** In 2006 the Government provided €1 million to establish the institute. In 2007, its first full year of operation, the institute will have a budget of €3.5 million.

The London task force is comprised of individuals who have an involvement with the Institute

of Sport and the Irish Sports Council. For example, Mr. Seán Kelly, who is the executive chairman of the Institute of Sport will also sit on the board of the London Olympics task force. A representative of the Irish Sports Council also sits on the London task force. I believe it is Mr. Ozzie Kilkenny, chairperson of the ISC. There is contact between the bodies.

*Written Answers follow Adjournment Debate.*

#### **Adjournment Debate Matters.**

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 21 and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy O'Shea — the urgent need for the State to provide for the treatment of public cancer patients at the Whitfield Clinic, Waterford; (2) Deputy Gogarty — that the Minister ensure the difficulty involving patients receiving continued treatment by a doctor is resolved; (3) Deputy Catherine Murphy — the chaos at locations close to train stations where commuters are attempting to mix modes of transport by driving as close to the station and parking nearby and taking the train onwards. The intention of Irish Rail to introduce parking at their train station car parks in the absence of feeder bus services and proper footpath and cycle provision will make train use less attractive and add to congestion; (4) Deputy Ó Snodaigh — the need for the Minister to put in place greater provisions in the event of fire emergencies; (5) Deputy Broughan — the urgent need for the Minister to ensure the site and campus of the historic Greendale community school, Kilbarrack, Dublin 5, retains its critical educational and community role for local residents; (6) Deputy Costello — the need for the Minister to address the sudden arrival of large quantities of heroin on the drugs market; and (7) Deputy Neville — the Capway Bioenergy Project proposed for Foynes, Co Limerick.

The matters raised by Deputies O'Shea, Gogarty, Neville and Ó Snodaigh have been selected for discussion.

#### **Adjournment Debate.**

#### **Cancer Services in Waterford.**

**Mr. O'Shea:** Approximately 1,000 patients every year from the south-east region must travel either to Dublin or Cork for treatment due to the lack of radiotherapy services at Waterford Regional Hospital. In 2004, some 815 patients were referred from Waterford Regional Hospital to St. Luke's Hospital in Dublin while 209 patients were referred to Cork University Hospital. In 2005, some 721 patients were referred from Waterford Regional Hospital to St.

[Mr. O'Shea.]

Luke's Hospital in Dublin and 205 were referred to Cork University Hospital.

Some of these patients are being referred for short radiotherapy daily sessions but because of the travel involved are forced to stay away from home while undergoing treatment. Some patients are quite ill, requiring either therapeutic or palliative treatment for their cancers. If these patients could be treated within the south-east region the issue of staying away from home and of long harrowing journeys for treatment could be eliminated or very significantly reduced.

The Taoiseach indicated on his visit to the Waterford constituency on Monday, 16 October, at the launch of the new Whitfield Clinic in Butlerstown, that Waterford is to get an integrated satellite centre for radiotherapy services based at Waterford Regional Hospital. However, the date set for this public private partnership project is 2011. By taking the public private partnership route, the people of Waterford and the south east will not have their radiotherapy service for another five years, at the earliest.

Yet, radiotherapy treatment for both public and private patients can be provided in the very near future at the University of Pittsburgh medical centre at the Whitfield cancer centre. The planning permission for Whitfield includes a condition that two linear accelerators, the equipment that provides the service, be installed at the centre. Although the two linear accelerators could be installed by now, only one is in place. However, it has been indicated by the clinic that they will proceed with the installation of the second linear accelerator even in the absence of any arrangement for the funding of public patients.

When he was in Waterford, the Taoiseach said he knew the Whitfield clinic had approached the Health Service Executive in relation to providing radiotherapy services to public patients. However, there is absolutely no indication that funding is going to be provided by the Department of Health and Children for the HSE to fund patients needing radiotherapy at the centre. The Taoiseach also said he understood the clinic and the National Treatment Purchase Fund had entered into discussions with a view to providing treatment for public patients. It is not clear if the Taoiseach's comment refers to radiotherapy. The National Treatment Purchase Fund provides for patients who have been on a public waiting list for three months. This is hardly an appropriate vehicle for cancer patients waiting for radiotherapy service.

As the one who started the campaign for radiotherapy services in Waterford, I am absolutely appalled and find it utterly unacceptable that now, when a solution is at hand to prevent cancer patients having to endure harrowing journeys or unnecessarily being away from home at a time when they need the help and support of their families and friends, the Government is not avail-

ing of this opportunity. The Government parties dither while the most vulnerable sick people continue to suffer. The people of Waterford and the south east will not stand for this.

I demand that the Minister gives an undertaking that immediate steps will be taken to provide radiotherapy for public cancer patients in the south-east region at Whitfield clinic, Waterford. The lack of urgency and commitment on the Government's part is shameful, barbaric and unacceptable. I put it to Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats that failing the public patients of the region on this occasion will probably be the greatest low in the very chequered existence of the Government.

**Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):**

I fully recognise the motivation of Deputy O'Shea in tabling this matter for debate. However, what he is asking the Government to do sits better with the Government's open approach to independent providers than the motion debated in the House this week, which condemned me for encouraging private health provision. I am being asked to procure services for public patients from a private provider, in this case a for-profit organisation. This is a highly respectable organisation but it is a for-profit private hospital. What Deputy O'Shea is suggesting is in total conflict with what he voted for last night and what his party moved in the House this week. I respect Deputy O'Shea's motivation in tabling the matter for discussion.

The Government is committed to making the full range of cancer services available and accessible to cancer patients throughout Ireland. Best outcomes for patients are achieved when all aspects of cancer care, surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy are delivered by multi-disciplinary teams based around major centres.

The HSE is implementing the Government's decision to create a national network of radiation oncology with two centres in Dublin, one in Cork, an integrated satellite service in Waterford and one in Galway, with a satellite in Limerick. We have also now agreed arrangements to have the major centre at Belfast City Hospital offer treatment for patients from Donegal.

Public patients are being treated at a centre in Limerick that was created by the Limerick hospital trust and is being run by the Mater private hospital. The HSE is working closely with that centre so that its services are used productively and fit in with cancer policy and quality guidelines.

There has also been recent contact between the HSE and the University of Pittsburgh medical centre's Whitfield centre to explore the scope and conditions for the procurement of its radiation oncology services. The HSE will comply with relevant procurement and quality guidelines in any contracting for these or, indeed, any other services from private sector providers.



As Deputy O'Shea is aware, I am open to all solutions from the public and private sectors that deliver quality care faster to patients. That is why today I have announced the approval of a capital investment in six new linear accelerators for St. Luke's, St. James's and Beaumont hospitals, in advance of the completion of the radiotherapy PPP.

The HSE has my full support in procuring quality services for patients from private, not-for-profit, independent providers or from the public sector. I share Deputy O'Shea's view that we will be able to procure services at the Whitfield centre for patients from the Waterford region in advance of our investment opening there in 2011.

### Health Services.

**Mr. Gogarty:** The Minister is fully aware that more than 400 medical card patients were told at short notice that they had to change doctors by 1 November 2006. These clients live in Newcastle, Rathcoole, Saggart and Brittas, and as far afield as Clondalkin, Lucan and Tallaght. They have been enjoying a high level of patient care from their doctor for as long as 14 years. After all this time, however, it turns out that Dr. Graham is not qualified to practice as a general practitioner under the GMS scheme. Despite his qualifications as a consultant, EU legislation, as a member of the Minister's staff informed a meeting of recently, prevents him from providing general practitioner services to medical card clients in his own right. I know the "whys" and "wherefores" and I also know that changing EU directives cannot be undertaken at short notice. Sometimes they cannot even be implemented in the long term but I am concerned about patient care. If patient care is truly at the heart of the Department's and the HSE's remit, a solution can and must be found.

I have met many of Dr. Graham's patients who are adamant that they do not wish to transfer to the doctors recommended by the HSE. Instead they want to continue being treated by him as their current GP. They insist they will not allow their medical records to be transferred. Many have personal reasons for this, which I do not wish to go into here, even under Dáil privilege. There are also issues of access and further issues regarding the suitability of the proposed new surgery, which some people have described charitably as a stable. However, the most important reason for wanting to maintain the *status quo* is that hundreds of clients have built up a long-standing relationship with Dr. Graham and they can see no logical reason for that relationship to be torn apart now. They trust their doctor and, for older patients in particular, trust is an important issue.

So far the HSE is not in favour of turning. It has behaved in a negative way. When my office contacted the HSE to get more information on the situation I was fed a cock and bull story. I was

told the reason Dr. Graham would not be working as a medical card GP any more was that he had not applied for the position. As an elected representative, I expect more than to be treated in this manner. The poor treatment of Dr. Graham's patients is the most important issue, however. I urge the Minister to force the HSE to meet Dr. Graham's patients and come up with a workable solution that will acknowledge the situation regarding his continuing practice but will also allow him to continue to work with his medical card clients under whatever terminology and position is appropriate.

At the recent public meeting to which I referred, I highlighted the rapid manner in which the Government was able to introduce legislation when it was found to be illegally charging elderly people for nursing home care. It would be great if the Government applied itself so creatively to the needs of patients within the health service. The buck stops with the Minister. She should use her good offices to ensure that a solution is reached which is agreeable to all and which will allow Dr. Graham to continue providing his important services.

I do not want to hear excuses. The Minister and I share the same constituency. If she wants to use legal terms or say it is a matter for the HSE or that her hands are tied, that is up to her, but, if so, she will have let a lot of patients down. I hope the Minister will have some good news in her reply for our constituents. She should put patients' care first and let the people be treated by someone they know and trust. There are ways around this situation and they need to be explored.

**Ms Harney:** I know the area well and I happen to know the various parties as well. This is the local village where I grew up. This is not a question of Irish law, it concerns an EU directive. If I broke the rules and overruled EU directives, which I am not empowered to do, Deputy Gogarty and his colleagues would be the first to criticise me.

One of the Health Service Executive's functions is to make contractual arrangements with general practitioners to provide services under the GMS medical card scheme. Since 1995, entry to the GMS scheme for general practitioners has been carried out through open competition and interview, following the advertisement of posts in national and medical newspapers. All suitably qualified persons may apply for these positions.

Applicants for GMS GP contracts must satisfy the provisions of EU Directive 93/16/EEC, which stipulates the requirement in respect of vocational training for persons seeking to be considered for such posts throughout the European Union. In accordance with that directive, the arrangements for the recruitment of general practitioners have operated well for over ten years.

The qualifying criteria are well known to all doctors who wish to secure a contract within the



[Ms Harney.]

QMS scheme. Many who do not comply go through the training in order to comply. The arrangements have ensured that a large number of well qualified, highly competent contractors provide modern, comprehensive and high quality services to public patients at primary care level.

The Health Service Executive has advised that the general practitioner providing services to medical card and GP visit card holders in Newcastle resigned in November 2005. While the process to fill the this vacancy was being conducted, a doctor from the area, who had been acting in the capacity of a private assistant to the recently retired GP, was contracted by the HSE in a locum capacity to provide services to the medical card and GP visit card patients. This was clearly an interim arrangement until the permanent post was filled and would have been understood to be so.

The HSE advises that five doctors applied for the post in Newcastle initially but that only one doctor actually attended for interview. The HSE has now completed the recruitment process and, with effect from 1 November 2006, the panel of medical card and GP visit card holders will be assigned to the successful candidate who will provide a GP service at both Rathcoole and Newcastle.

The arrangements to be implemented in Newcastle will bring significant improvements in services to the people of the area. The new doctor will provide clinics from an existing practice initially and within a short period intends establishing a new practice premises near the village centre. He intends to provide a full range of care, including special chronic care clinics, and he will be assisted by a female general practitioner.

### Alternative Energy Projects.

**Mr. Neville:** I welcome the opportunity to raise this important proposal concerning my constituency. It is a proposal to establish a bioenergy production facility at Foynes, County Limerick. The world faces unprecedented energy and environmental challenges and both sectors are inextricably linked. A company named Capway Bioenergy intends to be part of this new system. It commenced operations early in 2005 and, to date, has constructed a pilot research facility for biodiesel production and a laboratory at Shannon, County Clare. It has also developed a skills base in biodiesel technology, operating procedures and quality control systems. In addition, it has developed a core staff whose expertise is transferable to a commercial-scale plant.

Capway Bioenergy proposes to construct a large-scale, state-of-the-art biodiesel processing plant at Foynes Port, County Limerick, that will use Irish raw materials. To this end, the company has submitted an application to the Government under the biofuels and mineral oil tax relief scheme 2 for excise duty relief for 57.1 million

litres, which is 50,000 tonnes of biodiesel per annum.

The raw material of biodiesel is produced from agricultural products and residues. Capway Bioenergy will use Irish-grown rape seed oil and other oils and fats of Irish origin.

*5 o'clock* Towards this end, it signed a provision supply agreement with Dairygold Co-operative and Acorn Independent Merchants Group. Capway Bioenergy has provisional distribution agreements in place with three of Ireland's leading mineral oil distributors, Topaz Energy Products, Maxol Group and Tedcastles Oil Products. Furthermore, Capway has signed provisional supply arrangements with three high profile capital fleets, Roadstone Provisions Limited, STL Logistics and Pallas Foods.

In tandem with bolstering demand for native agricultural products, the project will generate high quality employment during construction and operations phases. Up to 80 jobs will be created during construction and direct employment during the operational phase will comprise more than 30 full-time positions. Indirect benefits will also be significant. I need not remind the Minister that my constituency has been devastated by three closures over the past 18 months which resulted in 1,000 job losses. This is an opportunity to reverse those losses and could represent the start of an exciting period for the development of bioenergy on the Shannon Estuary.

When fully operational, the project will offer net savings of approximately 160,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per annum. Capway Bioenergy has selected a site for the biodiesel site at Foynes port on the basis that it supplies easy access for native and imported raw materials and an efficient distribution route to the Irish market. It is intended that the processing plant will comprise two 50,000 tonne per annum modules, with construction of the first module to commence as early as possible. It will take two years from the date of the granting of excise duty relief before the first module becomes operational and the construction project cannot commence until relief is formally granted. In August, Capway lodged an application for excise duty relief with the renewable and alternative energy division of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

This project merits support because, by improving energy sustainability, increasing the sustainability of the transport system, addressing the decline in the agricultural sector, bolstering and diversifying the rural economy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it will address many of the challenges currently facing Ireland. It would also be an excellent partner for the miscanthus experiment currently being conducted in Adare. The challenge of creating an environmentally sustainable and indigenous energy supply for Ireland's transport sector may seem insurmountable and sustainability is unlikely to be achieved in a single step. However it can be achieved

through a series of small steps — through evolution rather than revolution. Capway Bionergy is committed to making a positive step towards that goal, so I urge the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources to allow Capway Bionergy to ameliorate the difficulties which have arisen in my constituency over the past 18 months.

**Ms Harney:** I propose to take this Adjournment matter on behalf of the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. A number of initiatives are in place to support the development of a biofuels sector in Ireland. In 2005, the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources introduced a pilot mineral oil tax relief scheme for biofuels which has awarded excise relief to eight projects. As a result of the scheme, 16 million litres of biofuels will be placed on the Irish transport market by next year.

Building on the success of this scheme, the Minister launched the second biofuels mineral oil tax relief scheme in July 2006. The new scheme will be rolled out between this year and 2010 at a cost of over €200 million and will enable Ireland to reach a target of 2% market penetration of biofuels by 2008. When fully operational, the relief is expected to support the use and production of some 163 million litres of biofuels each year. The scheme was launched on 25 July and had a closing date of 28 August. Approximately 100 applications have been received across the four categories covered by the scheme. An assessment panel comprising officials from the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Sustainable Energy Ireland and Enterprise Ireland has been convened and is currently in the process of assessing the applications received. The promoters of the project to which Deputy Neville referred have applied for excise relief under the scheme. Reflecting the requirements of openness, transparency and equal treatment of all applicants in the competition, and given that the deliberative process is ongoing, the Minister is not in a position to comment on or discuss the details of any application under the scheme. I do not therefore propose to discuss the details of the project in question.

The Government is firmly committed to the development of an Irish biofuels market and to the increased development of bioenergy generally in Ireland. In July, the Minister established a new ministerial taskforce on bioenergy as part of the ongoing policy to increase the share of indigenous renewable energy in the Irish heating, electricity and transport markets. The taskforce's members include the Tánaiste and the Ministers for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Finance, Agriculture and Food, Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Transport and Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Taoiseach's office is also represented. The primary objective of the taskforce is to draw up a

cohesive national bioenergy strategy by the end of the year. This strategy will also take account of EU developments and the views of stakeholders. The taskforce is being supported in its work by a senior officials' group representing the Departments concerned. Consideration of options to further increase market penetration of biofuels is a critical element of the work of the ministerial taskforce. The Green Paper on energy, which was published by the Minister, Deputy Noel Dempsey, last month, suggests a target of 5.75% market penetration of biofuels in Ireland by 2010 and the taskforce is considering the options available to Government in achieving such a target.

### **Fire Emergency Provisions.**

**Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** I wish to speak on the urgent need to put in place better provisions for dealing with a fire emergency such as occurred last night in a hostel in the north inner city. Calls have been made to provide additional resources to the fire brigade services in Dublin and throughout Ireland. In addition, a proper system of emergency planning is needed so that there will not be a recurrence of the disgraceful events in which the people rescued from the fire were accommodated in Mountjoy Prison. If a flight is delayed, passengers have the luxury of being accommodated in a hotel, yet one would appear to have to spend time in Mountjoy Prison in the event of a fire emergency. Several community halls are located in the inner city, as well as a number of hotels and hostels, which would be more appropriate for people who have just suffered the trauma of having escaped from a fire.

I congratulate Dublin Fire Brigade on its heroic efforts last night and, thankfully, nobody was seriously injured, although five people were hospitalised for smoke inhalation. An urgent need exists for a proper fire risk assessment to be conducted in Dublin. No such assessment has been carried out over the past 20 years. In some instances, people are crammed into hostels that resemble the Dublin tenements of yore. As is clear from last night's events and recent reports on RTE, some of these hostels represent grave fire risks and should be closed immediately. The 25th anniversary of the Stardust tragedy has just passed. While I hope such a disaster will never again be visited upon Ireland, it could happen if we do not invest in fire prevention or conduct a proper risk assessment in Dublin. The city has grown substantially over the past 20 years, so an assessment is needed. Comparisons should be made with the approaches taken in other cities. There is an immediate need for additional fire brigade ambulances. We have only 11 fire brigade ambulances, the same number as for the past 20 years even though emergency calls to the 999 number have increased from 26,000 per annum to 80,000. It is a tribute to the fire brigade and the emergency staff who deal with these calls that

[Aengus Ó Snodaigh.]

they have managed to keep going without a tragedy. If this city had another disaster last night, we would have suffered greater consequences because our emergency services would have been stretched to the limit. In 2004 the fire brigade service attended to more than 10,000 fires and more than 2,000 road traffic accidents, and there were nearly 70,000 calls to the 999 number, which indicates the level of work being done. The service needs to be properly resourced.

The Government needs to provide proper resources to ensure that we address longer-term planning for responding to fires and other major emergencies on an all-Ireland basis. We need to resource properly the fire brigade and ambulance service throughout the country.

**Ms Harney:** I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. I am responding on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche. I would like to place on record my gratitude and that of the Government to the members of the fire service for their work last night and for continuing to safeguard the community on a daily basis. I also extend my sympathies to those caught up in the fire and wish them well in their recovery.

I understand that last night's fire occurred in private rented accommodation which was formerly a hostel. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government issued guidance, addressed to local authorities and to

property owners and occupiers alike, with a view to reducing fire risk in apartments and hostels. In 1994 the Department published Guide to Fire Safety in Flats, Bedsitters and Apartments. In 1998 the Department published Fire Safety in Hostels.

Dublin City Council homeless services and the homeless persons unit, which is operated on a 24-hour basis by Health Service Executive community welfare officers on an agency basis for the city council, are available at all times to assist persons who may face a crisis regarding their housing accommodation.

With regard to the present case, the Homeless Agency in Dublin has advised the Department that the landlord has 24 additional apartments in the area, which will be used to accommodate residents. The community welfare officer in the North Strand and Dublin City Council have organised 14 beds in private bed and breakfast accommodation in Fairview and an additional 12 beds in a nearby hotel. Interpreters have also been organised to work with the residents to ensure that they are supported and that they understand the situation.

I again thank the frontline services for their speedy and effective response to last night's incident, which minimised more serious consequences to the victims. A more comprehensive response is now being provided by the housing and other social agencies.

The Dáil adjourned at 5.15 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 1 November 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 11, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Arts Funding.

12. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when he expects applications will be accepted for funding under the access and capital projects relating to arts projects; the projects that have been funded by county in 2006; if those areas that have experienced rapid population growth where community facilities are deficient will receive priority in the 2007 allocations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34703/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** On 24th July last, I announced a new scheme to support investment in arts and culture infrastructure. This new scheme, called ACCESS II, or the Arts and Culture Enhancement Support Scheme II, will run from 2007 to 2009. The scheme is intended to provide a further impetus to the refurbishment and development of arts and culture facilities — thereby enhancing the quality of life for our citizens. While the intention is to prioritise the enhancement and maintenance of existing facilities, provision is made to support new projects under the terms of the scheme.

This scheme is a successor to the highly successful ACCESS scheme, introduced in August 2001, which allocated €45.71m to the promoters of 44 projects.

Applications under ACCESS II will be accepted until 17th November 2006 and the selection of projects will be undertaken in close collaboration with the Arts Council. An independent Committee will assess project proposals received and will make recommendations to me for consideration. Obviously, the period of assessment will depend on the number of applications received. I hope, however, to be in a position to

announce the successful applicants early next year.

Considerations will include the extent to which the applicant projects:

- Improve and extend access to, or participation in, the arts within the catchment area of the relevant facility;
- Address a gap in provision, or address a proven need, within the relevant area;
- Are compatible with the National Spatial Strategy, or with objectives of other Government policies, including the Arts Council's strategy, 'Partnership for Arts'.

On 24th August last, I also announced additional investment of €16.4 million in the arts and culture sector. This is divided between the Arts Council, the Irish Film Board and theatre and arts organisations throughout the country. This allocation was as a direct result of savings that have been made in my Department. A total of 29 arts and cultural projects will benefit from the funding which will enable them to proceed with refurbishment, renovation and repair works, to purchase equipment, fixtures and fittings and to improve access.

I will provide the Deputy with a listing of these 29 projects, broken down on a county basis, for her information.

### Film Industry Development.

13. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the fact that no large scale Hollywood feature film has located here since 2003; and his further views on whether there must be a review of the structure and nature of State support for film in order to allow Ireland to compete in the international film market and to promote domestically produced films. [34805/06]



31. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the efforts being made to attract international filmmakers to Ireland to shoot and produce their films here; if he has met with the new head of the Irish Film Board's US office in Los Angeles to discuss this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34804/06]

35. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his plans for the extension of Section 481 beyond 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34873/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 13, 31 and 35 together.

Primary responsibility for the support and promotion of film-making in Ireland in respect of both the indigenous sector and inward productions is a matter for the Irish Film Board. This agency is funded through my Department and is independent of the Department in its operations.

Funding from my Department to the Board in 2006 amounts to €19.426m, including an additional €2.3m. allocated in recent months. In further recognition of the importance of Ireland as a film location, I was pleased to note the recent opening by the Board of an office in Los Angeles and the appointment of a US Film Commissioner. This Film Commissioner will establish closer contacts with the leading studios in their homebase, and so help to further improve co-ordination of efforts to secure future inward productions to Ireland. Such Board appointments are a matter for that agency and I will meet the new appointee in the course of business.

Attracting major international productions to the State is a particularly complex business, subject, as it is, to the dynamics of international competition, including new and enhanced incentives; lower cost structures and exchange rates.

There is a constant need to react to changing circumstances, be it in the type of projects being developed, the audiences to be reached, or the markets to be targeted. The evidence of a capacity to adapt can be seen in the Short Film Oscar for "Six Shooter" and the Palme d'Or for "THE WIND THAT SHAKES THE BARLEY" at the Cannes Film Festival.

My Department's direct function in supporting the film sector relates to the administration of elements of the Section 481 scheme. In addition to the increased supports granted to the Irish Film Board, the Government has reacted to the changing dynamics with major improvements to the Section 481 scheme, the most recent being in the Finance Act 2006. These changes lifted the maximum amount of a film budget that can be raised from €15m. to €35m. and increased the maximum percentage of a project's budget which can be raised from between 55%-66% to 80%. These changes represented the most significant improvements ever in the scheme and were

designed to increase Ireland's attractiveness as a film-making location.

In conjunction with the Irish Film Board, the total effects of these initiatives are constantly kept under review. Further consideration of the operation of the Section 481 scheme will be based on the experience over time of the latest changes.

I am pleased to note however, the incentives for which we have responsibility have been successful in attracting some major Television productions to the State in the past 12 months, including the US drama series "the Tudors", and "Rough Diamond".

I wish to assure the Deputies that I exercise a close scrutiny of the effects of these incentives and am committed to examining ways of developing the Irish film sector and supporting Ireland's competitiveness abroad.

#### **Tourism Industry.**

14. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when he expects to launch the results of Tourism Ireland's review of the North American market; the estimate as to the economic value of visitors from North America to Ireland; his views on whether the national tourist industry is in a position to exploit the benefits of increased numbers of North American visitors during the period of the Ryder Cup; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34810/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** As part of its operational responsibility for marketing the island of Ireland as a tourism destination overseas, Tourism Ireland carried out a major Review of the North American Market. I launched the Review on Tuesday last. The full Review is available on Tourism Ireland's website, [www.tourismireland.com](http://www.tourismireland.com).

North America remains one of the core markets for Irish tourism and its visitors are particularly important because they tend to stay longer, spend more and travel more widely within Ireland than the average visitor.

In 2005, it is estimated that the almost 1 million North American visitors to Ireland generated foreign earnings of over €700 million. Current data for 2006 suggest that those visitor numbers are still growing, with an increase of close to 10% to end August compared to the similar period last year.

Notwithstanding this performance and the level of latent demand identified in the Tourism Ireland Review, we are faced with a continuing challenge in the US market, in particular, due to the access restrictions imposed by the current Bilateral Agreement on air transport.

Tourism Ireland's Review clearly identifies the need for increased capacity on the Atlantic route if Ireland is to fully exploit the US market and identifies a number of gateways where increased or new services would be beneficial.

The success of the hosting of the Ryder Cup matches in Ireland has been widely acclaimed. I am confident that there will be a lasting benefit to our tourism industry, and the golf sector in particular, as a result of the raising of Ireland's profile internationally.

International experience suggests that the real spin-off of very major international sporting events comes in the years immediately succeeding the event. It is vital, therefore, that we have a clear strategy in place to build on the exposure that the Ryder Cup matches has given us. This has been addressed by the Tourism Agencies and I believe that the industry here is well placed to reap the benefits of the great success of the event in the years ahead.

### Tourism Promotion.

15. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the steps he is taking to support regional tourism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34698/06]

29. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on whether the growth of visitor numbers to this country is not matched by a growth in revenue, which is affecting rural hotels in particular, as low cost travel is bringing in a lower spending tourist for shorter periods of time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34876/06]

45. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he has satisfied himself with the regional balance of tourism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34697/06]

49. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he has established the boards of the reconstituted RTA's; the role they will play in the future development of tourism here especially in addressing the growing east/west divide as regards tourism spend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34706/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 15, 29, 45 and 49 together.

As I have advised the House on a number of occasions this year, most recently on 6th July, individual actions and measures relating to tourism promotion or development at regional level are day-to-day functions of the State Tourism Agencies.

CSO statistics for overseas tourism for 2005 are very positive with almost 7 million visitors, and overseas revenue earnings, excluding carrier receipts, up by almost 8% to €3.5 billion. These results represent a very robust performance by the sector in an increasingly competitive industry internationally. Performance to date in 2006, too, is very encouraging with CSO figures for the first

six months of the year showing almost 5.3 million visits to Ireland — an increase of 11% over the same period in 2005, well ahead of Tourism Ireland's target of 4.9%. According to the latest CSO data, the comparable increase in total foreign exchange earnings from tourism was 7% for the first six months of the year by comparison with the same period last year.

Growth in earnings is not matching the growth in numbers primarily because a 22% increase in the number of visitors from Mainland Europe for the first six months was associated with an increase of only 4% in expenditure. This reflects the large increase in arrivals from the EU accession countries, and Poland in particular. There is also evidence of a drop in the daily spend from the traditional tourist markets. A similar situation exists with regard to visitors from the rest of the world where a 5% increase in visitor numbers was accompanied by a 3% drop in expenditure. The failure of expenditure from 'rest of world' visitors, despite a 13% increase in spend per day, to match the growth in such visitor numbers, reflects a shortening of the average length of stay. On the other hand, spend by British and North American visitors has kept pace with the increase in their numbers.

While overall the relative strength of the British and North American spend augurs well for the industry, there is concern regarding expenditure levels from the main European markets — although there may be an improvement in the performance ex Mainland Europe during the peak holiday months of July and August. Both Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland are continuing their efforts to help the industry to address the issues behind this trend that is very much a global phenomenon and by its nature impacts on the holiday business at a regional level.

The home holiday market is an increasingly important component of the tourism business in Ireland particularly in terms of seasonal and regional spread. In 2005, 86% of holiday trips and 89% of holiday nights by domestic tourists were spent outside the Dublin area. This offsets, to some extent, the relative strength of Dublin in the overseas visitors market. In 2005, expenditure on domestic tourism was up across all regions — albeit at different rates and while CSO figures for expenditure on domestic tourism to date in 2006 are not yet available, industry reports to Fáilte Ireland up to September of this year are encouraging.

I believe that the new regional tourism structures will help to optimise the benefits of our tourism success across the regions. As Deputies may be aware, on 29th August last I announced the appointment of the Chairs of the five new Regional Tourism Development Boards. I understand from Fáilte Ireland that four of the Boards are now in place, and that they expect the fifth to be finalised shortly. One of the Boards, the North West Regional Tourism Development Board, held its inaugural meeting on 13 October last, to

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

be followed by the South East Regional Tourism Development Board on 27 October. The other Boards are expected to hold their inaugural meetings early in November. The key priority for the new Boards is to ensure a greater focus on the individual needs of each region at a national level and direct involvement for the regions in the development of national policy and tourism strategy.

With the new regional tourism arrangements facilitating enhanced tourism performance in the regions, various region specific initiatives introduced this year by Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland Ltd will further help to address this situation.

In 2006, Fáilte Ireland is investing in excess of €60 million on developing regional tourism, from supporting local festivals to building capability and strengthening the tourism product itself. Of this amount Fáilte Ireland is channelling €10 million directly to the regions to strengthen and enhance their operational and marketing capabilities this year. This investment is designed to ensure both a high quality visitor servicing experience at key tourist information offices and also a strong overseas promotional effort.

The “Super-Regions” initiative launched by Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland earlier this year is based on new strategic marketing alliances between adjoining Tourism Regions, positioning them to more fully exploit international market opportunities. The initiative, which presents a better, more tangible concept of Ireland’s regions to potential consumers abroad, has been well received by the industry.

Other Fáilte Ireland key initiatives include:

- The new Local Area Marketing Fund to support the industry in generating additional business in 2006 and 2007.
- An investment of €4m by Fáilte Ireland to sustain the recent remarkable growth in the home market.

Activities and attractions — things to do and see — are central to increasing visitor spend and it is especially important for rural areas to configure their accommodation and activity offering to appeal to Irish and overseas tourists. Over the past three years, Fáilte Ireland, under its ERDF co-funded Tourism Product Development Scheme, has allocated over €45 million to support 70 capital projects across the country. It will continue to assist in product development including, for example, looped walks, angling, festivals, cycling routes, equestrian, golfing and water based activities, and to support, through its €1million innovation fund, industry groups seeking to develop and market new tourism initiatives.

### Tourism Industry.

16. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the fall in the

number of salmon anglers visiting Ireland from overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34868/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** The 1990s witnessed the start of a steady decline in visiting overseas anglers, driven by a combination of factors, many of which were outside the control of the industry, such as, changing angling trends in the UK, the aging of the angling population, foot and mouth disease, 9/11, depletion of fish stocks but also the development of other tourism products, such as city breaks, and poorly targeted marketing investment.

Significant research was carried out in 2004 during which key stakeholders were consulted. Issues identified by anglers in the research included:

- Lack of information
- Concerns regarding the quality of fishing
- Difficulty in accessing fishing
- Complex licensing requirements and
- Declining value for money.

Following this research, an angling strategy was developed and a committee made up of representatives of Fáilte Ireland, the Fisheries Boards, regional tourism interests and Tourism Ireland was set up to implement the strategy.

A cornerstone of the strategy is the promotion of ‘Centres of Excellence’ that offer the visiting angler an exceptional angling experience. The list of ‘Centres of Excellence’ will cover all angling disciplines — game, coarse, sea and pike.

These centres have been identified and discussed with angling representative groups and the tourism angling industry. Fáilte Ireland will work with the industry to assist in the promotion of the best available product.

Going forward, the industry needs to focus on strategic marketing of those segments of the market where existing supply can meet expectations and at the same time, working with the various stakeholders such as the Regional Fisheries Boards, Local Authorities and angling clubs to ensure development and maintenance of fish stocks. The Government is currently considering proposals on the management of salmon stocks.

I believe that angling retains the potential to remain an important niche sector for Irish tourism, particularly in more rural parts of the country, and to provide overseas visitors in particular with an enriching experience of Ireland.

### Arts Funding.

17. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the efforts he is making to ensure that funding for the arts is equally spread across all parts of the country; his views on whether funding for smaller projects has disproportionately focused on cultural and arts centres



in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34814/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** The Arts Council is the principal agency through which State funding is channelled to the arts. Neither my Department nor I have a function in deciding on the extent of Arts Council funding for particular projects or venues. Indeed, the Arts Act, 2003, underpins the Council's independence in this context. Funding for the Arts Council in 2006 comes to €72.31 million, an increase of nine per cent on the 2005 figure. In addition, I recently awarded an additional €7.5m for 2006 to the Arts Council to fund its capital programme.

The main vehicle for direct capital funding by my Department is the Arts & Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme (ACCESS). Under the first phase of that scheme €45.7 million was allocated for the development of 44 arts and cultural facilities throughout the country. The increase in the availability of facilities and the enhancement in their quality has greatly increased access to and participation in the arts for many people.

Last August I announced a new funding scheme called ACCESS II. This scheme will run for the years 2007 to 2009. The primary focus of the scheme will be the refurbishment and enhancement of existing arts and culture facilities. Applications for this scheme will be accepted until November 17th next.

Of the capital projects announced in August 2006, the percentage of funding available allocated to projects in Co. Kerry amounted to 3.41% of the total.

#### Drugs in Sport.

18. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the reported increase in the taking of steroids by young athletes, especially in inter-school competition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34869/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I have been advised by the Irish Sports Council, the statutory body responsible for the operation of the National Anti-Doping Programme, that there are no indications that the taking of steroids by young athletes is an escalating problem in Ireland. However, it is an area of concern, which the Sports Council's Anti Doping Unit intends to address through its Educational and Research Programme.

Parents, teachers, coaches and athlete support personnel of young athletes must take responsibility for educating and supporting young athletes and avoid a 'win at all costs' attitude. All involved should promote positive attitudes and values in young athletes, and encourage a drug-free sporting environment.

The use of anabolic steroids in sport is prohibited. The use of these substances is very dangerous and has caused death or severe health problems for many athletes. Designer steroids, such as THG, may not have been tested on humans and therefore their side effects are unknown.

Currently, the Anti Doping Unit of the Irish Sports Council provides high quality relevant information on anti-doping in sport. A new education programme, similar to the UK Sport '100% Me' initiative, will be rolled out by the Sports Council to increase understanding of drug free sport at all levels of sport in Ireland, including competitors at school-level competition.

The Irish Sports Council has a reliable doping control process in place to deter and detect the use of prohibited substances and methods. While, at present, the focus of testing is at the elite level of participation, the Anti-Doping Unit works with the National Governing Bodies of Sport to identify the most appropriate level of testing of athletes. Athletes who compete at international level, be it in school competition or outside of school-specific competition, are also subject to testing by their sport's International Federation.

#### Horse Racing Industry.

19. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the 2005 annual report of Horse Racing Ireland; his plans to support the industry in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34825/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** The 2005 Annual Report of Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) highlights the unprecedented success enjoyed by Ireland's horse racing industry in 2005, both at home and abroad. There was a record nine Irish trained winners at the Cheltenham Festival in March followed by eight Irish winners at Aintree in April, while at home, the Punchestown Festival was once again a major success. On the flat Aidan O'Brien won three English Classics. There were four Irish trained winners at the Royal Ascot meeting, including Azamour who went on to take the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Diamond Stakes at Newbury in great style. Aidan O'Brien's Oratorio also won the Coral Eclipse Stakes at Sandown in July.

Significant increases were recorded in all key areas of performance with attendances reaching an all time record of 1.43 million, record Tote turnover of almost €49.3 million and a record number of 2,241 races run, an increase of 45 over 2004. The Festival meetings at Galway, the Curragh, Listowel, Punchestown and Leopardstown all showed growth, with Galway recording an Irish all time daily attendance record of 52,600 on 28th July.

2005 saw many significant developments under HRI's Capital Development Fund for Irish Race-



[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

courses, which was launched in November 2004. The Fund will provide for up to €200 million capital development in Irish racecourses over a five-year period, with HRI providing €110 million and the balance to be provided by the racecourses. Galway Racecourse announced a €22 million development plan, which will involve the demolition of the existing West Stand and the construction of a new grandstand facility in time for the 2007 festival. HRI also approved the development of Ireland's first all-weather racetrack, to be built at Dundalk. HRI will provide over €10 million in grant aid for the project, which will be completed in 2007. This new track will be Ireland's first all-weather track, first floodlit track and the first combined horse and greyhound racing facility. Killarney racecourse was also approved for grant aid towards its €1.7 million development of the weigh room and other facilities. New facilities were also opened at Ballinrobe racecourse.

This Government's commitment to funding the Irish horse racing industry, through the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund, has enabled Horse Racing Ireland to undertake long-term planning, which will result in the transformation of Irish racecourses in the coming years and has generated significant revenue for the Irish economy. In 2004, the Government put in place regulations to increase the limit of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund from €254m to €550m and to continue the Fund for a further four years to 2008.

### Ryder Cup.

20. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if a cost benefit analysis has been carried out on staging the Ryder Cup in the K Club; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34828/06]

21. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of State funding spent on staging the Ryder Cup in September 2006 in the K-Club, Co. Kildare, including tourism and Fáilte Ireland, the various Government Departments including Environment, Heritage and Local Government; if an evaluation has been carried out on the cost and benefit of the event; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34701/06]

24. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the television viewership figures recorded in North America and Europe for the Ryder Cup; if these figures fell short of Government expectations; if this will have a detrimental effect on the marketing opportunities that presented themselves for Ireland for the duration of the tournament; his further views on whether this was partly caused by the failure to list the Ryder Cup as a free to

air television event; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34803/06]

25. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on whether longterm damage has been done to the tourism industry here by efforts to financially exploit many visitors, especially those from North America, who came here during the Ryder Cup; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34824/06]

26. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the benefits of the staging of the Ryder Cup here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34823/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 20, 21 and 24 to 26, inclusive, together.

The Agreement signed with the PGA European Tour in 1998 for the staging of the Ryder Cup in Ireland provided for a payment of €9.5m to the Tour over the intervening period. Of this, the Exchequer, through Fáilte Ireland, contributed €4.9m and the three co-sponsors contributed the balance (Bord Bia, Waterford Crystal, AIB).

An additional €4.5 million was allocated to Fáilte Ireland in 2006 specifically to support an enhanced programme of marketing and promotional activities around the Ryder Cup, including a National Branding Programme and a number of golf marketing initiatives. Additional funding is also being provided to Fáilte Ireland this year to support costs associated with a complementary programme of events with the European Tour, including the official opening and closing ceremonies that made such a positive impact on international and domestic audiences. The aim of these programmes was to capitalise on the opportunities offered by the unique event that is the Ryder Cup with a view to promoting an enduring positive image of Irish Tourism.

I am not in a position to provide the Deputy with information relating to expenditure that does not fall within the aegis of my Department.

There is, I believe, little evidence to suggest that any significant inflated pricing occurred around the Ryder Cup. The tourism agencies were particularly vigilant in all of their dealings with the various elements of the industry and urged a commonsense approach to the pricing of their product during the period of the Ryder Cup. Furthermore, the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs, at the request of my Department, undertook a special initiative around that time to ensure that price lists in catering establishments and licensed premises were displayed prominently. In this regard I refer the Deputies to the reply given by my colleague the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in response to a Question, reference number 21922/06, on 11 October last.

I am informed by Fáilte Ireland that the research unit of the European Tour is currently

undertaking a full review of delivered TV audiences in terms of both live and deferred coverage and any subsequent magazine style shows. This work will continue for a number of weeks. However, the early indications on live coverage numbers across our two key source markets, Great Britain and the USA are that the TV audiences for SKY and BBC were up when compared to previous Ryder Cup events, while NBC's viewership numbers on the Saturday and Sunday were down on the previous Ryder Cup. I am satisfied that the "free to air" issue was not a significant factor in the coverage numbers for European and American TV audiences.

The success of Ryder Cup 2006, in terms of organisation and the presentation of a positive image of Ireland, has been widely acclaimed. Based on the experience of past tournaments, it has been estimated that the economic benefits of the event to Ireland are of the order of €130m. It is expected that, over the coming years, there will also be a lasting long-term benefit to the tourism industry, and the golf tourism sector in particular, as a result of the worldwide television coverage of the event and the raising of Ireland's profile generally. Furthermore, the positive experiences of overseas visitors to the event will serve as a valuable source of word-of-mouth marketing for our tourism industry for many years to come.

Fáilte Ireland, in conjunction with the PGA/European Tour, have commissioned Deloitte and Touche to conduct an economic impact assessment on the Ryder Cup in Ireland and I look forward to the results of their work, which are expected early in 2007.

The International Sports Tourism initiative was established by the Government some years ago to support efforts to attract major international sporting events with tourism potential to Ireland. From its commencement in 2000, the initiative, which is administered by Fáilte Ireland, has sponsored a total of 102 events to the end of 2005 with a funding allocation of close to €30m.

### **Sport and Recreational Development.**

22. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he has met with members of the Irish Sports Council to discuss their recently launched building sport for life three-year strategic plan; his views on whether more work needs to be done to promote participation in sport among the adult population; the efforts he is making in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34807/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** Under Section 25 of the Irish Sports Council Act 1999, which established the Council as the statutory body responsible for the promotion and development of sport in Ireland, the Council is required to prepare and present to me a three-year strategy statement for the period 2006-2008. I was happy to approve and, sub-

sequently, launch the Council's three-year strategy "Building Sport for Life" on 28th September 2006. Both my officials and I regularly meet with representatives of the Council to review implementation of Sport Policy and discuss relevant issues including the recently published strategy.

Under "Building Sport for Life", the Council will focus its efforts on increasing the number of people participating in sport and physical activity.

The following are the stated objectives of the strategy, which the Council will measure to determine the success of its work over the next three years:

- Increase the number of people participating in sport in partnership with governing bodies of sport, sports partnerships and other relevant agencies. The target is to increase adult participation rates by 1.5% over the life of the strategy. This increase will be sub-divided as follows- a reduction of 1.5% in the number of totally inactive adults and an increase of 1.5% in the number of adults meeting the recommended minimum level of health-enhancing physical activity (30 minutes per day x 5 weekly)
- Increase by 3% in the number of children taking part in some level of extra curricular sport and extra school sport combined
- The Local Sports Partnerships are charged with increasing participation and ensuring that the experiences in sport are positive.

The Irish Sports Council has created a new Participation Unit to implement its plans for increasing participation. The Unit will ensure the national rollout of the Local Sports Partnerships network in order to deliver greater access to sport for all. It will work with specific national governing bodies to deliver large-scale participation programmes. The Unit will target sections of the community for intervention programmes such as the existing Women in Sport and Sport for Older People initiatives.

The Council will facilitate the creation of a sustainable structure to ensure the strategic development of sport by providing resources to National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships who are charged with providing evidence across a range of sports. It will strengthen its relationship with the National Coaching and Training Centre in order to encourage governing bodies and sports partnerships to develop coaching infrastructures nationally and locally.

The Irish Sports Council has made a significant contribution to Irish sport since it was established in 1999. The list of its accomplishments is long and I am confident that the Council's new strategy will be fully realised and mark another major advance for the administration and development of sport in Ireland.

23. **Mr. Stagg** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on whether the absence of a proper indoor running facility here is hampering the chances of elite Irish athletes in their preparations for international competition; his further views on providing State funding for the construction of such a facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34820/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** Since 1998 this Government has provided over €900 million towards the development of new sporting infrastructure and sports programmes. Included in this figure is an amount of €469.8m in sports capital funding which has been allocated to 5,721 projects throughout the country which is now having a major impact on the range and quality of sports facilities. Almost €11m has been provided for the development of athletic specific facilities while additional funding has been provided towards multi-purpose facilities of which athletics would be one of the sports practised at the facility. Furthermore, the Deputy will be aware that the Government has provided funding for the development of a sports campus at Abbotstown and an Irish Institute of Sport. Both of these initiatives will, when completed, enhance further the range and quality of sports facilities and support for Irish athletes.

Discussions have taken place with the Athletics Association of Ireland in relation to the need for an indoor training facility and that organisation is currently embarked on the development of a strategy for such facilities which, when received, will be considered for funding. I am satisfied that there now exists a network of athletic facilities throughout the country which afford opportunities for those interested in the sport to engage in the sport. Research conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute by the Irish Sports Council has ascertained that the lack of facilities is not a serious impediment to persons involving themselves in sport.

*Questions Nos. 24 to 26, inclusive, answered with Question No. 20.*

### **Sports Capital Programme.**

27. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the criteria used by his Department to evaluate national lottery sport capital grant applications; if there is a noticeable trend where an applicant is more successful if they have failed in a previous sport capital grant application; the percentage of applications that fail to meet criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34700/06]

**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.

Applications submitted to the programme must meet certain minimum qualifying conditions before they can qualify for funding. These include: evidence of having the minimum amount required of own funding towards the cost of the project; evidence of title to property and of applying for planning permission (where this is required) and providing a feasibility study where the project costs over €500,000. These conditions are set out in the guidelines, terms and conditions of the programme which accompanies the application form and are available from my Department's website *www.dast.gov.ie*. I have arranged for copies of the application form and guidelines for the 2007 sports capital programme to be forwarded to the Deputy for his further information.

Applications which meet the minimum qualifying conditions are evaluated in accordance with assessment criteria, which are also listed in the programme's guidelines, terms and conditions and are as follows:

- Whether the project aims to increase active participation in sport and/or improve standards of sports performance in line with clearly stated targets and showing how the application will measure these increases or improvements. In particular, facilities will be prioritised which will help promote and enhance female participation in sport.
- Whether the application provides evidence that the project is located in a disadvantaged area and meets a need for sporting facilities in the area.
- Whether the following has been provided: evidence of title to the project site; evidence of planning permission applied for or in place; drawings/specifications for the project; and accurate costings for each element of the project.
- Whether the project is realistic in terms of scale, costs and grant assistance sought.
- Whether a proven history of fund-raising is shown that and a good level of own funding towards the cost which will allow the project to be finished within a realistic timeframe.
- Whether the applicant has proved the level of own funding contribution towards the project
- Whether the application includes realistic projections of income from the proposed facility that will be used to maintain it when it is finished.
- Whether the project has a high priority in relation to the applicant's existing facilities.
- Whether there is already a good level of similar sporting facilities in the area.



- Whether the application includes details and evidence of consultation with other clubs, community groups, schools and the local authority, especially those that will use the facility.
- Whether the application clearly explains how the applicant will attract socially excluded people to use the facility.
- Whether the project fits in with the priorities for its sport as identified by the sport's national governing body (for regional or national-level projects only).

Highest priority is afforded to projects in disadvantaged areas aimed at increasing participation. High priority projects include those which are essential or integral to sports participation or performance, e.g. pitch development, flood-lighting, changing rooms and showers. The assessment process also takes into account factors such as the existing level of facilities in an area, the number and quality of the applications received, the amount of funding being sought by each applicant and the strategic positioning of major facilities that may be required. At the end of the assessment process each application is given its order of priority within its own county. Every effort is made to achieve a balanced geographical spread of funds throughout the country.

Following the announcement of provisional allocations under a programme, my Department writes to applicants advising them of the outcome of the assessment process and whether or not they have been successful or unsuccessful. In the case of the latter, they are also given details of the assessment carried out on their application, indicating why the application was unsuccessful. This information can act as guidance to organisations in the submission of future applications for support under the Programme.

It is open to all applicants, both successful and unsuccessful to apply for funding under a future programme. My Department does not produce statistics in terms of the success rate of applicants which had previously been unsuccessful under the programme. In relation to unsuccessful applications, I can inform the Deputy that, of the 1,338 applications submitted under the 2006 sports capital programme, a total of 797 were awarded provisional allocations and 541 (or 40%) were unsuccessful.

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 under the programme, set for close of business on Friday 24th November next.

### **Sport and Recreational Development.**

28. **Mr. Sherlock** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the improvements to Ireland's sporting infrastructure and facilities that will be made in order to allow athletes here prepare for major international sporting competitions in

general, and the 2012 London Olympics in particular; his views on whether there has been little improvement in such facilities for Ireland's elite athletes since the 2004 Athens Olympics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34818/06]

47. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will expand on his recent comments that several countries have already expressed an interest in coming here to prepare for the 2012 London Olympics; his views on whether facilities are sufficient to attract countries to base themselves here in advance of the Olympics; the expressions of interest that have been received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34819/06]

53. **Mr. S. Ryan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will provide details of the new taskforce established to identify and maximise the opportunities arising from the 2012 London Olympics; the taskforce's main objectives; the potential benefits to Ireland and sport here in particular that arise from the London Olympics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34817/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 28, 47 and 53 together.

It is widely recognised that the selection of London as the host city for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games and Paralympic Games offers an unprecedented opportunity for Ireland particularly in the areas of sport, business, tourism, and arts and culture. Aside from the obvious economic and monetary benefits that London 2012 may bring for Ireland, this event has the potential to have a significant and long-term impact on the future of sport in Ireland, but only if early planning is undertaken and opportunities are recognised and are fully availed of.

With this in mind, I recently established a Task Force comprising representatives from the art, sport, tourism, and business sectors. The main objective of this group is to examine possible opportunities arising out of London 2012, identify the priority areas of interest, and map out a strategy to ensure that Ireland maximises this unique opportunity to benefit from its proximity to London. A list of the members of the Task Force is attached. The Task Force has held two meetings to date and I very much look forward to receiving their recommendations in due course.

London 2012 will offer obvious opportunities with regard to sport. The Olympic Council of Ireland has advised that a number of countries including the USA, Germany and Brazil have made enquiries regarding the use of Ireland as a base leading up to the Games. Ireland is an ideal location for such a training camp, possessing the advantages of being in the same climatic and time zones as London, within an hour by air travel,



[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

and Ireland will avoid most of the media hype that one often finds in the host country.

If Ireland is to be attractive to potential participating athletes, access to high quality sporting and residential accommodation must be available. An audit of national facilities is to be undertaken which will provide us with more accurate information on the range, suitability and type of facilities which are currently available. The Olympic Council of Ireland has already identified a number of individual sports facilities which are of suitable quality but may require minor upgrades. A limited number of local authority facilities may also be worth considering for the training camps. It is also possible that universities and institutions may be able to put together packages of facilities and accommodation.

Once the audit is completed, we will have a more comprehensive idea of the quality of facilities available, whether these facilities need to be upgraded, and the level of expenditure required in order to bring these facilities up to the standard required by potential visiting athletes and to cater for our own elite athletes in their preparations for future sporting competitions. Our proximity to the world's largest sporting event could produce a lasting legacy and any physical infrastructure built to attract teams will benefit future Irish athletes.

By the end of 2006, this Government will have invested in excess of €900 million in Irish sport since 1998. Of this amount, approximately €500 million has been spent on the development of sporting facilities at a national, regional and local level. A significant proportion of this investment has gone towards developing a network of top quality facilities around the country designed to meet the training, coaching and competition needs of our elite competitors in a wide spectrum of sports.

Among the major projects which have been supported are the National Aquatic centre, the National Rowing centre at Inniscarra, the National Tennis centre, the National Boxing stadium, the National Hockey stadium at UCD and the National Coaching and Training Centre at the University of Limerick, which complements the wide range of top quality facilities provided at the University, many of which have

been used by international sportspersons. It is understood that some 25 Olympic medals have been won by sportspersons from abroad who have used the facilities at UL to perfect their training. Recent Government decisions to proceed with phase 1 of the Sports Campus at Abbotstown and the development of the Irish Institute of Sport are important new components of Ireland's developing sports infrastructure. It is therefore fair to say that over the past number of years, there has been a significant improvement in sporting facilities catering for our elite athletes, and this will continue in the run-up to London 2012.

From a tourism perspective, London 2012 provides an opportunity for Ireland to attract visitors before and after the Games. The successful hosting of the Special Olympics World Summer Games in 2003 and the Ryder Cup held recently at the K-Club greatly enhanced Ireland's reputation and credibility on the world stage as a safe and welcoming destination. This very positive experience is something we can very usefully build on with London 2012 fast approaching. Our aim should be that tourists and teams visiting Ireland in connection with the Olympic Games would also return for visits in future years.

London 2012 will also afford opportunities for the promotion of our arts and culture during the anticipated Cultural Olympiad which will run parallel to the Games throughout London and the rest of the UK as part of the wider experience of 2012.

Furthermore, there is significant potential for Irish firms to become involved in developing infrastructure, providing services associated with the preparation for the Games and during the Games, and local services associated with training camps in Ireland. Irish companies may also seek to sponsor elements of the Games for marketing purposes.

The 2012 Olympic Games in London is a once in a lifetime opportunity for Ireland to promote our country and culture, to generate a keener interest in sport, to open up new markets for tourism, for Irish business of all sizes to be involved in the substantial construction programme and supply of services before and during the games, and to provide a massive boost and lasting legacy for sport in Ireland.

London 2012 Olympics Taskforce — Membership

Philip Furlong (Chair)	Secretary General of the Department of Arts, Sport & Tourism
Gillian Bowler	Businesswoman & Chair of Fáilte Ireland
Olive Braiden	Chair, Arts Council
Des Casey	former Honorary Secretary of the FAI & UEFA Life Member
Anne Ebbs	Secretary General of the Paralympic Council of Ireland
John Fitzgerald	former Dublin City Manager
Dan Flinter	former Chief Executive of Enterprise Ireland & Chair of the Athens Review
Pat Hickey	President of the Olympic Council of Ireland & the European National Olympic Committees

Ossie Kilkenny  
Seán Kelly  
Noel Murphy  
Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin  
Paul O'Toole  
Peter Quinn  
Ray Rooney

Chair of Irish Sports Council  
Executive Chairman of the Irish Institute of Sport  
former President of IRFU & IRB Council Member  
Chair of Culture Ireland  
Chief Executive Tourism Ireland  
Businessman & former President of GAA  
Businessman & former Senior Steward of the Turf Club

*Question No. 29 answered with Question No. 15.*

#### **Tourism Industry.**

30. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the areas his Department is involved in regarding the promotion of good environmental practice within the tourism industry. [34852/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I would refer the Deputy to my detailed reply to Priority Question No. 3.

*Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 13.*

#### **Irish Language.**

32. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he envisages difficulties for tourists travelling in County Kerry now that the word Dingle has been removed from all signposts in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34871/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I am not aware of any negative impact on tourism arising from the implementation of the Official Languages Act. Indeed, the implementation of the Act appears to have generated a vast amount of free publicity for An Daingean in particular.

As far as travel is concerned, the important thing is that the maps and guides fall into line with the official place names and signs as would be normal in other countries. I understand that this will happen. As the Deputy is well aware, tourism and marketing interests are, of course, free to use any names, including the English version of a placename, as marketing tools.

#### **Sport and Recreational Development.**

33. **Mr. M. Higgins** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position with regard to the development of the Abbotstown Sports Campus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34827/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** In November 2005 the Government gave its assent to the commencement of

phase one of the development of the National Sports Campus at Abbotstown. The estimated overall cost of the Phase 1 development is €119m and development is scheduled to take place over a 4 to 5 year period. Planning and preparatory work for this project has commenced and work is already underway on the refurbishment of the State Laboratory as the new headquarters for FAI Ireland.

Phase One of the Development Control Plan will provide:

- a National Field Sports training centre, catering for rugby, soccer, Gaelic games and hockey
- a National Indoor Training Centre which will provide world class training facilities for over 30 Governing Bodies of Sport
- accommodation for sports men and women; sports science/ medical facilities
- all-weather synthetic pitches for community use; and
- renovation of existing buildings to cater for needs identified by sports bodies.

Funds for the delivery of the project have been provided in my Department's capital envelope for 2006-2010.

The Fingal County Development Plan for the Abbotstown area requires that a study is undertaken to determine a suitable mix of sporting and appropriate commercial, leisure, and amenity uses to create a vibrant and sustainable sports campus and assess the possibility of opening up park lands for the residents of the Blanchardstown Area. In this regard, an inter-agency group is currently at work; it is chaired by the Office of Public Works and involving my Department, the Departments of Finance and Agriculture and Food, the Office of Public Works, Campus and Stadium Ireland Development Ltd and Fingal Country Council. Fingal County Council has undertaken a public consultation process as part of the study. The Planning Study is currently underway and is expected to be completed before the end of the year. When agreed it will act as a blue-print for the planning process for each facility to be provided at Abbotstown over the next four years. The National Aquatic Centre, the first facility developed on this site, was completed in 2003 at a capital cost of €71m.

34. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if the audit of sports facilities conducted by his Department is complete; when he intends to publish this report; the way the report will be used by his Department to plan and develop sporting facilities nationally; if the Census 2006 Preliminary Report figures were used in conducting this report; if the findings of the report will form a component of the National Development Plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34702/06]

44. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when the National audit of sport and recreational facilities will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34707/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 34 and 44 together.

The nationwide audit of sports facilities has commenced and is being carried out in stages to help speed up the availability of information. Phase one of the audit will establish a record of national and regional sports facilities and is being carried out within my Department.

The work currently being undertaken is a data gathering exercise in conjunction with the main sporting bodies and local authorities to identify the facilities for inclusion in this phase. My Department has identified a list of in excess of one hundred sports facilities of national or regional significance that have been funded under the sports capital programme since 1999 and in addition, details of facilities at third level educational institutions and swimming pools have also been included on this inventory. Further engagement with the main sporting bodies, local authorities, facility owners and managers is being undertaken so that a comprehensive database on the range and nature of sporting facilities at national and regional level can be completed.

By ascertaining and mapping what is already in place at a national and regional level, an important part of developing a strategic approach to future facility provision will be put in place, as well as establishing the level of need that exists in the sports sector and helping to determine future priorities.

This audit is taking place in the context of the development of a sports facilities strategy, which will also take into account the information contained in the 2006 Census report. As I have previously explained the enormity of completing the complete audit of sports facilities should not be underestimated and given the experience of other countries is likely to take a number of years to complete.

*Question No. 35 answered with Question No. 13.*

### Tourism Industry.

36. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will make representations to the Department of Finance to introduce measures in Budget 2007 to allow VAT recovery on corporate expenditure in hotels and restaurants for conference incentive travel and meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34709/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I continue to keep in touch with the Minister for Finance on this issue which is, of course, of key interest to those involved in seeking to develop our business tourism, in particular, our conference and meetings business.

37. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his plans to expand the tourism industry in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34829/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** In December 2002, I put in place a high-level Tourism Policy Review Group to report on the state of the Irish tourism industry and to indicate future strategies for the development of a sustainable tourism industry. The Group published its Report, 'New Horizons for Irish Tourism: An Agenda for Action', in September 2003. This Report set out a comprehensive tourism development strategy, covering a 10-year period, and included a detailed and practical action plan. The Report contained ambitious targets for the industry, namely, to achieve annual figures of 10 million visitors and €6 billion in foreign revenue by 2012. The New Horizons Report forms the blueprint for tourism development up to 2012.

Following publication of the Report, I established the Tourism Action Plan Implementation Group, for a two-year period, to oversee the implementation of the 76 Recommendations in the Report. The Implementation Group, in its final Report, which was published in March of this year, reported that 63 of the 76 recommendations made in the New Horizons Report had been implemented or good progress had been made in relation to them. The Group expressed itself satisfied with the degree of progress in implementing the strategy and pointed to a number of areas where progress had been less satisfactory.

In May 2006, I appointed a successor to the Tourism Action Plan Implementation Group, for the next two years, which will continue the work of the previous Groups and will advise on the implementation of the outstanding recommendations of the New Horizons Report. It will also respond to evolving issues as they arise in

the course of the development of the tourism industry in a dynamic international context.

The Government has given an unprecedented level of commitment and support for the Irish tourism industry. At over €140m, record levels of Exchequer funding have been allocated for tourism this year. The most recent figures for 2006 — to end August — show that visitor numbers are up by almost 11% on the same period in 2005. This follows on a record visitor number performance in 2005 with almost 7 million overseas visitors. These figures suggest that we are on the right path in relation to our strategy for the development of the tourism industry in Ireland.

#### Arts Plan.

38. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will provide details of the recently launched Government Arts and Education Committee charged with increasing exposure to the arts in schools here; his views on whether there is insufficient reference to the arts in the early stages of education; when this committee will produce its recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34806/06]

42. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the guidelines set down for the recently appointed Standing Committee on the Arts in Education; if the primary school sector is represented on the Committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34704/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 38 and 42 together.

Government policy for the Arts is set out in the Programme for Government and elaborated further in my Department's Statement of Strategy. Having regard for the statutory functions of the Arts Council as set out in Section 9 of the Arts Act 2003, and in accordance with section 21 of that Act, a Special Committee has been established to advise the Arts Council on how best to align the Council's strategies for the promotion and encouragement of the arts with the priorities of the formal education system. The Committee should deliver its advice to the Council by 1st May 2007.

The five person Committee will be chaired by Mary Nunan, Arts Council member. The other members will be Jerome Morrissey, National Centre for Training in Technology, Mr. Pat MacSitríc, Asst Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Science, Mr. Derek West, former Principal, Newpark Comprehensive School and Chair of NAPD Arts & Culture Committee and Orlaith McBride, Arts Council member.

Acknowledging the contribution that the Arts can make to a rounded and balanced educational experience, the Committee will have regard to

(a) the wide range of demands on the school curriculum bearing in mind that responsibility for determining the content of the school curriculum rests with the Minister for Education and Science;

(b) the need to prioritise and cost its recommendations; these recommendations must have regard both to their resource implications for the Arts Council and also to the fact that the budgetary resources likely to be available over the next four years to the Minister for Education and Science for development of services in the education sector must be allocated to fund existing policy commitments;

(c) subject to (b) above, the identification of what additional sources of funding, if any, might be available to fund its recommendations; and

(d) the roles and partnerships that are appropriate for relevant State and other agencies and bodies in this context, including the Department of Education and Science, the Arts Council, Vocational Education Committees, and Local Authorities.

The focus of the Special Committee's advice should be on making specific deliverable recommendations for implementation over three to five years.

I believe that by giving the arts a higher, more consistent profile at both primary and second level, we can not only benefit the arts, but can also bring significant benefits to the students concerned, which will stay with them for all of their lives. It is important also to stress that this applies to all students, and not just to those who are recognised as being particularly gifted artistically.

Every parent in the country wants their children to be creative, to be imaginative, and to express this creativity and imagination as best as they can. Because the future of the arts in Ireland rests with our children, it is vital that the Arts are embedded into our education system at a fundamental level, beginning at primary and pre-primary level, and continuing on from there. I have always believed that the benefits of the arts for the individual are greatly increased if exposure to the arts takes place during a person's most formative years, and for that reason it is a real priority of mine to enhance the position of the arts in our education system.

#### National Conference Centre.

39. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the development of the proposed National Conference Centre; if he has met with the pre-



[Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin.]

ferred bidder; the timetable for the construction of the conference centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34812/06]

43. **Mr. J. O’Keefe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the building of the National Conference Centre; the expected dates of commencement and completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34866/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O’Donoghue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 39 and 43 together.

As I informed the House on 3 October last, in reply to a Written Question, Spencer Dock International Conference Centre Consortium has been appointed Preferred Tenderer for the provision of a National Conference Centre in Dublin. Subsequently, on 18 October last, I was pleased to visit the proposed site for the National Conference Centre at Spencer Dock in Dublin where I was welcomed by the Chairman/CEO of Spencer Dock International Conference Centre Ltd, and had the opportunity to acknowledge the work of those involved, on both sides of the negotiations, in bringing the project to this important stage. As the Deputies are aware, the Centre is being procured under a Public Private Partnership process under the auspices of the Office of Public Works — the Contracting Authority.

During the Preferred Tenderer phase the Consortium is required to develop and provide the full range of project documents for review and approval by the Contracting Authority. The current expectation is that the contract will, subject to Government agreement, be awarded before the end of November. It is envisaged that site enabling and related works in preparation for construction would commence shortly thereafter and that the Centre would be operational in 2009.

I am delighted that a further critical stage in the process of delivering a world-class National Conference Centre for Dublin has been completed and that delivery of another major commitment in the Programme for Government is now in sight, subject, as already indicated, to final agreement of the Government.

On the basis of consultations undertaken earlier by my Department and research reviewed, I am totally convinced of the need for a modern, dedicated National Conference Centre if Ireland is to realise its full potential in the hugely valuable international conference market. According to a number of independent estimates, the National Conference Centre, when fully operational, is expected to generate additional foreign revenue earnings of between €25m and €50m per year.

### **Sport and Recreational Development.**

40. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the 2006 Women in Sport Initiative launched recently by the Irish Sports Council; the funding provided for projects under this scheme; the barriers to increased participation in sport by women here; the efforts he is making to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34808/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O’Donoghue):** There is a need to increase the level of women’s participation in sport and physical activity, as less than one in five women come close to achieving what the World Health Organisation deems to be the minimum levels of physical activity necessary for good health. Research by the Economic and Social Research Institute into participation rates indicated that 25% of women participate in sport regularly, compared to 41% of men. In order to address this problem, I provided a special budget of €750,000 in 2005 for the Irish Sports Council to introduce programmes specifically targeted at women.

In view of the success of the first year of the programme, I decided to increase the level of funding three-fold to €2.25m in 2006. At my request, there were special allocations made to both Basketball Ireland and Cumann Peil Gael na mBan as sports that have many women involved. This year, €370,000 was allocated to Basketball Ireland to build on its Regional Development Officer network and support its European Year of Women’s Basketball. Cumann Peil Gael na mBan received €314,606 to assist in the implementation of its Strategic Plan and to build on the success of its pilot programmes in 2005.

In addition to the specific allocations made to these two National Governing Bodies (NGBs), and consistent with last year’s Women in Sport programme, all of the NGBs were contacted by the Sports Council and asked to submit projects to increase the participation of women and attract new members to their sport. As a result, the Irish Sports Council allocated €1,238,561 to 20 projects under the 2006 NGB Women in Sport Grant Scheme and €193,524 to projects submitted by 15 Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs). In total, grant funding for Women in Sport has reached €2,052,085 in 2006.

As well as funding these projects, the Irish Sports Council developed a new Women in Sport Logo and a Women in Sport website. The Women in Sport website — [www.womeninsport.ie](http://www.womeninsport.ie) — showcases all the initiatives, informs women as to when events will be on in their areas, contains links to other sites where women can find participation opportunities, provides information on fitness and invites women to send in their stories and photographs to be featured on the website. NGBs and

LSPs are also encouraged to use the website to promote events or initiatives that they are organising for women and provide all contact links necessary for becoming involved.

An Ezine has also been created to which women can subscribe, which highlights upcoming events, features interesting articles from the website, highlights the profiles of women involved in sport in all capacities and gives updates on initiatives available to women in their locality. Merchandise has also been created incorporating the new logo to raise the profile of the brand and this will be featured and distributed at selected events for the remainder of the year. In the context of the allocation of funds under the 2006 Sports Capital Programme priority for funding was given to applications where it was clear that the provision of a facility was specifically to attract more women into sporting activity.

I accept that several barriers to women's increased participation in sport remain, including lack of interest, time constraints, competing social responsibilities and lack of masters/veteran opportunities. By continuing to invest in the Women in Sport initiative, this Government is specifically targeting women and ensuring that the necessary resources are in place for the Irish Sports Council to raise awareness among women of the sporting opportunities available to them and to encourage their participation in sporting activities. I am confident that we will be able to reduce the barriers and to increase the numbers of women enjoying regular physical activity.

#### **Tourism Promotion.**

41. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will provide details of the €10 million tourism marketing campaign for the autumn and winter period; the efforts he is making to promote year round tourism here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34822/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** The development and delivery of the campaign referred to by the Deputy is an operational matter for Tourism Ireland. I understand that the campaign is being rolled out in Great Britain, the United States and Continental Europe and incorporates a strong focus on promoting a wider regional spread of visitors. The core elements of the marketing campaign include advertising on television and radio, national daily newspapers and lifestyle magazines. In addition, I understand that it includes direct mail initiatives targeted at key contacts, internet marketing and the hosting of overseas media trips to Ireland.

The campaign is just one element of the initiatives supported by the unprecedented level of Exchequer resources which I secured for tourism development — €142 million for 2006 — rep-

resenting a 14% increase on the 2005 amount. This investment is enabling the Tourism Agencies — Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland — to deliver, in full, their ambitious plans for 2006 including an emphasis on extending the seasonal spread of visitors.

There has already been an improvement in the seasonal dispersal of visitor numbers. In 1999, overseas visitor numbers in July and August accounted for 27% of our yearly total. A target was set for the industry that this would be reduced to 25% by 2006 but, at 23.7%, we have already exceeded that target. The reality is that the Autumn/Winter period is now a significant part of the tourism year and the period from September to December yields as much as 30% of overall annual tourism business. This change has been helped by the international trend towards shorter and more frequent holiday breaks.

With regard to other initiatives to promote year round tourism, Fáilte Ireland already has a sustained Home Holidays marketing programme in place and, through its enhanced Regional structures, will remain active through the Autumn/Winter period promoting specific products, regions and events with particular emphasis on the Christmas/New Year period.

*Question No. 42 answered with Question No. 38.*

*Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 39.*

*Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 34.*

*Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 15.*

#### **Arts Funding.**

46. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the reason he did not use the offices of the Arts Council in relation to deciding on the allocation of the recently announced €16.4 million in arts grants from surplus money in his Department's budget; the efforts he made to ensure this money was spread evenly throughout the country and that smaller projects in one particular part of the country were not prioritised above another; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34816/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** On 24th August last, I announced additional investment of €16.4 million in the arts and culture sector, which is to be divided between the Arts Council, the Irish Film Board and theatre and arts organisations throughout the country. This allocation was as a direct result of savings that have been made in my Department. A total

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

of 29 arts and cultural projects will benefit from the funding which will enable them to proceed with refurbishment, renovation and repair works, to purchase equipment, fixtures and fittings and to improve access.

While an additional €7.5m was allocated to the Arts Council for its schemes, the funding of major capital arts projects and cultural institutions remains my Department's responsibility. The Arts Council's primary function is in relation to the provision of revenue funding and capital allocations form a small part of their work. The specific allocations for the additional capital this year was based on recommendations made to me by officials in my Department who identified quality substantive projects on hands to which funding allocations would be appropriate.

*Question No. 47 answered with Question No. 28.*

#### National Stadium.

48. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road; the latest timetable for the planning and construction process for the new National Stadium; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34826/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** In January 2004, the Government agreed to provide funding of €191million, phased over 5 years, to the joint IRFU/FAI project for the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road Stadium as a 50,000-seat stadium. The estimated total cost of the project is €365m and the IRFU and FAI will provide the balance of €174m. On 31 July 2006, Dublin City Council granted planning permission for the project, subject to a number of conditions. A number of appeals against the granting of planning permission have been lodged by local residents and it is understood that An Bord Pleanála intends to schedule an oral hearing to deal with these appeals although a date has yet to be set for such a hearing. Subject to the outcome of the planning process, it is intended that construction should commence early in 2007. I look forward to the completion of this much needed new Stadium which will be a welcome flagship facility for rugby and soccer.

*Question No. 49 answered with Question No. 15.*

#### Sports Capital Programme.

50. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of primary schools that received grant aid under the sports capital programme in 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34864/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** While responsibility for funding of school sports facilities rests with the Department of Education and Science, it is open to projects located on school grounds to apply for funding for sports facilities accessible also to the wider community under my Department's sports capital programme.

Applications to the programme from primary and post-primary schools and colleges must be made jointly with local sports clubs or community groups and must, as a minimum, demonstrate that the local community will have significant access to the proposed facility when it is not being used by the school or college itself. In this regard, the significant access is a requirement for a minimum of at least 30 hours a week throughout the year.

The sports capital programme does not sub-categorise school-related applications into primary and other categories. A total of €634,000 was allocated under the 2005 programme to seven joint projects situated in schools/colleges. The amount under the 2006 programme was €1,415,000 to 12 projects.

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 under the programme, set for close of business on Friday 24th November next and it will again be open to joint projects involving schools to apply for funding should they meet the terms and conditions of the programme.

#### Swimming Pool Projects.

51. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the level of funding that has been made available for swimming pool projects in the Dublin area; the details of each project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34699/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** Under the current round of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme the following projects have been/are being dealt in the Dublin area to date:

Pool Project	Status	Funding allocated
		€m
Finglas (replacement pool)	Completed	3.8
Ballymun (replacement pool)	Completed	3.8
Ballyfermot (replacement pool)	under construction	3.8

Pool Project	Status	Funding allocated
		€m
Jobstown (new)	under construction	3.8
Clondalkin (replacement)	under construction	3.8
St Michael's House (new)	under construction	3.7
Skerries (new)	preparing contract documents	*
Glenalbyn (refurbishment)	preparing contract documents	*
Dundrum (replacement)	revised preliminary report submitted	*
St Joseph's House (refurbishment)	preparing preliminary report	*

\*Grant aid is formally allocated at the stage when the tender for the project is approved.

My Department provides grant aid, under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, to local authorities towards the capital costs of a new or replacement public swimming pool or the refurbishment of an existing pool. Under the Programme, there are four stages in the development of a public swimming pool project. These are, in order of progress, Feasibility Study/Preliminary Report; Contract Documents; Tender and Construction. My Department's technical advisors, the Office of Public Works (OPW), evaluate each stage and prior approval is required before local authorities can proceed from one stage to the next. Grant aid is formally allocated when the tender for the project is approved.

The priority under the current round of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme where the deadline for submission of applications was 31 July 2000 is to continue to support those projects remaining to be completed. Of the 57 projects being dealt with, 22 projects have been completed, 15 other pools are under construction or about to begin construction. The remaining 20 projects are at various stages in the programme — 6 at tender stage, 7 at contract document stage and 7 are at preliminary report stage. I am happy to note that significant progress continues under the current round of the Programme. So far this year, I have approved 8 projects for grant aid and approved contract documents for 9 public pools.

My Department is completing an Expenditure Review of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme. The Review is examining, among other things, how the programme has worked to date and what changes, if any, are required to ensure its effective and efficient delivery. The Review is currently being finalised and I would hope that it will be completed before the end of the year. On completion of this Review, the question of re-opening the Programme can be considered. If the Programme is re-opened, it will be open to all local authorities to submit applications under the terms that will apply.

#### Tourism Industry.

52. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his Department has considered the implications for the tourism indus-

try of the privatisation of Aer Lingus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34874/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** The Government believes that Ireland's strategic interest in aviation is best served by the provision of regular, safe, cost-effective and competitive air services linking the country to key business and tourism markets around the world. The strategic aim in selling a majority of the Government's shares in Aer Lingus is to ensure that the company has sufficient resources, over the long-term, to enable it to compete successfully, to develop its business as market opportunities emerge and to ensure that it has the strength in its balance sheet to withstand the industry downturns and external shocks that are recognised features of the aviation industry. Through the IPO, Aer Lingus raised approx. €400m to fund its expansion based business plan to meet these objectives.

Competitive and convenient air access is an important element of Ireland's tourism strategy. A competitive aviation market helps to drive down the cost of air travel and benefits Ireland as a tourism destination. My Department was involved in the inter-Departmental group, which considered the option of an Aer Lingus flotation, and brought a tourism policy perspective to bear in the deliberations of that group.

*Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 28.*

#### Sports Sponsorship.

54. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the sponsorship of sporting events by alcohol brands and companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34870/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** On 22 September 2004, my colleague the Minister for Health & Children launched the Second Report of the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol. My Department and the Irish Sports Council were represented on this Task Force. The Report recommended that national sporting bodies, with high youth participation, develop a proactive strategy to find an alternative



[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

to alcohol sponsorship. I support this recommendation, which is in keeping with the provisions of the Irish Sports Council's 'Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport in Ireland' to which national governing bodies of sport have signed up. The development of such a strategy is a matter for the individual national governing bodies of sport. This derives from the recognition that the independence and autonomy of sports organisations, their affiliates and individual clubs has remained a fundamental principle underpinning successive Governments' support for Irish sport.

In any debate on issues arising in connection with the sponsorship of sport, it is important to retain perspective. Governing bodies and clubs across the spectrum of sports freely acknowledge that sponsorship from the business and commercial sectors provides much needed financial, material and promotional support, which has the effect of freeing up other resources that can then be invested in the development of the sport, increased participation and improved facilities. Nevertheless, I agree that where alcohol is concerned great care has to be taken by sports organisations to ensure that the nature and extent of any sponsorship is proportionate and appropriate to the environment in which sporting activities take place. This is particularly important when it comes to assessing the effect such sponsorship could have on children and young people involved in sport.

I am pleased to say that the three major field sports, the GAA, FAI and IRFU, have moved away from sponsorship by alcohol interests insofar as it relates to their under-age activities and competitions. The GAA, in particular, acting in response to its Alcohol Task Force, has appointed a full-time alcohol abuse officer, who is currently developing a strategy in relation to alcohol for the Association.

I would recommend that all governing bodies ensure that restraint and good judgement is applied in relation to sponsorship at all levels of their organisations. In that regard, the recent initiative taken by the GAA serves as an example of a mature and considered response to concerns articulated by its membership and I believe it provides a model which could be followed by other governing bodies in the interests of both sports people and the health and welfare of the wider population.

#### **Sports Funding.**

55. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of funding awarded by him in respect of sporting or recreational grants in the years 2003 to date in 2006; the intended expenditure for the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34830/06]

129. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of funding available for expenditure on major and minor sporting and recreational grants in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35032/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 55 and 129 together.

Under Subhead C1 of my Department's Vote, payments are made in respect of Grants for Sporting Bodies and the provision of Sports and Recreational Facilities. A total of €67,724,000 is available for expenditure in 2006 under this subhead.

The total amount of grant allocations relating to this sub-head for the years requested by the Deputy is as follows:

2003: €56,352,733

2004: €101,783,014

2005: €63,239,419

2006: €75,065,000.

The 2004 amount includes a grant of €40m in September 2004 to the Gaelic Athletic Association towards the re-development of Croke Park.

In the case of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, which is also administered by my Department, the sum of €32.3 million is available for expenditure under the Programme in 2006. My Department provides grant aid under the Pools Programme to local authorities towards the capital costs of a new or replacement public swimming pool or the refurbishment of an existing pool. Of the 57 projects currently being dealt with, 22 projects have been completed, 15 other pools are under construction or about to begin construction. The remaining 20 projects are at various stages in the programme. So far this year, I have approved 8 projects for grant aid and approved contract documents for 9 public pools. Details of the amounts available for expenditure in 2007 for both sports capital and local authority swimming pool projects will be available when the Abridged Estimates for my Department is published next month.

#### **National Theatre.**

56. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will provide details of the international competition underway to find a design for the new Abbey Theatre; when the competition will close; when he expects to be in a position to finalise design of the new theatre; the latest timetable for the construction of the new theatre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34811/06]

59. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the expected timescale for the provision of the new National Theatre at George's Dock; when will expressions of interest

be invited for the architectural design of the building; if he will proceed with a PPP arrangement to provide the theatre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34705/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 59 together.

In July 2006, the Government approved arrangements for the redevelopment of the Abbey Theatre at George's Dock on a Build, Finance, and Maintain (BFM) basis. It also approved the holding of an international design competition for the new Abbey Theatre. Once a winning design has been selected the building will be procured by means of a Build/Finance/Maintain (BFM) Public Private Partnership.

The OPW are currently working on the technical specifications for the design competition. A jury is being set up to select the winning design. The jury will have representatives from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, the OPW, the Dublin Docklands Development Authority, the Arts Council and the Abbey. It is hoped that a suitable design will be available by summer 2007. Once the design has been selected a competition will then be held to procure the contract for the PPP. A construction phase of approximately 18-24 months is envisaged once the PPP contract has been signed.

#### National Aquatic Centre.

57. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if repairs were carried out on the National Aquatic Centre recently; if an independent structural engineering assessment has been carried out on the building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34710/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** During severe weather conditions in the west Dublin area on 1 January 2005, damage was caused to the roof of the National Aquatic Centre. Consulting Structural and Civil Engineers, Kavanagh Mansfield & Partners, were commissioned to examine the damage and oversee the repairs. Repair works at the National Aquatic Centre were completed on 20 May 2005 and the Centre was reopened to the public on that date. Kavanagh Mansfield and Partners have certified that the programme of works was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the design and secured certification from the designer's contractors and subcontractors in relation to the various elements of the works.

The repair work, which cost just over €1 million, was completed at no cost to Campus Stadium Ireland Ltd. (CSID).

In common with all new buildings, there is a process for dealing with any snags that arise in the building. In relation to the National Aquatic Centre, some repairs to snags have been carried out, although there are still some such issues to

be resolved. The costs arising from any such repairs are a matter for the building contractor. No independent structural engineering assessment has been carried out in relation to these repairs.

#### National Concert Hall.

58. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if an organisation (details supplied) will be accommodated on the proposed extended National Concert Hall site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34708/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** The Government has agreed to the redevelopment of the National Concert Hall at its existing location on Earlsfort Terrace. It is proposed that the redeveloped Concert Hall will incorporate a main auditorium with a seating capacity for 2,000 patrons, the existing auditorium which will be retained as a rehearsal hall and a mid-scale public performance space, and a smaller flexible hall with a seating capacity of approximately 500. The redeveloped Concert Hall will also meet the requirement for universal access.

The proposal incorporates easy access for large articulated trucks transporting orchestral and concert equipment.

It is envisaged that the Earlsfort Terrace buildings would be re-united with the Iveagh Gardens, facilitating increased public access. New public rooms, cafes and restaurants would over-look the Gardens and the city.

There is no proposal to relocate the Royal Irish Academy of Music in the redeveloped National Concert Hall.

*Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 56.*

#### Illegal Fireworks.

60. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of prosecutions that were taken as a result of seizures of illegal fireworks in each of the years 1997 to date in 2006; the number of convictions and the penalties as a result of these seizures imposed for each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34909/06]

66. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount of illegal fireworks that were seized by An Garda Síochána in each of the years 1997 to date in 2006; the number of prosecutions that were taken as a result of these seizures; the number of convictions and the penalties as a result of these seizures imposed for each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34915/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 66 together.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the manner in which statistics were collated prior to 2004 does not allow the number of seizures to be identified, however over 63,000 fireworks were seized between 2000 and 2003.

The following table shows the number of seizures and approximate value of fireworks seized between 2004 and to date in 2006.

Year	No. of Seizures	Value (Approx)
		€
2006*	42	104,876
2005	126	454,760
2004	34	170,000

\*Figures provided for 2006 are provisional, operational and liable to change.

I am further informed by the Garda Authorities that from 2000 to date in 2006 there have been 13 proceedings commenced, with no convictions recorded, for offences under the Explosives Act, 1875 relating to fireworks. The Explosives Act, 1875 has been amended by Part 6 of the Criminal Justice Act, 2006 which came into effect on 1 August, 2006.

Statistics on seizures and prosecutions prior to 2000 are not readily available and can only be obtained by the disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources.

#### Fireworks Regulation.

61. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if all sections of the Criminal Justice Act, 2006 in relation to fireworks have been signed into law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34910/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I wish to inform the Deputy that on 1st August, 2006, I signed an order bringing all sections relating to fireworks in the Criminal Justice Act 2006 into immediate effect. The Criminal Justice Act 2006 provides for new offences, governing the illegal possession and use of fireworks, and increased penalties. Under these new provisions it is an offence:

- 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.

#### Crime Levels.

62. **Ms Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 124 of 19 October 2006, the page number in the Garda Annual Reports of 2003 to 2005 which contains the information requested in the question, that is statistics by Garda district; if he will confirm that this information is not contained in these reports; his reason for withholding such information when preliminary figures have already been provided to other Deputies; his views on whether withholding such information provides for a transparent and accountable police force; and if he will provide the information requested. [34911/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I have always been an advocate of a properly transparent and accountable Garda Síochána. For that reason I introduced the Garda Síochána Bill, which was enacted as the Garda Síochána Act, 2005, to increase, among other things, the Force's transparency and accountability. In addition to establishing such bodies as the Ombudsman Commission and the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, the Act provides in section 47 for the compilation of statistical information.

Following the submission to me in 2004 of a report and recommendations by an expert group on crime statistics, I decided that the compilation, production and publication of crime statistics should be taken over by the Central Statistics Office, as the national statistical agency, from the Garda Síochána. The Garda Síochána Act, 2005 consequently makes provision for this and the CSO established a dedicated Unit for this purpose. Following the setting up of the necessary technical systems and auditing of the data from which the statistics are compiled, I am pleased to note that the CSO will compile and publish criminal statistics, starting with the figures for the third quarter of this year.

The information provided in reply to Parliamentary Question No. 124 of 19 October 2006 is available on page 26 of the Garda Síochána Annual Report 2005 and page 40 of the Garda Síochána Annual Report 2003. The reports in question contain statistics based on Garda division. However, I understand that the CSO will examine how the crime statistics published might be expanded and made more comprehensive.

#### Residency Permits.

63. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Mini-



ster for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his Department has received an application by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath in relation to renewal of their residency application; the position of the application as same is required in view of the fact that they have an opportunity of obtaining a job; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34912/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** An application for a permanent residence card as the non-EU family member of an EU citizen has been received in respect of the person concerned. It is expected that a decision on the application will be made within the next few weeks.

#### **Illegal Fireworks.**

64. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of prosecutions that were taken in relation to offences committed with fireworks in each of the years 1997 to date in 2006; the number of convictions and the penalties imposed for each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34913/06]

65. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of prosecutions that were taken in relation to the illegal importation of fireworks in each of the years 1997 to date in 2006; the number of convictions and the penalties imposed for each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34914/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 65 together.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that between 2000 and 2006 there have been 13 proceedings commenced, with no convictions recorded, for offences under the Explosives Act, 1875 relating to fireworks.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that from 2000 to date in 2006 there have been 8 proceedings commenced, with no convictions recorded, for offences contrary to the Explosives Act, 1875 relating to the possession of fireworks without having an importation licence.

Figures in relation to 2006 are provisional, operational and liable to change. The Explosives Act, 1875 has been amended by Part 6 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006, which came into effect on 1 August, 2006.

Statistics prior to 2000 are not readily available and can only be obtained by the disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources.

*Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 60.*

#### **Departmental Properties.**

67. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the properties that have been acquired and sold by the Reception Integration Agency in each of the years 2000 to 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34957/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I am informed that the Commissioners of Public Works, acting on behalf of the Reception and Integration Agency, purchased the following properties for the purpose of accommodating asylum seekers.

Property

Park Lodge, Killarney

Atlas House, Tralee

Atlas House, Killarney

Cork Airport Hotel, Kinsale Road

Johnson Marina Hotel, Tralee

Parnell West Hotel, Dublin 1 — Sold Aug 06

Broc House, Dublin 4 — Transferred to Affordable Homes Partnership Sept 06

Lynch's Lodge, Macroom — Sold Dec 05

Devereux Hotel, Rosslare — Sold July 03

Ionad Follain, Myshall, Co Carlow — Transferred to the Minister for Health and Children Aug 02.

#### **Garda Deployment.**

68. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the cost to his Department of the increased Garda presence at Bellanaboy Shell Refinery since 2 October 2006; the cost to date with a breakdown of the Gardaí rank, the salaries paid including basic salary, overtime, transfer allowance and so on; the projected costs of this exercise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34958/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The detailed information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in the detail sought and is currently being compiled by the Garda authorities. I will contact the Deputy again when the information is to hand.

#### **Residency Permits.**

69. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be reached on the application for residency in the State on the basis of marriage to an Irish national of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34965/06]



**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** An application for residency in the State on the basis of marriage to an Irish national was received from the person in question in December 2005. An acknowledgement of receipt of the application was issued to the person concerned on 4 January, 2006.

Applications of this kind, in fairness to all other such applicants, are dealt with in strict chronological order and currently take approximately 12 months to process. It should be noted that marriage to an Irish national does not confer an automatic right of residence in the State.

#### **Garda Deployment.**

70. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when Monasterevin Garda Station will re-open; if, in view of the growth of the local population, he will request the Garda Commissioner to increase the number of personnel stationed in the town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34977/06]

**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 Garda station in Monasterevin was closed due to fire damage on 13th September, 2006. The Office of Public Works have been requested to ascertain the remedial works required to re-open the station. When the proposals are received from the Board and examined by the Garda Authorities, a decision on how best to proceed can be taken.

I have also been informed that the personnel strength (all ranks) of Monasterevin Garda Station, which forms part of the Carlow/Kildare Division, as at 26 October, 2006 was 3. The personnel strength (all ranks) of the Carlow/Kildare Division as at 31 December, 1997 and 26 October, 2006 was 281 and 362, respectively, representing an increase of 81 (or 29%) in the number of Gardaí allocated to the Division during that period.

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 Monasterevin will be given the fullest consideration.

#### **Citizenship Applications.**

71. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when the application for post nuptial citizenship of a person (details supplied) in County Cork will be dealt with; and the reason for the delay to date. [34998/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The statutory provisions providing for the process of post-nuptial citizenship were repealed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 2001, which came into effect on 30 November 2002. A transition provision contained in the Act enabled persons who married Irish citizens prior to 30 November 2002 to make a declaration on or before 29 November 2005. As the person in question married her husband on 16 January 2003, post-nuptial citizenship was not an option.

However, the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. In the case of a non national applicant who is the spouse of an Irish citizen those conditions are that the applicant

must — be of full age, be of good character, be married to the Irish citizen for at least 3 years, be in a marriage recognised under the laws of the State as subsisting, be living together as husband and wife with the Irish spouse, have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the island of Ireland immediately before the date of the application and, during the four years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the island of Ireland amounting to two years; intend in good faith to continue to reside in the island of Ireland after naturalisation, have made, either before a Judge of the District Court in open court or in such a manner as the Minister, for special reasons allows, a declaration in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State.

An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in the Citizenship section of my Department on 11 January 2006. The application was examined shortly after receipt and it was determined that the person in question did not have the required reckonable residency as she was not married for three years at the date of application and consequently was not eligible to apply for a certificate of naturalisation at that time. Her solicitors were informed of this by letter dated 10 March 2006.

On 21 July 2006, the person in question lodged a new application for a certificate of naturalisation. The average processing time for such applications is currently 24 months. Therefore, it is likely that the application of the individual concerned will be finalised in mid-2008. I will inform both the applicant and the Deputy when a decision has been made on the application.

#### Firearms Regulations.

72. **Mr. J. O'Keefe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of legally held firearms here; and the estimated number of illegal firearms. [34999/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** An Garda Síochána have informed me that at present there are 226,533 legally held firearms in the State. The very fact that firearms are held illegally precludes statistics being available of the number of such firearms. However, the Garda Síochána take all appropriate action to ensure that illegally held firearms are seized and that the holders of such firearms are proceeded against.

#### Visa Applications.

73. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a green card stamp will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35015/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I refer the Deputy to my previous reply to his question No. 165 of 24 March 2005 regarding the person in question. Despite being advised on a number of occasions by officials in the Immigration and Naturalisation Service of my Department to make an application for permission to remain in the State, the person concerned has not done so to date. The matter cannot be considered until such an application is made. Applications of this nature are dealt with in strict chronological order.

#### Residency Permits.

74. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will review an application for family reunification in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35016/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** As I informed the Deputy in my replies to his Dáil Questions on 8 February 2006 and on 27 September 2006, my Department has received no correspondence to date in relation to a request for a review of this case. If such a request is received it will be considered.

#### Asylum Applications.

75. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35037/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I refer the Deputy to Parliamentary Question No. 77 of Thursday, 15th June, 2006, and 179 of Thursday, 22nd June, 2006 and the written replies to those Questions. The position is unchanged.

#### Residency Permits.

76. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35038/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I refer the Deputy to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 177 of Thursday, 9th February, 2006; and 393 of Wednesday, 27th September, 2006 and the written replies to those Questions. The position is unchanged.

77. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will review the application for extended residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in

[Mr. Durkan.]

Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35039/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I refer the Deputy to my previous reply to his question No. 425 of 27 September, 2006 regarding the person in question. The immigration status of the person concerned is still under review.

78. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the procedure to be followed in respect of residency or citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35040/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I refer the Deputy to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 468 of Tuesday, 31st January, 2006; 147 of Thursday, 27th April, 2006; 427 of Tuesday, 16th May, 2006, and 630 of Thursday, 6th July, 2006, and the written replies to those Questions. The position is unchanged.

79. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; if they have been issued with a green card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35041/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The person in question was granted permission to remain in the State on the basis of being the dependent of the parent of an Irish born child. However the renewal of this permission is currently under consideration as the person concerned has changed circumstances. It is expected that a decision will issue shortly in this case.

#### **Citizenship Applications.**

80. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position in regard to the application for naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35042/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The persons referred to in the Deputy's question arrived in the State in 1998 and sought asylum. They subsequently withdrew their applications before a decision was reached and sought permission to remain on foot of parentage of their Irish born child in 1998. Such permission was granted for one year in September 1999.

Applications for certificates of naturalisation were lodged in the Citizenship Section of my Department on 20 March, 2003. On examination

of these applications, it was determined that the applicants did not satisfy the statutory residency requirements and they were informed of this in March 2005.

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. One of these conditions is that the applicant has had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of the application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, has had a total residence in the State amounting to four years.

In the context of determining if an applicant meets the residence requirement for naturalisation, certain periods of residence in the State must be excluded. These include periods of residence in respect of which an applicant does not have permission to remain in the State, periods granted for the purposes of study and periods granted for the purposes of seeking recognition as a refugee within the meaning of the Refugee Act, 1996.

Although both persons were granted permission to remain in the State on the basis of their Irish born child in September 1999, that permission expired on 28 September, 2000. It appears that neither person renewed their permission to remain between October 2000 and July 2002. Consequently neither party satisfied the statutory conditions at the time of their previous application.

Officials in the Citizenship Section of my Department have advised me that it is now open to both parties to lodge fresh applications for naturalisation provided they have maintained their permission to remain in the State at all times.

81. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position of the application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35043/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I refer to my replies to Parliamentary Question Nos. 209 and 76 of 29 June 2006 and 15 June 2006 respectively in which I informed the Deputy that the person concerned applied for naturalisation in November 2002 and I decided to refuse that application. I also informed the Deputy that it appears that the individual will be eligible to re-apply in January 2010 provided she maintains her permission to remain in the State at all times. This is still the position.

#### **Residency Permits.**

82. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the



residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35044/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The person concerned arrived in the State on 29 May, 2003 and applied for asylum. His application was refused following consideration of his 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, he was informed by letter dated 3 February, 2005, that the Minister proposed to make a deportation order in respect of him. He was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why he should be allowed to remain temporarily in the State; leaving the State before an order is made or consenting to the making of a deportation order. Representations have been received on behalf of the person concerned.

This 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). I expect the file to be passed to me for decision in due course.

83. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he has re-examined the full circumstances in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15, having particular regard to humanitarian and health issues with a view to offering extended residency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35045/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I refer the Deputy to Parliamentary Question No. 187 of Thursday, 1 June, 2006 and the written reply to that Question. The position is unchanged.

84. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the residency status in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35046/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The persons in question were granted permission to remain in the State on 24 February 2006 under the revised arrangements for non-national parents of Irish children born prior to 1 January 2005.

#### **Citizenship Applications.**

85. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position in regard to an application for naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied) in

County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35047/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** Applications for certificates of naturalisation from the persons referred to in the Deputy's question were received in the Citizenship section of my Department on 25 February, 2005. I understand that the processing of the applications is complete and that the case files have just been submitted to me for a decision. I will advise the Deputy and the people in question once I have reached a decision on the applications.

#### **Deportation Orders.**

86. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will review the decision to deport in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7 on humanitarian grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35048/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The person concerned arrived in the State on 11 April, 2001 and applied for asylum. His application was refused following consideration of his case by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and, on appeal, by the Office of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

The person concerned was informed by letter dated 10 July, 2002 that the Minister proposed to make a deportation order in respect of him and afforded him three options in accordance with Section 3(3)(b)(ii) of the Immigration Act, 1999, as amended, namely to leave the State voluntarily, to consent to the making of a deportation order or to submit, within 15 working days, representations to the Minister, in writing, setting out the reasons why he should be allowed to remain temporarily in the State.

His case was examined under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act, 1999 as amended, and Section 5 of the Refugee Act, 1996 on the prohibition of refoulement. Consideration was given to representations received on his behalf from his legal representatives for temporary leave to remain in the State. On 11 September 2003, I refused temporary leave to remain in the State and signed a deportation order in respect of him. Notice of this order was served by registered post requiring him to present himself to the Gardaí in Mill Street, Galway on 30 October 2003 in order to make travel arrangements for his deportation from the State. The person concerned failed to present himself as required and was classified as evading his deportation. He should therefore present himself to the Garda National Immigration Bureau without delay. The effect of the deportation order is that the person concerned must leave the State and remain thereafter outside of it.



[Mr. McDowell.]

The Deputy might wish to note that, in addition to the eleven factors contained in Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act, 1999 (as amended), I must, as stated earlier, also have regard for Section 5 of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement before making a deportation order. This essentially means that the safety of returning a person, or refoulement as it is commonly referred to, is fully considered in every case when deciding whether or not to make a deportation order. The enforcement of the deportation order is now an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

87. **Mr. Boyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of a person (details supplied). [35079/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The person concerned, a Nigerian national, arrived in the State on 19 August, 2003 and applied for asylum. His application was refused by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner on 17 June, 2004, and he was informed that in accordance with Section 13(2)(c) of the Refugee Act 1996 as amended, there was no appeal against that recommendation.

In accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, the person concerned was informed on 20 July, 2004 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. No representations were received from or on behalf of the person concerned. Judicial Review proceedings were instigated by the person concerned on 20th July, 2005 and the proceedings were settled.

I expect the case file in this matter to be submitted to me in due course for decision. This decision will be taken having regard to considerations specified in section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended. These considerations include matters relating to the common good, the person's family and domestic circumstances, as well as humanitarian considerations. Consideration will also be given to the prohibition of refoulement which is contained in section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 as amended.

#### Residency Permits.

88. **Mr. McCormack** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if and when a decision is expected on a residency application by a person (details supplied) in

County Galway; the reason for the delay in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35080/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I refer the Deputy to Parliamentary Question No. 401 of Tuesday, 4th April, 2006 and the written reply to that Question. The position is unchanged.

#### Road Traffic Offences.

89. **Ms Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number and proportion of struck out road traffic prosecutions that are reinstated for a period for which reliable figures are available; and the location where such information is published. [35081/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** I regret that the information sought by the Deputy is not readily available in the time allowed and is currently being researched. I will contact the Deputy again when the information is to hand.

#### Residency Permits.

90. **Mr. Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position of an application for a residential permit under the EU directive for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35082/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** As I stated in my reply to Parliamentary Question 199 of 18 October, 2006 it is open to the person concerned to apply in writing to my Department setting out the grounds for further permission to remain. On receipt of same the application will be fully considered.

#### Citizenship Applications.

91. **Mr. Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position of an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if the person received all of the documents requested in regard to their application; if not, when the appropriate forms will be forwarded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35083/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The person referred to by the Deputy arrived in the State in July 1998 and claimed asylum. He subsequently withdrew that application and applied for permission to remain in the State based on his marriage to an EU national. Permission to remain on that basis was granted in October 1999.

In July 2003, an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person concerned was received in the Citizenship section of my Department. The Irish Nationality and Citizenship, 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. Those conditions are that the applicant must:

- be of full age, or by way of exception, be a minor born in the State
- be of good character
- have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of the application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the State amounting to four years
- intend in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation
- have made, either before a Judge of the District Court in open court or in such a manner as the Minister, for special reasons allows, a declaration in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State.

It should be noted that in the context of naturalisation certain periods of residence in the State are excluded. These include periods of residence in respect of which an applicant does not have permission to remain in the State, periods granted for the purposes of study and periods granted for the purposes of seeking recognition as a refugee within the meaning of the Refugee Act, 1996. Consequently, time spent in the State prior to October 1999 by the person concerned is not reckonable for naturalisation. As the person in question did not meet the statutory residency requirement at that time, his application was deemed ineligible and he was informed of this decision in writing in July 2005 and any original documents in support of his application were enclosed. It is open to the person in question to submit a new application if and when he is in a position to meet the statutory requirements as set out above.

#### **Prison Building Programme.**

92. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the expertise of each member of the expert committee which qualified them as an expert in site selection for a prison to replace Mountjoy. [35095/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The members of the Committee established to review potential sites for a new prison facility to replace the

Mountjoy complex were selected from the relevant organisations on the basis of their experience and expertise. They were as follows:

#### *Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform*

Mr. J. Martin, Chairperson — Assistant Secretary with responsibilities in the prisons area, considerable experience in procurement procedures and a qualified barrister;

Ms A O'Gorman — Principal Officer in charge of the Prisons and Probation and Welfare Policy Division

Mr. F. Black — recent experience in acquiring properties for the Reception and Integration Agency

#### *Irish Prison Service*

Mr. J. Conlan — Director of Finance of the IPS and a qualified accountant

Mr. J. Boyle — Estate Management IPS, experience in site acquisition and prison construction and maintenance

Mr. S. Lennon — Prison Governor with considerable experience in the operation of prisons.

#### *Office of Public Works*

Mr. D. Byers — One of the Commissioners of Public Works with considerable experience in property acquisition and developing major projects and a qualified architect.

Expert advice was also available to the committee.

93. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if the proposed prison complex at Thornton Hall will contain halfway house or step down accommodation for pre-release and newly released offenders; if so, the provisions included in such accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35096/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The Thornton Hall Prison Project will provide specially designed facilities for prisoners in preparation for release particularly for those reaching the end of longer sentences in line with their sentence management. The new facility will enable the Prison Service to accommodate prisoners in a range of security levels.

These levels will include facilities and regimes which will cater for high security, stepping down to low security and pre-release prisoners. Each category, with an appropriate regime, will be accommodated in specially and individually designed buildings: an opportunity not heretofore afforded to any prison development in Ireland.

[Mr. McDowell.]

Each category will have its own education, work training, recreational and support services areas. These will be located on a campus style development within a secure walled perimeter. There will be no accommodation for newly released prisoners or a halfway house facility on the Thornton Hall site.

94. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the expenditure and the amount of each contract awarded under published tenders to date on the proposed prison complex at Thornton Hall by his Department, the Irish Prison Service and by the National Development Finance Agency. [35097/06]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell):** The Irish Prison Service has, to date, awarded two contracts on foot of published tenders in relation to the Thornton Hall Prison project. These tenders were awarded following an EU tender competition, advertised in the European Union Journal.

One tender related to the appointment of consultants to undertake the supply of engineering and other special consultancy services to assist in the preliminary planning of the proposed new prison complex at Thornton Hall, North County Dublin. The consultancy services included engineering, civil, mechanical and electrical as well as archaeological services, flora and fauna, topographical and geophysical surveys. €510,703 has been spent on this tender to date.

The second tender was awarded in relation to the provision of architectural, engineering, master planning, quantity surveying, development of the project brief and project management services for the substantive project. €174,285 has been spent on this tender to date.

I am advised by the National Development Finance Agency that they have engaged a firm to supply assistance in Financial Evaluation, Taxation and Insurance Services in respect of the Thornton Hall Prison Project. Deloitte & Touche were selected as the winning firm in May 2006 following a competitive tender process involving six bidders. No expenditure has arisen under this Contract to date. The Contract is a fixed price contract and the amount of the contract is not disclosed as it is commercially sensitive.

#### Licensing of Bookmakers.

95. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Finance the number of licences issued to bookies in each of the past ten years; the criteria governing the issuing of such licences; the tax to date from bookies in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34946/06]

**Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen):** The following table, prepared by the Revenue Commis-

sioners, provides details for the past ten years of the number of bookmakers licences issued and licence duty paid each year. Licences are renewed on an annual basis.

Year	Bookmakers Licences. Numbers issued	Bookmakers Licence. Duty Net Receipts
		€
1996	534	135,862
1997	572	145,512
1998	571	144,750
1999	495	125,196
2000	600	152,369
2001	582	146,921
2002	560	139,813
2003	584	145,124
2004	535	131,474
2005	588	147,500

Regarding the criteria governing the issue of such licences, a person who wishes to obtain a bookmaker's licence must first of all obtain a certificate of personal fitness from a Superintendent of the Garda Síochána. The criteria governing the issue of certificates of personal fitness are contained in section 4 of the Betting Act 1931, which provides as follows:

(1) Any person (other than a body corporate or an unincorporated body of persons) who is ordinarily resident in Saorstát Éireann and desires to obtain a bookmaker's licence may, after publishing the notice hereinafter mentioned, apply in accordance with this section to the Superintendent of the Garda Síochána for the district in which he has or proposes to have an office registered under this Act or, if he has not and does not propose to have any such office, to the Superintendent of the Garda Síochána for the district in which he ordinarily resides for a certificate (in this Act referred to as a certificate of personal fitness) that he is a fit and proper person to hold a bookmaker's licence.

(2) Every person intending to apply under this section for a certificate of personal fitness shall, not less than one fortnight nor more than one month before making such application, publish notice of his intention to make such application at least once in each of two newspapers circulating in the district of the Superintendent to whom he intends to make such application.

(3) Every application under this section for a certificate of personal fitness shall be made in the prescribed manner and on the prescribed form and shall be approved of and signed by two Peace Commissioners in the district of the superintendent to whom the application is made.

(4) A Superintendent of the Garda Síochána to whom an application for a certificate of personal fitness is duly made under this section shall, within fourteen days after the receipt of such application, do one or other as he in his discretion shall think proper of the following things, that is to say, either give to the applicant a certificate in the prescribed form that he is a fit and proper person to hold a bookmaker's licence or on any one or more of the grounds hereinafter authorised refuse to give such certificate.

Once a person has obtained a certificate of personal fitness, he or she can apply to the Revenue Commissioners for a bookmaker's licence within 21 days after the issue of the certificate. Subsection (3) of section 7 of the Betting Act 1931 provides that:

Upon delivery to the Revenue Commissioners of an application under this section for a bookmaker's licence and payment to the Revenue Commissioners by the applicant of the excise duty required by law to be paid by persons taking out such licence as is specified in such application, the Revenue Commissioners shall issue to the applicant a bookmaker's licence in accordance with this section. Provided that, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any other enactment, any licence commencing on or after the 1st day of October, 1993, shall not be granted by the Revenue Commissioners unless a tax clearance certificate in relation to that licence has been issued in accordance with section 242 (as amended by the Finance Act, 1993) of the Finance Act, 1992.

As regards the tax paid by bookmakers, the only information that is readily and accurately to hand is data in respect of betting duty over the last ten years, and this is supplied in the table below. The rate of duty was 10% up to 1 July 1999 when it was reduced to 5%. The rate was further reduced to 2% with effect from 1 May 2002 and was reduced again with effect from 1 July 2006 to 1%. Bookmakers are treated as exempt bodies for VAT purposes.

Year	Betting Duty Receipts
	€m
1996	51.6
1997	57.8
1998	66.2
1999	67.8
2000	58.9
2001	68.1
2002	47.9
2003	38.4
2004	45.5
2005	45.8

### Illegal Fireworks.

96. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of illegal fireworks that were seized by the Revenue Commissioners Customs Service in each of the years 1997 to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34909/06]

**Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen):** I am informed by the Garda authorities that the manner in which statistics were collated prior to 2004 does not allow the number of seizures to be identified. However, over 63,000 fireworks were seized between 2000 and 2003. The following table shows the number of seizures and approximate value of fireworks seized between 2004 and to date in 2006.

Year	No. of Seizures	Value (Approx)
		€
2006*	42	104,876
2005	126	454,760
2004	34	170,000

\*Figures provided for 2006 are provisional, operational and liable to change.

I am further informed by the Garda Authorities that from 2000 to date in 2006 there have been 13 proceedings commenced, with no convictions recorded, for offences under the Explosives Act, 1875 relating to fireworks. The Explosives Act, 1875 has been amended by Part 6 of the Criminal Justice Act, 2006 which came into effect on 1 August, 2006.

Statistics on seizures and prosecutions prior to 2000 are not readily available and can only be obtained by the disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources.

### Tax Code.

97. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer for reducing the top rate of tax by 1% and 2% and for reducing the bottom rate of tax by 1% and 2%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34942/06]

**Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen):** By reference to the 2007 Pre Budget ready reckoner prepared by the Revenue Commissioners the full year costs to the Exchequer of reducing the top rate of income tax by one percentage point and two percentage points are estimated to be €228 million and €457 million, respectively. The costs of corresponding reductions in the standard rate of income tax are estimated at €512 million and €1,023 million respectively. These figures are provisional and subject to revision. The ready reckoner is available on my Department's website, at [www.finance.gov.ie](http://www.finance.gov.ie).



98. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if there are proposals to amend Section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 as sought by the Dyslexia Association of Ireland to allow the cost of specific tuition for dyslexia to qualify for tax relief under the heading of health expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34954/06]

**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.

#### **Social Welfare Code.**

99. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on allowing sole traders who employ their spouses to pay social insurance contributions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34996/06]

**Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen):** The issue raised is a matter for consideration by my colleague the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. I have no functional responsibility in this matter.

#### **Tax Code.**

100. **Mr. Boyle** asked the Minister for Finance the number of private pension plans, with a value of €5 million and more, that have been granted tax relief since 1 January 2005 until the coming into being of the Finance Act 2006, giving details of the granting of such reliefs on a monthly basis. [35011/06]

**Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen):** I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to the provision in Section 787P of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1999 (introduced by section 14 of the Finance Act 2006) which introduced a maximum allowable tax-relieved pension fund on retirement of €5 million, known as the ‘standard fund threshold’ and to the higher ‘personal fund threshold’ to apply where the capital value of an individual’s pension rights on 7 December 2005 exceeded the standard fund threshold amount. This limit or ceiling applies to the total capital value of pension benefits that an individual can draw in their lifetime from all tax relieved pension products, including public sector pension schemes, where those benefits first come into payment on or after 7 December 2005. To avail of the higher personal threshold, the individual concerned was required to notify Revenue and provide details of the higher amount on or before 6 June 2006.

Private pension plans can take a number of forms: Occupational Pension Schemes (including small self-administered schemes used primarily by proprietary directors of companies); Retirement Annuity Contracts (used primarily by the self-employed); and PRSAs (which are open to all). The €5m standard fund threshold and the personal fund thresholds apply to all these categories of private pension plan.

However, notification to Revenue of amounts in excess of €5 million, for the purpose of these thresholds, did not arise until 2006 (as these measures were not announced until Budget 2006, and the relevant processes were put in place in Finance Act 2006.) I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that 117 notifications of personal fund thresholds in excess of €5 million were received by them before the 6 June 2006 deadline. I am further informed that, to date, Revenue has issued certificates noting the relevant personal fund thresholds in respect of 75 of the notifications received. The other 42 notifications are at various stages of enquiry.

The Deputy will be aware that, in due course, where the capital value of pension benefits drawn by an individual, whether by way of pension, lump sum or transfer to an approved retirement fund etc, exceeds the relevant threshold, the excess will be subject to an up-front income tax charge of 42%. This charge is in addition to any other income tax charge that might arise in the normal course on the pension benefits drawn down. The Deputy will also be aware that this measure was part of a suite of measures in relation to pensions announced in Budget 2006, and should not, of course, be seen in isolation.

#### **Public Sector Employment.**

101. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if the imposition of pay pauses for civil servants that are not applicable to private sector employees is constitutionally sound, in view of the fact that civil servants have a statutory right

to pay and conditions of employment which can be enforced by the Courts and taking into account that he is obliged to fix pay and conditions of employment of civil servants in accordance with Articles 40.3.1 and 40.3.2, including relevant rulings and interpretations by the Courts in relation to articles (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35023/06]

**Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen):** Under each of the public service pay agreements under Sustaining Progress and Towards 2016 the effective date of the first pay increase under the new agreement was some months after the termination of the previous agreement. These terms were negotiated by the Government and the public service trade unions. I am satisfied that there is no conflict with any constitutional provision.

#### Tax Code.

102. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if an organisation (details supplied) in County Louth can obtain compensation for VAT paid on building works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35076/06]

**Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen):** The position is that charities and non-profit groups engaged in non-commercial activity are exempt from VAT under the EU Sixth VAT Directive, with which Irish VAT law must comply. This means they do not charge VAT on the services they provide and cannot recover VAT incurred on goods and services that they purchase. Essentially only VAT registered businesses which charge VAT are able to recover VAT.

Ministerial Orders have been used in a limited way to provide refunds of VAT on certain aids and appliances for the disabled and on medical equipment donated voluntarily to hospitals. These orders are focused and are designed to target specific circumstances. However, under EU law, it would not be possible to introduce new schemes within the VAT Act 1972 to relieve charities from the obligation to pay VAT on goods and services that they purchase.

I would add that the tax code currently provides exemption for charities from Income Tax, Corporation Tax, Capital Gains Tax, Deposit Interest Retention Tax, Capital Acquisitions Tax, Stamp Duty, Probate Tax and Dividend Withholding Tax. Moreover, charities also benefit significantly from the uniform scheme of tax relief for donations, which was introduced in the Finance Act 2001 and which, for the first time, allowed tax relief on personal donations to domestic charities and other approved bodies. The relief is based on the taxpayer's marginal rate which for an individual donor could be as high as 42%. In the case of donations from the PAYE sector the relief is given directly to the charities.

#### Public Works Projects.

103. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance the projects and final costs of the projects that involved work by a company (details supplied) for the Office of Public Works in each year since 2003 to date in 2006. [35098/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon):** The information sought is being compiled at present by the Commissioners of Public Works and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

104. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance the estate agents, auctioneers and valuers who have been contracted to do work for the Office of Public Works in each year since 2003 to date in 2006; the projects in which they were involved; the value of their contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35099/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon):** The information requested is not maintained in a format which is readily available within the Office of Public Works. I propose to forward the information directly to the Deputy when all the details have been collated.

#### Health Service Allowances.

105. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Health and Children if, in view of the need, she will review the decision to refuse domiciliary care allowance to a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34932/06]

**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.

106. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a person (details supplied) in County Cork who successfully appealed a decision regarding domiciliary care allowance recently is entitled to a respite care grant. [35000/06]

**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

[Mr. T. O'Malley.]

have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

#### Community Care.

107. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount paid to staff and the amount paid to home care packages in view of the amount of funding given to County Mayo under the home care grant packages. [34908/06]

**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.

#### Child Care Services.

108. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children his views on further funding for a crèche (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will respond to the submissions made to him at the meeting of 15 June 2006. [34926/06]

**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 Child care Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP) and the National Child care Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP), which are being implemented by the Office of the Minister for Children.

The Group in question has been provisionally approved capital funding of €1.4 million under the EOCP, in respect of a proposal to develop a child care facility. This funding is approved subject to the Group concluding a satisfactory contractual agreement with Pobal, which is engaged to administer the grants on behalf of the Office of the Minister for Children.

Following my meeting with the Group in June 2006 to discuss the amount of capital funding provisionally approved in line with the programme criteria, I understand from enquiries I have made that revised plans for the proposal have been submitted by the Group to Pobal and that discussions are continuing with a view to bringing the project to contract.

#### Proposed Legislation.

109. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children when she will introduce the promised legislation to fortify flour with folic acid as recommended by the National Committee for Folic Acid Food Fortification in July 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34927/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power):** In accordance with the recommendations of the Report of the National Committee on Folic Acid Food Fortification, an implementation group has been established to oversee operational issues associated with the mandatory fortification of breads with folic acid. The report was launched on 18 July 2006 and the projected timescale for the introduction of the necessary legislation and for the implementation of the fortification programme is one year from that date.

#### Nursing Home Subventions.

110. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the criteria for assessment of nursing home subvention are currently under review; if so the amendments being considered; the stage the review is at; when changes are expected to be implemented; if the value of an applicants home or part of that value will be considered as part of subvention applications in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34928/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power):** As the Deputy may be aware, the Health (Nursing Homes) Act 1990 and the Nursing Homes Regulations 1993 provide for the payment of subvention for private nursing home care for applicants who qualify on both medical and means grounds. General rules for the assessment of means in respect of an application for nursing home subvention are set out in the Second Schedule of the Nursing Homes Regulations 1993, as amended by the 2005 Regulations.

Under the Regulations, when considering an application for subvention, the Health Service Executive carries out a means test which takes into account the means (including assets) of the applicant and his or her spouse/cohabiting partner, where appropriate. The means test involves looking at the applicant's income for the previous twelve months. Income from all sources is taken into account and is assessed net of PRSI, income tax and the health contribution and the income of a married or cohabiting person is half the total income of the couple. In assessing an applicant's assets the first €11,000 of such assets is disregarded. The HSE may refuse to pay a subvention if an applicant has assets exceeding €36,000, (excluding their principal residence). In relation to the principal private residence of an applicant, the HSE may impute an income of 5% of the estimated market value of the principal residence of an applicant for subvention, unless the residence is occupied by a spouse or son or daughter aged less than twenty one years or in full time education or in receipt of a social welfare pension/allowance as set out in the 1993 Regulations, as amended by the 2005 Regulations, and generally does so unless there are exceptional cir-



cumstances. The HSE may refuse to pay a subvention if the value of the applicant's principal residence is in excess of €500,000 or more (where the residence is located in the Dublin area) or €300,000 or more (where the residence is located outside the Dublin area).

The HSE has discretion to pay more than the maximum rate of subvention relative to an individual's level of dependency in a case, for example, where personal funds are exhausted. The application of these provisions in an individual case is a matter for the HSE in the context of meeting increasing demands for subvention, subject to the provisions of the Health Act, 2004. The average rate of subvention paid by the HSE generally exceeds the current approved basic rates. The supports paid by the HSE vary from person to person and region to region, depending on nursing home fees for example.

The Health (Nursing Homes)(Amendment) Bill 2006 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. In addition, national guidelines on nursing home subvention are currently being developed by the HSE to ensure an even and equitable application of the regulations nationally.

The Government is currently considering new policy on Long Term Care and several principles underlying this were agreed with the social partners in "Towards 2016". These principles include, 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 Department is currently drawing up proposals as agreed with the social partners in "Towards 2016".

#### **Hospitals Building Programme.**

111. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of sites on the grounds of public hospitals that she has identified for the construction of private hospitals; the estimated market value of the sites; the financial terms under which the sites will be disposed of to the private sector; the bed capacity of the proposed private sector development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34943/06]

**Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):** The HSE is currently engaged in a procurement

process with the private sector to build and operate private hospitals on 10 public hospital sites. This will enable up to 1,000 beds in public hospitals, which are currently used by private patients, to be re-designated for use by public patients. Proposals will be subject to detailed evaluation by the HSE. The procedure will also provide for a rigorous value for money assessment of any proposal and will take account of the value of the public site and the cost of any tax foregone. Any transaction will be on a commercial basis and will fully protect the public interest. In addition, there will be full adherence to public procurement law and best practice.

#### **Health Service Staff.**

112. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she or her Department made a referral to An Bord Altranais in respect of the professional conduct of nurses employed in Leas Cross Nursing Home. [34944/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power):** I have been advised by An Bord Altranais that it does not disclose any information in respect of applications for Inquiry under consideration by the Fitness to Practice Committee. This policy is in accordance with the provisions of the Nurses Act 1985.

#### **Health Repayment Scheme.**

113. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application for return of moneys under the national repayment scheme for a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [34955/06]

114. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application by a person in County Limerick for return of moneys under the national repayment scheme on behalf of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [34956/06]

**Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 113 and 114 together.

As the Health Service Executive has responsibility for administering the Health Repayment Scheme, enquiries relating to the Scheme are referred to the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive. My Department has asked the HSE to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued to the Deputy.

#### **Hospital Services.**

115. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Health and Children his views on correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34976/06]



**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.

**Civil Marriages.**

116. **Mr. J. O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the parts of the Civil Registration Act 2004 relating to marriage and marriage registration that have not been implemented; the objections that remain thereto; and when she expects the provisions of the Act to be fully operational. [34997/06]

**Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):**

An tArd-Chláraitheoir, the Registrar General, is the person with statutory responsibility for the administration of the civil registration system in Ireland, including civil marriages. I have made enquiries with an tArd-Chláraitheoir and the position is as follows. The Civil Registration Act, 2004 provides for the commencement of the various provisions of the Act on a gradual basis. Parts 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8 of the Act, which relate to the administration of the service and the regis-

tration of births, stillbirths and deaths, were commenced on 5 December 2005. The new provisions for marriage are set out in Part 6 of the 2004 Act and include universal procedures for notification, solemnisation and registration of marriages, as well as a choice of venue for civil marriage ceremonies. Before the provisions can be commenced, a substantial body of work needs to be completed, including drafting and publication of regulations, guidelines and detailed procedures; establishment of a register of solemnisers in consultation with religious bodies; establishment of a register of approved venues for civil marriages; and the further development of the computer system to facilitate the administration of the new marriage provisions introduced in the Act: Work in all these areas is underway and is progressing well. There are no objections to the implementation of the marriage provisions that I am aware of.

In view of the number of complex tasks involved in preparing for the commencement of the marriage provisions, it is not possible to be definitive as regards a date for signing commencement orders, but it is unlikely to be before mid-2007. I would like to assure the Deputy that a comprehensive public information campaign will be undertaken at the appropriate time.

**Disabled Drivers.**

117. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a disabled drivers and disabled passengers tax concessions grant has been refused to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [35012/06]

**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 Waiting Lists.**

118. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the waiting period for cardiac or hip replacement surgery; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35013/06]

**Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):**

Responsibility for the collation and publishing of waiting list and waiting time data, including the waiting period for cardiac or hip replacement surgery, now rests with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). The NTPF, which is a statutory body, was established as one of the key actions for dealing with public hospital waiting lists arising from the Health Strategy. My Department has, therefore, asked the Chief Executive of

the NTPF to reply to the Deputy directly with regard to the information requested.

### Health Services.

119. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will undertake a review of stroke services here as recommended in the Government's Cardiovascular Strategy seven years ago; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35014/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power):** In 2005, the Minister for Health and Children met with the Irish Heart Foundation to discuss *inter alia* services for patients with stroke. Following that meeting, the Foundation, with the support of a grant of €70,000 from my Department, convened a National Stroke Review Group (NSRG). The NSRG has representatives from the HSE (population health) and from a wide range of relevant professional and voluntary organisations (community health nurses, speech therapists, volunteer scheme etc.) The Group developed a comprehensive research proposal over a period of nine months based on methods used for an audit of hospital and community services in the UK.

The project involves six separate surveys:

- hospital organisational audits;
- community-based surveys of GPs;
- allied healthcare practitioners (AHPs);
- hospital clinical audits;
- patients and carers;
- nursing homes.

The entire study is scheduled to take 18 months to complete and will provide an important advance in quantifying the preparedness of Irish hospitals for modern stroke treatment, as well as providing a nationwide profile of community stroke services in the Republic of Ireland. The final reports from the hospital organisational audit and GP survey were delivered on schedule on 1 September 2006 and the final report of the survey of allied health professionals is due to be delivered on schedule on 1 December 2006. The three other elements of the study, patients and carers, hospital clinical audits and nursing homes, are currently on schedule with final reports due on 1 September 2007. The NSRG will monitor progress of the research and use the findings to make recommendations on the development of stroke services. The Department and the Health Service Executive will consider policy implications in the light of this national service audit.

### Hospital Services.

120. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if provision will be made for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare currently in Naas General Hospital for their transfer to

either St. Vincent's Hospital, Athy or Maynooth Community Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35036/06]

### 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.

121. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a reply will issue to a query on behalf of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly who is awaiting work on a risk management report following the death of their spouse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35078/06]

### 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 Staff.

122. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the division to which a former principal officer of his Department (details supplied) was transferred on 26 June 2006. [34982/06]

### Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey):

The information being sought by the Deputy is a management issue for the Department's Secretary General and is not one in which I have a function.

123. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if he will request a former principal officer of his Department (details supplied) to furnish him with details as to the nature, venue and date of a sporting or other social events which the officer may have attended or watched on television during the World Cup 2006 as a guest of a party associated with Shell EP Ireland Ltd; and if he will make the report available to this Deputy. [34983/06]

### Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey):

I refer the Deputy to parliamentary Question No. 432 of the 24 October 2006. I have nothing further to add to that reply.

### Telecommunications Services.

124. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources his plans to provide fibre optic broadband to serve a town (details supplied) in County Galway in order that the town is provided with a world class broadband service to enable it achieve it's potential; when he will be announcing the next roll out of broadband to serve those towns not already being served with fibre optic broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35075/06]

**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. 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.

Some 27 MANs have been completed under Phase One. The second Phase of the programme involves the building of MANs in over 90 towns with a population of 1,500 and above that do not have a satisfactory broadband offering from the private sector. Tuam is not part of Phase Two but may be included in a further phase subject to the necessary approval and Exchequer funding being made available.

### Tourism Industry.

125. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the growth of the North American, European or other locations from whence tourists have come here in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35024/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** The compilation and dissemination of Tourism and Travel Statistics is primarily an operational matter for the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and its publications are available to the Deputy. In terms of travel to Ireland, the picture, I am glad to say, is a healthy one. Last year, almost 7 million overseas visitors came to Ireland with an associated spend on the ground of almost €3.5 billion and a further €583 million on carrier receipts. The 2005 visitor numbers were up almost 10% on the corresponding figure for 2003.

All of the major tourism markets showed growth in visitor numbers between 2003 and 2005 as follows:

Britain — up almost 3% at 3.8 million,

Mainland Europe — up 28% at almost 2 million

North America — up over 5% at 953,000, and

Other Long Haul Markets — up over 14% at 285,000.

While it is too early to make final predictions regarding the 2006 season, overseas visitor numbers for the first 8 months of the year are up by almost 11% on the corresponding period for 2005, putting us on course for a record tourism season. Current performance suggests that we may not just achieve but exceed our 2006 targets of a 4.9% growth in visitor numbers and an associated increase of 6.7% in revenue. As global competition intensifies and consumer preferences evolve, these results represent a very robust performance by the sector and emphasise the dynamism and responsiveness of the Irish tourism sector.

126. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if holidays here are competitively priced with holidays in the US, Canada or throughout Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35025/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** Tourism is a services industry, which relies heavily on labour, and Irish public policy operates on the basis of seeking to ensure that those in employment are paid fair wages. Our fiscal model also emphasises indirect as opposed to direct taxation. While both these approaches provide a strong economic development impetus, they can impact on consumption costs for the visitor.

The Tourism Agencies continue to monitor Ireland's competitiveness as a tourism destination. While Ireland is clearly not a low-cost destination, it does seem that Ireland is not perceived as an expensive destination to get to but that there are issues about the relative cost of some on-the-ground amenities.

In 2005, Tourism Ireland undertook a pilot project that focused on benchmarking Ireland's offering on-line against our key competitors in the top four markets (GB, USA, France and Germany) in relation to the cost, availability and choice of flights, hotels and car hire. Overall, it appears that Ireland, in the on-line arena, is very competitive in these sectors.

Fáilte Ireland's Visitor Attitude Survey shows that the area of value, price and good all-round value for money remains an important prerequisite for visitors when considering Ireland as their holiday destination, as does the availability of reasonably priced accommodation and competi-

tively priced air and sea fares. It is important to remember that competitiveness is not just about price. It is about value for money and, if our tourism sector is to be competitive, that is what it must deliver. As in most industries, there is, no doubt, scope for efficiency gains and Fáilte Ireland has a range of programmes to help the industry in this area.

### Arts Funding.

127. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his plans to encourage the development of a network of theatres with a view to the promotion of the arts here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35030/06]

128. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will offer financial assistance for the restoration of existing buildings or the development of new structures to accommodate local productions or plays, musicals or other presentations of a theatrical nature with a view to encouraging development of the arts in all areas here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35031/06]

130. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will offer recreational grants to musical or dramatic societies for the improvement, extension or restoration of their premises throughout County Kildare in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35033/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 127, 128 and 130 together.

On 24 July last, I announced a new scheme to support investment in arts and culture infrastructure. This new scheme called ACCESS II or the Arts and Culture Enhancement Support Scheme II, will run from 2007 to 2009. The scheme is intended to provide a further impetus to the development of arts and culture facilities thereby enhancing the quality of life for our citizens. While the intention is to prioritise the enhancement and maintenance of existing facilities, there will also be provision to support new build projects under the terms of the scheme.

This is a successor to the highly successful ACCESS I scheme, introduced in August 2001, which allocated €45.71 million to the promoters of 44 projects. This scheme greatly enhanced the provision of arts and culture infrastructure nationwide, increasing accessibility to the arts throughout the country. Applications under ACCESS II will be accepted until 17 November, 2006 and the selection of projects will be undertaken in close collaboration with the Arts Council. An independent committee will assess project proposals received and will make recommendations to me for consideration. I hope to be in a position to announce the successful applicants early next year.

*Question No. 129 answered with Question No. 55.*

*Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 127.*

### Departmental Expenditure.

131. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the expenditure by his Department from the proceeds of the National Lottery in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35034/06]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue):** The elements of my Department's Vote which are part-funded by proceeds of the National Lottery are as follows:

Subhead C.1 — Grants for sporting bodies and for the provision of sports and recreational facilities under the Sports Capital Programme;

Subhead C.3 — Grant-in-Aid provided to the Irish Sports Council in respect of general assistance to sports organisations and expenditure in relation to sports activities; and

Subhead D.7 — Grant-in-Aid allocation provided to the Arts Council.

Details of National Lottery expenditure under these subheads since the establishment of my Department in 2002, together with the Revised Estimates allocations for 2006, are contained in the following table:

	Sports Capital Programme	Irish Sports Council	Arts Council	Totals
	€	€	€	€
2002	61,323,096	27,261,000	13,567,000	102,151,096
2003	60,990,907	26,597,000	13,249,000	100,836,907
2004	80,703,656	29,000,000	20,508,000	130,211,656
2005	56,782,491	32,573,000	23,000,000	112,355,491
2006	67,724,000*	38,996,000	23,839,000	130,559,000
Total	327,524,150	154,427,000	94,163,000	576,114,150

\*2006 Sports Capital allocation includes €5 million in savings carried forward from 2005 in accordance with the Departments five-year capital envelope arrangements.



### Job Creation.

132. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the average cost of grant aid per job created by the IDA in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34924/06]

**Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin):** The cost per job sustained in

Cost per job created in IDA supported companies

1994/2000	1995/2001	1996/2002	1997/2003	1998/2004	1999/2005
€15,232	€15,169	€17,236	€16,942	€15,040	€13,229

Constant 2005 prices.

133. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the average cost of grant aid per job created by Enterprise Ireland in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34925/06]

**Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin):** The average cost per job, of jobs created with assistance from Enterprise Ireland from 2001 to 2005, is outlined in the following table. The cost per job is calculated by taking into account all direct agency expenditure on all Enterprise Ireland client companies in a seven year period. Only jobs created during, and sustained at the end of each seven year period, are

Cost per job of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland

Period/Year	1995/01	1996/02	1997/03	1998/04	1999/05
Cost per Job	€10,181	€10,675	€9,387	€8,155	€5,412

### Corporate Enforcement.

134. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment further to parliamentary Question No. 961 of 27 September 2006, the status of a director (details supplied) of an Irish company who has been disqualified as a director in another EU country for a period of 20 years; if this matter has come to his attention; if the matter is being investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34948/06]

**Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin):** The details supplied by the Deputy with the current question have been referred to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE). If the Deputy has any further information in relation to the matters she has raised, I would again urge her to bring it to the attention of the ODCE. It is not my function to deal with matters that come within the day-to-

IDA supported companies is calculated by taking into account all IDA Ireland expenditure to all firms, in the period of calculation. Only jobs created during, and sustained to the end of, each seven-year period are credited in the calculations. The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

represented in the calculations. The figures in the table are given in 2005 constant prices. The cost per job calculation takes the total grants paid to companies to undertake development projects at both start-up and expansion stages, and the new jobs that arise from these projects.

It should be noted that Enterprise Ireland follows an investment policy of 50% grant and 50% equity, and this departure from higher amounts of grant support has allowed for a greater level of risk sharing in company development projects, and allows for an increased spread of grants to a larger number of companies. The funds that are realised from the sale or repayment of equity related investments are deducted in the cost per job calculations. This has been one of the drivers in the declining cost per job figure in recent years.

day remit of an independent statutory authority such as the Director and it would be inappropriate for me to do so. The Director is required, under section 16 of the Company Law Enforcement Act 2001, to report annually on the performance of his functions and activities and this report is laid before each House of the Oireachtas.

### Newsprint Industry.

135. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment his views on the practice of oversupply of newspaper and magazines by distribution companies to newsagents, which in some cases amount to oversupply of 30%, particularly in view of the fact that there is currently no producer responsibility fund for the newspaper and magazine industry; and his further views on regulating oversupply to newsagents by trade practice measure as has been done in other jurisdictions. [34987/06]

**Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin):** The practice referred to in the Deputy's Question essentially appears to relate to transactions between businesses and as such would seem primarily to be a matter of contract law. It is understood that in a number of instances the terms and conditions of supply specified by distribution companies provide that the supplier may specify a minimum order number of newspapers, magazines etc. Newsagents who consider that the practice of oversupply is in breach of the terms agreed with their distributors may wish to consult their legal advisers to consider how best to proceed.

Although the supply of unsolicited goods is not, of itself, an offence, the Sale of Goods and Supply of Services Act 1980 provides that persons may not seek payment for goods that are unsolicited. In considering whether the practice of oversupply as outlined in the Deputy's question involves the supply of unsolicited goods within the meaning of the 1980 Act, consideration would have to be given to the terms and conditions of supply agreed between the parties and in particular any specific terms governing the sale or return of goods as well as the payment terms for such goods. Should the Deputy have details of specific instances of payment being demanded from newsagents in respect of unsolicited newspapers, magazines etc. he may wish to advise those newsagents to refer their complaints to the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs who enforce the provisions of the Sale of Goods and Supply of Services Act 1980.

In terms of possible environmental and other impacts arising from the oversupply of newspapers, magazines etc., I am aware that my colleague, the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government is currently in discussions with the newsprint industry with a view to developing an industry initiative to promote greater recycling of newsprint.

#### Departmental Staff.

136. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment 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. [35008/06]

**Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin):** There are currently five persons employed in my Department whose status has changed to that of disabled since commencing their employment.

137. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if Enterprise Ireland produced a staff directory within the past

three years or so; if so, the amount it cost; and if it was published or launched. [35022/06]

**Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin):** The production of a staff directory is an administrative matter for Enterprise Ireland, and not one in which I am directly involved. I am informed by Enterprise Ireland that it has not produced a staff directory within the past three years. However, a staff directory was developed and produced in-house approximately six years ago, and has been updated and enhanced since then from time to time, as appropriate. The staff directory is available to all Enterprise Ireland staff on the EI intranet. Primary contact points for Enterprise Ireland, and contact points for specific Enterprise Ireland programmes and events, are included on the Enterprise Ireland corporate website, as appropriate.

The Institute of Public Administration publishes summary information on Enterprise Ireland, including the names of the Board members and Executive Directors, and the Regional and Overseas Offices, in its Annual Administration Yearbook. Enterprise Ireland also publishes these details as part of its Annual Report.

#### Family Support Services.

138. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the average waiting time for payment of respite care grants from date of application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34929/06]

**Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan):** The majority of respite care grants are paid to people who are in receipt of Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Constant Attendance Allowance or prescribed Relative Allowance. In these cases, the grant is paid automatically without the beneficiaries having to make a specific application for the grant. A total of 26,909 people were paid respite care grant in these cases up to the end of August 2006.

People who are providing full-time care and attention in cases where neither Carer's Allowance nor Carer's Benefit is in payment may still qualify for Respite Care Grant by making specific application for the grant. A total of 8,174 grants have been paid so far this year in these cases. Some 5,711 of these were in respect of 2006 and a further 2,463 were paid in respect of 2005. The average time for deciding these applications for Respite Care Grant is currently just under eight weeks.

139. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the average waiting time for payment of carer's allowance from date of appli-

[Ms Harkin.]

cation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34930/06]

**Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan):** The average time for deciding an application for carer's allowance is currently 9.53 weeks. The average in 2005 was 8.88 weeks, while the average in 2004 was 12.70 weeks. Entitlement to carer's allowance is based on an applicant satisfying medical, means and residency conditions. In determining entitlement to the allowance there are, in certain cases, unavoidable time lags involved in making the necessary investigations and enquiries to enable timely and accurate decision to be made. Delays can also arise if persons applying for the allowance are not in a position to supply all the necessary information in support of their claim.

Many applicants for carer's allowance are already in receipt of another social welfare payment while their claim is being processed. Such payments will normally continue until entitlement to their carer's allowance is determined. There are currently 2,042 pending cases awaiting a decision, over 65% of which were received within the last eight weeks. The majority of claims currently on hands will be processed within the next ten weeks. Some 7,746 new claims were processed to a final decision up to week ending 20 October 2006. The volume of claims finalised so far this year represents a 9% increase on the average achieved in 2005 and a 17% increase on the average achieved in 2004. There are 27,000 carer's allowances in payment, compared to 25,000 at the end of 2005 and 23,000 at the end of 2004.

The staff and other resources available to my Department must be deployed to ensure good customer service, to prevent fraud and abuse of the schemes and to achieve value for money. My

Department is engaged in an ongoing process to ensure that available resources are prioritised to the greatest extent possible on front line service delivery and to ensure that the best possible standard of response is provided across the range of schemes and services. The position will be kept under review to ensure that the best possible customer service continues to be provided.

#### Social Welfare Benefits.

140. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of recipients of fuel allowance with a breakdown for each welfare payment. [34995/06]

**Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan):** The aim of the national fuel scheme is to assist householders on long-term social welfare or health service executive payments with meeting the cost of their additional heating needs during the winter season. Fuel allowances are paid for 29 weeks from end-September to mid-April. The allowance represents a contribution towards a person's normal heating expenses.

A number of improvements have been made to the scheme in recent years including the easing of the means test and extending the duration of payment from 26 weeks to 29 weeks. Most recently, Budget 2006 provided for an increase in the rate of fuel allowance of €5.00 from €9.00 to €14.00 (€17.90 in designated smokeless areas).

Some 264,400 people (145,800 with basic fuel allowance and 118,600 with smokeless fuel supplement) benefited from the scheme in 2005 at an annual cost of €85.4 million. It is estimated that some 274,000 people (151,000 with basic fuel allowance and 123,000 with smokeless fuel supplement) will benefit in 2006 at an estimated annual cost of €125.1 million.

The following table shows the number of fuel recipients by scheme at 20 October 2006.

Fuel Allowance Recipients 2006

	Fuel Allowance Recipients (€14.00/week)	Smokeless Supplement (€3.90/week)
State Pension (Contributory)	15,988	9,755
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	48,181	7,557
State pension (Transition)	25,358	12,540
Widow's Pension (Contributory)	40,955	20,937
Widow/er's Non Contributory Pension	8,625	1,951
Invalidity Pension	17,546	8,975
Deserted Wife's Benefit	5,661	4,580
Deserted Wife's Allowance	993	587
One-Parent Family Payment	38,944	27,661
Occupational Injuries Benefit	323	154
Back to Work Allowance	728	1,348
Blind Person's Pension	717	311
Disability Allowance	33,417	11,323
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	2,403	1,203

Farm Assist	4,100	2
Long-term Jobseeker's Allowance	22,250	9,371
Pre Retirement Allowance	7,190	2,743
Illness Benefit	0	1,550
Long-term Jobseeker's Benefit	0	520
Others	9	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>273,387</b>	<b>123,170</b>

Table (i)

Year	Standard Fuel Allowance No.	Smokeless Supplement No.	Expenditure
			€m
2000	270,000	109,000	55.5
2001	265,000	108,000	61.1
2002	259,000	115,000	80.5
2003	270,000	118,000	83.2
2004	272,000	121,000	84.7
2005	264,400	118,600	85.4
2006 Est.	274,000	123,000	125.1

Table (ii): Energy Inflation, SW Rates 2002 to 2006

Year	Consumer Price Index				Social Welfare Rates (including fuel allowance)		
	All Items	Energy Products	Liquid heating fuels	Solid fuels	State Pension (Con)	State Pension (Non-con)	Long Term Jobseekers Allowance
					€	€	€
2001 Dec.	100	100	100	100	140.94	127.61	114.91
2002	102.7	104.8	106.9	103.1	156.30 (+ 10.9%)	143.00 (+ 12.1%)	127.80 (+ 11.2%)
2003	106.3	109.0	105.2	105.2	166.30 (+ 6.4%)	153.00 (+ 7.0%)	133.80 (+ 4.9%)
2004	108.6	118.2	134.0	113.7	176.30 (+ 6.0%)	163.00 (+ 6.5%)	143.80 (+ 7.5%)
2005	112.5	136.9	158.9	120.1	188.30 (+ 6.8%)	175.00 (+ 7.4%)	157.80 (+ 9.7%)
2006 Sept.	117.2	144.9	176.4	125.3	207.30 (+ 10.1%)	196.00 (+ 12%)	179.80 (+ 13.9%)
Cumulative Increase (4.75 years)	17.2%	44.9%	76.4%	25.3%	47.1%	53.6 %	56.5 %

141. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs his views on granting individual travel passes to the spouses of travel pass recipients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35001/06]

**Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan):** The free travel scheme is available to all people living in the State aged 66 years or over. All carers in receipt of carer's allowance and carers of people in receipt of constant attendance or prescribed relative's allowance, regardless of their age, receive a free travel pass. It is also available to people under age 66 who are in

receipt of certain disability type welfare payments, such as disability allowance, invalidity pension and blind person's pension. People resident in the State who are in receipt of a social security invalidity or disability payment from a country covered by EU Regulations, or from a country with which Ireland has a bilateral social security agreement, and who have been in receipt of this payment for at least 12 months, are also eligible for free travel.

Spouses of travel pass holders may travel on the same journey with their partner at no cost to them. In addition, the free travel companion pass entitles the pass holder to have any one person,



[Mr. Brennan.]

aged 16 years or over, to accompany him/her free of charge when travelling. Such companion passes are available to persons who qualify for free travel and who, on account of their disability, are unable to travel alone.

The main objective of the free travel scheme is to encourage older people and people with disabilities to remain independent and active in the community, thereby reducing the need for institutional care. The purpose of allowing pass holders to be accompanied while travelling is to further facilitate this mobility. While extension of the scheme in the manner proposed would not be in keeping with this objective, I am always willing to look at proposals within the budgetary context.

142. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if arrears of invalidity pension, back dated to 2001, is payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35049/06]

**Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan):** The person concerned applied for an invalidity pension on 13 June 2006 and was awarded the pension from 15 June 2006. Unfortunately it has now transpired that in this case the pension was originally awarded in error. To qualify for an invalidity pension an applicant must, *inter alia*, have a total of 260 PRSI contributions paid and 48 PRSI contributions paid or credited in the last tax year before their claim is made. Only PRSI contributions paid at classes A, E and H are reckonable. The person concerned does not satisfy the PRSI contribution conditions for receipt of pension and the necessary arrangements are being made to reinstate payment of disability allowance of which he was previously in receipt. Any inconvenience caused to the person concerned as a result of the error is very much regretted.

#### National Car Test.

143. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport the reason it is not possible to book an NCT test more than five weeks ahead of a proposed appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35090/06]

**Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen):** Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. 477 of 2006) the Road Safety Authority has responsibility for the oversight and monitoring of the National Car Test scheme.

#### Light Rail Project.

144. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport the criteria of selection for the proposed route of the Metro; the way each of the alterna-

tive lines, central, western and eastern performed under each of the criteria; and the scoring weight given to each of the criteria. [35091/06]

**Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen):** The selection of the preferred route for Metro North is a matter for the Railway Procurement Agency (RPA). The preferred route for Metro North, which I announced last week, was approved by the Board of the RPA recently following a rigorous assessment of the options against a number of criteria which were published in February 2006 as part of the public consultation process. The selection process encompassed one of the most comprehensive public consultation exercises ever undertaken. A total of 100,000 newsletters were issued to residents along the potential routes and over 2,000 written submissions were received by the RPA. The public consultation exercise had a significant impact on the eventual route selected and on the location of stations.

The RPA has informed me that it evaluated each route with respect to seven published criteria: compliance with transport and land-use strategy, minimising environmental impacts including congestion and associated pollution problems, generating social and economic benefits, delivering good quality transport integration, optimising capital and operating costs, delivering a safe and operationally efficient system and achieving efficiency and minimising risk during construction. No percentage weightings were given to the seven criteria as it was considered that the seven published criteria were of a generally equal importance. The Preferred Route performed best against a majority of the assessment criteria. The West Route performed poorly against most assessment criteria. The Preferred Route attracted considerable local support along its route, albeit with concerns about elevated structures. Conversely, there was considerable local opposition to the East Route due to the impact of further major construction following on from the Dublin Port Tunnel works, which have adversely affected the area for the last five years.

The Preferred Route serves key facilities and institutions including hospitals, universities, sports venues leisure amenities, shopping districts and employment centres. The Preferred Route, serving Ballymun, is compliant with the relevant County Development Plans and is supported by the local authorities. The Preferred Route was evaluated the strongest in terms of environmental impacts including, congestion and air pollution. The Preferred Route has the highest benefit to cost ratio. The Preferred Route offers excellent interchange with the Maynooth Railway Line and with the Luas Red and Green lines, which are important strategic objectives. The Preferred Route has the highest forecast patronage. The Preferred Route facilitates interoperability with the planned Metro West — the East Route does not facilitate this connection. The Preferred

Route has the lowest capital cost. All three routes performed similarly in terms of safety and operational efficiency, though the East Route would have a negative impact on journey times from Metro West to the city centre. The Preferred Route has advantages in terms of reducing construction impacts, the East Route would require significant mitigation measures during construction where it crosses the alignment of the Dublin Port Tunnel.

145. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport the assessment carried out of the transport needs of the north side which led to the removal from Transport 21 of the LUAS network outlined in a Platform for Change that was to interconnect the western line through Drumcondra, the northern line and DART through Howth Junction and the Metro line to Swords via the airport and serving Whitehall, Beaumont, Artane and Coolock. [35092/06]

**Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen):** Transport 21 provides a Government commitment to deliver an extensive Luas and Metro network for Dublin in the period up to 2015. While Transport 21 involves a very large commitment of financial resources, those resources are also finite. It was necessary therefore, to prioritise the investments to be made over the ten year period. Although the Dublin Transportation Office strategy of 2001 did suggest a number of other projects across the Greater Dublin Area, including a Luas line servicing the Whitehall to Kilbarrack area, this project was not include in Transport 21. However, the Dublin Transportation Office's Platform for Change remains the longer term vision for transport in Dublin and funding is provided in Transport 21 for feasibility studies on those elements of it not included in the current 10 year programme.

#### **Community Development.**

146. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when a decision will be made on the application for funding under the research grants for an organisation (details supplied) in County Cork to his Department. [34980/06]

148. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when a decision will be made on the application submitted for a grant for locally based community and voluntary organisations by a group (details supplied) in County Cork. [35006/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 and 148 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. They are being assessed. 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.

#### **Social Inclusion Programme.**

147. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if, through his Department, there is funding available under any aspect or heading for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare to assist in providing English classes for persons seeking such classes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34984/06]

**Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív):** Under the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, my Department funds a small number of local Partnership companies to provide funds for English classes for non-nationals, but only if this fits within their own local strategy of how to support the integration of non-nationals in the area. The person in question should contact the local Partnership Company, at The Kildare Community Partnership, Jigginstown Commercial Centre, Naas, Co. Kildare — telephone 045 895450.

*Question No. 148 answered with Question No. 146.*

#### **Departmental Staff.**

149. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if she is satisfied that the procedure used in the 2005 and 2006 round of promotions, for area superintendent and district superintendent grades was fair; if she is further satisfied that the subjective procedures used were the most appropriate; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is dissatisfaction within the ranks of persons who were interviewed regarding the process; if she will review the outcome of the interviews; her views on feedback received by her Department on the promotions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35002/06]

**Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan):** I am satisfied that the procedures used in the 2005 and 2006 round of promotions for Area Superintendent and District Superintendent were fair and equitable. The procedure was a competitive structured interview process, all aspects of which were agreed in advance with the Union, which represents these grades.

### Knackery Industry.

150. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the situation regarding the export of live horses for slaughter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35003/06]

**Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan):** Trade in horses for slaughter is provided for in European Union legislation, which states that horses can be exported for slaughter once they comply with health certification requirements and are transported either directly or after transit through a market or an approved marshalling centre to the slaughterhouse.

All horses exported from Ireland must apply for an export certificate, except those exported under the tripartite agreement, which permits trade from Ireland to the UK (all horses) and to France (registered horses) without health certification, on the basis of the existence of an equivalent health status in the equine sector in these countries. Although the standard EU health certificate does not distinguish slaughter as a purpose of export, the application for export certification requires the exporter to state for what purpose the horse is being exported. My Department has not received applications for health certification for horses being exported for the purpose of slaughter. All export certificates which have been issued by my Department are in respect of animals for breeding, racing, jumping /sport use.

Notwithstanding the above, because horses exported to the UK or France under the tripartite agreement do not require an export certificate, it is not possible in all cases to be certain of the purpose for which they are being exported.

### Decentralisation Programme.

151. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the numbers of staff in her Department who have indicated willingness to decentralise; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35004/06]

**Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan):** Since the announcement of the decentralisation programme there has been an increase of some 180 full-time posts in my Department in Portlaoise. My Department's Decentralisation Implementation Plan allows for a phased movement to Portlaoise, i.e. the transfer of functions and posts over a number of years. The 2005 and 2006 phases of Decentralisation are now substantially complete and planning and preparations are ongoing for 2007 and subsequent phases. My Department is currently recruiting applicants from the Central Applications Facility for future moves to Portlaoise.

The process of recruitment for Fermoy has also begun. Initially there were 73 applicants for the 100 posts advertised for Fermoy and 74 for the 100 posts advertised for Macroom.

### Departmental Schemes.

152. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if an extension of time will be granted to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary for participation in the land purchase and reclamation annuities discounted redemption scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35073/06]

**Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan):** The current discounted buy out scheme for Land Purchase Annuities is governed by Statutory Instrument No. 830 of 2005, the Land Purchase Annuities Redemption Scheme Regulations, made under the Land Act 2005. The scheme commenced on 1 January 2006 and was to terminate on the 30th June 2006. I have by Statutory Instrument No. 352 of 2006, the Land Purchase Annuities Redemption Scheme (Amendment) Regulations, already extended it beyond its original expiry date of 30 June 2006 to 31 October 2006 for all annuitants to specifically facilitate those who needed additional time to raise the finance necessary to participate. This extension has been notified to all remaining annuitants on a number of occasions and I have no plans to further extend the scheme.

153. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if the land purchase and reclamation annuities discounted redemption scheme can be paid in instalments by a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35074/06]

**Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan):** The legislative basis for the current discounted buy out scheme for Land Purchase Annuities is contained in the Land Act 2005 which provides for the introduction of a scheme for early redemption of annuities at a discounted price provided the annuity is redeemed by a single payment to include all outstanding arrears. As the Act does not contain any provision for the exercise of discretion or for varying the conditions for participation in the scheme for any individual annuitant, the person named cannot participate in the scheme on the basis of making instalment redemption payments.

### Pension Provisions.

154. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if, in view of the fact that participants in the ERS only agreed to forfeit the value of their State pension while in receipt of their farm retirement pension, his Department should allow them to retain increases in the State pension; if such a mechanism would at least in part protect their income against inflation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35094/06]



**Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan):** It is a requirement of the EU Council Regulations under which the 1994 and 2000 Early Retirement Schemes were introduced that the Early Retirement Pension can be paid only as a supplement to any national retirement pension to which the participant, and his or her spouse or partner in a joint management arrangement, is entitled. This means that the entire value of any such national retirement pension payable must be deducted from the Early Retirement Pension. Payment under the Scheme is suspended in the case of participants whose national retirement pension exceeds the amount of their Early Retirement Pension.

It has been determined in consultation with the European Commission that the following pensions are National Retirement Pensions: Old Age Contributory pension; Old Age Non-Contributory pension; Widow/Widower's Contributory pension (at age 66); Widow/Widower's Non-Contributory pension (at age 66); Retirement pension; Invalidity pension (at age 66); Blind Person's pension.

#### **Decentralisation Programme.**

155. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has obtained temporary accommodation in Mullingar for the decentralisation of her Department; the number of civil servants to be accommodated in the facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35093/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** My Department is assigning officers wishing to decentralise to Mullingar to posts in Dublin due to decentralise to that location on an on-going basis with a view to being in a position to relocate 300 posts to Mullingar in 2009 when permanent accommodation is ready for occupation. The feasibility of sending an advance party to temporary accommodation in Mullingar will be kept under review but any decisions made must be based on an adequate cohort of staff being in place with sufficient experience to undertake the functions decentralising as well as the availability of suitable temporary accommodation. At this stage, no decision has been taken relating to an advance party.

#### **Schools Refurbishment.**

156. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she expects to announce decisions made in respect of applications made under the summer works scheme for 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34902/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** All applications received under the Summer Works Scheme 2007 are currently being

assessed. The list of successful applicants is due for publication before the end of the year as outlined in the Circular Letter governing the scheme.

#### **Special Educational Needs.**

157. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 1306 of 27 September 2006, if her Department has agreed to the retention of special needs assistant support for a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34907/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has agreed to the retention of the special needs assistant support for the pupil in question until the 10th November 2006. The school has been advised of the position. My officials are currently liaising with the National Council for Special Education in the context of the pupil's needs.

#### **Radon Gas Levels.**

158. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the situation with regard to radon levels in a school (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34921/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** The school referred to by the Deputy was tested for radon in 2000 under my Department's remediation programme and the levels were negligible with readings below 100 Bq/m<sup>3</sup> in all rooms. The radon reference set for the workplace under the "Radiological Protection Act, 1991 ((Ionising Radiation) Order, 2000" (Statutory Instrument 125 of 2000)) is 400 Bq/m<sup>3</sup>.

#### **Schools Building Projects.**

159. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Science if approval for an extension to a school (details supplied) has been approved; the commencement date for works; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34923/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** I can confirm to the Deputy that the school to which he refers has applied to this Department for capital funding for a Resource Room/Parent Room. The project has been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects and has been assigned a Band 3 rating. Progress on the project is being considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme from 2007 onwards.

160. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the new replacement primary school for a school (details supplied) in



[Mr. Costello.]

Dublin 1 will be constructed; if she will provide for a rooftop canopy to protect the rooftop playground from the elements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34940/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that tenders are currently being examined for the new school in question. When this process is completed, my Department will be authorising the project to progress to construction. The new school will completely transform the facilities available to this school community. The tendered project does not include for a rooftop canopy in view of the significant additional cost involved.

#### Psychological Service.

161. **Mr. Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason psychological services from the national educational psychological service will not provide a service to pupils in a school (details supplied) in County Kildare, who are in autistic spectrum disorder classes in their school; and if she will arrange to have an educational assessment carried out in view of the situation which exists in this school. [34941/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** Since the establishment of my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in 1999, the number of psychologists in the NEPS has increased from 43 to 127 at present. Seven psychologists have been recruited in recent months.

All children allocated places in units for children on the Autism Spectrum were most likely assessed by HSE prior to entry to these units. Support for children with Autism is a complex matter and inter disciplinary collaboration is a fundamental principle.

Traditionally, health services, including psychological services, have been provided by HSE on a continuing basis. I understand that children in this school are from a number of counties corresponding to Local Health Office areas (equivalent to the previously designated community care areas).

NEPS's role in relation to the school so far has been limited, however in the past school year a psychologist from NEPS has provided support to teachers in the autism units with regard to the management of behaviour and the psychologist also supported teachers in acquainting them with a specific teacher assessment instrument.

#### Schools Building Projects.

162. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the status and early prospects for the long sought new school building for a school (details supplied) in County Monaghan; the application for which was lodged

with her Department nine years ago; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34947/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** My Department has received an application for capital funding towards the provision of a new building for the school referred to by the Deputy. My officials are in the process of assessing the school's accommodation needs. This assessment includes consideration of factors such as current and projected pupil enrolment, demographic trends in the area and the potential impact of ongoing and proposed housing developments. Once the assessment has been completed, the building project required will be considered in the context of the 2006-2010 School Building and Modernisation Programme.

163. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Science the progress regarding the application by school authorities in a school (details supplied) in County Limerick for capital funding towards the provision of an extension to promote ancillary accommodation. [34952/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** An application for capital funding towards the provision of an extension to provide ancillary accommodation has been received from the school referred to by the Deputy. The project has been assessed in accordance with the prioritisation criteria for assessing large scale building projects and is being considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

#### Youthreach Programme.

164. **Mr. Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she is satisfied with the ongoing development of the Youthreach programme here; if her Department has proposals to expand the Youthreach programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34966/06]

**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 approximately 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 Employ-

ment. 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 Catering, 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.

165. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of participants currently enrolled in Youthreach programmes in County Kildare; the number of participants in the past three years; if her Department has received requests for further Youthreach provision in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34967/06]

**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.

County Kildare VEC has an allocation of 85 Youthreach places. There are currently three Youthreach centres in operation in the county located in Leixlip, Athy and Naas. The centre in Naas commenced operating in February this year. The numbers attending Youthreach in County Kildare in the last three years are as follows: 2003 — 54; 2004 — 55; and, 2005 — 57.

There are currently 76 young people availing of Youthreach places in County Kildare. My Department has not received any request for further Youthreach provision in County Kildare.

#### **Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme.**

166. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she is satisfied with the ongoing development of the VTOS programme here; if her Department has proposals to expand

the VTOS programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34968/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera):** The Vocational Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) provides full-time second chance education and training opportunities for unemployed adults who are at least 21 years of age and in receipt of specified social welfare payments for at least six months. The scheme is funded by my Department and operated through the 33 Vocational Educational Committees (VECs).

Students on VTOS are offered a wide range of vocational options. Participants may also pursue subjects in the Junior and leaving certificate or acquire a portfolio of qualifications in line with their needs and interests. The scheme has proved to be successful in opening up learning and progression opportunities for people marginalised by unemployment. My Department provides funding to VECs annually to assist with childcare expenses of VTOS participants.

In 2005, over 71% of students who completed the course in that year, progressed to employment or further education and training. Expenditure on the non-pay element of the VTOS programme in 2005 was just in excess of €38 million. The authorised number of places that can be filled on the scheme annually is 5,000. There are no plans to increase this number.

167. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of participants currently enrolled in VTOS programmes in County Kildare; the number of participants in such programmes; if her Department has received requests for further VTOS provision in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34969/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera):** The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) is delivered locally by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) with funding from my Department, which authorises a given number of VTOS places to be filled annually by each VEC. Co. Kildare VEC has an allocation of 270 VTOS places for the academic year 2006/7. I can confirm that a request for an additional 20 VTOS places was received from Co. Kildare VEC in April of this year but that it was not possible to sanction these extra places.

#### **School Transport.**

168. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to correspondence (details supplied) when her Department will make contact with the persons concerned; the reason this has not happened to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34978/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera):** The pupil to whom the Deputy refers is eligible for transport to the school referred to in the details supplied. My Department understands that there is not a sufficient number of pupils offering for school transport from the distinct locality in question to set up a dedicated service. However, Bus Éireann which operates the School Transport Services on behalf of my Department, has advised that it has facilitated the pupil with a transport service in the morning only.

My Department will contact the parents regarding the availability of a remote area grant towards the cost of school transport and request Bus Éireann to review the present arrangements.

#### **Schools Building Projects.**

169. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 221 of 8 June 2006 the reason for the delay in approving funding for a building project for a school in County Roscommon; the status of the project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34979/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** The proposed refurbishment and extension project for the School referred to by the Deputy is at an early stage of architectural planning. Additional Stage 2 (Sketch Scheme) documentation was requested from the school authorities and has been received. The documentation is currently being examined by the Technical Staff in my Department.

Department officials will be in contact with the school authorities in early November regarding the outcome of this examination. A decision on which school building projects will advance to tender and construction will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

#### **Adult Education.**

170. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science if through her Department, there are grants or funding available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare seeking to provide English classes for persons seeking such classes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34985/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera):** Funds for Adult and Community Education services, including adult literacy, are provided by my Department to the Vocational Education Committees. The disbursement of these funds is a matter for each VEC, which, subject to its budget, decides the nature of the Adult and Community Education service to be provided in its area and the manner in which the funds should be spent.

Funding for English spoken as another language is funded through the Adult literacy budget. It is open to the person in question to submit an application to the local VEC.

#### **Schools Building Projects.**

171. **Mr. Walsh** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans for the development of post-primary education in a town (details supplied) in County Cork. [34986/06]

**Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):** Both schools referred to by the Deputy have submitted applications for major capital funding to my Department. These applications have been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria with the Education Partners and have been assigned a band rating.

Schedules of accommodation to meet the current and projected accommodation needs of one of the schools have been drawn up by my Department. In relation to the second school, a more thorough assessment of their long term accommodation needs is required to determine the extent of their accommodation needs. Both projects will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

#### **Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme.**

172. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the VTOS travel allowance and the VTOS meal allowance; the comparison allowance rates for each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35077/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera):** VTOS students may be entitled to a travel allowance if they reside more than 3 miles from a centre. The rates of the travel and meal allowance are equivalent to those paid to participants on FÁS training courses. They are increased periodically in line with increases in FÁS rates; the current rates outlined below are in operation since 2002.

3-5 miles €4.60, 5-10 miles €11.90, 10-20 miles €17.60, 20-30 miles €21.60, 30-40 miles €27.70 and 40-50 miles €32.60. The meal allowance is €0.80 per day.

#### **Defence Forces Reserve.**

173. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Defence the number of appointments unfilled at commandant and captain rank by brigade in respect of the Reserve Defence Force; the reason promotions have not been made to fill them; and the number of officers who did not apply for an appointment in the RDF who have been interviewed to determine if they wish to continue in service. [34920/06]

**Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea):** The Military Authorities have advised that the number of appointments unfilled at Commandant

and Captain rank by brigade in respect of the Reserve Defence Force are as shown in the table.

	Commandant	Captain	Lieutenant-Commander (Naval Service)	Lieutenant (Naval Service)
2 Eastern Brigade	14	25	N/A	N/A
1 Southern Brigade	7	18	N/A	N/A
4 Western Brigade	14	20	N/A	N/A
Naval Service	N/A	N/A	1	6

The reasons for these appointments remaining unfilled are:

- Recent retirements that will be filled in due course.
- A significant number of the unfilled appointments are Corps Appointments that require specialist qualifications such as Engineer and Medical Appointments.
- The imminent publication of the new Administrative Instruction R5. This Administrative Instruction has been developed to support the objectives of the White Paper on Defence and the recommendations of the Reserve Defence Force Review Implementation Plan Board. The new Administrative Instruction has been agreed with RDFRA.

The procedure for RDF Officers applying for appointments is outlined in the current Administrative Instruction R5/R6 (RDF Officers, NCOs and Privates Assignment Procedures).

The military authorities have informed me that all RDF Officers were made aware of the assign-

ment procedure and that each Officer was responsible for deciding which appointment, if any, they would apply for.

Officers who did not apply for a specific appointment were assigned to appointments within the establishment, consistent with the terms of the Administrative Instruction. The Administrative Instruction did not provide for interviewing of RDF Officers who did not apply for an appointment.

The military authorities are not aware of any RDF Officers not wishing to continue in service due to their assigned appointment.

#### Defence Forces Personnel.

174. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Defence the number of personnel in the Army, Navy and Air Corps; the quantity of sick leave experienced by each sector over the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34934/06]

**Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea):** The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the following tabular statement.

Permanent Defence Force strength at 30th September and categories of sick leave in person-days in the period 1st October 2005-30th September 2006

	Army	Air Corps	Navy	Totals
Strength as at 30th September, 2006	8,623	839	1,066	10,528
ED (person-days)	17,992	1,571	1,868	21,431
SL (person-days)	83,786	17,317	9,490	110,593
USL (person-days)	13,659	2,067	767	16,493
Total (person-days)	115,437	20,955	12,125	148,517

ED — Excused Duty (may only be granted by a Defence Forces Medical Officer)

SL — Sick Leave

USL — Uncertified Sick Leave

Note: The Permanent Defence Force operates on a 7-day working week i.e. 365-day year.

My Department has been addressing the sick leave situation on a number of points, and intends, as part of the ongoing modernisation process, to review current sick leave arrangements within the Defence Forces.

#### Bullying in the Workplace.

175. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Defence the number of complaints of bullying

recorded in each of the past ten years made by men and women members of the Permanent Defence Forces. [34935/06]

**Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea):** The Military Authorities have advised that the number of complaints of a bullying or harassment nature recorded in each of the past ten years and made by men and women of the Permanent Defence Force is as follows:



[Mr. O'Dea.]

## Redress of Wrongs — Male

## Complaints of Bullying/Harassment nature under Redress of Wrongs Procedures

Year	No. of Complaints	Upheld	Not Upheld	Ongoing
1996	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
1997	4	Nil	4	Nil
1998	2	Nil	2	Nil
1999	3	1	2	Nil
2000	4	Nil	4	Nil
2001	6	Nil	6	Nil
2002	6	1	5	Nil
2003	6	Nil	6	Nil
2004	6	3	2	1
2005	5	Nil	2	3
2006	3	Nil	Nil	3
Totals	45	5	33	7

*Redress of Wrongs — Female*

There has been one complaint of a Bullying/Harassment nature made under the Redress of Wrongs Procedures by a female since 1996. This complaint was made in 1996 and was not upheld.

Formal Complaints. Complaints of Bullying/Harassment nature under Interpersonal Relationships Procedures (Admin. Instruction A7)

Year	No. of Complaints	Male	Female
2004	11	7	4
2005	4	3	1
2006	6	4	2
Totals	21	14	7

*Note:* A new Administrative Instruction on Interpersonal Relationships was introduced in March 2003.

The Defence Forces and the Department have taken a wide variety of initiatives and have devoted an unprecedented level of resources to this issue, since Dr Eileen Doyle and the External Advisory Committee presented their original report “The Challenge of a Workplace” in March 2002. This independent report addressed the range of interpersonal issues within the Defence Forces. Its contents and recommendations were accepted in full.

As I have previously outlined, implementation of the recommendations of the Doyle report has been one of the highest priorities for the Defence Forces and the Department since its publication. An Independent Monitoring Group was established in May 2002 to oversee the implementation of these recommendations.

The Independent Monitoring Group’s progress report “Response to the Challenge of a Workplace”, which was launched by my predecessor on

24 September, 2004, is available on the Defence Forces website and describes in detail the very significant progress achieved since the publication of the original Doyle Report in 2002.

Arising from the Doyle Report, the following steps have been taken:

- Firm guiding principles have been set out in the Defence Forces Dignity in the Workplace Charter
- A major educational awareness programme is ongoing throughout the Defence Forces.
- A new Administrative Instruction on Interpersonal Relationships was introduced in March 2003. The Instruction and a users guide were distributed to every member of the Defence Forces.
- Some 184 of a planned 200 Designated Contact Persons (DCPs) have been fully trained and are deployed throughout all Defence Forces posts and barracks, both countrywide and overseas. Courses to train a further 40 DCPs will take place before the end of the year. The DCPs will facilitate the operation of the formal and informal procedures that may be used by any party wishing to institute a complaint.
- An independent external confidential “Free Phone” Helpline and Counselling Service was set up for members of the Permanent Defence Force in March 2003.
- An independent pilot project of Exit Interviews seeking the experiences and views of outgoing members of the Permanent Defence Force was conducted.
- Leadership training has been given by external experts and has been the subject

of NCO focus groups with an emphasis on “training the trainers”

- Changes in Cadet School Instruction have been initiated and issues concerning the ranking, selection and training for Cadet School instructors are being addressed.
- Defence Force Regulations, Administrative Instructions, policies and procedures have been reviewed by an Equality Steering Group under a Labour Court chairperson.
- An officer within the Defence Forces Human Resources Management Section has been assigned responsibility for Equality matters
- A Training Circular entitled “Military Code of Conduct for Students and Instructors in all Training Environments” was issued in 2004 and was followed by an extensive series of associated workshops for all relevant personnel.

In addition, the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces has been appointed.

The Chief of Staff has repeatedly emphasised his acceptance of the problems indicated by the Doyle Report. He has recognized the necessity to tackle this matter in a fundamental way at all levels of the Defence Forces and has demonstrated a very active and genuine commitment to change. He has emphasised that it is incumbent on all commanders to ensure that best practice in the management of personnel is fostered at all levels in order to eliminate the problems identified in the Doyle Report.

Policies on equality, dignity and bullying are being constantly communicated to all ranks. I am satisfied that the military authorities are alert and vigilant to this issue and are committed to addressing the matter in a continuing and proactive manner through educational modules on interpersonal relationships which are now embedded in career courses for all ranks.

It is reiterated that bullying is not training for anything. It has always been acknowledged that the project of bringing about necessary fundamental changes in attitudes and culture is not quick or easy. However, with substantial and vigorous leadership, there is every confidence that the proper environment will be firmly established and maintained throughout the Defence Forces. The matter continues to receive the highest priority in the Defence Forces in terms of incorporating the correct ethos in training at all levels and in terms of maintaining the resources necessary to assist personnel in tackling difficulties where they may arise.

#### Overseas Missions.

176. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Defence if Irish soldiers are stationed in Afghanistan; if so, when the mission began; the

number of soldiers serving in Afghanistan; the role of the soldiers; the person under whom they serve; the length of time they will stay; the person who decided to send Irish soldiers to Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34936/06]

**Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea):** On 20 December, 2001, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1386 authorising the establishment of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for six months to assist the Interim Afghanistan Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and the surrounding areas. The authorisation of ISAF has been extended by the UN Security Council since then. NATO assumed the lead in ISAF on 11 August, 2003. The current Commander of ISAF, which has a strength of approximately 8,000 personnel, is Lt. Gen David Richards (UK).

Ireland has participated in ISAF in Afghanistan since 5 July, 2002, following the Government Decision of 2 July, 2002 authorising the provision of seven members of the Permanent Defence Force for service with the force.

Seven Irish personnel are currently serving with the force. Three personnel are serving as staff officers with the ISAF HQ in Kabul and four personnel are deployed in Liaison Teams in the Regional Command Capital (RC(C)) Kabul. The Liaison Teams specifically liaise between the RC(C) and the Afghan National Directorate of Security, Kabul Police and the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA). Irish personnel serving with ISAF are rotated on a four monthly basis.

It is proposed that the Defence Forces will continue to serve with ISAF in the immediate future, subject to an ongoing review by my Department.

#### Hearing Impairment Claims.

177. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Defence the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7 has not had their hearing impairment claim processed after five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34937/06]

**Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea):** The State Claims Agency assumed responsibility for this case last March. The claim is now a matter for that Agency. I understand that the Agency has been endeavouring to contact the plaintiff’s solicitor.

The plaintiff would be best advised to contact his legal representatives to ascertain the status of his claim.

#### Overseas Missions.

178. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Defence if he has studied the findings and recommendations of the final report on the investigation into the Niamba ambush; if he will publish

[Mr. Costello.]

that report; if he proposes to take action on foot of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34938/06]

**Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea):** As the Deputy is aware I undertook during Priority Questions on 12 October to study the contents of the Report when received. I can confirm that I have received the Report from the Chief of Staff and I will revert to the Deputy with its findings when I have had an opportunity to examine the Report in full.

#### Departmental Correspondence.

179. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Defence when details attached to an accident affecting a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will as stated in a previous parliamentary question be forwarded to the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34939/06]

**Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea):** I undertook in a reply to a parliamentary question tabled by him on 5 October 2006 to arrange for copies of the various representations made by the Deputy to my Department regarding the person concerned to be sent to the Deputy. I subsequently wrote to the Deputy on 19 October 2006 enclosing copies of this correspondence.

#### Departmental Staff.

180. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Defence 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. [35007/06]

**Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea):** My Department does not hold this information at present.

The Department of Finance in conjunction with the National Development Authority are presently examining potential new approaches to monitoring disability, including the possible use of a survey based on voluntary self-disclosure both for new staff on appointment and for existing staff. This would assist my Department to identify those with disabilities including those who have acquired a disability. In the meantime staff who declare a disability are supported by my Department.

#### Defence Forces Personnel.

181. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the top rate of pay for the rank of commandant within the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35055/06]

182. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the top rate of pay for the rank of

colonel within the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35056/06]

183. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the top rate of pay for the rank of lieutenant colonel within the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35057/06]

184. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the retirement age for the rank of commandant, colonel, lieutenant colonel and all ranks of general within the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35058/06]

185. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the number of commandants due to retire on age grounds for each of the years 2007 to 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35059/06]

186. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the number of colonels due to retire on age grounds for each of the years 2007 to 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35060/06]

187. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the number of lieutenant colonels due to retire on age grounds for each of the years 2007 to 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35061/06]

188. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the number of generals due to retire on age grounds for each of the years 2007 to 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35062/06]

**Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 to 188, inclusive, together.

The Minister for Finance announced in his 1994 Budget Statement that modified PRSI would no longer apply to new public sector employees recruited on or after 6 April, 1995. The position therefore, is that there are two sets of pay scales for officers of the Defence Forces, i.e. rates for those recruited prior to 6 April, 1995 and who are liable to pay PRSI at Class C and for those recruited on or after 6 April, 1995 and who are liable to pay PRSI at Class A.

The rates paid to members of the Defence Forces is dependent on whether they are Line Officers (Rate 1), Technical Officers i.e. Engineer Officers, Legal Officers, Army School of Music Officers, Executive Branch and Communications Officers of the Naval Service, Psychologists and Military Analyst (Rate 2), Medical Officers i.e. Doctors and Dentists (Rate 3) and Pharmacists (Rate 31). The top rate of pay for the members of the Defence Forces in the ranks of Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel are outlined in

the following Tabular Table 'A': The retirement ages for the rank of Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel and all rank of General are as follows.

Rank	Retirement age
Commandant	56
Lieutenant Colonel	58
Colonel	60
Brigadier General	61
Major General	62
Lieutenant General	63

With regards to your questions in relation to the number of officers due to retire on age grounds. Please see the following Tabular Statement 'B' which details the number of officers in the rank of Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, Brigadier General, Major General and Lieutenant General respectively due to retire on age grounds in each of the years 2007 to 2011 inclusive.

ive. There are no immediate plans to extend the retirement age of officers ranks in the Defence Forces.

The 2000 White Paper on Defence and the earlier Defence Force Review Implementation Plan both recommended reduction to retirement ages in an effort to address the age profile and fitness of the Defence Forces. More recently on the other hand, the retirement age for people recruited into some areas of the public service has been increased. A trend of improvement in the age profile in the Defence Force has been achieved through a programme that included early retirement packages, regular recruitment and short-term contracts.

A key element in military life is the need for personnel to maintain a level of fitness for combat readiness. There is constant need to balance this requirement with the need to retain experience and expertise particularly at managerial level in the Defence Forces. I will continue to monitor the needs of the Defence Forces in this area and mindful of ongoing experiences in other areas of the public services will introduce change in this area if required.

Table 'A'

Top rate of pay for Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel

	Commandant		Lieutenant Colonel		Colonel	
	Class C	Class A	Class C	Class A	Class C	Class A
	€	€	€	€	€	€
Rate 1	66,126	69,605	72,842	76,674	€91,392	96,209
Rate 2	76,951	81,006	85,124	89,610	104,350	109,841
Rate 3 Doctors	85,415	89,910	94,994	100,006	113,647	119,639
Rate 3 Dentists	85,311	89,801	89,941	94,674	N/A	N/A
Rate 31 Pharmacists	76,009	80,015	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(a) There is no establishment for Pharmacists above the rank of Commandant.

(b) There is no establishment for Dental Officers above the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Table 'B':

The numbers of officers from the rank of Commandant upwards due to retire on age grounds in each of the years 2007 to 2011 inclusive

Year	Commandant	Lieutenant Colonel	Colonel	Brigadier General	Major General	Lieutenant General
2007	12	10	9	1	Nil	1
2008	12	12	2	2	1	Nil
2009	17	9	7	2	Nil	Nil
2010	19	18	8	2	1	Nil
2011	32	20	5	Nil	Nil	Nil

189. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the number of other ranks that have been enlisted since 1994 and are subject to short-term contract; the duration of this short-term con-

tract now; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35063/06]

190. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence if, when a member of the Defence Forces on short-term contract is promoted, the



[Mr. Timmins.]

length of time their contract is extended for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35064/06]

191. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the retirement age for other ranks that enlisted before 1994; the duration of this short-term contract now; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35065/06]

192. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the retirement age for corporals, sergeants and senior non-commissioned officers who enlisted in the Defence Forces since 1994; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35066/06]

**Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 to 192, inclusive, together.

In 1997 agreement was reached with the Permanent Defence Force Other Ranks Representative Association (PDFORRA) on a new manpower policy for the Defence Forces. This policy, applying to personnel enlisted after 1 January 1994, provided that service for Private Soldiers would initially be for five years with the option to be extended to a maximum of twelve years. Extension from 5 to 9 years and from 9 to 12 years were subject to the individual soldier meeting certain criteria including standards of medical and physical fitness, conduct and courses attended or period of overseas service.

In 2004 PDFORRA submitted a claim under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for a further review of the terms of service applying to personnel enlisting in the Permanent Defence Force after 1 January, 1994. Following detailed and prolonged discussion on this claim a set of criteria has been agreed. The criteria meet PDFORRA’s desire to provide longer careers in the Permanent Defence Force while continuing to address the Government’s previously stated objective of having an appropriate age profile to meet the challenges of a modern defence forces. The criteria require that any person re-engaging must be able to continue to operate at their current level both at home and overseas on an ongoing basis.

Re-engagements will be subject to the individual soldier meeting specified criteria in regard to physical fitness, medical category, successful completion of military courses of instruction, service overseas and conduct ratings.

Following a ballot of all post 1994 personnel PDFORRA have advised that their members accepted the agreed criteria for re-engagement (after 12 years service) and continuance in service (after 21 years service). As a result personnel

enlisted after 1 January 1994 may now serve beyond the current 12 year limit.

Since 1994 and up to 24 October 2006, the latest date for which figures are available, a total of 7,488 personnel have enlisted for general service under the 5 year contract.

Promotion does not directly affect the duration of an enlisted person’s contract. An enlisted person who has been promoted has to apply and meet the normal criteria for extension.

In relation to retirement ages, in accordance with Defence Force Regulations, a person:

- who enlisted in the Permanent Defence Force before 1 January 1994 may be permitted to continue in service up to the age of sixty years, and
- a person who enlisted in the Permanent Defence Force on or after 1 January 1994 may be permitted to continue in service up to the age of fifty years in the rank of Sergeant and to the age of fifty-six in all higher ranks.

Enlisted Personnel, in the rank of Corporal, who enlisted after 1 January 1994, may not serve beyond 21 years service.

#### **Building Regulations.**

193. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the regulations including statutory instruments and article references governing where and when obscure glass may or must be used in buildings in built-up areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34949/06]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche):** There are no such provisions in Building Regulations or Planning Regulations.

#### **Recycling Policy.**

194. **Mr. N. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the provision being made for the elderly in rural areas, where the recycling facilities are being withdrawn and there is no local authority refuse collection. [34953/06]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche):** Under Section 33 of the Waste Management Act 1996, it is a matter for each local authority to ensure that adequate arrangements for the collection of waste are available in its functional area, except where the cost of collection would be unreasonably high or where adequate arrangements can reasonably be made by the holder of the waste.

### Local Authority Staff.

195. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has received an application from Athy Town Council for the appointment of two community wardens; if he will approve this application; if funding will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34970/06]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche):** There is no such application before my Department.

### Planning Issues.

196. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the densities of developments being granted by local authorities in provincial areas; his further views on whether high density developments are more suited to town centres, or large urban areas; his views on whether there is currently too high an emphasis in the marketplace on the provision of small apartment units, that do not provide for life-long occupancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34971/06]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche):** A wide range of policies and measures have been put in place to ensure that the unprecedented rate of housing development in Ireland is planned for in a manner that supports the creation of sustainable communities within a high quality environment, as well as providing affordable options for those seeking housing.

Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Residential Density were published in 1999. These Guidelines set out the basis on which locations appropriate for higher residential densities may be identified, the range of varying densities appropriate to different locations and the controls and safeguards to be addressed in promoting such development. The purpose of the guidelines is to assist in achieving high quality residential density of a suitable scale at appropriate locations, in conjunction with improved public transport systems.

These guidelines are currently being reviewed and updated to take account of changing population and settlement patterns and the extensive experience built up since the introduction of the 1999 guidelines in the design, assessment and development of higher density proposals.

In order to inform the revised guidelines on residential densities my Department commissioned a research study into apartment size and space standards earlier this year, with a specific focus on the need to make apartment living more attractive for family living. The study is

available from the 'publications' section of my Department's website at [www.envirom.ie](http://www.envirom.ie).

A new Housing Policy Framework: Building Sustainable Communities was approved by the Government and published in December 2005. This sets out an agenda for an integrated package of housing policy initiatives. These include supporting higher densities and compact urban settlement through quality design in the creation of new homes, new urban spaces and new neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, with regard to the sustainable development of smaller towns around the country, my Department's Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines which were published last year, recognise that the development of the rural environs of major urban areas, including the gateways and hubs identified in the NSS and county and other larger towns, needs to be carefully managed to ensure their orderly development and successful functioning into the future.

I am confident that the continuing implementation of the policies outlined above will have a positive influence on bringing about better urban design and sustainable development into the future.

197. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if having regard to the provision of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, he will require local authorities to enter into detailed agreements with developers at pre-planning stage in relation to the delivery of social and affordable housing, as per each local authority housing strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34972/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern):** It is a matter for planning authorities and developers to negotiate Part V agreements as an integral part of the planning process for residential developments. In making agreement with developers, authorities must have regard to the social and affordable housing needs identified in their housing strategy.

The intention of the Part V legislation is to provide for a two-way process involving the planning authority and the applicant seeking planning permission. Section 247 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides for pre-planning consultations. The need to undertake such consultations, involving both the planning and housing sections of authorities, has been communicated to local authorities on a number of occasions since the introduction of Part V; most recently, in a Part V resource pack developed by the Affordable Homes Partnership in conjunction with my Department.

[Mr. N. Ahern.]

While planning authorities have been strongly advised to engage in pre-planning consultation with applicants, and where possible, to reach an agreement in principle prior to the submission of a planning application, the conclusion of a detailed final agreement is subject to the granting of planning permission, where it is included as a specific planning condition. However, pre-planning agreements should ensure that final agreements are concluded quickly.

198. **Mr. Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if having regard to the provision of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2006, he will take steps to ensure that local authorities do not concentrate social housing units in any one part of a development in view of the requirement to achieve social integration, and local authorities be encouraged to ensure that social and affordable units are spread throughout all developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34973/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern):** The Planning and Development Acts 2000-2006 require planning authorities, in developing their housing strategies, to ensure that policies and objectives are in place, which will counteract undue social segregation in housing developments. The manner in which local authorities avail of Part V arrangements for the provision of social and affordable housing is determined by them based on the needs for such housing identified in their housing strategies.

In finalising a Part V agreement involving an alternative option to on-site land, the authority must consider, *inter alia*, whether such agreement will counteract undue segregation.

#### Local Authority Housing.

199. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to change the situation to allow tenants of voluntary housing associations to purchase their houses outright; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34974/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern):** There is no provision at present in the voluntary housing schemes for the purchase of individual houses by tenants. However, it was agreed under Housing Policy Framework — Building Sustainable Communities that consideration would be given in consultation with the voluntary and co-operative sector, to pilot a tenant purchase scheme for some new voluntary homes under the scheme. The timing and

modalities of such a scheme, including any legislative element, will be developed in the coming months.

200. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when officials from his Department will visit Athy to meet officials from Athy Town Council to discuss the proposed remedial works scheme in estates (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34975/06]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern):** My Department sanctioned the provision of funding to Athy Town Council in March of this year for refurbishment works to houses at Carbery Park / Townspark in Athy under the Remedial Works Scheme. A meeting was provisionally arranged for 11 October 2006 but had to be postponed due to unavailability of staff. My Department has been in contact with Athy Town Council seeking a new date for a meeting and this is currently being finalised.

#### Local Authority Staff.

201. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of local authority parks or parks and landscape services departments that are staffed with professionally qualified landscape horticulturists, landscape architects or landscape managers; the local authorities which run such departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34988/06]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche):** The information requested on the number of local authority parks or park departments in local authorities is not available in my Department, and staffing returns received from local authorities do not contain the classification of employees referred to in the Question. 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 organizational arrangements as may be necessary for the purposes of carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

#### Recreational Amenities.

202. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the Ministerial directives, strategies or policies, his Department has issued in relation to the planning, design and management of green spaces and parks during the current Government's term of office; if guidelines or directives to county managers in respect of parks or open spaces matters

have been issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34989/06]

203. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if there is a unit or permanent staff in his Department responsible for policy development for parks and green spaces. [34990/06]

204. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his Department provides specific, ring-fenced financial supports for the capital development of parks or green space infrastructure at local Government level. [34991/06]

205. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if there is a statutory basis to the provision of green spaces and parks, not including the planning codes; and if there is a duty on local authorities to provide parks. [34992/06]

206. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if, in view of the recent situation in an area (details supplied) in Dublin 6, he is preparing legislation for the protection, planning, design and management of green spaces and parks. [34993/06]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 202 to 206, inclusive, together.

Section 67 and Schedule 13 of the Local Government Act, 2001 empower local authorities to take such measures, engage in such activities or do such things (including the incurring of expenditure) as they consider necessary to promote the interests of the local community. This includes general recreational and leisure activities such as the provision of parks, gardens and open spaces. The exercise of these powers is a matter for individual authorities. I have no proposals to amend the legislation to alter discretionary functions which are appropriately located at local authority level.

While there is no specific provision in my Department's Vote for the funding of local authority parks and open spaces, my Department provides significant financial support to local authorities through the Local Government Fund which is usable at the discretion of the authority. The provision of open spaces and amenity areas in local authority housing schemes is also a matter for the individual housing authorities in the first instance. Certain facilities of this kind may be funded from my Department's capital allocations where the work is undertaken in conjunction with the provision of new local authority housing or

the refurbishment of existing housing under regeneration/remedial measures.

To assist local authorities in discharging their functions, my Department, in 1987, issued A Parks Policy for Local Authorities which outlined a national policy for the provision, development, administration and maintenance of a graded system of parks, open spaces and outdoor recreation areas by local authorities. Guidance in relation to the provision of open space and other amenities in social housing projects is also contained in my Department's Social Housing Guidelines — Design Guidelines published in 1999.

In addition, Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Residential Density were published in 1999. The Guidelines, inter alia, address issues such as the criteria to be taken into account for higher densities including the provision of social and community facilities, pedestrian and cycle linkages and the need to address the needs of children and elderly people. The Guidelines also focus on the need to place a greater emphasis on the quality of open space including spaces suitable for children's play and passive amenity. These guidelines are currently being reviewed and updated to take account of changing population and settlement patterns and the extensive experience built up since the introduction of the 1999 guidelines.

In April 2006, my Department published for public consultation Draft Guidelines on Development Plans for Planning Authorities. The Draft Guidelines highlight the requirements regarding recreation and amenities, under the Planning and Development Act 2000 to which local authorities must have regard in preparing their development plans. These include objectives for: the preservation, improvement and extension of amenities and recreational amenities; and the provision of public open space and recreation space including space/places for children to play. It is intended to finalise these guidelines shortly.

#### **Building Regulations.**

207. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will provide a copy of the training specification for the BER inspection programme. [35009/06]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche):** A copy of the training specification for BER Assessors (New Dwellings) is available in the Oireachtas library. This specification is also available on the Sustainable Energy Ireland website: [www.sei.ie/epbd](http://www.sei.ie/epbd).

#### **Decentralisation Programme.**

208. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government



[Mr. Connolly.]

the numbers of staff in his Department who have indicated willingness to decentralise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35010/06]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche):** At this stage, a total of 224 staff have confirmed their availability to decentralise with my Department to Wexford,

Kilkenny, Waterford, and New Ross. 118 of these are now working in the Department and the process of arranging for the transfer of the other staff to the Department is continuing.

A total of 147 of my Department's staff indicated their intention to decentralise with other Government Departments/Offices and State Agencies; 22 of these have already transferred out of my Department.