



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

**DÁIL ÉIREANN**

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

*Thursday, 29 November 2007.*

Order of Business	1545
Witness Protection Programme Bill 2007: First Stage	1559
Garda Síochána (Powers of Surveillance) Bill 2007: First Stage	1560
Statement of Expenditure: Motion	1560
Voluntary Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2007 [ <i>Seanad</i> ]:	
Second Stage ( <i>resumed</i> )	1560
Referral to Select Committee	1573
National Drugs Strategy: Statements	1573
Ceisteanna — Questions	
Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism	
Priority Questions	1632
Other Questions	1642
Adjournment Debate Matters	1660
Adjournment Debate	
Hospital Services	1660
Health Service Staff	1663
Special Educational Needs	1666
Human Rights Issues	1669
Questions: Written Answers	1673

## DÁIL ÉIREANN

—  
*Déardaoin, 29 Samhain 2007.*  
*Thursday, 29 November 2007.*  
 —

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

—  
*Paidir.*  
*Prayer.*  
 —

### Order of Business.

**The Tánaiste:** It is proposed to take No. 10*a*, motion on supplementary statement of expenditure for Houses of the Oireachtas; No. 1, Voluntary Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2007 [*Seanad*] — Second Stage (resumed); No. 16, statements on National Drug Strategy 2001 to 2008 and the mid-term review of the National Drugs Strategy March 2005. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that No. 10*a* shall be decided without debate; the proceedings on No. 16 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 3.30 p.m. and the following arrangements shall apply. The statements of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for the Fine Gael Party, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case; the statements of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case; Members may share time; and a Minister or Minister of State shall take questions for a period not exceeding 20 minutes; on the conclusion of questions a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed five minutes.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is the proposal for dealing with No. 10*a* without debate agreed? Agreed.  
 Is the proposal for dealing with No. 16 agreed?

**Deputy Enda Kenny:** The Government seems to have a problem in bringing forward legislation. In recent weeks there have been a series of statements to which I do not object. The Tánaiste said last night that Members should speak in the House on issues of importance. I put the Tánaiste on notice that in future if the Government intends to bring in a series of statements, there should be a motion from the Government rather than bland and endless statements on whatever the issue may be? The Government, for example, should put forward a motion on drugs to allow the House an opportunity to have a real debate on the issue.

**Deputy Ruairí Quinn:** Last night when the Tánaiste invited the House to have a debate on various issues, I interjected “not statements” with which he agreed. In the spirit of that contribution, which was a measured one, he will accept today’s proceedings were negotiated in advance. However, I support Deputy Kenny’s views on motions rather than statements. To facilitate the House and the Government Whip, if a division has to be taken on one it can be deferred for another day. We are not trying to create difficulties on that front.

Until we begin to engage seriously, we will not take ourselves seriously nor will we be taken seriously. The process of having statements to fill up time is of no benefit to anyone. It does not get us the coverage or engagement with our constituents that is required. For Government backbenchers and the Opposition a more robust engagement involving motions, and divisions on them to be held at a convenient time, would be a better way to do our business since the Government seems to be incapable of generating legislation.

**The Tánaiste:** I have no problem in principle with any arrangement that will enhance the debate and coverage of the House in plenary session, particularly with committee work. Any arrangement that would enhance the House’s deliberations is to be welcomed by all Members on all sides. These matters are Whips’ issues. On the interjection referred to by Deputy Quinn on statements, I took that to mean that people would rather that we come into the Chamber without prepared scripts more often. I am in favour of that but getting coverage without a prepared script is more difficult.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is the proposal for dealing with No. 16 agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy Enda Kenny:** Yesterday, I raised with the Taoiseach the findings and conclusions of a working group established by the then Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Martin, into the requirements and conditions of employment for locums, but no answer was given. I note from a report in one of today’s newspapers that when the Department of Health and Children was contacted on this matter, it could not find the relevant paperwork, despite an exhaustive search, which seems to be in keeping with the way the Department and the HSE do business. Much of the controversy over sensitive medical problems in the past couple of months has arisen where locum personnel were involved. Will the Tánaiste undertake to follow up on this and see what conclusions the Martin report reached?

What is the Government’s position on the Tribunals of Inquiry Bill which was on the Order Paper two weeks ago but seems to have disappeared? Does the Tánaiste accept the Taoiseach’s explanations as his previous evidence appears to be crumbling in the face of evidence being

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

acquired by a tribunal? Does the Government intend to leave the Bill where it is until this module of the tribunals is completed?

What is the Government's intention in respect of the legislation for persons in nursing homes which is due to take effect on 1 January? It is over 12 months since the Government announced this. Our party Whip, Deputy Kehoe, tells me that the Government intends to bring the Bill in and guillotine it through in the last two days of this session. I give the Tánaiste notice that if that is the intention, Members will strongly resist it. People legitimately want to ask about putting in place a fair and equitable structure that will not place an undue financial burden on patients and their next-of-kin. Will Members from all parties have adequate time to discuss the Bill, as they are entitled to do?

**The Tánaiste:** Second Stage of the Tribunal of Inquiries Bill has resumed. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform has given full and unambiguous assurances that it has nothing to do with existing inquiries and does not interfere with them in any way, as the Opposition knows.

**Deputy Pádraic McCormack:** The Government will interfere at the first chance it gets.

**The Tánaiste:** It continues nevertheless to trot out the same old stuff in the hope that it might get a line in the newspapers. I do not intend editorialising on the tribunal's deliberations although I note that the Opposition does so every day of the week.

**Deputy Enda Kenny:** Does the Tánaiste believe the Taoiseach's evidence?

**Deputy Fergus O'Dowd:** It is an about turn.

**Deputy Enda Kenny:** We will not get an answer to that question.

**The Tánaiste:** It is intended to take the nursing homes support scheme Bill in this session. It has been in the public domain for well over a year. If the Opposition had any queries it could have used parliamentary Question Time or Private Members' motion time. It has had any number of opportunities to seek further clarification on it.

**Deputy Dan Neville:** It has not been published.

**The Tánaiste:** The Minister for Health and Children has often enunciated the full details of how it would work.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** How can we see it if it has not been published?

**The Tánaiste:** The Bill will be debated when it comes forward because the Minister is anxious to proceed with it. The legislation provides for a new nursing home support scheme, the final details of which are being addressed.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** Will it be guillotined?

**The Tánaiste:** The Minister proposes to publish the Bill following Government approval and have the legislation in place in time for the new year.

**Deputy Jan O'Sullivan:** The Taoiseach seemed to be in doubt about that yesterday.

**Deputy Eamon Gilmore:** The Government's legislative programme, published on the day the House resumed in September, listed 17 Bills for publication in this session. Only two, however, have been published. We have not been overburdened with legislative business from the Government during this session. No legislation is listed for debate in the Dáil next week, which is understandable because it is budget week.

After next week there will be five sitting days left before Christmas, two or three of which will presumably be taken up with the Social Welfare Bill which leaves two or three more days. There is no way that we will accept the nursing home Bill or any other Bill being introduced at short notice and rammed through the House a couple of days before Christmas and guillotined.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Eamon Gilmore:** There was a great deal of talk over the past two nights during which the Minister for Health and Children said she wants a bipartisan approach to health. We will see what happens.

**Deputy Pádraic McCormack:** That was when the Minister was in trouble.

**Deputy Eamon Gilmore:** The nursing homes support scheme Bill is of serious concern to people around the country but it has not even been published. If the Government has any intention of railroading that Bill through the House it will meet with almighty resistance. The same applies to any other Bill.

Will the Tánaiste tell us what Bills the Government will put on the Dáil Order Paper between now and Christmas? That is a reasonable question.

**The Tánaiste:** A significant amount of legislation was cleared before the election was called. We have said we will publish the majority of the Bills before the next session. The Whips will decide on the balance of the work for the House in this session but that includes the budget, the Social Welfare Bill, the nursing homes support scheme Bill, the Appropriation Bill and there is the possibility of another health Bill being pub-

lished in that time. There will be no shortage of important legislation in the remainder of this term.

**Deputy Emmet Stagg:** Will we be able to debate it?

**The Tánaiste:** The Minister has several times enunciated the content and political direction of that Bill in the past few months.

**Deputy Pádraic McCormack:** Is the Government going ahead with it?

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Are we just going to nod it through?

**Deputy Eamon Gilmore:** There is a long-standing practice which I understood Government had accepted that there would be a period of two weeks between the publication of a Bill and the commencement of Second Stage, except when emergency legislation was required. Normal practice allows a decent time for Committee and Report Stages. The Nursing Home Support Scheme Bill has not yet been published. The Tánaiste says its political direction and main content have been known for some time which makes one wonder why it has not been published, particularly if it is intended to take it before Christmas. If the Government wants a serious political row before Christmas it will get it on this Bill because organisations representing elderly people want an opportunity to consult on and discuss it, as do we. This affects many families.

It is too clever a trick to move the Bill and get it done before Christmas and hope that the flak dies down. It will not. When will it be published? Will the Tánaiste assure me that it will not be rushed and guillotined through the House and that the two week convention will apply between its publication and the start of Second Stage?

**The Tánaiste:** I have outlined the position on the nursing home Bill and as soon as it is published the arrangements will be made for it to be taken in the House. The issue requires urgent attention. Many families are waiting for it to ensure that a fair deal is available to all. It will not affect people who are now in long-term nursing home care. It will provide arrangements for the future to ensure that we have an equitable system.

**Deputy Emmet Stagg:** It will take 15% off their houses.

**The Tánaiste:** There are people who unfortunately have to sell their homes under the existing system.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputies cannot go into the content of the Bill now.

**Deputy Jan O'Sullivan:** There is no consultation.

**A Deputy:** The Government's friends will build private nursing homes for the public patients.

**Deputy Emmet Stagg:** What about the two week convention for the Bill?

**The Tánaiste:** We will make sure that situation does not arise. It is the old story here, where everyone says they are talking about reform but continues to talk about the *status quo*.

**Deputy Enda Kenny:** The Government will not get away with this now.

**Deputy Pádraic McCormack:** Will the Bill be published before the next election?

**Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** As Christmas approaches tens of thousands of families face the festive season in substandard accommodation and unsuitable housing. The stark rise in homelessness is evident every evening on the streets of this city and statistics clearly indicate that social housing as a percentage of overall housing output is steadily decreasing.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** To what legislation is the Deputy referring?

**Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** There is a crisis in the area of housing and, with respect, I am no less entitled to expand on this point than any previous speaker. Given the seriousness of this situation for so many families, will the Tánaiste expedite the Social Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill so we can properly address the tragedy facing so many throughout the State? Can we redirect this Government's housing policy towards the provision of social housing as it is a key responsibility of national and local government?

**The Tánaiste:** That Bill provides for social housing reforms aimed at improving services and their delivery, including strengthening local authority powers to deal with anti-social behaviour, expanding the path to home ownership for social housing tenants and providing for the rental accommodation scheme. The Bill is due next year and our capital programmes contain a strong commitment to enhance the provision of social and affordable housing that is consistent with the National Economic and Social Council, NESC, report. The strategy to eliminate homelessness is proceeding and has been successful in many respects.

**Deputy Pádraic McCormack:** The last time I asked a question concerning that Bill I was told it was due, but the Tánaiste did not know of such a Bill.



**The Tánaiste:** I apologise to Deputy McCormack as I did not hear him.

**Deputy Michael D. Higgins:** How will provision be made for the meetings that have taken place between the chairpersons of committees? Perhaps it will be made by way of Supplementary Estimate. It is acceptable that we agreed to No. 10a this morning without debate because that sum covers the administration of the House. I understand the Accounting Officer for the Vote of the House is the Clerk of the Dáil. Meetings have taken place between the chairs of all the committees that have been established and they have begun making statements on the needs of the various committees.

A parliamentary question I tabled relating to the Committee on Foreign Affairs was turned down by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Dermot Ahern, as he has no function in the funding of that committee. The matter was referred to this Vote for the Houses of the Oireachtas. If we are to drive the reform of practices in these Houses and if committees are to have the resources, including physical resources, recording equipment, staff, meeting rooms and so on, that nearly all committee members agree on, will we have a separate Supplementary Estimate? Account must be taken of the additional resources needed to enable the committee system to function well because it has been expanded but not resourced. However, are we to take it that No. 10a, which was agreed without debate this morning and which applies to an existing level of expenditure, is the only opportunity we will have to properly fund the reforms that are desperately needed to change a committee system that is not working into a system that involves proper consultation?

I put this question to the Tánaiste because it is difficult to know where one should get information on the Houses of the Oireachtas. Regarding the Order of Business, will the Government order a Supplementary Estimate that will enable the expansion of committee resources agreed by the committee chairpersons?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Houses of the Oireachtas Commission has allocated a budget for the committees that is operated by the working group of the chairmen of committees. It, in turn, can make a case to the commission for additional funding it deems necessary.

**The Tánaiste:** The Ceann Comhairle's suggestion would meet more fruitful results than coming directly to me on this matter.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** That is what we might hope.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** What is the position on carbon in next week's budget? Will the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Cowen,

make known his intentions regarding the format of the carbon budget and carbon report? Will the budget take account of the report of the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, which shows we have dramatically exceeded our target on carbon emissions?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We cannot discuss the budget as the Deputy knows. The Deputy cannot ask questions on the content of the budget.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** This is part of the budget and no indication has been given of the Government's position. Will the Government be represented at the United Nations climate change conference in Bali?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** That is not relevant to the Order of Business and we will move on. These matters can be discussed next week.

**Deputy Brian Hayes:** The Deputy can bet her bottom dollar the Government will be represented in Bali.

**Deputy Ruairí Quinn:** Perhaps the Green Party Members of the House can tell us if they will be represented at the United Nations climate change conference in Bali.

**Deputy Trevor Sargent:** The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy John Gormley, will attend the conference.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** Can the Tánaiste give us the outline of the format carbon offsets will take in the budget as this is an important and expensive matter?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy knows that is not possible.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** Perhaps a search party is needed to find out who is going to Bali.

**Deputy Jan O'Sullivan:** This morning's newspapers report that six women seen at the Mid-West Regional Hospital in my constituency are to be recalled for review — this relates to the case of Rebecca O'Malley. Their tests were done at Cork University Hospital and the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, is soon to publish a report on the matter. This will be one of a number of reports because Dr. Ann O'Doherty has a report and a report is also due relating to the locum pathologist in Cork University Hospital, who also worked in Galway. The Health Service Executive has indicated it is carrying out a report on the situation in Portlaoise.

We have debated these matters in this House over the past two nights, there is widespread concern relating to testing for cancer and the Minister has called for support across the House for her proposals on cancer. I believe this House has

a strong role in debating these reports and I support Deputy O'Reilly regarding the Committee on Health and Children and public representatives playing their roles in ensuring confidence is restored in cancer services. Will the Government provide time in this House to debate the results of the various inquiries and ensure we make a contribution to restoring confidence in cancer services in this country?

It would also be positive to discuss Professor Keane's proposals and announcements in next week's budget on the funding of cancer proposals, which I hope to hear. As the Tánaiste knows, no indication has been given of how we will fund the considerable resources needed to implement the proposals. Current resources, even in what will be centres of excellence, are inadequate.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We have fully debated these issues over the past two nights and, while I understand the Deputy's concerns, I know the Tánaiste will say the Whips will have to agree on the discussions the Deputy proposes.

**Deputy Jan O'Sullivan:** Will we have the opportunity to contribute positively to this issue as it is a concern that is felt on all sides of the House?

**The Tánaiste:** This is a matter for the Whips but, to take up Deputy O'Sullivan's point, it is important that this House plays a role in all services, rather than seek to undermine them. It is important to point out that 96,000 people who, unfortunately, have this disease were diagnosed properly and that is 75% more than ten years ago. BreastCheck is being rolled out and many positive things are happening.

**Deputy Jan O'Sullivan:** It is four years too late in my constituency.

**The Tánaiste:** The genesis of this strategy was the 1996 cancer care strategy of Deputy Michael Noonan and that is to his credit. As Minister for Health and Children, I brought forward a cardiovascular strategy——

**An Ceann Comhairle:** With respect, we cannot have a debate on this issue.

**The Tánaiste:** I ask the Ceann Comhairle to allow me make this point. Too often, the impression is left hanging that everything is wrong in the health service. The reality is that there are 5,000 people alive and well today who would have suffered perhaps fatal heart attacks if we had not implemented strategic changes in the area of treatment for heart disease, the other great killer. Major developments and improvements are taking place in this regard.

11 o'clock

Professor Keane's role is to redirect resources to these centres, to ensure that what happened in Portlaoise——

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We cannot debate this issue now.

**The Tánaiste:** ——does not happen again. Aside from the allocation of additional resources, it is clearly a question of redirecting resources to ensure we get the quality outcomes that all citizens are entitled to expect. If we can construct our debates so that this is the focus of our concern, bearing in mind that we are here to represent ordinary people, not interest groups or people who put forward their own particular version of events to maintain the status quo and are opposed to everything——

**Deputy Jan O'Sullivan:** Ordinary people are saying that additional resources are required.

**The Tánaiste:** If we are prepared to do that, we can add to the quality of the debate.

**Deputy Michael Mulcahy:** Deputy Jan O'Sullivan should listen to what the Tánaiste is saying.

**The Tánaiste:** Too often, however, the narrative is such that it does not add anything and, on occasion, takes away from the dignity of the House in the way that we conduct our debates.

**Deputy Michael Mulcahy:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Jan O'Sullivan:** My contribution was entirely in a positive spirit.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I have called Deputy Crawford.

**Deputy Jan O'Sullivan:** The people to whom I have spoken tell me that additional resources are required.

**Deputy Noel Dempsey:** We are not concerned with listening only to those with vested interests.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We cannot have a debate on this issue.

**Deputy Seymour Crawford:** Given that home care services that allow patients to remain in their own homes have been removed, there is an urgent need for the nursing home support scheme Bill to be brought to this House.

There is cross-party support for efforts to secure a good outcome for illegal Irish immigrants in the United States. However, it is important that we have a full debate on how we treat people who come to this State, some of whom are fleeing severe circumstances. When will the immigration, residence and protection Bill be introduced?

[Deputy Seymour Crawford.]

I attended a discussion on mental health and suicide this morning. Those who contributed to the discussion emphasised the part played by alcohol in mental illness and the damage it does. Is there any prospect that the Bill included in the legislative programme some years ago regarding the promotion of alcohol at youth events will be reintroduced? When will the sale of alcohol Bill, which is included in the current legislative programme, be introduced so that we can have a debate on this issue? We cannot walk away from this extremely serious situation.

**The Tánaiste:** The question of whether to reactivate the alcohol products Bill is under consideration. The drinks industry has taken a voluntary approach and is operating a code of conduct. We are working with the industry to ensure advertising is more responsible.

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** That approach is not working.

**The Tánaiste:** People can have their view on these matters. I am bringing to the Deputy's attention the current status of the legislation.

**Deputy Seymour Crawford:** We were promised that the alcohol products Bill would be reintroduced.

**The Tánaiste:** I understand the immigration, residence and protection Bill will be introduced this session. The Government is anxious to see the nursing home support Bill enacted as quickly as possible.

**Deputy Brian Hayes:** The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government informed the Seanad last night that it is the Government's intention to reform the Upper House. In particular, there is a proposal to reform the university seats by merging the two panels together and extending the franchise to all graduates. The latter proposal would implement a referendum decision of the electorate in 1979. When are we likely to see the legislation to implement these proposals? The only way to effect the changes is through primary legislation. Assuming this is an agreed Government initiative, what timeframe is envisaged for its implementation?

**The Tánaiste:** The Minister pointed out that, in principle, we are of the view that extending the franchise should form part of prospective future reform of the Seanad. He took the first opportunity yesterday to give that indication in the Seanad. I am sure it will be welcomed by Members on all sides of the House given that it is a long-standing recommendation and one that will reflect the far greater participation we are pleased to have reached in third level education. There are many graduates who should have voting rights to those seats along with those who tra-

ditionally held them in the past when the situation was different.

The question of when legislation will be brought forward—

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** Surely that is elitism.

**The Tánaiste:** It is the very antithesis of elitism to extend voting rights to all third level graduates.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We cannot have a debate on this issue or we will be here all day.

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** Why should voting rights be confined to third level graduates?

**The Tánaiste:** I never thought I would hear a Labour Party Deputy defend the current situation in regard to Seanad seats.

**Deputy Emmet Stagg:** We do not defend it; we wish to change it.

**The Tánaiste:** As they say in my part of the country, that beats Banagher.

**Deputy Róisín Shortall:** My point is that there is no reason that those who had the benefit of attending third level should have separate representation in the Upper House. There is no justification for that.

**Deputy Eamon Gilmore:** There should be universal suffrage.

**Deputy Brian Hayes:** There is much to be said about the rotten boroughs that exist. I thank the Tánaiste for his reply. Has a memorandum gone to the Government on this specific issue or was the Minister winging it last night when he spoke in the Seanad?

**The Tánaiste:** The Minister gave his views—

**Deputy Brian Hayes:** That is my point; he gave his views.

**The Tánaiste:** No. He gave the Government's views on this matter as part of a wider prospect of reform that should take place. Deputy Brian Hayes may one day get to make a ministerial speech — which I hope he will, although not in the near future.

*(Interruptions).*

**The Tánaiste:** In any case, I hope he will be making speeches as a Deputy rather than a Senator. It is possible for a Minister to give his or her views without a memo to Government. Deputy Hayes should not be too stilted if he ever gets the job.

**Deputy Michael D. Higgins:** The Minister is simply making a narrative.

**Deputy Brian Hayes:** There is no legislation proposed. The Tánaiste said this proposal is part of a broader review. In other words, nothing will have happened in five years' time.

**The Tánaiste:** That is not the case. Deputy Hayes should accept when somebody says something new.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** When will the George Mitchell Scholarship Fund Act 1998 (Amendment) Bill come before the House? Ms Vargo is interested in taking Irish taxpayers' money but she is not so interested in taking Irish sons and daughters into the United States.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy should not make claims about named persons, who are not Members, in that fashion.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** She is interested in our taxes but not in our sons and daughters.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The person referred to by the Deputy is not here to respond to what he said. He should refrain from referring to this person.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** When will that legislation come before the House so we can have a debate?

My second question is on a topic of interest to Deputy Finian McGrath. When will the noise Bill come before the House? There was much noise last week from Deputy Finian McGrath and various Government backbenchers but there was no action.

*(Interruptions).*

**The Tánaiste:** There is no better man in the House than Deputy Ring to ask about the noise Bill. He has the best set of lungs in west Mayo.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** Deputy Finian McGrath takes the Banagher.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** We have all heard the noise of Deputy Finian McGrath changing his mind.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** As they say in my area, that takes the biscuit.

**Deputy Ruairí Quinn:** Deputy Finian McGrath took the shilling.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I assure Deputy Ring he is not the only person interested in the noise Bill.

**The Tánaiste:** In view of the delays in bringing forward the noise Bill, perhaps Deputy Ring will introduce a Private Members' Bill. The George Mitchell Scholarship Fund Act 1998 (Amendment) Bill is at the preparatory stage.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** What is the status of the noise Bill? It is included in the legislative programme.

**Deputy Pat Rabbitte:** Deputy Finian McGrath is introducing that Bill.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** Perhaps Deputies Finian McGrath and Ned O'Keeffe will introduce it. I would support it.

**Deputy Michael D. Higgins:** It is badly needed.

**The Tánaiste:** The Bill is unlikely to be taken while Deputy Ring is in the House.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** I am not like the Government Members who make much noise but take no action when it comes down to it. Deputy Quinn is correct; Deputy Finian McGrath took the shilling, the Taoiseach's shilling rather than the Queen's.

**Deputy James Bannon:** Local government is an essential element in any democratic state. Since its establishment in 1898, local government is the vehicle by which important services have been provided in the State. Is the electoral (amendment) Bill being delayed to accommodate the Green Party in its proposal to reduce the number of local public representatives in counties outside the Pale, including Cork and Galway? The boundary commission recently published its report on the constituencies for Dáil and European elections. The latter are fast approaching. It is important we get this legislation out of the way.

I have heard there is a proposal from the Green Party to reduce the number of local public representatives in constituencies outside of Dublin. Will the Tánaiste confirm if that is true?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** He cannot discuss the content of the legislation.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** He wants to.

**The Tánaiste:** The heads of the electoral amendment Bill are being prepared but no proposals have come to Government yet. When the Government gives approval we can discuss the matter.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Given the number of post offices which continue to be closed in Kerry, Laois, Offaly, Dublin, Cork and other places, and that the Taoiseach has indicated the ESOP-oriented Bill relating to the post office services will not be introduced in that context, is it intended to introduce legislation to lay out the framework for the future operation of post office services?

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

**The Tánaiste:** Not as far as I know.



**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Deputy Ned O’Keeffe might not have a post office handy to send in an application for re-admission. The matter needs urgent consideration.

**Deputy Damien English:** Will the Tánaiste give serious consideration to a debate on the benefits of putting new power lines underground? The Tánaiste should not be dismissive of it.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I am not being dismissive but the Deputy should come to the point.

**Deputy Damien English:** The Tánaiste was dismissive of the matter. It is unfair to place these power lines without proper discussion. There are two Bills planned, the electricity (transfer of transmission assets) Bill and the electricity regulation (EirGrid) (amendment) Bill. If they were brought forward we could have a serious debate. People’s health deserves such a debate.

These power lines will be in the north east but will have a national effect. It is only right and fair that the House has a proper debate on the benefits of putting these cables underground. We should at least analyse data and cost, which could be done under those two Bills. Proper decisions should be made in this House on people’s health.

**The Tánaiste:** Both of those Bills are due next year.

**Deputy Damien English:** They could be brought forward before that.

**Witness Protection Programme Bill 2007: First Stage.**

**Deputy Pat Rabbitte:** I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to provide for the establishment and operation of a programme for the State protection of witnesses involved in criminal investigations and prosecutions; and to provide for related matters.

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

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Tom 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.

**Deputy Pat Rabbitte:** I move: “That the Bill be taken in Private Members’ time.”

Question put and agreed to.

**Garda Síochána (Powers of Surveillance) Bill 2007: First Stage.**

**Deputy Pat Rabbitte:** I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to provide additional powers for the Garda Síochána with respect to surveillance; and to provide for related matters.

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

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Tom 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.

**Deputy Pat Rabbitte:** I move: “That the Bill be taken in Private Members’ time.” I am happy to fill the legislative lacuna on the other side of the House if the Government will facilitate it.

**Deputy Brian Cowen:** There is still too much work required on it.

Question put and agreed to.

**Statement of Expenditure: Motion.**

**Deputy Seamus Kirk:** I move:

That Dáil Éireann take note of the supplementary sum not exceeding €2,530,000 required by the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 December 2007, for a grant-in-aid.

Question put and agreed to.

**Voluntary Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2007 [Seanad]: Second Stage (Resumed).**

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

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Michael Kennedy was in possession with some minutes remaining. As he is not here, I call on Deputy James Reilly.

**Deputy James Reilly:** It is unusual to get such pregnant silences here.

As far as I understand it, the purpose of this Bill is to meet requirements coming from Europe to regulate the VHI to allow it engage in the activities it has been involved with before this, and SwiftCare and travel insurance in particular. There are many issues and concerns surrounding this.

It is quite clear we need competition in the insurance market because it brings the best service to people. Any doubt can be dealt with

through the following example. The VHI has been controlling demand by limiting supply, meaning it has made it extremely difficult for people in the past to access various private facilities, particularly MRIs, CT scans etc. The advent of VIVAS into the market changed this, as they allowed direct referral from the GP. Before this, the patient had to be referred to a consultant to get an MRI, although the patient would have known the scan was needed following examination by the GP in the first place.

This was bunging up the system but BUPA followed the lead of VIVAS, and then the VHI followed suit. This freed up much of the consultants' time. For example, in the case of a knee injury it may be determined that there is no requirement for surgical intervention or MRI and the person can get on with treatment in the community through physiotherapy etc. That is one example.

If there is true competition in the market, where are the competitors? There is a small company called VIVAS and the company formerly known as BUPA. Where are the other big insurers we would expect to find in such a market, such as AXA, Friends First and Hibernian? They are involved in many other types of insurance. It is not a very competitive market, meaning it is not attractive.

The Bill addresses European issues but confers many additional powers on the VHI to get involved in financial affairs, fiscal packages, pensions etc. The net effect of what is happening is twofold. As a result of solvency rules from which the VHI has received a derogation, it does not have to keep the same funds in place as its competitors, such as VIVAS, Quinn Healthcare or anybody else coming into the market. There is no doubt that is a net financial advantage.

Current regulations in this country have a 40% figure with regard to solvency but the regulations in Europe have a 25% figure. Is it part of the Minister's plan that when she determines solvency, the rules will change retrospectively so the VHI could suddenly become solvent under the new regime? The 25% figure would relate to VHI but the Minister has hamstrung the new competitors in the market with the 40% level, despite them only being at a start-up stage.

Another issue is allowing the VHI enter other areas of activity. The VHI currently controls a large section of the travel insurance market. If people change their VHI health insurance, they automatically lose their VHI travel insurance, which is an anti-competitive practice. What parts of the Bill would protect people from such action?

In the past number of years we introduced legislation to stop banks from behaving in such a way and make it easier for a person to move bank accounts. I am sure the Minister will acknowledge this issue in the current Bill and take care to address it, as we are going backwards instead of forwards.

The VHI has 76% of its market but the big issue for many in the country has been risk equalisation or community rating. That functions to protect older people from rising premiums, particularly those who have historically been members of the VHI. They paid their share when young in keeping the premiums of the elderly down and they should not be discommoded.

The problem is the rate risk equalisation is set at. It was at 25% and the Minister has proposed to drop it to 20%. No other country has a rate of 20% and Australia, for example, has a rate of 3% or 4%. Leaving the matter aside, the VHI holds 76% of the market and is by far the dominant player, making profits of €70 million last year. Why does the company now need risk equalisation? An argument can be made that as its profits fall because of the growing age of the population then risk equalisation should come in. As its share of the market falls to the 40% level where it should be going, as the ESB has been instructed to do, risk equalisation should then arise. The two should meet half way rather than requiring those entering the market — many are choosing not to enter the market — being asked to pay up-front when the VHI has no issue with profitability at the moment.

The risk equalisation issue goes further than that. One company alone is due to pay €16 million to the VHI. What will that €16 million be used for? I would like to see it ring-fenced for health insurance. However, having spoken to accountants and others, I have ascertained that is virtually impossible because with all sorts of management fees, accounting activity etc. it could be used for anything. Will it use the €16 million from risk equalisation to compete in the primary care sector through VHI Swiftcare clinics or to promote its pensions or travel insurance? It is grossly unfair to everybody else in the marketplace. The VHI should be solvent before it is given any further powers or any greater level of activity.

A normal insurance market has little litigation. There is not that much activity between lawyers either here or in Europe. However, the amount of litigation going on here and in Europe involving BUPA, Vivas and the VHI is staggering because the market is not level and it is perceived by the players involved — and those who will not enter it — as being grossly unfair. The Bill needs to correct that issue. Rather than being used as a smokescreen to allow it further powers at this time, it should be used to batten down the hatches. In the Seanad we tabled an amendment, which was accepted, requiring the VHI to report to the Competition Authority twice a year. It will be important to see what actions the Competition Authority will be able to take and what the company must report to the Competition Authority. The devil is in the detail.

Some 52% of the population subscribe to private health insurance which is extraordinary in a country that is supposed to have free hospital care. Why do people feel it is necessary? The

[Deputy James Reilly.]

answer is obvious. It is not that they have lost faith in the public hospital service. They have lost faith in their ability to access it. They believe that by having insurance they will be able to get timely efficient proper health care. They are concerned about Susie Long's seven-month wait and the wait of two years for a mammogram. During the week a lady in Cork got an appointment for 2010. Running our public health service in that manner is leading to people paying for insurance. We have a new phenomenon with some people with medical cards also having private health insurance because a family will club together to ensure that their grandparents or parents have access to speedy care. That is clearly bizarre and not right.

Part of the rationale behind the Bill was that the EU Internal Market Commissioner, Charlie McCreevy, wanted the Government to restructure the VHI. Has restructuring in the VHI that will pass muster with the EU Commissioner happened? Can the Minister confirm whether Commissioner McCreevy is now satisfied that the Bill is adequate, or does she expect that he will seek further and more immediate action from the Government on this matter? In other words must the VHI reach solvency and become authorised at an earlier date before it engages in wider activities?

The Bill raises questions about the level of reserve the VHI must have. I have already alluded to the 25% and 40%. I am concerned that having forced the newer players into the market with a 40% reserve the bar will drop. If the VHI is expected to reach a solvency level of 40% of its premium income by the end of 2008, I understand it will need to raise €140 million by the end of next year. How does the Minister expect the VHI to raise this level of income? Is the Government considering giving the VHI a cash injection or will the cost be passed on to the customer who has already seen VHI premiums rise by 25% in the past two years? The Bill proposes that the VHI be permitted to borrow in order to finance its solvency. Under the Third Non-Life Insurance Directive, insurance companies are permitted to borrow funds for the purposes of meeting solvency requirements, but subject to highly restrictive conditions on the extent and terms of such borrowings. Will the same criteria apply to the VHI or will it be allowed to borrow at a lower cost of capital that may give it a further advantage over its insurance rivals?

Under the revised legislation it is now proposed to establish a subsidiary services company into which all VHI staff and health services will be moved. This suggests that while the VHI will be subject to regulation, all staff will be put into a separated unregulated company. This would not be allowable for normal non-life insurance companies, which are not allowed outsource their entire business and must maintain a senior management team to control the business, a com-

pliance officer, a senior claims handler etc. Can the Minister confirm if it is intended that the entire business will be outsourced to an unregulated company with all the attendant risk to staff? This services company will allow the VHI to apply economies of scale whereby the same staff work for all the different companies and businesses, allowing the staff in the services companies to do services for health insurance, travel insurance, pensions etc. This is not allowed under normal insurance standards.

Under the current legislation the relationship between the VHI and its subsidiaries is not clear. Will there be cross-subsidisation, to which I have already alluded and which would clearly introduce further uncompetitive practice into the marketplace? The Bill does not indicate whether these subsidiary companies will be for-profit companies or if they will only be required to break even. Will these companies be required to make a return to Government on any profits they make or will the profits be used to subsidise the core health insurance business to help maintain premiums at a lower level? That is a very important question. Many people would be happy to see a company like the VHI engaging in other activities if those activities were going to be profitable and ultimately feed back into the insurance company resulting in lower premiums for the client.

Should these subsidiaries face financial difficulties does the Minister expect that they will be capitalised by VHI or will they have the capability to borrow money in their own right? We need to know the status of those companies and whether they are profitable. There is no transparency. We have had considerable discussion about transparency and accountability recently. We need some transparency in this area also.

I have already alluded to the substantial risk equalisation payments the VHI will potentially receive. How will this money flow throughout the business? Will it be used to subsidise other non-profitable areas of activities in which it might care to experiment? The Bill does not specify whether subsidiary companies will be permitted to cross-sell and tie their products to the health insurance products. A customer who does not like the VHI health insurance offering cannot avail of travel insurance with it. If the company widens its remit to get involved in pensions and life insurance, will the Bill address the possibility that it could refuse to continue a customer's pension or life insurance? We need to think long and hard before empowering the VHI with all these additional powers before we address these problems.

Considering the VHI holds 76% of the health insurance market a contract with the VHI will be of critical importance to the survival of co-located hospitals. To date, six co-location facilities have been approved by the HSE with a further two locations awaiting approval. This is supposed to add 1,000 new private beds to the market. A couple of questions arise in that context. Have



any of the co-located hospitals done deals with the VHI? If they have not and do not do so, it is extremely unlikely that they will survive. How does the Minister propose to finance the loss of insurance income to public hospitals which are currently paid by the VHI and other insurers when private patients occupy their beds? I have seen nothing in any budget that explains how these 1,000 beds will be funded. The Minister might tell us whether a single planning application has been lodged for any of these co-located hospitals. I understand that no such applications have been lodged. We all know how long the planning process takes in this country. How long will we have to wait until the new co-located hospitals are built? Will they ever be built?

I would like to raise another couple of issues. The publicly stated policy of the VHI has been that there is no need for any more private beds. Its annual report stated:

The single biggest challenge facing private healthcare in Ireland is the unprecedented increase in private hospital capacity which has been encouraged by generous tax relief for such investment. VHI Healthcare has questioned the wisdom of such tax incentives particularly since there does not appear to be any significant demand from the public sector to use these new facilities. The cost of financing the new capacity will place huge pressure on our objective to provide our members with quality healthcare at affordable prices.

That is a big issue when considering the co-located hospitals. My understanding is that the current batch of private hospitals would encounter some difficulty if patients were not directed to them by the National Treatment Purchase Fund. The undermining of our public hospitals, in tandem with the encouraging of private for-profit hospitals, is at the heart of the ideology I find objectionable.

I will repeat the point I made two nights ago — the old private hospitals were voluntary hospitals, often run by religious orders, rather than for-profit hospitals. The model of private hospital being proposed is entirely different. Such hospitals will be able to cherry-pick easy forms of treatment, such as elective surgery. As they will not have accident and emergency departments, they will not have staff on call 24 hours a day, or certain types of high-tech equipment, which would be needed if they had to deal with major road traffic accidents. All that stuff will be farmed out to our public hospitals, which will have to bear the strain. When patients have been stabilised and are no longer in too much danger, they will be transferred to these co-located hospitals which will be able to continue to make profits. It strikes me as poor value for taxpayers at every level. What will be the insurance rates for these co-located hospitals? It seems from what the VHI is saying that those rates will be in excess of the current rates. As the VHI admits that the cost of

private health insurance will undoubtedly increase in such circumstances, it will become unaffordable for many people.

I also have concerns about data protection. Will the information collected by the VHI when it is selling health insurance be available to that company when it tries to sell life assurance? I find it highly improbable that some type of Chinese wall will be erected within the company. As the VHI will have access to the intimate health care information people have provided over the years, it will be able to use it to assess such people for life assurance and pension purposes. I ask the Minister to look long and hard at the many issues that need to be addressed. The VHI is a very important organisation that has played an enormous role in this country's health care provision. The Minister should put certain safeguards in place. She should insist that the VHI should come to the marketplace on a level playing pitch with everybody else and that its share of the market should decrease from 75% to 40% over the next five years. As it stands, this legislation does not include such safeguards, which gives it the potential to make matters much worse for Irish consumers.

**Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin:** The purpose of this Bill, which is essentially technical, is to oblige the board of the VHI to attain the level of reserves needed to achieve authorisation as an insurer. According to the explanatory memorandum, this legislation will give the VHI a structure that, among other things, will give it commercial freedom on products and pricing. The board members of this statutory corporation are appointed by the Minister for Health and Children. The VHI, which is regulated by the Health Insurance Authority, is the main provider of personal health insurance in Ireland, although a number of competitors have entered the health insurance market in recent years.

The VHI plays a key part in health funding in the State. The content of this Bill will not change these essential features of the VHI. As risk equalisation is essential, it has received cross-party support in the Oireachtas. We have been told that the changes being made in this Bill are necessary to ensure the continuation of risk equalisation. Regardless of the detail or contents of the Bill, what it is leading us towards is another matter entirely. It does nothing to remove the doubts about the future of VHI as a statutory corporation for which the Government has a clear and special responsibility. The Government has not made its position clear. Everyone in this House is aware of the penchant of this Government, especially the Minister for Health and Children, for the privatisation agenda, which may well give us reasons to be concerned.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions' landmark study of our health care system, *How Ireland Cares*, states:



[Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.]

There is no necessary logical reason to link the risk equalisation decision with the ownership status of VHI. The authors advocate that VHI continue to be a state company so that it can continue to serve national rather than private or parochial interests. Whatever the future of VHI, it should not become a for-profit company.

I note that a member of one of the Government parties, Senator Deirdre de Búrca of the Green Party, made a significant contribution to the debate on this Bill in the Seanad. She stated:

The Green Party broadly supports its thrust but we see the Bill as significant in that it may be the necessary precursor for the privatisation of the VHI. While the intentions of previous Governments in regard to the privatisation of the VHI have not been clear, we are aware the VHI board has indicated its preference for the privatisation of the company.

She went on to say the Bill could tilt the balance towards private medicine as opposed to the public system. She might have added that the intentions of the Government of which her party is a member are not clear either and this must be repeated today. However, she admitted that no reference is made to the future ownership of VHI in the current programme for Government. It seems from her contribution that the Green Party is against privatisation, at least in this specific instance.

It is interesting to read the response of the Minister for Health and Children when concerns were raised in the Seanad about the prospect of VHI privatisation. She made the following statement:

If one has private health insurance, one has preferential access to diagnostics and facilities paid for by the taxpayer and for which a group of employees in this State gets a fee.

This surely is an interesting contribution from the Minister for Health and Children. The Minister appeared to speak disapprovingly of this preferential access, yet she has done everything over a series of years to maintain the system that sustains that preferential access which is the two-tier system of which I and many Deputies have spoken about in this House on many occasions.

In 2005 the Minister said the fact that, "more and more people are getting private health care is a good thing. It's a sign of increasing disposable income." What the Minister did not say was that the increasing number of people taking out private health insurance is also a sign that people are moving away from the public health system because of long waiting lists and a steady deterioration in confidence in that system as operated by the HSE, the Department of Health and Children and with the accountable responsibility of this Government now in office in excess of a decade.

A vicious circle has been created. The public health system has been allowed to deteriorate and this prompts more people to go private. The for-profit health sector grows richer and this is indisputable. This Government is fattening this for-profit health care business as never before, most notably with the Minister, Deputy Harney's flagship project of private hospital co-location on public hospital sites.

Many uninsured people are also abandoning the public system and going into debt to pay for private care in order to avoid long waiting lists and to have their procedure performed at the earliest possible time to address their agony, their pain and their suffering or that of a loved one within their family.

In recent years, credit unions have reported growing numbers of people taking out loans to fund health care. Given the understanding of the market that credit unions primarily seek to serve, this is a sure indication of real failure in terms of the provision of a quality health care system available to every citizen on the basis of need. If credit unions have indicated that they loaned in excess of €30 million in 2004 to fund health care access, then this Government has truly failed the average citizen in this State. If that is the figure for 2004, I wonder what is the figure for 2005, 2006 and the current year. I warrant the figure has increased steadily in each of those years and it is imperative that the statistics be published and made publicly available.

We do not know the total amount of money expended on health services. We know the Government's commitment to health care delivery as part of the overall Exchequer spending but that is not the whole picture; far from it. We know that the best use is not being made of the public moneys because it is being applied inequitably and inefficiently in a two-tier system. Approximately 70% of the population pays for their health care twice, once through taxes and again through personal health insurance or direct-user fees for GP services, medicines and hospital care. People are paying twice and meanwhile the proportion of the population with medical cards is declining. This complex and inefficient funding system has been used by successive Governments to underpin the grossly inequitable two-tier public-private system.

The Government's fundamentally flawed policies and gross mismanagement of the health services has meant that increasing numbers of people have had to take out personal health insurance for themselves and their families. Many of these people are on relatively low or moderate incomes, do not qualify for the medical card and are concerned that if they rely totally on the public system they will face long waiting lists and poorer health care outcomes. They are paying on the double for health through tax and PRSI and through private health insurance. Many people fall between two stools and do not qualify for the

medical card nor can they afford private health insurance.

Many of these people are getting into serious debt to pay for health care. I have stated before in the House that I have seen the anguish of young parents on low incomes with young children having to make the choice between some essential and the worry of bringing their child to the doctor. They do not have a medical card nor can they afford access to health care. They are in that limbo bracket in the centre, viewed by the continued annual review of the threshold for qualification for the medical card to be able to provide for their own health care needs from their own resources, but this is far from the truth. These people are suffering and they are forced to go without in order that their children have access to a local GP or whatever other referral is necessary. This is a disgraceful situation. I know of such cases and I have had to help in any way I can.

Sinn Féin has called for the establishment of a health funding commission. This is necessary for a proper assessment of all the money currently being spent on health services both by Government and by citizens directly in the form of health insurance premiums and user fees. Such a commission would not be engaged in a statistical exercise but rather its purpose would be to plan the transition to a truly fair and efficient system of health care funding, leading to the delivery of a quality public health care system.

It should be accessible to every man, woman and child on the basis of need alone and should not discriminate on the basis of the money in one's pocket or bank account or where one lives on this island. All citizens have that right. They are born equal and should be treated equally throughout their lifetime. This is the single fundamental common fact that all Members must face.

In Sinn Féin's strong view, the way forward is a universal, single-tier system of health care accessible to all based on need alone and regardless of income. Such a system would be funded from general taxation based on the principle of ability to pay. It would protect the most vulnerable and ensure there was no fast track to better care for some, while others languished on waiting lists. The best care should be available to all. There are very few winners in our current inequitable health care system. The exceptions are those who profit from the increasingly lucrative private health business. Overall, our population suffers an inequitable and inefficient system. This has been proven both repeatedly and in recent weeks and not only in the midlands. Its fundamental structure is flawed and it is plagued with bad political and bureaucratic management.

A new beginning is needed and health funding is central in this regard. No one accepts the proposition that because the Government is spending more than at any previous time, its commitment to quality health care delivery is clear and obvious. Nothing could be further from the truth.

While more money is being pumped into the health system at present, the population dependent on it has also increased. Moreover, both the awareness of, and incidence of, need among our citizens are growing. A much wider debate on these issues is required than can be facilitated by the debate on this Bill regarding voluntary health insurance or by the Private Members' time accorded to the debate on the Labour Party motion of no confidence in the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Mary Harney. Members require a substantive period of time to be allocated by the Government to address the realities of health care delivery in this State. The Government fears such a debate most and is not likely to accommodate it. However, I urge it to do so to address such matters in the round and holistically and to ensure the full facts are properly aired and exposed in this Chamber, as is appropriate.

I note the content of this Bill and await the Minister of State's response. I hope that were this Bill to proceed from Second Stage to further Stages, Members would have the opportunity to address some of the real concerns I have articulated. I refer in particular to the Government's intent and its absolute weddedness to a privatisation agenda in health care delivery. Shame on it for this and shame on those who voted last night to continue the writ of Deputy Mary Harney in health care in this State.

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hackett):** I thank the Deputies who have contributed to the debate and will respond briefly to some of the issues raised. A number of Members, including Deputy Tom Hayes, highlighted the benefits that competition can bring. The Government is committed to encouraging greater competition in the market and this Bill will help achieve that objective. Many of the recent reports on the market have highlighted the need to address VHI's legislative provisions.

The position of VHI must be regularised and this Bill provides for this at the earliest opportunity. Deputy Mitchell's support for the application of risk equalisation is welcome. As for the level of transfers that arise, I note that the risk equalisation scheme has never fully compensated VHI for the risk profile of its members as costs associated with higher level plans are capped. In addition, since April payments under the scheme have been reduced by a further 20% following the removal of the exemption for new entrants and Government consideration of the market reports. This is often overlooked as the scale of potential transfers attracts attention. However, the scale of transfers that arises under the scheme simply reflects, albeit not fully, the risk imbalances that exist in the insured populations.

The Minister is satisfied that the advantages, if any, that may have accrued from the derogation no longer apply and VHI's board was instructed

[Deputy Máire Hoctor.]

to build its reserves to the required level in December 2005. In this regard and noting Deputy Terence Flanagan's comments on authorisation, the position at present is that the board is obliged to maintain reserves and does so to the extent that its reserves are well above the minimum EU requirement, notwithstanding the derogation granted to it under the first non-life directive. Moreover, the derogation can be seen as having hindered the development of VHI. In addition, one must take account of the extent to which the risk equalisation scheme as currently structured does not compensate VHI for its adverse risk profile.

It is important to bear in mind the relative risk profiles of the insurers when commenting on the proportion of the market held by VHI. Given its disproportionate share of the risk, particularly in the older age groups, and the level at which risk equalisation operates, VHI is not in a position to engage in predatory pricing strategy. Similarly, its market share cannot be compared to that held by large companies in other markets given the obligation to provide community-rated cover and to provide it on the basis of open enrolment and lifetime cover. In addition, the Health Insurance Authority is an independent body and is independent of the Minister in the performance of its functions.

A number of Deputies commented on the manner in which the VHI engages in the provision of ancillary services and of travel insurance in particular. The Minister has written to the VHI concerning this issue. VHI's management has engaged with the Financial Regulator on the manner in which it offers the product. The position is that VHI offers travel insurance as an intermediary, having been authorised by the Financial Regulator to do so. Members will also be aware that other insurers are offering special deals on the basis that more than one product is purchased. More generally, the Minister has asked the VHI to behave as if regulated in respect of compliance with the regulator's consumer protection code. As VHI moves to being an authorised insurer, this will become a statutory requirement.

Under the terms of the Bill it also will be the case that VHI will be obliged to form a number of subsidiaries to comply with the requirements for authorisation and to the extent that such subsidiaries would be subject to regulation by the Financial Regulator, they will be. They will also be stand-alone incorporated entities that do not pose a risk to the authorised health insurer. The regulator's requirements regarding freedom on pricing mean that any ministerial involvement in this area would not be permissible. The level of reserves required by the regulator has also been highlighted. While the Minister is of the view that the nature of health insurance and the manner in which it is provided supports the view that a

lower solvency requirement should apply, it is a matter for the regulator to determine.

Deputy Neville referred specifically to VHI's failure to provide cover for psychotherapy. I have been advised by VHI that psychotherapy, when provided by a consultant psychiatrist who is appropriately registered with VHI Healthcare, is covered under both the outpatients' and inpatients' scheme. The level of cover depends on the plan held by the individual in question. I also understand that VHI is liaising with Deputy Neville on the issue of cover for psychotherapy as part of a multidisciplinary approach to the delivery of mental health treatment. As for the six-month limit for psychiatric services, it is the same for all hospital stays.

The Deputy also asked the reason psychiatric hospitals were not included in the recent National Hygiene Services Quality Review 2007 carried out by the Health Information Quality Authority, HIQA. Section 7 of the Health Act 2007 sets out the functions of HIQA. It provides that the authority will set standards on safety and quality regarding services provided by the Health Service Executive and service providers in accordance with the Health Acts — except for services under the Mental Health Acts 1945 to 2001, which are the responsibility of the Mental Health Commission — the Child Care Acts 1991 and 2001 and the Children Act 2001.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan noted that consultants have been retained to provide advice on VHI being authorised by the end of 2008 and the scope of the provisions under section 3(d). VHI is being allowed to pursue a number of options regarding the acquisition of the necessary reserves to maximise flexibility. The consultants' report will assist in the use of the appropriate means and, more generally, on requirements for the submission of a robust application to the regulator.

As for the possible introduction of universal health insurance, many studies have been carried out, both national and international, of different funding mechanisms for health systems and no one mechanism has stood out as the ideal mechanism to be adopted by all countries. All have their strengths and weaknesses. The model adopted in each country tends to be a reflection of its history and social structure.

Following an analysis of the most appropriate method of funding the health system, the 2001 health strategy concluded that no alternative system of funding would deliver significant improvements over the current tax-based method. The World Health Organisation commented in 2005 that no specific health financing mechanism is optimal and recommendable in all settings and that little advantage is discernible in one financing system over another in terms of impact on health outcomes, responsiveness to patients or efficiency.

Any new powers under the Bill do not arise until the authorisation has been achieved. The Minister has no function in regard to the level of



reserves that the Financial Regulator would expect any applicant to hold. Many insurance companies have a structure that encompasses a services subsidiary. Any decision on VHI covering services is a matter for the VHI board. This is specifically recognised in section 2 of the 1996 Act. No decision has been taken to privatise the VHI. This Bill facilitates authorisation. The board has not said it is in favour of privatisation in any discussions it has had with the Minister. Since the establishment of the VHI in 1957 it has operated on the basis that it would provide cover for persons who also had public eligibility, thereby contributing to the delivery of acute care to the entire population.

No decision has been taken on the privatisation or break-up of VHI. I commend this Bill as a necessary development of the legislative provisions governing the VHI.

Question put and agreed to.

**Voluntary Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2007 [Seanad]: Referral to Select Committee.**

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Horder):** I move:

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

Question put and agreed to.

**National Drugs Strategy: Statements.**

**Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey):** I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the Dáil on the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 and the mid-term review of that strategy, the outcome of which was published in March 2005. The operational timespan for the current national drugs strategy is drawing to a conclusion and I see today's debate as opening the process of drawing up a new strategy for the coming years. Already I have sought nominations to a steering group, which will be made up of representatives of various Departments, agencies and the community and voluntary sectors, to facilitate the development of a new national drugs strategy for the period 2009-16.

I am very much aware that the current national drugs strategy grew out of the work done by Members of various parties in the second half of the 1990s. This included the first and second reports of the ministerial task force on measures to reduce the demand for drugs in 1996 and 1997, and much work subsequent to the finalisation of these reports. I acknowledge the work and commitment of all involved at that time. I pay particular tribute to Deputy Rabbitte, under whose tenure the

report was published, to Chris Flood who was the first Minister with responsibility for this area and to subsequent Ministers for the work they have done, and for the co-operation the strategy has received both inside and outside the House from the various political parties.

I see today's debate as contributing to the formulation of the new strategy and I am keen to listen to the views of Members and to consider any proposals they have on how to address the issue of problem drug use in society. This debate gives an opportunity to the Members of the Dáil, as elected representatives of the people, to contribute in a significant way to the framing of the review of the strategy. I look forward to engaging with Members of the Oireachtas as the new strategy is developed. The Government is determined that it will facilitate the tackling of the illicit drugs problem in a comprehensive and effective way.

Problem drug use is a complex and difficult issue. This is a global problem and no country has succeeded in coming to terms with all aspects of it. Our efforts to tackle it in Ireland must be seen in that context. However, the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 has achieved considerable success in reducing the hardship caused by problem drug use to individuals, their families and the wider community. The main broad achievements include the hugely increased level of drugs seizures by the Garda and the Customs and Excise service; under the prevention pillar, the SPHE and Walk Tall programmes have been rolled out to all schools — in that regard I have asked the Department of Education and Science to examine what might be done to sharpen the focus on senior cycle students in regard to drugs awareness; various awareness campaigns have been run.

A new national drugs awareness campaign, focused on cocaine and utilising modern media, is in preparation; and tremendous achievements have been made under the young peoples facilities and services fund, run by my Department; treatment facilities have increased significantly. Approximately 8,500 people are now in receipt of methadone, and a range of services are being provided across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors for various types of problem drug use. The research outcome longitudinal study in Ireland, known colloquially as ROSIE, undertaken by the National Advisory Committee on Drugs, focused on outcomes for opiate users in treatment and showed that considerable success is being achieved. Their experience after the first year of treatment indicate that most service users have been retained in treatment leading to substantial reductions in drug use. Participants also reported substantial decreases in their involvement in crime and significant improvements in general health. Members will be aware of the recent study carried out by the Keltoi Centre in St. Mary's Hospital in the Phoenix Park which showed significant outcomes in terms of rehabili-



[Deputy Pat Carey.]

tation in particular. Research continues in areas such as drugs prevalence, cocaine, treatment outcomes and families and drugs, informing our current progress and helping towards the development of a new strategy.

Arising from the mid-term review of the national drugs strategy, rehabilitation became the fifth pillar of that strategy. Subsequently, the report of the working group on drugs rehabilitation was published in May this year and the implementation of the recommendations therein have been included as a commitment in the programme for Government. I am determined to press ahead with this work as a priority. The specific achievements of my Department under the strategy include the programmes developed by local and regional drugs task forces, capital projects developed under the premises initiative fund and preventative actions undertaken through the young people's facilities and services fund. The 14 local drugs task forces have been in operation for nearly ten years and they support approximately 300 interim-funded community-based projects employing more than 300 people. More than 100 further projects that started at local drugs task force level have been mainstreamed. These projects deliver a wide range of services and supports for problem drug users, their families and their broader communities. Currently an evaluation process on the interim-funded local drugs task force projects is nearing completion and it is hoped that the results of this will help to inform our ongoing efforts at community level. Since my appointment I have visited all the local drugs task force areas, met with representatives of the various task forces and visited many projects. I was impressed by the general quality of the projects and by the enthusiasm and commitment of those working on the ground. There is no doubt that much has been achieved. Too often the drugs problem attracts negative headlines but there is also a positive story to be told regarding the prevention measures, the help being given and the real improvement in the lives of many people.

Ten regional drugs task forces were established in 2003, thus ensuring that all parts of the country benefit from the operation of a drugs task force. It has taken time to get regional drugs task forces fully up and running, and some managed to progress more quickly than others, but they are now pressing ahead towards full implementation of their plans over the next year or so, at a full cost in excess of €14 million per annum. The Government is committed to making this sum available and the programme for Government confirms our commitment to develop and strengthen the range of projects being undertaken through drugs task forces. As in the case of the local drugs task force areas, I am also undertaking a series of visits to regional drug task forces and many of their projects, to hear at first hand what are regarded as the issues on the ground and to assess the response in hand so far. In the past ten days I

have held meetings and visited projects in Athlone, Cork and Waterford and I hope to visit Sligo, Longford and Carlow next week. While progress countrywide varies, huge improvements are being made and the same spirit and commitment is in evidence around the country. I see my role as being truly on a national level and it is my intention to ensure that we are in a position to respond to drugs issues wherever they occur.

The young people's facilities and services fund was established to assist in the development of youth facilities, including sport and recreational facilities, and services in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem exists, or has the potential to develop. Earlier this week I opened Knocknaheeny youth "Link-Point" project in Cork and the Farronshoneen Youth and Community Centre in Waterford — two hugely impressive developments, substantially funded by the young people's facilities and services fund, that will bring great and immediate benefits to the youth of those areas. Overall, the main aim of the fund is to attract "at risk" young people in disadvantaged areas into these facilities and activities and divert them away from the dangers of substance abuse. The target group of the programme is young people in the age range of ten to 21 years who are defined as "at risk" due to factors such as family circumstances, educational disadvantage or involvement in crime or substance misuse.

To date, allocations totalling over €130 million have been made to nearly 500 facility and services projects in LDTF areas in Dublin, Bray and Cork, as well as in Galway, Limerick, Waterford and Carlow, all of which are currently in the operational areas of the fund. Indeed, building on the significant success of the operation of the YPFSF to date, the programme for Government envisages the expansion of the fund to further towns, mainly in Leinster, and I will be considering such expansion in the short term.

I have spent much of the first five months as Minister of State building on my knowledge of the drugs issue through meetings and interaction with service users and service providers in those projects operating in communities around the country. Apart from the extensive contacts that this entailed with the community and voluntary sectors, I have engaged with statutory and nationally focused bodies such as various representatives of the Health Service Executive, judges of the drugs court, whom I met last week, the Garda and the Irish Prison Service. I have been impressed by the range and quality of the work being undertaken and by the dedication and commitment of the people involved, working in the main under various actions of the national drugs strategy.

A theme that repeats itself across all my interactions is the importance of inter-agency co-operation, crossing statutory, community and voluntary sectors. Such inter-agency working to maximise the impact of initiatives for the benefit

of problem drug users and the various clients of drug initiatives is something that we must aim to foster across all our work. Indeed, where it works well, as is the case with the young peoples' facilities I opened this week in Cork and Waterford, the benefits to the target group who will use these facilities is obvious and very encouraging. Through the new strategy, we must ensure that groups work together consistently in the coming years to maximise benefits. I ask everybody to support that as the way forward.

I have already spoken about some of the prevention measures under the national drugs strategy. Since my appointment I have repeatedly emphasised my particular focus on prevention — if we can prevent people starting a drug habit we can avoid the heartache and pain, as well as the expense, that arises as a result. In regard to prevention, I pay tribute to the fine supplement on drugs that was circulated with the *Irish Examiner* last week. This was indeed a timely, useful and thought provoking publication and I applaud all involved.

My other main stated focus is on rehabilitation — if we can facilitate people to become fully involved in the process of regaining their capacity for daily life from the impact of problem drug use through a continuum of care we will, in each individual case, achieve a great deal and facilitate a better life for many. Rehabilitation became the fifth pillar of the strategy arising from the mid-term review. The programme for Government commits the Government to implementing the recommendations of the report of the working group on drugs rehabilitation and I am determined to progress this quickly with inter-agency support and co-operation.

The key recommendations involved are an effective inter-agency approach based on a continuum of care for the individual; an expansion of the range of treatment options; building on the rehabilitative impact of community employment schemes; broader life issues including medical support, access to employment, access to education, housing, particular issues relating to the rehabilitation of offenders, child care, the role of families in the rehabilitation process; and research. The substantially increased focus on rehabilitation is very significant in the context of the preparation of the new strategy. It is most important that we go the extra distance to ensure that people are empowered to access the social, economic and cultural benefits of life in line with their needs and aspirations.

Implementation of the recommendations of the report will be led by the HSE and co-ordinated through a national drug rehabilitation implementation committee. In keeping with the national drugs strategy generally, the process will involve in-depth cross-departmental inter-agency co-operation in liaison with the community and voluntary sectors. The aim is to ensure that such co-operation is achieved from the top policy level to the implementation of the care plans of individual

recovering problem drug users. Linked to the Rehab report this year is an allocation of €150,000 made by my Department for the further development of a family support network for families affected by problem drug use. This allocation will facilitate the development of the network as a national organisation, thereby ensuring a more co-ordinated approach to the issue of family support within the national drugs strategy.

Problem drug use can have a devastating effect on the family. I have long been of the view that it is particularly important to have appropriate, accessible and timely services in place to help these families to overcome the problems they face, very often in situations where problems of this kind were never envisaged by the people involved. While primarily focusing on the provision of support to the families of problem drug users, the money being made available to the family support network will also indirectly help to facilitate an increased involvement of these families in supporting the recovering drug users. This is in line with the recommendations of the report of the working group on drugs rehabilitation. That report, while recommending increased support for families, also called for increased inclusion of families in the rehabilitation process of their loved ones, thus more fully unlocking the potential that families have to aid recovery.

Meanwhile, the drugs situation in Ireland is constantly evolving and we must continue to be flexible in our attitudes and policies so that we can adapt our approach to meet whatever challenges arise. Thus, we are endeavouring to tackle the cocaine problem in a proactive way. It is only when the second national drug prevalence survey is completed — the first reports from which will be published in January — that we will have an up-to-date picture of the prevalence of illegal drug use, including cocaine use, in our society. However, it is clear from the previous prevalence survey, as well as from international evidence, that young adults, especially males, in the 15-34 age group are the key at risk group.

The national advisory committee on drugs publication, "An Overview of Cocaine Use in Ireland", which was published in March, brings together all available data on cocaine use in Ireland. It concludes that data sources indicate an upward trend in cocaine use, albeit from a low base. The report highlighted the extremely high risks associated with cocaine use, risks that are often underestimated by users, as was sadly the case in Ballybeg in Waterford city last weekend. I send every good wish to those who are seriously ill in Waterford and I hope they make a full recovery. However, incidents such as this will happen when people take illicit drugs — which by definition are open to adulteration with various substances, if they were not dangerous enough in any case.

Cocaine causes physical problems such as heart conditions, strokes, nasal problems and respirat-

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

ory ailments. Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, agitation, compulsive behaviour and paranoia can occur. On top of these risks are the financial, social and dependency issues that arise and the increased threat of crime and violence. Furthermore, cocaine is particularly dangerous when combined with alcohol and other substances and the messages on the real dangers associated with its use need to be brought home to users. I stress again the dangers associated with so-called recreational or weekend cocaine use and the glamorising of cocaine in some quarters. Apart from damaging themselves in various ways, such users cause social and economic harm to their families and to the communities that bear the brunt of the behaviour and criminal activity associated with the supply and use of cocaine.

Individuals have to take personal responsibility for their actions and they must consider the negative implications of their behaviour on other people when taking so-called recreational drugs. Their use of drugs such as cocaine is impacting on others, including people in some disadvantaged communities where we are witnessing violence, including murder, notwithstanding the wholehearted efforts of the Garda and other statutory, community and voluntary organisations.

The NACD report makes a number of recommendations, principally in regard to treatment, but also covering supply, prevention and research. A key conclusion of the report is that treatment, primarily in the form of counselling, can and does work and that there is no need to be unduly concerned by the absence of a replacement drug, as in the case of heroin. In regard to treatment, some stimulant specific treatment interventions are recommended although it is accepted that drug services generally should be capable of catering for the individual problem drug user, regardless of the drugs they use.

Recommendations in regard to the training of front-line personnel to deal with cocaine issues are being followed up both by the HSE and by my Department. Indeed, my Department has already funded training initiatives as well as four pilot cocaine treatment projects to examine different methods of treatment for cocaine use. The HSE is currently rolling out appropriate training to service providers both within the HSE and in the community and voluntary sectors. Furthermore, under the emerging needs fund of my Department, six cocaine specific projects in local drugs task force areas have been funded and allocations have also been made under the fund in support of a further nine projects aimed at polydrug-cocaine use. My Department also sponsored a highly successful conference, organised by the SAOL project and the NDST in Croke Park last June, on the response to cocaine through shared good practice. A very useful resource pack for workers in the field was launched at that event.

Overall, it is my priority to closely monitor the progression of the implementation of the recom-

mendations of this report as appropriate through the HSE, the Department of Health and Children, the Garda, the Irish Prison Service, drug task forces and others. I am co-ordinating this through my chairmanship of the inter-departmental group on drugs, where reports on implementation are a standing agenda item. The challenges posed by cocaine use are significant, but I am confident that we can deal with these challenges through a co-ordinated approach utilising the structures of the national drugs strategy.

As I indicated, I have initiated the process that will lead to the formulation of a new national drugs strategy for the period post-2008. I have long been of the opinion that the problems of alcohol and illicit drug use are interlinked so I will be stressing the need for synergy in the approach to these issues. Again, the formulation of the new drugs strategy will involve collaboration between Government Departments and agencies and the community and voluntary sectors. We will face many challenges over the coming years but I am confident that with a concerted effort by all involved we can build on our experiences and achievements to date and successfully tackle the problems presented over time by the evolving drugs situation. As I said at the outset, it is important that Members of the Oireachtas contribute to the development of a new national drugs strategy. I look forward to hearing the views of Members on this important matter.

I wish to avail of this opportunity to apologise to Deputy Byrne, who has just come into the Chamber, for not being present to take a matter on the Adjournment last week. It was an oversight on my part and I apologise to the Deputy for it.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** I am disappointed the Government did not take a case against Justine Delaney-Wilson, who made serious allegations affecting a small group of people in this House. I do not believe the allegation, but I am surprised the Cabinet as a group did not take a case against Ms Delaney-Wilson and RTE because this serious allegation has been left to hang over 15 Ministers. It is wrong that somebody should make an allegation such as this against Ministers, judges, airline pilots and other professional people. When the furore hit the airwaves, Ms Delaney-Wilson went on holidays, which is also wrong. If she had the evidence it should have been produced. If there is a person in the Cabinet who is taking drugs that person should be identified and she should not be afraid to identify him or her, but she should not be using the good name of members of the Cabinet, judges or airline pilots to sell her book. I wish to put on record my disappointment that the Government did not take a case against her.

This week in Dublin 160 gardaí have come from all over the country to police Operation Freeflow. I wish that 300 or 400 gardaí would



come to the city today to stop the free flow of drugs in the capital and every other town and village in the country. It sends out the wrong message. If the Government were serious about fighting the drug problem, we would see a major clampdown on the drug pushers that are walking around this city and around every town and village. Drug pushers represent one of the largest and most serious attacks on the community. It is time this House, the Government and the people of this country agreed to put in place the resources, the money and the personnel required to get rid of these drug pushers. They should not be on the streets but behind bars. That is the attack we should be carrying out today.

This discussion on the national drugs strategy is timely given the sad events of the last week, which have unfortunately brought home the reality of the looming drugs crisis in this country. It is clear to everyone that drugs are now widely available in every town, village and city in this country. It is no longer a problem restricted to urban disadvantaged areas but affects people from all backgrounds, income levels and professions and is steadily spiralling out of control.

The recent supplement on drugs published by the *Irish Examiner* provided very worrying evidence of the trail of destruction left by drugs on the lives of people across the country. It gave a snapshot of the number of deaths, illnesses, family breakdowns, financial hardship and other devastating social problems caused by drugs and provided further proof, if it were needed, that we are fighting a losing battle. It is clear now that cocaine use is rife across the country. Addiction is becoming more and more prevalent not just in Dublin, but nationwide, and polydrug use is now the norm, with alcohol and other substances regularly mixed with potentially dangerous or lethal consequences.

The figures speak for themselves. Last year, more than 1,700 new injectors presented at the Merchant's Quay needle exchange service in Dublin city centre. It is reported that the numbers seeking assistance with treatment increased by 900% between 1999 and 2005. An Garda Síochána reported an increase from 180 to 968 in the number of cocaine-related offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act between 2000 and 2005. Nearly two tonnes of cocaine have been seized so far this year, the biggest annual haul in the State's history. In addition, more than a tonne of herbal cannabis has been seized this year, compared to 290 kg last year. Deaths attributed to alcohol have doubled in the past ten years. The number of heroin addicts seeking treatment outside Dublin jumped by 500% from 1998 to 2005. Between 2000 and 2005, there was a sixfold increase in cocaine detection in post mortem examinations. Perhaps the most worrying trend that has been highlighted by those working in drug treatment services is that we are now facing polydrug use among many of those presenting for treatment. Of those who reported cocaine as their

main problem drug between 1998 and 2003, 93% reported using more than one drug. Often, ecstasy, cannabis and alcohol are used in combination with cocaine to lethal effect.

The Minister has set up the national drugs strategy, but we have been waiting to find out approximately how many people are actually taking drugs. Now is the time for the Minister to receive that report, and it should be published as quickly as possible. We have an epidemic in this country and we need to respond to it. In the past, the Garda Síochána used to focus on working class areas in which there was a lot of crime. The Minister should have a meeting with the new Garda Commissioner to send out a strong message as we approach Christmas. Taxi drivers in this city will testify that at weekends they regularly bring professional people to buy drugs which are then brought to parties. As well as targeting working-class areas, the Garda should focus on middle class areas and the rich. It should target these parties coming up to Christmas. We need to see some raids and to see the law applied equally across the State, not just in working class areas.

The Minister knows a lot about this problem because he serves an area that has been ravaged by drugs over the years. He understands it and is committed to doing something about it. Let us have equality in the way in which this problem is tackled. I ask the Minister to meet the Garda Commissioner about this issue. A plain-clothes unit should be set up to talk to taxi drivers and find out where these parties are being held, and there should be equality in the way in which raids are carried out. We have a serious problem which has resulted in the setting up of many centres working with people who use drugs. The national drugs strategy is not working. If it is working, why are more and more people getting involved with drugs?

We do not have a sufficient number of detox beds. People who want to be looked after by the State are presenting themselves for treatment but the beds are not there. It is time we got the extra detox beds that are needed so we can treat the people who want to be treated, who are crying out for help. In my constituency people are presenting with drug problems, which did not happen ten years ago in rural Ireland. We now see people being arrested in rural areas that never previously saw or heard about drugs. They are in every corner of the country now. We need a zero tolerance strategy on drugs. The Garda Síochána should be given the resources it requires, as should hospitals and drug centres.

We must send out a clear message from the Government and from the House that selling or taking drugs will not be tolerated. The people who take drugs are encouraging the drug pushers and making them millionaires. The President recently commented to the effect that the people who were buying and using drugs were every bit as bad as those selling them because they make the pushers rich and encourage them to bring



[Deputy Michael Ring.]

more drugs into the country. She is right about that and this is the first thing that must be addressed.

We must put treatment facilities in place. We must provide resources to those dealing with these people on a daily basis. We cannot have people who need help waiting for it. We must give them the help immediately. When they cry out for help, the State must give them it. I know of mothers and fathers who are very upset. For example, recently there was a meeting in Castlebar and over 500 turned up due to concern about the abuse of drugs and alcohol.

Alcohol is also a drug. It is one of the drugs most abused in this country. We speak about the hard drugs, but we walk away from addressing alcohol. We support alcohol use. We see alcoholic drinks companies using sporting organisations to promote alcohol. Alcohol is the most abused substance. It is the most prominent family breaker in this country. We have a tolerance for the abuse of alcohol. It is time we got tougher and, in particular, that we dealt with it by bringing legislation through this House to stop sporting organisations advertising alcoholic drinks and having alcoholic drinks companies sponsoring their events. Surely there are companies other than alcoholic drinks companies which should be encouraged to provide sponsorship for sporting organisations. Sporting organisations should be promoting people's efforts to get fit and healthier, not promoting alcoholic drink. Their promotion of alcoholic drink is wrong and it is a matter for which legislation should be brought through this House quickly.

I welcome this debate and I am glad the Minister of State, Deputy Carey, will answer questions from Members in a question and answer session. I wish more Ministers did so.

There are questions which Members want to ask. My colleague, Deputy Byrne, is my party's spokesperson on drugs. I assure the Minister of State that she is like himself. She comes from an area from which she has gleaned a great understanding of the matter. She works in this area and she has points to make which she has spoken to me about and she will make these points in the Dáil today. She wants something done because it is awful to see communities, families and areas being destroyed by drugs.

This is the one aspect which upsets me most and which I have raised in this House previously. It is awful to see that these drug pushers, who are not working and who are unable to show where they get their wealth, are driving around in big cars when everybody in the community knows they are drug pushers, and yet the Garda Síochána does not have the manpower and cannot get the evidence to put these people behind bars. It is wrong.

Over the past year we have seen the amount of drugs found. We saw the find by the coast guard in Cork. That was only one find. What about the

rest of the coastline? The coast guard has only one boat. How can we protect our coast? These are highly sophisticated people with plenty of resources because they are making big money out of drugs. These people have resources and the State must be given the resources to fight them, to keep drugs out of the country and to deal with those who are selling drugs and working in the drugs trade.

I ask the Minister of State to ask his colleagues, particularly the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen, to commit to giving the resources. Every Minister, when he or she gets the opportunity, should condemn drug pushers. We should have a strong message for such people that the State means business when it comes to drug pushers. That is not the message being sent to and received by these people. These people think they can break the law, walk over everyone and do what they please.

We need to give the resources to the Garda Síochána. Second, we need to give the resources to the people who are dealing at the coalface with those who want to be treated for drug abuse. Third, we must get into the schools, which is the big issue. We must teach young people and show them the effects of people taking drugs. We should have videos and show them in schools. We must ask whether that is the life they want and show them a person in a drug treatment centre and the effects of the drugs on them.

Young people think it is cool to take drugs. It is not cool to take drugs. Families have been very badly affected. Husbands have lost their families, their wives and their homes due to the abuse of drugs and young people, who are now better educated, should know better.

Drugs are not the way forward. We should tackle the matter in the schools. We should have a programme on the curriculum that shows young people the effect of drugs. That is the way forward.

We must get the report and find out the position. The present strategy of the Minister of State does not seem to work, although I recognise that people are doing their best with the resources provided. We must get a new strategy. We must find a new way to tackle and deal with this.

**Deputy Jack Wall:** I am pleased this debate is being held and the format it is taking in that the Minister of State will take questions at the end of the submissions. I thank the Minister of State for his efforts and dedication to this portfolio. He has been helpful to me, as my party's spokesperson for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. His input shows the importance he places on addressing this issue. As the Minister of State will be aware, it is not an easy one. As Deputy Ring stated, one cannot identify a constituency that is not affected by drugs. Whereas some constituencies may get highlighted more than others due to major crimes such as murder due to drugs, it does not mean that those constituencies are different

to any others. Unfortunately, in every town and village the illegal drugs trade is seen as an easy means of making a living.

I will help the Minister of State in every way possible and I will be as constructive as possible in trying to put the best strategy together. The Labour Party will support him in every way possible in trying to achieve that goal.

The national drug strategy has pinpointed four areas as being crucial in any attempt to address the life sentence that is drug use. The first area mentioned in the strategy is the reduction in the supply of drugs. The cold-blooded nature of recent drug related killings leaves us all asking what can be done. I am sure that looking at that aspect of it we see that, because of the vast amounts of money available, immediately a drug baron is taken out — to use their term — someone else takes up that particular plot. Given the large number of people involved in the illegal drugs trade, that poses a considerable problem in addressing the issue.

In founding the Criminal Assets Bureau, CAB, the then Minister for Finance, Deputy Quinn, certainly set something in motion that would be a success but we must develop that further. In doing so, we must supply the CAB with every possible assistance and we must feed into that from each Garda district the information affecting each constituency. Why can we not support a CAB initiative to address people driving big cars, as Deputy Ring stated, and seemingly living the high life without any visible means of income? Why do we not work with the Garda in this?

I have been involved in public life for 15 years and the one matter that has really begun to annoy me is the movement towards isolating the Garda from the community. The Garda is blamed for everything now. I do not blame the Garda. I blame the Government for not giving the Garda the resources to address the problems. It is wrong that we isolate the Garda as a unit, but we should work with it and pressurise the Government into providing the Garda with the necessary resources. That is where we are losing the momentum in many of these matters. We are isolating the Garda when it is not its fault. It is the Government which is not supplying the Garda with sufficient gardaí, funding and training to address problems. We must give CAB additional personnel, provide them with additional training and determine from the international scene how countries using a similar directive address the issue. We should send CAB's members abroad to ensure we follow the top trends in detecting drug barons and removing them from society.

Unfortunately, drug barons are moving into my constituency because of Garda pressure in the cities etc. They are moving into the suburbs, as Kildare is viewed in respect of Dublin. We must continue to fight the battle. It will be tough because of the money available to the drug barons through their illegal operations and the fact that someone will always replace them. We

must continue with our work and vigilance, but the Government must support the CAB system and provide the Garda with the funding, personnel and expertise to match this difficult problem.

Educating and raising awareness among communities is important. The time has come to see gardaí back on the beat working directly with communities and building contacts therein that would allow residents to report suspicious activity instead of living with the fear of reporting such crimes, a fear that is prevalent in many communities. I do not need to remind the Minister of State that my constituency of Kildare South has no community gardaí. The entire county has four community gardaí, two fewer than at the beginning of the year.

We blame the Garda, but this is not its fault. Money has not been invested and bodies have not been deployed to create the community activity required for them to work together. In many instances, the communities suffer and are in fear because of drug barons pressuring them to hide guns and drugs and not to inform the Garda of what is occurring. If we do not care for communities and if the people are not behind us, no strategy will work. This is the problem, namely, ensuring that the community is involved and wants to work with the Garda towards freeing the former of drug barons and threats to individual families and making it active and vibrant so that it can prosper, survive and care for everyone therein.

Any national drugs strategy must recognise the importance of the Garda winning the fight against the supply of drugs. Without proper resources, appropriate training and sufficient manpower, we are giving criminals an advantage on which they have recently built.

Recently, I spoke to a member of my GAA club, a secondary school teacher who took a course on drug awareness for the first time and was amazed by what was occurring. The teacher is a good community worker and is involved in every aspect of his community, but he was taken aback. He told me that, while he was grateful to know what was occurring, the follow-up was terrible because he had heard nothing since.

The Minister of State's most difficult job is to try to make the drugs issue relevant to communities on a weekly or daily basis while keeping it on the national scene. Newspaper pages will always be concerned with drug barons being taken out in Dublin, but the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, will not be given the same page space to show the fear, dread and destruction caused by drugs. This problem is ours and the Minister of State's as the lead in this matter. Newspapers will cover everything else.

The *Irish Examiner* is to be congratulated on marvellous journalism, albeit frightening to read. The photograph showing the damage done to a young woman by drugs over a period was unthinkable, but it was the first time the position was outlined in a national newspaper. The Mini-

[Deputy Jack Wall.]

ster of State will never again be given such an opportunity to detail the problem or to try to align it with people so that they will attend seminars to ensure their children know what drugs can do. Were the photograph to be on the wall of any house to show children what destruction drugs can do, it would be a wonderful day's work. I hope the *Irish Examiner* will benefit.

The demand for drugs is at an all time high. As we approach Christmas, parties are prevalent. Last week, a terrible incident in Waterford led to 11 people being rushed to hospital because of drugs. The person in question, who is in receipt of disability allowance, is before the courts. We can now see how he makes money to supplement his lifestyle, namely, the supply of drugs, and to give him everything he could not attain due to a lack of income. I have submitted a question to the Minister in this respect for next Wednesday.

Christmas is supposed to be peaceful, happy and wonderful, but how will we highlight the types of problems that arose in Waterford? How will we get it into people's heads that this is an awful situation into which to lead someone? When children go places, families and parents in particular must know what is transpiring. If there is a house party, parents must ensure it is clean, enjoyable, well organised, well policed and one from which their children will come home. Everyone who goes to a party should not be searched, but there should be an overview of authority, namely, the person who allows children to go out or to house parties must lay down the law to the effect that, while they can enjoy themselves, there is a limit on how that enjoyment should be attained.

Drugs pose a problem in every constituency. Senior gardaí have noticed that the demand for cocaine has picked up in recent years as the country's wealth has increased. If the demand comes from people with money, there will be a supply, at which time we will realise the size of the problem. The actor Robin Williams joked that cocaine is God's way of saying that we are making too much money, but words of approval continue to be associated with its use. The words "recreational" and "lifestyle" only add to the problems in the continuing fight to educate and increase awareness, which must be the cornerstone of any strategy.

The Minister of State complained about a man who appeared on the "Late Late Show" and stated that recreational drug use was wonderful. The man stated that he could not have done some things without using drugs. How could this be allowed by the national broadcaster? How could Pat Kenny stand up and tell us that it was fine for the man to—

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

**Deputy Jack Wall:** I will say no more on that matter. I will revert to the Minister of State via questions. Alternatives must be considered. We must ensure alternative activities, such as sport and recreation, are involved. The Howard committee, which the Minister of State has attended, has published 13 reports, 11 of which reflected this. Reports are good but they must be acted upon. I hope some of these reports will be examined positively. I will be seeking to drive forward alternative activities and educating people on the consequences of drug misuse.

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** Tá mé buíoch as ucht an deis seo a fháil labhairt an gceist rí-thábhachtach seo. Ba mhaith liom aitheantas a thabhairt don meon úr atá glactha ag an Aire Stáit i leith na ceiste seo ó tháinig sé isteach ina post nua. Tá sé ag déileáil leis an gcuachás in bhfuil an tír faoi láthair ó thaobh drugaí de. Measaim go bhfuil an mí na meala thart anois, áfach. Tá súil agam go bhfeicfí táirgí ón obair a rinne an Aire Stáit i rith an tsamhraidh, go háirithe, nuair a bhuaíl sé leis na grúpaí dífriúla timpeall na cathrach. Níl a fhios agam ar éirigh leis dul lasmuigh den chathair chun bualadh le grúpaí ar fud na tíre.

Caithfidimid díriú isteach ar an obair mór atá romhainn agus tabhairt faoi i gceart. Nuair a ardaigh Teachtaí Dála agus móran den phobal ceist heroin go luath sna 1980í, dúirt gach éinne go mbeadh fadhb ollmhór againn faoi dheireadh. Nuair a fhorbair an epidemich sin, níor éirigh leis an Rialtas freagra a fháil ar feadh 15 bliana. Tá Sinn Féin agus eagraisí áirithe atá ag cuir seirbhísí drugaí ar fáil ag rá le blianta anuas go bhfuil fadhb mór ann ó thaobh cocaine. Níl freagra tapaidh go leor ag teacht ón Rialtas. Aithním go bhfuil obair á dhéanamh — níl mé ag caitheamh anuas ar — ach tá i bhfad níos mó ag teastáil. Ní leor scéimeanna píolótach.

Tá mé ag tabhairt faoi ndeara go bhfuil fadhb níos mó ag teacht anuas ar an cocaine, an heroin, an alcól agus hash agus a leithéid. Tá fadhbanna ag teacht chugainn maidir le crack cocaine agus crystal meths. Ní gá ach féachaint ar cad atá ag tarlúint timpeall an domhain maidir le crystal meths chun a thuiscint cad a tharlóidh anseo.

Six years after it was set up, the National Drugs Strategy 2001 to 2008 has failed to deliver, despite it being conservative in its targets. There is a great need to discuss a new strategy after 2008. The new strategy needs to be imaginative and far-sighted as there are major challenges ahead of us. It needs to be realistic and effective as it must deliver. The evidence of failure of the current strategy can be found in the fact that last year 1,700 new heroin injectors presented to the Merchants Quay Ireland service. This is an indictment of our failure and society's failure to address this major drug problem.

Cocaine-related deaths are on the increase. The Dublin County Coroner, Dr. Kieran Geraghty, issued a stark warning during the sum-



mer on the lethal nature of even small quantities of cocaine after he dealt with five cocaine-related deaths in one day. The frequency and volume of seizures across all categories of illegal drugs are at a record high level and prevalence and use are increasing, and that is happened during the lifetime of the national drugs strategy.

Why has the strategy failed to deliver? First, the Government has refused to throw its full weight, in the form of resources, behind it. Second, the Government has refused to respond quickly to changing trends and to heed the warnings. The 2007 budget and previous budgets resulted in major funding shortfalls and as a result emerging needs, in particular, could not be met. We are still in the pilot phase of many projects, in particular those for cocaine, despite the early warnings of service providers.

If the Government approached the heroin and other drugs crisis in the same way it approached foot and mouth disease, our society would be better off. Some may argue my claim is ridiculous as foot and mouth disease would be a cost to the economy. Putting aside the death and destruction drugs cause to human life, we should calculate the cost to our economy of illegal drugs.

Take, for instance, the cost of the numbers of drug addicts presenting at accident and emergency departments because of complications from drug-taking. There is the cost of drug users who have contracted hepatitis C, HIV-AIDS and other disorders. There are days lost at work because of the effects of drugs. There is the cost of unemployment and disability benefits paid to those who cannot work because of their drug dependency. There is the cost of guardian payments, which are not enough, for grandparents who must rear orphaned children because their parents have died from drugs or are incapable of looking after their children. The HSE is struggling with its budget. What moneys could be spent on other medical programmes which are diverted to methadone and other drug-related health programmes? In the past, up to 70% of crime, such as burglaries and criminal damage, were drug-related. What was that cost to our economy and society? There is a large financial cost, apart from the human cost. The Government must approach this issue as a crisis.

There is also the human cost of drugs. Last year, I had to go to a neighbour's house to confirm that her son had died of a heroin overdose. I have known quite a number of people who have been caught up in drugs who have died or are so incapacitated by drugs they cannot function properly in society. I have attended many services of remembrance and I know that the Minister of State, Deputy Carey, has as well.

That is the effect drug addiction has on communities and families. It causes great heartache. Those who live with a family member who is addicted to drugs hope they can come off them through an addiction programme, but often their hopes are dashed when he or she relapses. The

children of parents who are addicted to drugs are also affected. That is their symbol of parenthood. There is also a cost to the community with the intimidation of neighbours and the threat and reality of violence from drug dealers. The situation is extremely urgent. We have failed to take the matter as seriously as it deserves.

I cannot stress enough the importance of well resourced intervention at the earliest opportunity. That is why I have warned about crystal methamphetamine — meths. Last week a feature report in *The New York Times* warned that meths is gaining a foothold in Europe. The article quoted Thomas Pietschmann, an expert at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, who said the sudden growth of the drug in the United States and its expansion from a regional to a national issue should serve as a warning. He warned it must be feared that something similar could happen in Europe.

The number of European countries reporting seizures of meths more than doubled from 11 in 2000 to 25 in 2005. Over the same period the quantity seized increased by a multiple of four. Hopefully when people realise that there is a cocaine epidemic, it will not explode overnight as it did when we realised the extent of heroin addiction. That will not happen if we take the necessary action. Crystal meth is already available in our cities, towns and in some rural settings. There have been consistent seizures since 2004 and although the quantities are relatively small, they are rising and it may have cost several lives already. We do not know. The consequences of taking crystal meth can be aggression, psychosis, addiction, abscesses, liver or kidney disease. The Government must commit to not repeating the mistakes of its past and must respond promptly to the new threats identified by communities and service providers.

In the past two years, the heroin crop in Afghanistan has been the highest ever. Consider what that means for our society. The large haul off the coast shows that cocaine shipments are increasing tenfold. Drug suppliers are increasing the potency of cannabis. Artificial drugs are on the increase. There has also been a significant increase in alcohol consumption, particularly by young people, as well as older people. The open sale of other herbal drugs needs to be shut down as quickly as possible.

We must keep an eye on the development of a new strategy based on the five pillars of the national drugs strategy which must be implemented with determination and full financing, and in full partnership with communities. In addition, a cocaine specific action plan must be drawn up as quickly as possible.

The five pillars of the strategy must be pursued vigorously. My party made a range of recommendations on supply reduction in its submission to the Garda policing plan 2008. These include at least the doubling of resources for national and



[Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh.]

local drugs units. That is vital because there is no way we can win this battle unless the Garda Síochána is properly resourced and has the trained personnel to respond positively. There is a need too for a non-Garda phoneline to receive reports of drug-related crime, based on the “dial to stop drug dealing” initiative successfully piloted in Blanchardstown. This will address lack of confidence in, and reluctance to be seen to cooperate with, the Garda Síochána. We should invest in any method that will get information by hook or by crook to the Garda to stop drug dealing in our communities. I have mentioned this programme in Blanchardstown many times. We must tackle open drug dealing if we are to rebuild confidence within our communities.

I could show anyone here the streets in my constituency and state the time at which drug deals take place. I am not alone in that. Consider the fear that causes among the elderly in our communities and the message it sends to young people who pass by and think drug dealing is okay. That must be stopped. The Garda needs to examine the consequences of its operational decisions on tackling open drug dealing and decisions to allow some dealers ply their trade in deference to the big picture.

Given the increasing prevalence and use of drugs serious work remains to be done across the board particularly to dispel the commonly held myth that cocaine is somehow a harmless drug. There can be no ambiguity about this in any quarter. The glamorization and acceptance of cocaine as a clean, safe and sociable drug needs to be tackled. Cocaine abuse continues to result in serious health deterioration, mental and emotional problems, chronic addiction, debt and rising gangland killings and reprisals. There is also a worrying development in the increase in those injecting cocaine, which can result in serious medical implications with users experiencing abscesses and wounds and even serious infection leading to amputation of limbs.

While cocaine is no longer exclusively the drug of the middle classes, everyone, particularly those who are well-off, seem oblivious to communities scourged by drugs. Everyone should examine his or her conscience the next time he or she does a line of coke, drops an e-tab or smokes a joint and realise that their actions have repercussions for communities gripped by fear of drug gangs, who are parasites destroying predominantly working class areas. Their actions have repercussions for families which have had to bury loved ones after overdoses, drug-fuelled aggression or related gun attacks or suicide. Using cocaine or any drug is not merely a personal choice; it has major ramifications for society at large.

I appeal to the Minister to continue the work he started in the summer but also to appeal to the Minister for Finance to give him and those in communities who are fighting a good fight the

resources they need to ensure that we start winning this battle.

**Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív):** Tá athas orm deis a beith agam cúpla focail a rá i dtaobh fadhb na ndrugaí. My Department is totally committed to continuing work on the drug scourge. I compliment the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, on the great personal effort he has made in his role since joining the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. We must tackle this significant challenge to society. We can consider this on three levels — the abuse of substances generally, including alcohol which is often a gateway to other types of drug, including prescription drugs. There is also the cocaine issue as mentioned by the previous speaker and the problems of drugs associated with deprivation.

I was interested in the Deputy's reference to foot and mouth disease. In that case ordinary people in urban and rural areas made a conscious decision to ensure that it would not spread in this jurisdiction. Over 90% of the people were fully committed to this decision. Unfortunately, the challenge in respect of drug abuse is that too many people in our society, many of whom are well educated and have had great opportunities in life, do not have the same attitude towards various drugs. The prevalence of the misuse of cocaine in so-called middle class society is testament to the challenge we face in trying to change people's mindsets. It is obvious that we cannot possibly police everybody in the State. The good functioning of society depends significantly on people making personal choices in respect of these matters. It is important to get the message across that this involves personal choice and that the abuse of any substance is unacceptable in society.

The use of heroin and other drugs in deprived communities is a slightly different issue. Many of these communities have suffered serious inter-generational problems, lack of opportunity and life expectation and isolating the drug issue from the other social issues is futile. It is for that reason the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs was set up and that many community programmes, including partnership programmes, community development programmes, the Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development, RAPID, programme and drugs programmes, operate from within one Department. The idea is to achieve joined up thinking in tackling the multi-dimensional problems that face communities.

As Minister with special responsibility for the RAPID programme and the areas under its remit, I believe it is an important element in tackling the problems these areas face. The programme helps ensure that we do not see the drug issue as separate from the overriding issues of lack of development and facilities. We have, for the first time, come to realise that creating a

dependency on other people to make decisions for these communities, such as a local authority making decisions instead of giving people a say, is a fundamental flaw if people are to be active citizens and full participants in society. I have, therefore, put great emphasis on the need for the area implementation teams to have adequate community representation and for that voice to be heard. My belief is that, even if State funding is used, if people do not have a say in their future, it is difficult to expect social change to occur. The leverage funds and dormant accounts fund provided by my Department specifically for RAPID areas have always come with the proviso that community members of area implementation teams, AITs, must have special input into how these funds are used in their areas.

Over the few years the RAPID programme has operated I have seen how communities have grasped the initiative and have been willing to work with the process to try to cause change from within. The process is slow and, as I have stated, RAPID areas need a long period to develop; residents must understand that their areas will not be removed from the programme as soon as it makes progress. I believe a minimum of 20 years is necessary to bring about the type of social change we seek. In the short history of the RAPID programme it has already brought about not only physical change in terms of better facilities but psychological change in that where the programme works successfully, people believe they have a bigger say in issues that affect them. We must provide the social and educational opportunities that more fortunate people in society take for granted, which means the provision of playgrounds, sports facilities, recreation facilities and activities.

I noted with great regret the terrible events in Ballybeg, Waterford, last weekend but, while it was a tragedy, I do not think it is indicative of the good things that are happening in that housing estate. I visited the area recently to open the sports centre and saw the huge amount of work being done. I compliment Waterford Crystal, a partner in development in the area, on trying to bring about change. Some days one wonders if progress is being made but I believe by working consistently to provide services and back-up we can bring about change in these communities.

Young people are the key because those who have access to organised activities are far less likely to become involved in drugs than those who are idle. The provision of facilities through the young people's facilities and services fund, the staffing of those facilities, the development of services and back-up and encouraging young people to get involved in community activities such as sport, art and drama are central to changing mindsets. I was guest of honour at an awards ceremony for children from Dublin's south inner city recently and I admire the work in many communities that seek to give new outlets to young people for different activities. We must continue

to build on this type of diversionary process, which will give people new aspirations and connections.

Is díospóireacht tábhachtach í an díospóireacht seo. Tá go leor oibre le déanamh mar tá fadhb uileghabhálach ar fud na tíre againn maidir le cúrsaí drugaí. Ní féidir linn na maidí a ligint le sruth. Mar atá ráite ag chuile dhuine, is fadhb idirnáisiúnta í seo. Ní féidir balla a thógaint timpeall na tíre. Caithfimid a dhéanamh cinnte go dtéann muid i gcionn ar mheon an phobail, go leanann muid ag rá, arís agus arís eile, nach nglacfaidh muid leis go bhfuil sé sásúil go mbeadh drugaí á thógáil ag daoine. Caithfidh daoine freagracht a thógáil as a gcuid gníomhaíochtaí. Ag an am céanna, caithfimid leanacht leis na cláracha ar nós RAPID, an community service programme, CSP, agus na cláracha éagsúla sna pobail is míbhuntáistiúla, le deis a thabhairt dóibh siúd atá go mór faoi míbhuntáiste teacht aníos ó na fadhbanna atá acu agus teacht ar réiteach ar chuid de na fadhbanna atá sna pobail sin le trí nó ceithre ghlúine anuas.

**Deputy Catherine Byrne:** I listened with interest as the Minister spoke of the RAPID programme and, as a councillor of many years standing in the south-west inner city, I have much to say on the regeneration of communities and the consultation process. I too was at the awards ceremony the Minister attended and it was clear to me that such awards are important to young people at the early stages of their lives as they give a new insight into who they are and they help them feel they are achieving something. Many of the children who received these awards at the ceremony will go on to do greater things as they get older. The contribution of the South West Inner City Network, SWICN, has had a huge impact on young people in schools in the inner city and the Liberties and I welcomed the Minister's words at the ceremony.

I thank the Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Pat Carey, for his reference to the words I spoke last week, which I will not go back over. Some weeks ago Deputy Enda Kenny called me into his office to ask me to speak on the national drugs strategy on behalf of Fine Gael and I was taken aback because I am not an expert in the area. I cannot pronounce the names of many of the drugs available but I can speak at length on the real problems drugs have introduced to communities. I lived in a close-knit area of Inchicore but in the 1980s one could not enter one's front garden without seeing a person shooting up there. Many elderly people had to change their post office books to receive their allowances from another area because they were afraid to walk the streets of Inchicore. Drugs had a devastating effect on the community, businesses and residents there and brought Inchicore to its knees.

I grew up in the area and, as the Minister knows, was involved in community work so I saw

[Deputy Catherine Byrne.]

young people at the youth club who clearly would not reach their teenage years due to drugs. I visited such young people in hospitals through the years, I sat beside many as they died, I sang at their funerals and attended many services, as have other Deputies, to commemorate the loss of young lives. I will never forget, at such services, seeing the faces of family members etched with distraught and anguish at the loss they suffered. I have known the Minister of State, Deputy Carey, for some time and I am aware of his commitment to communities and particularly this issue. I know the Government is making progress but I think we have some way to go. That is why I welcome this review. It is important that, every so often, we dust down these glossy documents and go through them again. It is only then that we can review what has been done.

As the song says, a picture paints a thousand words. In the *Irish Examiner* last week, we were shown graphic images of what drugs can do to a person's body, mind and soul, and the damage they cause to communities. The media are sometimes deserving of blame in the manner in which they highlight such issues. However, this particular report illustrated the devastating effect of drugs on society.

The media has a major role to play in how all of us, particularly young people, view drugs. Drugs are often glamorised on television and in magazines and the dangers are not highlighted. By contrast, the *Irish Examiner* should be commended on the approach it took. Young people are targeted by the media, which often show the glamorous version of what drug abuse entails. As a parent of young children, I am aware that many popular music idols, soap opera actors and film stars are openly abusing drugs. We cannot protect our children from this type of exposure but we can educate them about the damage drugs can do to their bodies and general well-being and to their families.

An anti-litter advertisement is currently being shown on television in which a young woman walks down the road dropping litter. While she continues to believe she looks beautiful, her image gradually changes in other people's eyes. We must take the same approach in regard to drugs awareness through the media. The anti-litter advertisement and the one warning of the dangers of drink driving, in which a young girl is seen in a wheelchair in a graveyard, have had a profound effect on many young people, including my own children. The reform of the drugs strategy should include a consideration of how the media can be utilised to further its objectives.

There is a large and ever increasing cocaine abuse problem in Dublin and throughout the State. Although we have known about this for ten or 12 years, an effective rehabilitation programme is still not in place to assist people to overcome their addiction to this drug. Some small pilot projects are in operation but those working

in local task forces insist that this is inadequate. We are talking about people, including young children, with a serious addiction. Teenagers as young as 14 or 15 years are taking cocaine. We must ensure the facilities are in place to offer rehabilitation to young people as soon as they request it.

The lack of psychological services for those abusing drugs is another aspect of the problem. Many addicts who attend services provided by local drugs task forces are doing their best to overcome their addiction. However, one can only access some of these services if one has already stopped taking drugs. A person who approaches a local drugs task force and asks to be included in a rehabilitation programme will only be admitted if he or she is clean of drugs. I do not understand this approach.

Many of the responsibilities taken on by staff of local drugs task forces go beyond their official capacity. I know of staff who have waited for hours in accident and emergency departments, sometimes at night, with people who have presented in a terrible condition. These people are trying their best to recover and are in a vulnerable position. The only way in which staff can seek psychological support for them is to take them to an accident and emergency department. Urgent action must be taken to address this shortcoming in psychological support services. Addicted persons who are fortunate enough to have the money can check themselves into a private clinic where they have a good chance of resolving their addiction. However, that help is not available to those without the resources to obtain it privately. One must be clean of drugs before being admitted to publicly funded addiction support services.

I understand that more than €200 million was spent last year under the national drugs strategy. Given that level of expenditure, it is sad to discover that a significant proportion of drug users undergoing rehabilitation are still in school. This is shocking. The social, personal and health education, SPHE, programme in schools must be expanded. I put a parliamentary question to the Minister for Education and Science this week asking when the SPHE programme will be rolled out for senior cycle in all schools. The Minister states in her reply:

A programme in social, personal and health reduction for senior cycle is currently being developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, but no proposals in this area have as yet been submitted to by Department. The council has consulted widely on a draft curriculum framework, and there has been general acceptance that it should cover such areas as mental health, gender studies, substance use, relationships and sexuality education, and physical activity and nutrition.

The SPHE programme should be extended immediately, because we cannot afford to wait



any longer. Many young people begin by dabbling in drugs at parties and a great many are pressurised by their peers to experiment.

If I were granted one wish in regard to the fight against drug abuse, it would be that we begin again. We must recognise the importance of education and ensure that children are informed of the dangers as soon as they begin primary school. There must be a thorough review of how such issues as substance abuse, health and well-being are communicated to pupils from the beginning of their primary schooling right through to senior level and on to third level.

I welcome the review of the national drugs strategy and I look forward to addressing some questions to the Minister at the conclusion of this discussion.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** I propose to share time with Deputy Joe Behan.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Peter Kelly):** That is agreed.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** The annual report for 2007 of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime states that the total number of drug users worldwide is now estimated at some 200 million. This is a shocking figure, equivalent to approximately 5% of the global population aged between 15 and 64 years. We must constantly strive to ensure that the measures and policies in place to address the problem of drugs are appropriate and flexible enough to respond to what is a global and dynamic issue.

The Government remains resolutely committed to tackling the problem of drug misuse through the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008. The strategy addresses the problem under pillar headings of education and prevention, supply reduction, treatment and rehabilitation, and research. It is firmly founded on the principle that drug misuse must be addressed in an integrated manner across these headings through a co-operative approach involving the statutory, community and voluntary treatment sectors.

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, under the stewardship of the Minister of State, Deputy Carey, is the lead Department in co-ordinating the implementation of the national drugs strategy. This co-ordinated and integrated approach, involving all the relevant players concerned with the issue, is the only way in which real and meaningful progress can continue to be made in tackling the drugs problem. Significant resources continue to be allocated to a range of measures dedicated to addressing the issue. A good example of this is the allocation of €50 million to the Vote of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for the drugs initiative this year. This represents a 16% increase on the 2006 allocation.

We must evaluate the current drugs situation, harness our experiences during the past six years

of the strategy and utilise what we have learned from the outcomes achieved when developing a new national drugs strategy for the period 2009 to 2016. Under the remit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the area of drug supply reduction and drug law enforcement remains a key feature of the Government's drug policy framework. Enforcement of the law relating to drugs very much continues to be a key element in the Government's policing priorities. Underpinning this approach, the Garda Síochána will continue to invoke a number of broad strategic responses in addressing the issue. I would like to see dedicated Garda drug squads in every division, which we had in the past. Some of those have disappeared over time but there is a great need to have such drugs squads.

Under the strategy, the Garda national drugs unit co-ordinates large-scale operations against drug dealing and trafficking and unit personnel either investigate such cases or assist local investigation teams. Policing operations continue to dismantle drug trafficking networks and have led to the arrest in recent times of major criminals based here and abroad involved in drugs. Such measures must continue to be vigorously pursued by the Garda Síochána.

There is also a role for the community alert programme, a national initiative I am involved with under Muintir na Tíre. There is a role for neighbourhood watch schemes and community policing. It is vital we have community support and activity to look out for each other.

Additional Garda resources are coming on stream all the time. Such resources will facilitate the new Garda Commissioner, Fachtna Murphy, in the allocation of additional manpower to areas most in need, including areas with significant drug problems. There can be no room for complacency in our response to drug misuse and the implementation of the national drugs strategy is a crucial part of the Government's work in the coming years.

The Government's integrated approach to addressing the drug problems that threaten the fabric of this country must be viewed by our constituents as a bipartisan commitment by the Government to ultimately achieving a drug-free environment. This would not be unlike the efforts expended in creating a smoke-free environment in workplaces and places of recreation, which have had unprecedented results.

**Deputy Joe Behan:** I join Members on all sides of the House in welcoming the opportunity to take part in this debate on an issue of very significant importance for people from all walks of life throughout the country. I contrast the tone of this debate with that experienced in the health service debate over the past two days. This debate has not been swayed by party politics and the views expressed have been genuine, particularly by people such as Deputy Catherine Byrne, who is involved with community work and knows what



[Deputy Joe Behan.]

she is speaking about in this area. I hope the comments will feed into a very practical review of the national drugs strategy.

I congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, on his appointment as Minister of State with special responsibility for this area. I know from people working on the ground that they appreciate his level of engagement and work in this area. As a colleague in Fianna Fáil, I am very impressed with his grasp of detail and his serious intention to try to bring about a radical and meaningful review of the drugs strategy. I hope an effective strategy will be drawn up for the years from 2009 to 2016.

The Minister of State acknowledged the cross-party contribution to this area going back many years. If I am not mistaken, Deputy Pat Rabbitte was the first Minister of State with responsibility for the drugs strategy. He set the ball rolling quite effectively and I pay tribute to all Ministers and Ministers of State involved since then.

When I knew I would speak in this debate I conversed with some people involved in the area in my home town of Bray. I appreciate the work of people in a particular group in my home parish called The Get Along Gang. This is made up of a number of parents who got together in 1995 to establish a support network for parents and families of people involved in drug addiction. They have stayed the course for the past 12 years despite initially having no help from anybody. The group is now engaged with the HSE, which is welcome.

An issue they have outlined to me which I will highlight for the Minister's attention is family support, particularly increased funding for the family support network. People involved in this do much good work in trying to ensure families are supported, tackling the matter of a son or daughter who is a drug addict and helping families to rehabilitate that son or daughter. In his speech the Minister of State said that €150,000 will be given to the family support network to continue the work. I welcome the funding and hope the amount will be increased in time to come.

In Bray and other parts of the country, cocaine is becoming a major scourge, with some people arguing it is almost out of control. It is said it affects only the higher income groups but in reality it affects all classes. I know the Minister of State is aware of this and I am confident he will address it in the new strategy.

I welcome the Minister of State's reference to alcohol abuse. We cannot discuss drug addiction and abuse without remembering alcohol and the damaging role it has played in society over many years, particularly with regard to social problems and the devastation it can cause for families and the person who is addicted to alcohol. If we are to have a meaningful strategy, it is important alcohol abuse is linked to drug abuse and forms an integral part of future action.

The Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív, made a very valuable contribution, as he always does in debates such as this. He has a genuine commitment to community affairs and solving these problems. As I come from an area with a successful RAPID programme, I welcome and endorse the Minister's view that RAPID should have a minimum of a 20-year timeframe to be effective and bring about meaningful social change. I am glad he made the comment in the House.

**Deputy Terence Flanagan:** I acknowledge the presence of the Minister of State, Deputy Haughey, and thank him for sitting in on this debate on a matter which affects our young people. It is important we educate these people on the dangers of drugs, which are a major problem in today's society. Today, in many areas of Ireland, people as young as ten or 11 are using drugs and drinking alcohol, a situation which must be urgently addressed. Early intervention is needed to cover the crucial period during adolescence and early adulthood.

Cocaine abuse has hit a record high, with the drug now the third most commonly used illegal drug in Ireland. There is a shocking report that states that 3% of 15 and 16 year old school children have used cocaine in the past year. Seizures of cocaine in Ireland have increased dramatically, from 206 in 2000 to 1,342 last year.

The shocking incident in Waterford that left three men hospitalised last week highlights the need for a nationwide awareness campaign to focus on the potentially lethal effects of cocaine. The drug is being taken regularly at parties across the country and in many cases is the stimulant of choice in preference to alcohol. People have a personal responsibility to themselves and their health to say no to cocaine. The State has a responsibility to hammer home the lethal risks associated with cocaine, particularly as the drug is increasingly being mixed with other hazardous substances.

We need a nationwide information campaign to highlight the potentially lethal consequences of cocaine use. The Garda Síochána and schools have a major role to play in getting the message out to communities. I call on the Minister to facilitate the daily screening of advertisements on television to portray to people the damage drugs can do. I want to see advertisements on RTE showing the effects an overdose has on an individual as a campaign showing the damage caused by drug taking will reduce the numbers of people sampling drugs.

I commend the work done in this area by the health promotion unit in the Department, which provides informative leaflets on alcohol, drugs, relationships and healthy eating. Schools can access a supply of these leaflets, which are useful for teenagers. Drugs education should feature on a weekly basis on the school curriculum. In secondary schools, students have access to one class a week on social and personal health education.

In this class, topics such as alcohol, drugs and relationships are supposed to be addressed.

In many schools not enough time is devoted to these subjects, as demands exist from other disciplines such as career guidance. In addition some teachers do not feel they have the experience or the confidence to deliver information on these topics. Videos should be circulated to all schools highlighting the damage that drugs do to people. An outside body should conduct these weekly classes. I hope this area will not be neglected in the forthcoming budget.

Drugs are rife in our prisons. I welcome the introduction of sniffer dogs in our prisons, as they will help to reduce the number of drugs in our prisons. These dogs should patrol our prisons on a daily basis. However, nothing has been done about the number of drugs being thrown over prison walls. Those responsible for this activity must be laughing at the Government's failure to address this problem. Proper nets need to be installed in our prisons to address this problem. Drugs are being thrown over walls on a daily basis. The 2006 report by the visiting committee to Mountjoy Prison suggested that more CCTV cameras should be provided and an increased Garda presence would help this problem. The committee also asked for nets to be erected, but this has not happened to date.

Facilities for our young people are badly needed. In my constituency of Dublin North-East, many local groups are fighting for facilities for young people. If young people had somewhere to go they would not be so tempted to take drugs. Many organisations in my constituency are doing great work in helping to alleviate the drug problem. I commend KCCP, Kilbarrack Coast Community Programme, which works with 150 recovering drug misusers. KCCP was set up in 1998 to provide aftercare and rehabilitation for those affected by drug addiction.

Does the Government intend to introduce dedicated treatment for people suffering from dual diagnosis? Dual diagnosis is used to refer to drug misusers who have another problem, for example mental illness. Drugs agencies want research done to quantify the numbers of people suffering from dual diagnosis. Ireland has a good policy and students conducting research would be led to believe that Ireland has the situation under control, which is not the case. In reality, there are few resources available and the service is bad. People with drugs problems are offered methadone, but there is no alternative. There are limited opportunities for counselling for drug users. Problematic drug users are not receiving individual programmes. If a drug user drops out of treatment, nobody does anything. Des Corrigan of the national advisory committee on drugs has called for individual programmes to be drawn up for drug users, with which I agree.

The Kilbarrack Coast Community Programme recently published a report entitled *Young People and Drugs*. The report noted that a

majority of young people from urban and working class areas will take cannabis at some point in their lives. Education is badly needed to make young people aware of the dangers. The perception of cannabis as a harmless drug needs to be challenged by accurate information and education. Movie stars and models who appear in daily newspapers should not be allowed to glamorise drugs and cocaine in particular.

The dangers of drug use should be raised in schools on a weekly basis. Unfortunately drugs have taken over too many communities. The Government needs to take the issue seriously and put its money where its mouth is by providing adequate education and resources to help save our young people from drugs.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** I wish to share time with Deputy O'Connor. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate and I welcome the points made by the speakers on all sides and in particular by the Minister of State. Our economy has made tremendous progress in the past 25 years with many positive benefits particularly with job creation, the increase in the standard of living etc. There was an old maxim that improving the quality of living for a society helped address the problems associated with social exclusion and therefore by including people in society it had a better capacity to allow them to live their lives in a more responsible way. Unfortunately that has not happened. While we have seen the benefits and the quality of life has improved, we have also seen the darker side associated with the preponderance of abuse of both alcohol and drugs, which we would not have expected 25 years ago. A significant effort has been made to deal with social exclusion through various programmes rolled out by successive Governments, and the required funding was allocated. While they have had an effect they have not had the effect to the extent they should have had.

However, the most worrying aspect is that the taking and abuse of drugs is no longer limited to the socially excluded groups. While I do not want to dwell on any specific case, I was somewhat concerned at how the incident in Waterford over the weekend was reported. The initial reports indicated that people were hospitalised, some in serious conditions, and that it was probably related to a toxic batch of drugs. The notion that some horse sedative was added to the drug was put forward as the reason for the young people having fallen ill necessitating them being hospitalised. However, in truth the addition of a horse sedative or any other compound is not needed to make drugs as we know them toxic or lethal. We need to be careful. The way it was reported almost gave the impression that the consumption or abuse of drugs was acceptable and the bit that caused the problem was the notion that some extra toxin had been added. It would be dangerous for us to accept that.

[Deputy Timmy Dooley.]

We have a real challenge to try to deal with the abuse of drugs among the professional class — people who should know better but have made a choice based on education, information and a good upbringing to consume drugs as a recreational choice in the same way that many other people would either smoke a cigarette or consume alcohol. That is very dangerous and needs to be addressed.

I am also concerned at the “High Society” television programme recently aired by RTE. While I acknowledge it has given rise to some debate in this House, regardless of whether it was factually correct about drug use by a politician or an airline pilot, if information exists that people in such responsible positions as airline pilots, surgeons or politicians are prepared to brag about their consumption of cocaine or even believe it is acceptable to use cocaine, we have reached a very serious and dangerous situation. I know the Minister of State has been in discussion with RTE. I hope the authorities show the kind of responsibility necessary. It is not right that people in responsible positions who brag about their use of cocaine should remain in their jobs, regardless of whether they are Ministers, Members of this House, surgeons or airline pilots.

Regardless of whether that information is true, people getting on aeroplanes today including some people who may not travel very much, are rightly concerned that the captain of the aircraft might not be in the full of his or her senses. If it was an allegation that a pilot consumed ten or 15 pints every night, there would have been uproar. I am not sure why it has been almost accepted by society. It indicates a greater acceptance of the abuse of drugs than I thought existed.

**Deputy Charlie O'Connor:** I thank my colleague, Deputy Dooley, for giving me an opportunity to make a brief contribution to this important debate. I welcome the partnership approach that is central to the national drugs strategy. Statutory, community and voluntary groups are working together to tackle the drugs problem. While many statutory bodies are clearly wholehearted in their support of the partnership approach, some of them are dragging their heels to a certain extent. The Minister of State recently announced that the national drugs strategy will be reviewed in 2008. I hope the review will recommend the setting of protocols to ensure total compliance with the spirit of the strategy on the part of all the statutory bodies.

Like my colleague, Deputy Rabbitte, I was in Tallaght on Tuesday to welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, to the annual service of hope and remembrance in Killinarden parish for those who have been affected by drugs. The Community Addiction Response Programme, which hosted the event, welcomed visitors from other parts of Dublin, including the Tallaght Rehabilitation Project, the SWAN family support

group, Jobstown Assisting Drug Dependency, St. Dominic's Community Response Project and St. Aengus's Community Action Group. I mean it sincerely when I say that my colleague, Deputy Rabbitte, did a lot of progressive work when he was Minister of State with responsibility for this area. I am sure he does not mind me praising him and I am not a bit afraid to do so. I appreciate the work that has been done by successive Ministers of State, including my constituency colleague, Chris Flood, on the drugs problem.

I am glad that the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, has taken the baton. The manner in which he is going about his business is impressing many people. When I was at the service in Killinarden on Tuesday, many people praised the time and energy he has devoted to his task over the past six months. I do not wish to be parochial when I mention that he has been to Tallaght on three occasions since he took office, which is greatly appreciated in the area. Somebody reminded me the other day that the Minister of State used to work as a teacher in Finglas, which is an area with high levels of early school leaving, and is therefore familiar with the need to do something about this problem. That person asked me whether the Minister of State has been able to persuade his Government colleagues, the Ministers for Education and Science and Finance, of the need to roll out early school programmes in all areas that are encountering problems with drug use, particularly heroin use. I understand that the person in question also raised this issue with the Minister of State. There is a view that if a full roll-out cannot be done immediately, plans will have to be put in place to initiate early school programmes in all RAPID areas, including parts of Tallaght, within a given timeframe. They can then be rolled out in Leader areas and, finally, in all other parts of the country. I understand that international research shows that the best way of preventing the misuse of drugs is to educate people as early as possible.

In the Minister of State's remarks in Tallaght on Tuesday, he referred to the reluctance of some statutory bodies to adopt a partnership approach, a problem to which I alluded at the beginning of this speech. Will representatives of the community sector have to resign again to ensure that the statutory bodies play a full and proper role in responding to the drugs crisis and getting involved in political engagement? While I do not want to repeat everything I have said, I feel I should mention again that the reputation of the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, is very strong in the Tallaght area. He could easily be a Dáil candidate in Tallaght if he wanted to be. He has been out there several times. The Minister of State has shown a great deal of understanding of the problems of urban communities. He spends a great deal of time in urban constituencies.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** What about the Minister of State, Deputy Haughey?



**Deputy Charlie O'Connor:** I am always pleased to welcome Ministers and Ministers of State to my constituency. The Minister of State, Deputy Haughey, and others should understand the merit of coming to my constituency as often as possible.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** What about the Minister of State, Deputy Conor Lenihan?

**Deputy Charlie O'Connor:** The various drugs groups have asked the Government to explain why no mechanism for collating needle exchange data has been put in place. I appreciate the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this debate. I wish the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, well.

**Deputy Pat Rabbitte:** I would like to share time with Deputy Costello.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Johnny Brady):** Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy Pat Rabbitte:** As I have not spoken on the issue of drugs since the last general election, I would like to start by congratulating the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, who is now responsible for the national drugs strategy. I wish him well with the task he faces. Like most of us who are present in the Chamber for this debate, he represents a constituency with many communities that are suffering from the disease which is the misuse of drugs. We are familiar with the devastation caused by drugs in many communities. Drugs are often at the root of the criminal behaviour that is wreaking havoc in some parts of Dublin and other cities throughout the country. This debate is important, therefore. If the Minister of State wishes to bring new energy to the national drugs strategy, he should listen to Deputies on all sides of the House. That energy is required because we are at a new stage.

My constituency colleague, Deputy O'Connor, was kind enough to remind the House that I established the national drugs strategy in 1996. If I make one point during this debate, it is that the success of the strategy since 1996, under the stewardship of those who succeeded me, such as the former Minister of State, Chris Flood, has been built on partnership between statutory agencies and community organisations. The achievements that have undoubtedly been recorded as a result of the strategy can be attributed to such co-operation.

I worry, therefore, when people who are involved with community organisations, most of whom have garnered extraordinary experience at the coalface, tell me that the partnership approach is being undermined in some areas. Such people feel there is a reversion to the time when the statutory agencies sought to control the strategy in that the agencies are starting to assert themselves in certain areas once more and trying

to diminish the role of community representatives. For example, the agencies are not as responsive to the community organisations as they should be. They are starting to veto new ideas and thwart initiatives. In some instances, the statutory agencies are beginning to send people of a lower rank than used to be the case — I do not mean they are necessarily of a lower calibre — to participate in drugs task forces. The impression being formed by some community representatives is that those involved with the agencies are not really engaging with them in the same fashion as their predecessors did in the early years of the national drugs strategy.

I can give a tangible example of the point I am making. I am advised that there is a palpable desire on the part of the Health Service Executive to take control of the needle exchange programme. The HSE wants to deal with it on an outreach basis, to the exclusion of some of the community treatment centres. A community treatment centre in my constituency that runs a successful needle exchange programme funds its activities from the pockets of those who run it. The programme helps to clean the detritus of syringes etc., which can be found around the place. That is my net point.

I would like to respond to the comment Deputy Dooley made in passing about recent events in Waterford. The case in question seems to bring home to all of us the need to put more emphasis on harm reduction strategies. We need to send out a message, by means of public advertising, for example, to communicate our acceptance, whether we like it or not, that this kind of drugs misuse event happens all too commonly when young people gather in our towns, villages and cities. We must acknowledge that this is a harsh fact of modern life and that we ought to address it with harm-reduction strategies and so bring the problem to the attention of young people.

I wish to say a word of deserved praise for the HSE's support of the cocaine project. I ask the Minister of State to outline the funding available up to 2008 and to say what will be the situation after 2008 because it takes a lot of time, investment and energy to build up a strategy.

Is there any plan to share the Dublin experience with other communities? Parts of the country are still resistant to admitting there is a drugs problem in their midst. I find it disturbing that clients are returning to Tallaght who may have relocated or been relocated to different parts of the country. They are returning because there is no service for them. This highlights the necessity for us to share the valuable experience we have garnered.

Will the Minister of State say whether there has been an increase in HIV-Aids? I am advised there has been and that it needs to be addressed.

**Deputy Joe Costello:** I thank my colleague, Deputy Rabbitte, for sharing his time. This is an appropriate occasion for a review of the national



[Deputy Joe Costello.]

drugs strategy and the 2005 mid-term review as this day next week the lights on the Christmas tree at the Hope monument which is at the junction of Seán MacDermott Street and Buckingham Street will be lit. The Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Diarmuid Martin, will perform the ceremony. This is an important annual event in the area where hundreds of people died from drug abuse in the 1980s, 1990s and up to the present.

I join with those who have commended Deputy Rabbitte who, as a Minister of State, established the initial drugs strategy and identified the key necessity to ensure a multi-agency approach between the statutory and health and education and justice agencies and to include community groups and local politicians. The strategy package included tough legislation dealing with the supply and control of drugs, the proceeds of crime and the establishment of the Criminal Assets Bureau. A significant momentum was established but I do not believe the national drugs strategy from 2001 to 2008 retained that momentum. A conservative estimate of the value of the illegal drugs industry is well in excess of €1 billion. While use of hard drugs was confined to Dublin, there is now a nationwide network which means drugs are readily available throughout the length and breadth of the country along with the associated violence.

Cocaine use is a serious drug problem and its distribution is nationwide. It has arrived on the scene during the time of the drugs strategy but no corrective measures have been taken in time to deal with the problem.

I could not believe my ears when I listened to the Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív speaking about the wonderful work of the RAPID programme and the dormant accounts funds. The Minister must realise that the national development plan funding of €2 billion was to be invested in disadvantaged areas the length and breadth of this country. All the preparatory work had been done in these areas and the projects had been identified. However, the fund was cannibalised by the Government after 2002 and the scheme was never introduced. The hundreds of millions of euro funding coming from the dormant accounts fund became a political slush fund for the same Minister, rather than being part and parcel of a coherent, holistic approach to dealing with the drug problem. As a result, the local drugs task forces have been deprived of long-term planning because the resources were not available. They have been operating from hand to mouth. This situation must not continue. I compliment the Minister of State with responsibility for drugs and I know he will do a good job. The new strategy will cover from 2009 to 2016 and new pillars are in place. I am confident that under the new Minister of State there will be a new commitment which is required to ensure that the resources are provided and to avoid the incoherent approach

which dogged the last strategy and caused it to be a failure.

**Deputy Brendan Kenneally:** I wish to share my time with Deputy Cyprian Brady.

I wish to reiterate the dangers associated with drug use, which have been graphically illustrated by the recent incident in my own city of Waterford where 15 people were hospitalised as a result of taking an illegal substance at a party. Thankfully, most were discharged from hospital but unfortunately, two young men are still in a coma and from what I hear, the prognosis is not very good. Our thoughts are with the Grey and Doyle families at this time. It is hoped that this incident will be a deterrent to others from getting involved in drug abuse even though it may be too late for those two young men.

I compliment the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey and his predecessor, Deputy Noel Ahern, on their tremendous work in this area. Both represent the constituency of Dublin North-West and will be well acquainted with the problem which they will have experienced on the ground in their constituency. Deputy Carey was in Waterford last Tuesday to open a new community and youth building in Farranshooneen, which is in my own area of the city. It is ironic that 12 months ago, the Minister of State, Deputy Noel Ahern, turned the sod for this building while the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, cut the opening ribbon. There is a little bit of Dublin North-West down around the Dunmore Road area of Waterford.

While in Waterford, the Minister of State met the regional drugs task force. Members of the task force were very impressed with the Minister of State's commitment to eradicate this problem in so far as possible. They were impressed with his common sense approach to the problem.

Much of the funding for the building to which I refer came from the young people's facilities and services fund. Waterford and other areas of the country have benefited from this fund. Diversion is the key tactic to be used. An effort must be made to divert young people before they become involved in drug or other substance abuse. The Minister of State also visited another building nearing completion close to the city centre. Waterford regional youth services have been proactive in providing these facilities.

Waterford City Council also is coming on board. In the past, many local authorities have been criticised, probably rightly, for simply building houses or allowing developments without putting in place other necessary facilities. Waterford City Council may be the first city council to have begun to do so. In the Carrickphierish-Gracedieu area of the city, playing fields for a GAA club already are being installed. The council also hopes to establish soccer fields there and has allowed for a school and a library. In addition, the council has spoken to the Minister regarding a community building in which it is prepared to

invest its own funds. The provision of such facilities is the route to take.

I was struck by a comment made last Tuesday by Eoin O'Neill, a director of youth services in Waterford who drives such initiatives. He referred to much of the funding that has been distributed to different projects through the national lottery, the sporting bodies or whatever. He noted that, frequently, those who are in need of help do not have access to such facilities as the latter levy charges that are too high for them to afford. Often such clubs are obliged to charge for their facilities because they must match whatever funds are provided by the Government. His vision is that in the main, usage of such community facilities should be free or at most at a nominal cost, in order to encourage their use by those who require help and who should be diverted from other activities.

**Deputy Cyprian Brady:** I thank Deputy Kenneally for sharing time and welcome the opportunity to speak briefly on this important and timely debate. The abuse of drugs continues to be one of the most pressing social problems faced by Ireland. The 2007 report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime states that the total number of drug users in the world is estimated to be 200 million people, which is equivalent to approximately 5% of the global population aged between 15 and 64. This is a global phenomenon and Ireland must continue to make it a top priority and to maintain its focus in this regard.

I have been making the point for a long time that we must begin to think outside the box regarding drug prevention and treatment. In that context, I visited the European Parliament earlier this year and met senior officials who were responsible for policing and drug control. Their analysis of the worldwide problem of drug trafficking was not encouraging. It is universally accepted that 2006 was a record year for the growth of the poppy plant in countries such as Afghanistan. It is also accepted that two or three years can elapse from the harvesting of the poppy plant to its appearance on the streets of cities such as Dublin as it finds its way across Asia and Europe. Effectively this suggests that soon, we again will be faced with an influx of cheap heroin. Obviously this will lead to serious problems for Ireland against which we must protect ourselves.

I have witnessed at first hand the fantastic and amazing work that is being done on the ground by individuals and small groups. I will take this opportunity to mention one of those individuals. I refer to a young Salesian, Father Joe Lucey, who passed away suddenly earlier this week. The enormous crowd that turned up to Seán McDermott Street church yesterday was a testament to the work Father Joe had done in the north inner city over the years. He had been working away quietly and no one had ever heard of him or had read about him in the newspapers. Nevertheless,

he touched a great many lives in the north inner city. I refer in particular to young people who were highly dependent on drugs.

However, one must continue. Deputy Rabbitte's contribution to the establishment of the task forces was mentioned earlier. In the early 1980s, the communities took to the streets and demanded action from both the Government and the statutory agencies. Much progress has been made under the drug strategy as it was put in place. While a review was carried out in March 2005, different aspects of the strategy must be considered. For instance, the effectiveness of the methadone protocol should be examined. The general consensus regarding methadone is that it only suits some people. An issue also arises in respect of its long-term use and consequential health effects as some addicts are approaching their 20th year on methadone. While some groups are of the opinion that the only effective treatment for drug addiction is a completely drug-free approach, I believe there is room for both methods.

Drug supply reduction and drug law enforcement are two key features of the Government's strategy at present and the national drugs unit, the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation and the Criminal Assets Bureau have all played a pivotal role. I have witnessed such co-operation at the local community policing forum in the north inner city. The community has co-operated closely, with the result that the drugs squads have made significant seizures and arrests and the people consider that the information they are passing on is having an effect. This is working to a greater degree. I was delighted to hear the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy Brian Lenihan, mention recently that drug dealing at any level is unacceptable and that both small and large scale dealers will be pursued. This was mentioned in the policing plan for 2008.

This issue faces everyone and one sees it day in and day out, whether one is a parent of young children or through involvement in local communities. I refer to the potential devastation the misuse of drugs can have on individuals, their families and communities. I commend the Minister of State with responsibility for this issue, of which he has a good grasp given his background and the years of work he has put into his own locality. He has a great knowledge of the problems caused by drug misuse and undoubtedly he will be extremely successful in bringing on the strategy in future.

**Deputy Damien English:** I welcome the opportunity to say a few words on this subject, on which I worked in recent years. As it is no longer my brief, I may not have all the up-to-date facts and figures possessed by the Minister of State. I welcome the new Minister of State with responsibility for this issue although he now has been in office for some months. He brings a genuine interest in and knowledge of this subject and will

[Deputy Damien English.]

make a difference. I have stated repeatedly in the House that I was not fully convinced that the Government as a whole realised the urgency associated with this issue. However, I expect the Minister of State will get across to the Government the point that it should be dealt with. This issue is bigger than a single Minister and must be tackled by all politicians, both from the Government and the Opposition. They should get out the message as consistently and frequently as possible that drugs are bad and lead to serious problems in respect of one's health and family, as well as economic and social problems.

The major problem is that young people, particularly those who are approximately my age, do not realise the dangers that drugs pose to their lives. They believe that dabbling in drugs at weekends or once a month will not harm them. The Minister of State and I both know it will, as do most of those who have studied the subject to an extent. However, this message is not getting out. Young people think they are invincible, which can be seen from the behaviour of young drivers. The attitude is wrong as such drivers are convinced it will never happen to them. The same is true of those who take drugs. People I know who use drugs are convinced that nothing bad will happen to them as a result of so doing. While they are intelligent people who would not take drugs if they thought it would affect them personally, they are convinced there will not be an effect and carry on doing it. Such people play the lottery every week because they are convinced they will win. However, everyone knows the odds of winning the lottery are extremely slim while the odds of being affected by drugs are extremely high. Consequently, the message must get through and people's attitudes must be worked on and sorted out.

The Minister of State's contribution mentioned facilities and so on for young people, which is extremely important and the more done in this regard the better. However, education is an important avenue by which such people may be reached. No matter what it takes, people at both primary and secondary school must be made aware from a young age that drugs are not good for us. This may entail bringing in those who have suffered from drugs in the past or who are actors or anything we can do to get the message across.

I am glad the Taoiseach has entered the Chamber for this debate because last February or March, I took exception to his comments in which he more or less dismissed the suggestion that we have a drugs problem. While they are not ubiquitous, they can be found in most towns and villages and serious problems exist in this regard. Ireland's leaders, the Taoiseach included, should speak on this issue and let people know it will be taken head-on and beaten.

This leads me to the recent incident in respect of the reporter and her mystery Minister. I do not believe any Minister takes cocaine. Certainly, I

do not believe any Minister would admit to so doing to a journalist. This issue must be nipped in the bud and sorted out. Mysteriously, the journalist's tapes have gone missing. I would not settle for this and would prove her to be wrong to end this myth. This would demonstrate that the Government and Members are determined to rule out the possibility of drug use among those with whom they work because they do not agree with it.

That will send out a strong message that we say no to drugs. We are very serious about that. We have to send that message out clearly, from the Taoiseach, Ministers, Ministers of State and everybody else as well. We must get the message out that drugs are wrong. This message must be on the tip of our tongues.

I welcome this debate. We do not always have to debate legislation in the Chamber. It is no harm to have discussions and debates. I would prefer if they were interactive rather than it being a case of me making a speech while others talk and where Members make speeches of ten or 20 minutes. This does not get to the point. I would welcome an interactive debate. Perhaps the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, could facilitate a round table discussion, similar to committee debates but outside that structure.

**Deputy Pat Carey:** We are doing it this afternoon. When we finish this debate, we will have a question and answer session.

**Deputy Damien English:** I accept that. I am not giving out. I am saying it is grand, but apart from the question and answer session it would be useful if the Minister of State could call together those who are interested to have a round table discussion on this area in order that we can offer ideas and solutions. In his speech, the Minister of State mentioned he would welcome any input from us and that he is willing to work with us. I believe the Government wants to work with us. The other day we had a very good round table discussion with Deputies of all parties about the future of transport in Dublin. It was very informative. We can do the same with this issue, not necessarily in committees or in the Dáil Chamber, but where those who are interested can meet and work together. The Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, served on a useful committee that related to child care where he was an effective participant. I accept there are benefits in that approach.

This is part of the review of the previous drugs strategy. While that strategy has done much work in terms of organisation and preparation, it did not achieve a reduction in the level of drugs consumption or succeed in protecting people from drugs. It has helped certain people but the number of people involved in drugs has increased, especially in terms of cocaine use. Reports show that drug use has increased sevenfold or eightfold. It was revealed in a committee



that over 300,000 people between the ages of 16 and 25 admitted to using cannabis. We must face the fact that the number of people using drugs has increased. Any review should acknowledge that but the review was trying to be too nice. While we gained, we have not gained enough.

The future strategy must have solid targets in areas in which we want to achieve so as to reduce the amount of drugs in which people dabble. It is important the future strategy has targets and proper review limits. A review that takes place five years after the strategy has been put in place and does not get discussed on the floor of the Dáil for a further two and a half years is not very effective. We had a useful discussion of this in committee but it would not have been any harm to have had a debate in the Chamber and get the message across to the wider public.

I will send in writing to the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, specific issues I have not had time to raise. We must target our message at parents. They need to realise we can solve the drugs problem. They do not believe this and until the problem knocks on their door they do not get involved. We need to get parents fully behind this campaign and put pressure on State agencies to tackle this problem. Leadership is required in order to encourage people and convince them we can solve the problem. The perception is that politicians cannot solve problems or get anything done. I believe we can achieve something but we need to get everybody involved, especially parents.

Local drugs task forces have worked well in some areas of Dublin but the regional drugs task forces were not encouraged enough in the early years. It was almost four or five years before most of the regional drugs task forces presented us with a plan of what they wanted to do. I blame the Department for not pushing the agenda and making sure these plans were produced earlier. They are in place now and money has been allocated in recent years. The Minister of State referred to the allocation of €14 million. We need to drive the drugs task forces because they can provide solutions. It is important to share the experiences in this area nationally and internationally with the task forces and ensure they get results. We should not be happy that people are just discussing the problem or handing out cheques to certain groups, we should demand results and set targets for the drugs task forces to achieve.

I spoke extensively in the past about pilot schemes to tackle drug use. We do not need pilot schemes. We know what works here and what has worked in other countries. Too much time on pilot schemes is spent adding figures and fixing reports for the following year to ensure funding is guaranteed. We should allocate money to different projects and let them get on with it. We should not be worried about getting results. If we get it wrong we will just try some other scheme. We should not tie up projects with too much red

tape. The Minister of State referred to youth groups and youth centres where progress is being achieved. I hope every town and village will soon have top class youth centres and facilities. A great deal of red tape gets in the way of running youth centres. It takes a lot of time and effort to draw down money. We should try to fast-track this system and get money to where it is needed. It is all very well announcing on budget day that millions of euro are being allocated to certain projects but we want to get it spent where it is needed in helping those who are affected.

**Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie O'Connor):**  
One minute remains.

**Deputy Damien English:** I am sure the Acting Chairman would give me longer anyway.

The review of the strategy highlighted the area of community policing. We have failed in this area in terms of tackling drugs. Youth and community policing should be a major part of the strategy and could be effective in tackling soft drug use in particular. It can also be important in terms of picking up information and finding out who is involved in what. We need to expand community policing if we are to have a chance of tackling crime. Through community policing, younger members of the Garda have a great chance to reach out to young people in an advisory capacity and prevent them from getting involved in drug use.

I welcome the Minister of State's comment that his main aim will be prevention. That is the right approach to pursue. Rehabilitation is important also, as the Minister stated. I know the subject of ex-offenders leaving prison and the rehabilitation of drug addicts back into society is dear to the Minister of State's heart. Reference was made by him to education and employment. It is important that when people leave prison a care plan is put in place for them to get re-educated and to provide whatever help is necessary to get them back into society and functioning. This will keep them off drugs and away from crime.

We must also convince taxpayers that it is worth spending a lot of money on drug prevention and rehabilitation. It will save money in the long run. We have not been getting this message across to them. There is no widespread support to spend money in this area and we need to convince people of the merits of doing that. This is part of the Minister of State's job and I am happy he will do what is necessary. I hope when we review the next strategy in a few years we will have real figures to talk about and something about which we can clap ourselves on the back. We need to produce real results and reduce the number of people who are on drugs.

**The Taoiseach:** Tá mé sásta go bhfuil díospóireacht againn inniu faoin straitéis náisiúnta drugaí. When this issue was raised for debate last week, I was happy to encourage the Dáil to con-



[The Taoiseach.]

sider the subject. A number of important issues arise in terms of the use of illegal drugs in society which need to be addressed. In addition, I wish to set out the Government's strategy for dealing with this issue. All the elected representatives from my constituency are involved in this debate. Deputy Gregory and Deputy Costello are due to speak and Deputy Cyprian Brady has already spoken. We have all been dealing with this issue in our political lives, as has the Acting Chairman, Deputy O'Connor, in his constituency for the past quarter of a century. We have always taken a keen interest in this issue.

The impetus for raising this issue was the excellent supplement produced by the *Irish Examiner*. Its research and informative guide led to a focus on this matter. I congratulate the newspaper which I believe has further plans in this regard. It is most commendable of a national newspaper to carry out that task.

The Government is deeply committed to tackling this ever-evolving challenge. We have been working hard in recent years to bring about real changes through a multifaceted approach to education, crime prevention and detection and rehabilitation. I have had the honour of working with the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, my brother, the Minister of State, Deputy Noel Ahern, and former Deputy, Chris Flood, a colleague of Deputy O'Connor, in the past ten years. I have had the opportunity of chairing the Cabinet committee on social inclusion which has met on a regular basis, at least monthly but sometimes more often, where we have been dealing with this issue. I accept what Deputies have said; this issue is challenging and difficult for all of us.

This week is just another week but the recent incident in Waterford shocked many. Sadly, this type of event is becoming too familiar in towns and cities. I accept that it is a problem in cities, towns and even villages throughout the country.

I welcome the opportunity today to highlight, particularly for younger adults and young people, the health risks of using illegal drugs. Some people try illegal drugs once or twice thinking that simply experimenting has no significant consequences and that they will escape serious injury. Everybody can understand somebody making that attempt and not understanding what they are getting into. Young people will always try things out of a spirit of adventure but in this case we must warn them and guard them from the devastating effects. It is not the case that one can just try them once or twice. The physical and mental health risks are so high that an experiment need only go wrong once for serious, and sometimes fatal, consequences to arise for the drug misuser, their families, friends and members of the wider community.

Recently, there has been an increased incidence of young people using cocaine. There are extremely high risks associated with cocaine use. Serious physical and mental health problems can

arise. It is particularly dangerous when combined with alcohol, as we have seen recently, and other substances. I have always maintained that the cornerstone of our efforts to tackle the drug problem must be the maxim that prevention is better than cure. In this regard, education and awareness are crucial to combating the menace of drug abuse. Deputy Carey, with his long experience as a community activist and his long teaching career, is aware of this. His advice and statements on the issue not only in his current capacity, but also over the years, have been important.

There have been a number of major drug awareness programmes organised over the past number of years. Some have been targeted at both parents and younger people. Some run through the local drugs task forces have been focused directly on people in their own local areas. These all have an important role in providing information to people about illegal drugs and in getting the message across about the serious health risks. The health promotion unit of the HSE is currently working on a new targeted and long-term awareness programme. Many of the programmes in the past 20 years or so have been very useful in keeping people off drugs and on the straight and narrow. Of course, not everybody has been kept away from drugs but that does not mean that the programmes have not been extremely beneficial in the education system and in communities. Community activists and organisations in my constituencies and others have been funded and do a very good job. They have saved many people over the years.

The Government's strategy as outlined in the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008, augmented by the joint national advisory committee on drugs, the national drugs strategy team's report on cocaine and the report of the working group on drug rehabilitation, is the correct one. The national drugs strategy, which was launched by the then Minister of State, former Deputy Eoin Ryan, will be reviewed over the next year with a view to putting in place a strategy to cover the period from 2009 to 2016. This is important, as are debates such as this and other consultations taking place in communities throughout the country.

It is important to acknowledge that there have been significant achievements under the current national drugs strategy. There is now either a regional drugs task force — which were set up in 2005 — or a local drugs task force — these were set up in 1997 — covering all areas of the country. The level of drugs seizures by the Garda and the customs service of the Revenue Commissioners have been well in excess of the strategy targets. I congratulate the Garda on its success. However, gardaí face daily challenges in tackling the sale of illegal drugs in the State by the highly organised criminal gangs who now confront them.

The Government has also been engaged with those involved in service-response development at a more strategic level — from drug task forces

at local and regional level to nationally based organisations, such as the Health Service Executive, the Garda and the Irish Prison Service. I have had the opportunity of listening to their presentations and seeing the agency reports in my capacity as chairman of the committee on social inclusion. For the past ten years, the Government has invested in approximately 450 projects under the local drugs task force plans. Those plans are mainly in force in city areas; there are not yet as many throughout the country. Many of those plans provide tremendous community facilities. They are costly but very beneficial.

I commend the dedication and commitment of the people involved in the development and delivery of services under the aegis of the national drugs strategy. These services are having a meaningful impact on the lives of the people availing of them, be they problem drug users, their families or the local communities, within which many of the services are set. The strategy has been complemented by the RAPID programme tackling urban disadvantage and by the community services programme.

Drug treatment and rehabilitation services are being delivered primarily through the Health Service Executive. These treatments include addiction counselling, detoxification programmes and methadone treatment programmes. The programmes have advanced a great deal. Not many years ago we had great difficulty trying to sell them and explaining their benefits to people. However, understanding has now moved to a different level. Through the HSE there was an allocation of €85.05 million in 2006 directly attributable to drugs programmes. Rehabilitation has been included as a fifth pillar of the national drugs strategy. This need was identified in 2005.

In addition to highlighting the serious health risks from illegal drugs, the Government recognises the importance of diverting young people from drug misuse now and in the future by supporting their involvement in other activities, hobbies and in sports. In the long run, the best way to keep young people away from drugs is by providing other outlets to them. We are providing facilities and services for the most "at risk" young people through the young people's facilities and services fund in particular. Almost 500 facilities and services projects are being delivered through the fund, including the employment of 228 youth and outreach workers and 27 sports development officers, to divert young people away from drug misuse. This funding supports sports facilities, youth cafés and recreational activities for young people.

It is important to remember that illegal drug use is a global issue and so our efforts to tackle it in Ireland must be seen in that context. Significant progress has been made internationally in reducing the supply of drugs and in providing treatment facilities. Needless to say, however, no country has succeeded in coming to terms with all dimensions of the problem. We will continue to

facilitate and support agreed international responses while pursuing our own goals through the implementation of the various actions contained in the current national drugs strategy.

I wish to conclude by reiterating my point on the health risks associated with illegal drugs. They are illegal because they are toxic; illegal drugs are a serious health risk and must remain illegal for that reason. The Government can only do so much. Individual citizens must see that there are serious physical and mental health risks attached to using illegal drugs. Our people also need to see the links to criminal activity associated with what is perceived as recreational drug use or weekend drug use. I acknowledge that much remains to be done to tackle the problem but I equally believe that progress is being made through the Government's national drugs strategy.

I commend the work of the *Irish Examiner* in highlighting the problem and supporting efforts to tackle it. I was anxious to participate in this debate today to support the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, and his officials in their efforts on this programme. We must continue to build on the excellent work that is being done by communities the length and breadth of this country. Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Chomhairle.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** We are glad to see the Taoiseach back in the House on a Thursday.

**The Taoiseach:** Whenever the debate is interesting I will be here.

**Deputy Mary Upton:** I congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, on his appointment to this portfolio. I wish him well. I also acknowledge his generous availability in my constituency. His visits to communities there are welcomed and appreciated.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. Every year, in different parts of my constituency, I attend commemoration services for people who have died from drug addiction. These events include memorial Masses, the production of quilts that are carefully and lovingly embossed with the names of the deceased and tree planting ceremonies. Invariably, the attendance includes the families, parents, partners, siblings and children of the addict. It is important for the families that this commemoration is available to them and it helps them in their grief. However, the message must be that we should not have to have these commemoration ceremonies. We must put an end to the misery and destruction caused by drugs in our communities.

My heart sinks when I look around and see the level of open drug-dealing going on in the streets and laneways of this city and in many pockets of my constituency. Modern technology has aided and abetted the drug dealers. The use of mobile phones has been a significant contributing factor in their battle against the system. Then, of course, there are those who are pushing back the fron-

[Deputy Mary Upton.]

tiers in the manufacture of illicit chemicals. They are clever, immoral and greedy and they care not a whit for the consequences of their actions. Much of this technological development takes place in other countries, but we do hear regular reports of such activities here, often taking place in a garage or garden shed. It is not high-tech but with enough know-how they are able to concoct these lethal cocktails with which they proceed to exploit anybody unfortunate enough to fall into their clutches. These people need to be hunted down, brought to book and made to pay for their crimes. I am not recommending the banning of mobile phones or putting a stop to research, but I am pointing out the challenges that are now commonplace and give advantage to the criminal element which is ready and able and has sufficient resources to exploit such technology.

This morning, Deputy Pat Rabbitte introduced two Bills designed to combat serious crime. I hope we will get the opportunity to debate these Bills in the near future. The witness protection programme urgently needs to be placed on a statutory basis and nowhere is such protection more needed than in dealing with the major, and some lesser, criminals who are destroying the lives and security of many decent and long-suffering people in our communities. Much of this criminality is based in drug-dealing. The second Bill is designed to give the Garda the power to undertake electronic surveillance of criminal suspects. Gangland killings most frequently have their origins in the illicit drug trade and whatever powers are needed by the Garda should be made available to ensure that these criminals and murderers are caught, charged and convicted. The dealers swagger around in their big cars, live in posh houses and seem to have absolutely no difficulty getting access to guns, organising hit-men and moving on to their next unfortunate targets. We need these two pieces of legislation to reassure our communities and to catch and remove the drug-dealing parasites from these communities.

In addition to these Bills, there is also a need for enhancement of basic policing activity. Local residents who suffer due to low-grade drug-dealing activity in their communities always tell me that the presence of community gardaí is the only effective deterrent to this kind of activity. In addition, the presence of community gardaí reassures people who are frightened and vulnerable and who most often become unfortunate targets. It is also the case that good local police work is often underrated. It can make a significant contribution to knowledge and information on local criminal activity. More patrols, more visibility and more support for the community gardaí are fundamental to driving out the pushers and dealers.

I particularly wish to draw the Minister of State's attention to the need for support and intervention for families who live in disadvan-

taged areas. I speak of positive intervention to support individual parents and families who, for whatever reason, including drug-related problems, are unable to look after their children on their own. Is it acceptable that small children are left literally to their own devices? They never get a decent meal, they are frequently missing from school and they do not participate in any structured way in what might be called normal society. I raise this point because I know of such children. They will never have a chance to participate in a normal home environment. Not all, but very many of these children come from homes in which drug addiction is, unfortunately, the norm. I speak of all drugs including alcohol. I challenge the Minister to ensure that the provision of the services needed to give these children a chance is undertaken as a priority. Without this intervention, the vicious cycle of dysfunction, misery, illiteracy and all the attendant problems will continue.

There is a need for intervention in many areas of the drugs business, but I am convinced that unless positive support is provided within the family home no real progress will be made. Children, I am told, frequently see school as their only safe haven. They have a decent breakfast, some order and structure, and a bit of security. However, at 2.30 p.m. or 3.30 p.m. they return to the dysfunction within their own families. I ask the Minister to consider this and to do whatever research is required, access all the facts and provide the resources to deliver for these children. They are the innocent victims, directly or indirectly, of the vicious drug barons, at whatever remove it may be.

Increasingly, heroin use is no longer confined to the Dublin area. It is one of the major drugs that has blighted communities for a long time. Serious heroin problems are now reported not only in our cities, but also in towns around the country. Everybody who has spoken on this today, no matter what part of the country they represent, is unfortunately only too well aware of the drug problems within their own communities.

The issues surrounding the drugs business have been identified by everyone who has spoken. The laws of supply and demand apply to drug dealing as to any other commodity. Unfortunately, the consequences of this type of dealing are quite different from those of other trading activities. We are talking about a business which is being run by dealers and drug barons. The consequences, which bear repeating, include some of all of the following: drug addiction; health problems, including hepatitis and HIV, and eventually death; job loss; unemployment; anti-social behaviour; robbery, violence, murder and intimidation; homelessness; fear and intimidation within the community; family destruction, breaking up of homes and neglect of children; and all-round, absolute misery. These consequences, unfortunately, are widespread in the communities that suffer due to the drugs problem.



It is not just the drug user that suffers. The net is spread far and wide and draws in the vulnerable, the disadvantaged, the young and the innocent. The list I just gave relates mostly to illegal drugs, but let us not forget the legal drug that is alcohol and the effects of abuse of that drug. Recent proposals have made a case for legalisation of certain so-called soft drugs. Let us knock that on the head. As a society, we have enough trouble dealing with the legal drug of alcohol. That issue has been rehearsed by other speakers.

I welcome many aspects of the work of the drugs task force, including the roll-out of treatment places and the methadone scheme. The increased use of GPs and pharmacies has helped within communities. We need closer monitoring of our ports and coastal waters and investigation of the methods used to obtain drugs and introduce them into our communities. The issue of drugs in prisons may have been raised already, but it is an important point that needs to be considered. We must try to get to grips with this problem. Ex-prisoners need to be rehabilitated, managed within the community and given the security and support they need to break away and stay away from drug addiction.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** I wish to share time with Deputy Tony Gregory.

**Acting Chairman:** Is that agreed? Agreed.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** I welcome the opportunity of participating in this important debate on the national drugs strategy because this is a major national issue. I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, to the debate and wish him well in developing sensible policies to deal with this problem. To illustrate my direct experience of this issue, last week I attended another funeral of a past pupil of mine who died due to drugs. We must accept that we are losing many sensible young people to drugs. Things were bad in the 1980s when we had a major heroin epidemic, but in 2007 we still have a significant problem.

**Acting Chairman:** I ask Deputy McGrath to withdraw his offer to share time so that I can facilitate Deputy Gregory until 3.05 p.m.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** That means Deputy Gregory has ten minutes.

**Acting Chairman:** If Deputy McGrath takes seven minutes, Deputy Gregory will have eight.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** That is fair enough. Drugs are a major problem in the country in 2007 and we must accept that it is no longer an issue confined to particular disadvantaged areas. It is now a cross-society issue. It hits every family in the country — working class families, poor families and middle class families. In recent events we also have seen the massive violence and intimidation that goes with the drugs issue.

We must take a broader view when tackling the issue and coming up with solutions to the abuse of drugs. We must include issues such as poverty, educational disadvantage and housing as part of the solution. I welcome the fact that these are included as a sensible part of the solution. I welcome the radical proposals emerging in some areas throughout the city.

I particularly welcome the new Cromcastle plan in my area in Dublin North-Central which will provide new centres, new sports facilities and housing projects around the Northside Shopping Centre. It will develop the Cromcastle area in a positive way. I commend Dublin City Council and all those directly involved in the project. These are issues that I raised in my agreement with the Taoiseach and they are covered in sections 7, 9 and 11 of the agreement. I repeat that the focus must be on educational disadvantage, housing issues, developing communities and tackling poverty.

Since 2007, €7 million was given to 42 projects to assist young people. This is a positive development, particularly the worthwhile projects that are working with young people and with the families of addicts, but we need to ensure this money goes in the right direction and goes deep down to meet the needs of people in the community. Some people working within the community have concerns that sometimes the resources do not necessarily get to the people who need them most. I know this from speaking to parents and families of addicts and also those who have a major contribution to make to the drugs issue.

The solution to this issue lies in communities, in families and in policing. It is important that we focus on these. If there are poor, disadvantaged families and young children at risk, we must intervene at an early age. I welcome the sensible projects being rolled out, particularly across the northside of Dublin, addressing educational disadvantage and assisting these young people, particularly young pupils between the ages of four and six. That is part of the solution and we can save many young people if we deal with issues such as literacy and low self-esteem at an early age. Such issues are important in creating a better person for the future. There are many good sensible projects, but we also need to develop them and ensure they are rolled out.

Quality policing is an important strategy in the campaign. We need community gardaí. We need professionals talking to and reassuring residents, but we also need the super squads in the form of the Garda drug squad directly involved to take out the violent dysfunctional criminals because they are causing havoc.

Let us also accept responsibility. There is a demand in society for drugs. If there was not a demand, there would not be a market. We must face that reality as well. If our neighbours, friends, children's children or somebody in the



[Deputy Finian McGrath.]

wider community is contributing to that, it is important we highlight it.

We should re-examine the role of the Criminal Assets Bureau, CAB. I commend my colleague, Deputy Gregory, for his magnificent work over the years, particularly in new radical ideas about making CAB relevant to communities but also in his consistent work on drugs issues. I urge people directly involved, particularly Ministers, to listen to individuals like Deputy Gregory who have a massive contribution to make, both at national and community levels. That is accepted on a cross-party basis in this House. If one is talking about a strategy, one must include the views and sensible solutions for the way forward. Deputy Gregory and others like him should be supported.

We should look at the positive ideas coming from all Deputies in this House. I have seen all-party agreement on issues such as Irish emigrants and climate change, and there is no reason we cannot look at the drugs issue in the same light.

Statistics show the level of drug seizures by the Garda and the Customs and Excise have been well in excess of the targets set in the strategy, and I welcome that important development. However, it shows that we have a bigger problem than sometimes people think.

On the violence and intimidation I mentioned, it is appalling that there are young families suffering and the level of violence involved. In my constituency, there was the slaughter of the young mother, Donna Cleary, which was cocaine related. We must accept the reality that this is the downside. As I stated last week in the Dáil although nobody seemed to take any notice, it is not acceptable for smart-alec journalists to state on television that it is all right to take cocaine and drugs. Every day in our clinics in our constituencies we see the reality of drugs and the violence and intimidation. Incidentally, many people who are not involved in politics do not see the reality. Many people come to Deputies, councillors and Senators with significant information on violence and drugs issues in their communities and it is important to take these views on board when dealing with the issue.

I welcome this opportunity to make a contribution to the debate. I commend the Minister of State, Deputy Carey, for the work he has done. I urge him to listen to the people directly affected in coming up with solutions because there is a enormous crisis and we need to act now.

**Acting Chairman:** I would point out to Deputy Gregory that the Chair is obliged after seven and a half minutes to ask the Minister of State to take questions for a period not exceeding 20 minutes.

**Deputy Tony Gregory:** I thank the Acting Chairman for the opportunity to say a few words, but I doubt that I will need the seven and a half minutes.

I take the opportunity, as Deputy Cyprian Brady did earlier, to pay tribute to the late Fr. Joe Lucey who did magnificent work — I am not overstating it in any way. Our Lady of Lourdes Church on Seán MacDermott Street was packed last night as a tribute to his work. He is certainly an immense loss to that community in the north inner city and to the marginalised young people in the Crinan Youth Project and in other projects with which he worked over the years.

Also last night I attended a meeting in Store Street Garda station of the community policing forum in the north inner city. This is an initiative which I was involved in setting up 3 o'clock where the local authority, the Garda drug unit and the community come together in their efforts to counter the drugs problem in the north inner city. After at least 25 years of a drugs plague and scourge in Dublin's north inner city, last night when the Garda drugs officer made his report of drug seizures over the past couple of months throughout the north city area, despite all the hype we hear about cocaine being the new drug, seizures of heroin were reported everywhere, right throughout the north city.

Previous speakers have pointed out that heroin is rooted in social disadvantage and in marginalised vulnerable young people, and there is no doubt about that. It is a great shame on all of us that we have failed to use the affluence that has been available to this country over the past ten or 15 years to make any radical inroads into that impoverishment from which so many young people still suffer in some of the areas of our city and country.

That was the reality last night. A variety of drugs have been seized, but I hope the seizure of crack cocaine in the north inner city was an isolated one. In terms of seizures, the most prominent drug or the drug on which the drugs unit, having learned from the past, concentrated used to be heroin. The Minister of State is by no means new to this issue because he is as long around as any of us and his constituency has as large a problem as, if not larger than most.

The national strategy includes the idea of community policing fora in every drugs task force area. Having one in the north inner city is a great help according to the local authority, Garda and community, which must be brought together if there is to be an effective approach to countering the drugs problem. I hope similar fora will be set up throughout task force areas.

Not far from Leinster House this morning, I attended a joint policing committee review, which is another strand of the strategy. I hope initiatives such as community policing fora and local authorities' joint policing committees are a step towards the democratisation of the Garda. I would like to believe that when there are directly elected mayors in some areas such as Dublin city in a few years' time, the Garda will fall under the

local authorities and mayors' remits. This may be a long way off, but it is necessary.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** Will the Deputy go for it?

**Deputy Tony Gregory:** Next weekend a local drugs unit comprising a sergeant and five gardaí will be established for the first time in the Minister of State's constituency, perhaps due to his position. From P. J. "The Psycho" Judge to Marlo Hyland, that area has been to the forefront of the drugs crisis and has suffered more than most. I raised a number of Dáil questions concerning the establishment of such a unit in the area because it is common sense to focus resources such as gardaí in areas with the highest incidence of and greatest problems with drug crime. However, this simple logic seems to have escaped the Garda. It would not have done so were the Garda under any form of democratic control, a direction in which we must head. The people, local representatives and local authorities see what is occurring on the ground at first hand. The Garda must work hand-in-hand and under the direction of locally and democratically elected people representing the areas.

**Acting Chairman:** The Deputy's time has concluded.

**Deputy Tony Gregory:** I was going to conclude with a few remarks on the Criminal Assets Bureau, which is probably outside the remit of the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, but I addressed it a number of times previously.

It is high time to review the powers of and resources available to CAB. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform stated that he would provide additional resources and referred to profilers, namely, each Garda district would have a profiler to get and forward drug dealers' details to CAB. This will not help because CAB is effectively a small, centralised bureaucracy. While profilers across the country will send their information to CAB, it will not have the resources to respond. The only way to get at drug dealers through their assets is with local units of CAB in the areas where they are needed or where there are serious drugs crises.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Tony Gregory:** I have gone over time and, as the Acting Chairman has been lax with me, I will leave it at that.

**Acting Chairman:** "Tolerant" is the word. Deputy Deenihan has one minute. If I can facilitate him when questions are being asked, I will be happy to do so.

**Deputy Jimmy Deenihan:** I welcome the Minister of State, but we are losing the battle against drugs. No longer an urban phenomenon, the drugs issue is widespread and will demand more concerted and direct action.

The national drugs unit sent some of its people to Tralee in County Kerry some time ago and they were successful. A large number of convictions were achieved principally because members of the local drugs unit, while effective, are well known by the drug pushers. The national unit's people spent a weekend going into bars and got a large number of convictions. They should be sent all over the country. There must be an inter-departmental approach to this matter.

Last night, I watched the film about Veronica Guerin, who took on the drug barons in the mid-1990s. Unfortunately, she put so much pressure on them that they murdered her. If the Garda had the resources to put drug barons under similar pressure, they would not murder gardaí and would be weeded out where possible. We should take a lesson from the film, that is, while her bravery and courage cost her her life, she proved that putting the people in question under pressure is the only way to eliminate them.

**Acting Chairman:** The Chair is obliged to point out that the Minister of State shall take questions for a period not exceeding 20 minutes. I will call on Deputy Ring first and the Minister of State will reply to each question.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** I will ask my three questions together to give everyone else a chance. First, when will there be mandatory drug testing, which is important and has been debated for many years? Drugs are lethal and people are being killed on the roads. Second, does the Department plan to set up a pilot scheme to target urban and rural schools with a video showing what happens to someone who takes drugs, the available treatment and the effects on families? Third, is the Minister of State happy with the support he is receiving from his Government colleagues in terms of resources and funding? What does the Minister of State most want from the forthcoming budget to tackle the drugs epidemic?

On another serious matter, I ask that the Minister of State speak with other members of the Government regarding Ms Justine Delaney-Wilson as it is wrong of her to castigate and put pressure on Ministers and judges who have served the State well. They comprise a small body of people and some legal advice should be taken to make Ms Delaney-Wilson confirm or deny her statements.

**Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey):** We have held a number of discussions with the Garda, medical professionals and those with ideas concerning the matter of mandatory drug testing. It can only be done on a voluntary

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

basis in the workplace and cannot be applied compulsorily.

It is disturbing that a large proportion of those tested as part of the drink driving campaign have been found to have substances other than alcohol in their bloodstreams. To answer the Deputy's question simply, we are working on the problem, but we are not unique. Other jurisdictions such as Australia have not satisfactorily mastered mandatory testing, although there are several provinces in Australia that are further ahead than others.

Local-based campaigns for schools are proving to be extremely successful. Deputy Catherine Byrne will know that last Saturday morning the Ballyfermot youths' service, under the aegis of the local drugs taskforce, launched a very good information campaign targeting transition year students. Up to 120 transition year students met at a nightclub at 10 o'clock in the morning on the fringe of the Dublin South-Central constituency. They were talking about the programmes devised by them on heightening the awareness of alcohol and drug misuse. I believe the two, alcohol and drug misuse, must be aligned.

Members referred to a campaign in Blanchardstown. A DVD was made by a group in Drogheda, which I have not seen but I believe is very effective. I am in discussions with the *Irish Examiner* newspaper about getting its supplement distributed more widely to schools and other outlets. We need to heighten awareness of drug misuse.

One of the best campaigns I have seen is in County Kerry. Deputy Deenihan knows of the Kerry education for life project. It has two mobile units that travel to schools in the county under the aegis of the regional drugs taskforce. Children as young as four years of age are shown how to understand what happens to their system when one takes tea, coffee or crisps. It works up along to show what happens to one's system when one takes cannabis, cocaine and heroin. The campaign, borrowed from a UK idea, is having much success. Other campaigns are potentially worthwhile such as those in Crumlin and Dublin inner city groups.

At a more formal level, we are in discussions on how to target an information and awareness campaign that will hit the upper second level age group to the 35 year old group. I have been examining using newer media such as Bebo and Facebook as a way of getting through to this age group. Focus groups are working on the content and the direction of this campaign, which will be coming to fruition soon. It needs to be done sooner than later.

As Deputy Wall stated, coming up to Christmas is a good time to highlight the dangers of drugs. If ever there was a lesson to be learned, it is unfortunately the one learned from the ingestion of cocaine at a recent party in Waterford. Unfortunately, that could have happened in any

village, town or city. It is to be hoped that it will be a wake-up call.

From the published Estimates, funds will be provided for the roll-out of the strategy. We are working with other Departments in getting additional resources to implement the drug rehabilitation report. It contains 13 recommendations, including the provision of additional detox beds, accommodation, education and training of frontline workers.

It has been suggested that those services available in Dublin need to be rolled out to the rest of the country. I say "Amen" to that. Every community needs to take ownership and responsibility of the problem. Dublin-based Members will recall how difficult it was to get needle exchange and methadone maintenance programmes developed in Dublin. I suspect the same challenges will be posed in communities where there is already a reluctance to allow such programmes be developed.

On Tuesday I visited in Cork where, under the aegis of the HSE, a centre of excellence is proposed to be built. It will incorporate all services such as needle exchange, methadone maintenance programmes, counselling, psychological and psychiatric support in the one centre in the Harbour House development. Every community needs its own residential and day treatment centres so a continuum of care is in place. Waiting lists in many Dublin centres, such as those in Ballyfermot and Clondalkin, are building up because of people presenting from other parts of the country.

I am slow to be drawn on the Justine Delaney Wilson issue. I have already stated my views on this. Neither the book nor the programme made a contribution to helping address the issues surrounding cocaine. If anything, it simply glamorised it. As to whether the Government will take any action on it, I am awaiting the outcome of the RTE investigation to see what it feels its response ought to be. Whether any action will be contemplated after that, we will await that development.

**Deputy Jack Wall:** On the proposed campaign, will the Minister of State consider including all national sports organisations and holding a national seminar to highlight an alternative to drugs?

Education campaigns in schools are vitally important as well as research. In the past several days, we have learned of various new mixes of drugs and alcohol. Research into these will have to be conducted and information given to the various bodies concerned.

In the drugs taskforce for Kildare South, there is one taskforce employee to 54,000 people. In other areas, such as the south east, it is one to 17,000 of the population. This is out of sync given the geographical position of County Kildare to the greater Dublin area. The south east should not match such a determination to that extent.



**Deputy Pat Carey:** The campaigns will be very important. The young people's facilities and services projects fund will be extended. For no other reason but to get maximum benefit, I will be engaging with the youth and sports organisations in the Leinster area. I will keep in touch with the Deputy on that matter.

Education is the key to this strategy. The DEIS programme must address those issues raised by Deputy Upton and others and the SPHE programmes must be further rolled out. I am keen the senior cycle in post-primary schools is appropriate to their needs which it currently is not.

The work on the all-Ireland prevalence study has been completed and will be published before the end of January 2008. It will give a good indication as to prevalence levels of various drugs. Other research from the EU monitoring report will show increases in some areas in the use of some drugs.

A potential model of good practice for regional drugs taskforces is evident in the south east. It has county-based sub-committees of its taskforce. The experiences and concerns with drugs in Carlow will be different from those in Waterford. Such sub-committees are the best means to address local need. That is why I am anxious that we all engage in building up the next strategy.

**Deputy Tony Gregory:** Does the Minister of State have a view on the role of the Criminal Assets Bureau? In the past ten years approximately €5.5 million worth of assets have been returned to the Exchequer, which seems incredibly low, maybe because of the seven year freeze on assets.

What does the Minister of State think of the recommendation of the financial action task force, the EU monitoring group, that the seven year freeze be reduced to three to make CAB's powers more effective? Does he feel that in an area as heavily affected by drug dealing and related crime as his constituency a local unit of the CAB would be another effective tool against those activities? We need to do more to take the assets from drug dealers at all levels because their affluence attracts young people into the drug-crime spiral.

**Deputy Pat Carey:** I do not engage day-to-day with CAB but the new Garda Commissioner's background in that area will inform much of the policing. The profiling the Deputy mentions operates in my area and has potential for other areas. Asset freezing may be a matter for domestic legislation but it is worth exploring the possibility of reducing it from seven years. CAB has begun to localise many of its operations but I am not sure whether that is happening *de facto* or *de jure*. The results of policing in some parts of the city indicate that CAB is closely involved there.

**Deputy Finian McGrath:** Is the Minister of State satisfied that the €7 million rolled out in September is being well spent and is getting down to the young people and communities? There are many excellent educational programmes in primary schools but does the Minister of State accept that we need to update many of them as some are five or six years out of date?

Does the Minister of State have a good relationship with the Irish Pharmaceutical Union, particularly in light of its recent row with the Health Service Executive? Pharmacists are an important part of any anti-drugs strategy.

**Deputy Pat Carey:** The Deputy need only go to places such as Clondalkin boxing club, Waterford, where I was on Tuesday, or to Knocknaheeny in Cork to see the high quality buildings funded by allocations from the €7 million young people's services and facilities fund. In Knocknaheeny there is a preschool child care centre, a community centre, a family resource centre and a community development project, working closely together. That is what I want to see everywhere.

Deputy Finian McGrath and I come from a teaching background and we believe that educational programmes always need to be updated to take account of the new attitudes of young people.

Community pharmacists are important in the delivery of the drugs strategy. We will not, nor should we, provide a building for a methadone clinic on every street corner. We will work with general practitioners and community pharmacists to make sure that service is delivered.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I am now required to call on the Minister of State to make a statement but I will allow three Deputies to put questions, the replies to which the Minister of State could encompass in his statement.

**Deputy Jimmy Deenihan:** What action is the Government taking on this issue? Is there joined-up thinking across Departments? Is there a Government sub-committee discussing it or does the Minister of State operate in isolation? Can the Minister of State direct the national drugs unit to visit large towns? Education is an important strand in dealing with this issue but it is not the only one.

**Deputy Joe Costello:** We will have a new strategy which the Minister of State will implement over the next five years and an extra pillar, rehabilitation, will be added to the four existing ones. How will we integrate the five pillars and will the Minister of State be able to monitor them to see that they operate effectively? Has the Minister of State included the prison system in the strategy?

**Deputy Catherine Byrne:** Is there a plan to introduce much needed psychological services to



[Deputy Catherine Byrne.]

operate at ground level with the local drugs task forces? The Minister of State mentioned something about this but it may apply only in rural areas.

**Deputy Pat Carey:** I will mix my replies with my wind-up speech. The national drugs strategy involves not only me, but all of us. I chair the interdepartmental committee on drugs which will meet again on 13 December. Participants come from Departments, State agencies, the community and the voluntary sector, the Garda and so on.

**Deputy Jimmy Deenihan:** I was referring to ministerial level.

**Deputy Pat Carey:** There is a Cabinet committee on social inclusion which meets as well and feeds into Government policy. I almost annoy people at this stage when I say inter-agency co-operation and collaboration is the only way forward. I do not want to see every partnership, community development project, family resource centre and drugs task force doing its own thing. That is of no value and is counter-productive.

Last week I was at a conferring ceremony in UCD for drug addiction counsellors, I was at one in Coolock the previous week and will attend another in Ballymun tonight. Trained addiction counsellors are being provided in some areas. Many come from the voluntary sector but they have a great deal of expertise and are very good.

I thank everyone for their contributions. This has been a worthwhile debate in which there have been many contributions. The next strategy will stretch as far as 2016 — it would be foolish to ignore the fact that we are dealing with a radically different Ireland — which is the centenary of the Easter Rising and of the 1916 proclamation. At the risk of cherry-picking from the proclamation my ambition is that we would by then be able to treat all the children of the nation equally by the goals we set and our achievements on their behalf.

Drug use changes every day. People are now engaging in polydrug use, alcohol being the common denominator. I am anxious that we have as far as possible a united strategy for alcohol and drug misuse. There is no point in doing this any other way. There has been a great deal of research in this area but more is needed. I was in Milwaukee during the summer and saw some of the research taking place there. Members have mentioned crack cocaine and crystal meth. We need to be ahead of the posse. The researchers are on top of strategies to deal with these drugs as are the Garda and others in the area who plan programmes. There is a good regime of counselling people who misuse cocaine.

The Irish Prison Service has contracted the Merchant's Quay Ireland group to provide counselling services in prisons and that is being rolled

out. In my view this will be extremely successful. There is a very good arrangement on prison links whereby a number of drugs task forces have workers dealing with how prisoners will be treated on release with regard to accommodation, education, training and so on. I am confident that a dramatic change of approach has occurred in the Irish Prison Service to the benefit of prisoners.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I hope the Minister of State will forgive me shaving a minute from his response time but he did receive three minutes extra for his opening statement so there may be some balance achieved.

## Ceisteanna — Questions.

### Priority Questions.

#### Arts Plan.

1. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will report on the status and future of the ACCESS programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31684/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** Government policy on the arts is set out in the programme for Government and will be elaborated further in my Department's statement of strategy for 2008-10, which is currently being developed. The objective is to encourage and support the strategic development of the arts in local communities, both geographic and communities of interest, for the disadvantaged and for minority groups. In this regard, my Department has taken a direct role on the provision of capital grant aid for the arts and cultural infrastructure throughout the country in recent years.

The arts and culture capital enhancement support scheme, ACCESS, is a key element in the Government's regional arts strategy and has greatly improved access to and participation in the arts for large numbers of people nationwide. The scheme has been widely acknowledged as a significant intervention in the provision of quality cultural spaces.

Facilities funded to date include integrated arts centres, theatres, galleries, studios, and creative and performance spaces. In this manner the Department provides the bulk of capital funding for building and refurbishing arts facilities around the country, mainly in the not for profit sector, while the Arts Council provides the ongoing revenue support for many of the facilities.

Under the first round of ACCESS, announced in 2001, funding of €43 million was provided to the promoters of 40 arts and culture projects. The majority of these projects were for the provision

of new arts centres and most are now open and operational.

The national development plan, NDP, 2007-13 provided €81 million to conclude the first round of ACCESS and to facilitate further rounds. In April 2007 a second round of ACCESS funding was announced and a total of €32 million was offered to the promoters of 67 projects nationwide. The primary focus of the second round of the scheme is the refurbishment and enhancement of existing arts and cultural facilities and it will run from 2007 to 2009. During 2008 my officials will be working closely with the projects which have been offered funding under the second round of ACCESS to enable early delivery of the projects.

I intend to announce a third round of ACCESS next year and am currently considering the timing of such an announcement.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Nobody can deny the capital funding that has been available to the arts in the past ten years and in the local authority of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown there are now two major theatres where there was none ten years ago. They are representative of the proliferation of facilities that has generated a need for further programmes if we are to get value for money from the ACCESS programme. There are hints of an emerging danger around the country because state of the art facilities, including theatres and multipurpose venues, have been built and do not have money for programming. There is no point in constructing a building without realising it must be managed, heated and maintained and that it needs programmes. It is most important that these buildings are well managed.

I spoke last month of the need for Arts Council funding for touring programmes and so on but today I want to focus the Minister's attention on the €40 million that is left in the NDP for funding facilities through the capital programme. That is a lot of money and we need to focus on where these facilities are to be located because representatives of a number of counties have expressed concern to me that every town in those counties has a facility and they are struggling to provide programming. We need to concentrate on growing audiences for these centres.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** As applies to sport, there is general agreement that when one invests in hardware such as facilities and bricks and mortar one must be careful to support the software side also, which includes the talent necessary to manage theatres and artistic facilities. I take the point that we must strike a balance between the capital provision of facilities and investment in the talent, skill and creativity necessary to make them a success, otherwise the capital investment could be wasted.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** There is a suggestion that the Arts Council will only fund facilities where the local authority provides matching funding. I think it unfair that facilities would have to draw down money from local authorities that, after all, do not have a statutory function in this regard. Is this the policy and what is the Minister's view on this?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I do not think such a condition exists as the Arts Council deals with current funding and ACCESS funding is capital funding that comes directly from the Department. As far as I know there is no requirement for local authorities to match Arts Council funding.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** I understand but I heard it suggested that may be the case in the future.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** We may have to examine that with regard to ACCESS but it is not envisaged in respect of current funding.

### Sports Funding.

2. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if, in view of the positive effects multiannual funding can have in long-term planning, he has considered providing multiannual funding to the Sports Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31805/07]

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** The funding of the Irish Sports Council, as with all Departments and State agencies, is a matter for consideration under the annual budget and Estimates process. In doing so, the Government must balance competing demands from every part of our economy and society. The question of whether multiannual funding should be provided for agencies such as the Irish Sports Council is primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Finance. My Department, like all other Departments, is provided with annual current expenditure budgets through the Estimates process.

The Government acknowledges the many social and health benefits that are derived from sporting participation and this is reflected in the levels of spending on sport. The budget for sport this year is over €295 million, compared to just €17 million ten years ago. Furthermore, the national development plan includes a commitment to provide €991 million for sport infrastructure during the period up to 2013.

The Irish Sports Council was established in 1999 as the statutory body responsible for the promotion and development of sport in Ireland. The council's mandate comes from the Irish Sports Council Act 1999, which gives it six key functions. It should encourage the promotion, development and co-ordination of competitive sport, develop strategies for increasing participation in recreational sport and co-ordinate their implementation by all Irish bodies involved in

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

promoting recreational sport and providing recreational sport facilities. It should facilitate good standards of conduct and fair play in both competitive and recreational sport, combat doping in sport, initiate and encourage research concerning competitive or recreational sport and facilitate research and disseminate information concerning competitive or recreational sport.

In 2000, the first full year of operation of the Irish Sports Council, its funding allocation was €13.2 million. This was increased to €19.6 million in 2001, €28.7 million in 2002, €28.3 million in 2003 and it rose to €40.9 million by 2006. The figure was over €54 million in 2007. The increase from 2000 to this year represents a very significant increase of more than 300%. The Government has provided funding of over €240 million to the Irish Sports Council since it was established. These are significant amounts of taxpayers' money in any context and the Government's commitment to sport is evidenced by these very substantial increases in funding.

I am pursuing funding for the council in 2008, along with all aspects of sport funding, as we work to conclude the 2008 Estimates process, which is underway.

**Deputy Mary Upton:** I welcome the decision to fund the annual team performance scheme for inter-county players and I welcome the statements from the Minister and the Gaelic Players Association, GPA, in this regard. I am pleased the matter has been resolved and that teams will compete in the new year with funding in place.

I thank the Minister for his reply in regard to funding for the Sports Council. During the debate on the national drugs strategy, which preceded Question Time, the role of sport in combatting drugs was raised, as was the importance of investment in this area. The Minister has outlined clearly the incremental increases and the overall increase, which is substantial, for the Sports Council.

However, the key issue for the council is that it is required to have a three-year strategy, which involves setting out its proposed expenditure over that period, as the national governing bodies are also required to do. It is difficult for any organisation to do this when there is not certainty as to the funding that will be available on an annual basis. The funding that will be provided in a three-year period is not known, therefore, but the council must put forward a three-year plan.

I appreciate what the Minister said about the annual budget, but perhaps he might discuss with the Minister for Finance whether there is a way that three-year funding programmes can be put in place.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I thank the Deputy for her comments on this morning's announcement regarding the agreement with the GPA. Capital funding is allocated on a multi-annual

basis because of the large number of capital projects under way throughout the State. The Deputy is correct that current funding is not provided on a multi-annual basis. I appreciate that every agency would like to know, year on year, what its income will be for the next three or four years. However, the budgetary framework means we must do battle on an annual basis through the Estimates process. I am conscious of the unsatisfactory nature of this from the point of view of many organisations, but that is the system in which we must operate.

**Deputy Mary Upton:** If funding were to be made available on a multi-annual basis, does the Minister agree we would get better value for money? For example, the Arts Council must plan one or more years in advance if it wishes to engage an opera singer. The same is probably true for the Sports Council if it wishes to engage a badminton coach, for instance. The lack of certainty as to future funding places organisations in a predicament in that they are unable to plan for significant current investments. The Sports Council receives no commitment for the funding available for a given three-year period but may be obliged to make decisions a year or two in advance of the availability of the money. If this system were changed, we would get better value for money.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I take the Deputy's point that certainty is preferable. However, it is sometimes difficult in the areas of arts and sports to tell the difference between capital and current expenditure. In the case of a once-off event such as the Ryder Cup, for example, the Department of Finance might go 40 rounds with my Department in its insistence that it is capital expenditure. However, it is effectively current expenditure in the sense that it is capital expenditure that will only be spent once. There is much argument about the definitions, particularly where there are many once-off events. I will take the Deputy's arguments into consideration.

### **Tourism Industry.**

3. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the potential loss of tourism opportunities as a result of the planned termination of the Dublin-Dubai flight by Aer Lingus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31685/07]

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Last year was a record year for Irish tourism with an all-time high of 7.7 million overseas visitors to the country and associated foreign revenue earnings of €4.7 billion. We are on track to surpass that performance this year, with the most recent figures published by the CSO showing an increase of more than 4% in the number of overseas visitors to Ireland in the first nine months of the year compared to the same period in 2006.



I understand, from media reports, that Aer Lingus has announced its intention to redeploy all its long-haul capacity to the United States, resulting in the suspension of the Dubai service from the end of March 2008. According to Aer Lingus, this decision is due to the significant demand for both existing and new United States destinations in the busy summer season. While the final tourism impact is uncertain at this stage, it is reasonable to assume that it may impact negatively on potential growth from new and developing markets such as the Gulf, India and China, while possibly impacting positively on the United States market. If there is a sustained higher load factor from the United States than from the Gulf, the net impact on tourism flows to Ireland may well be positive.

On the other hand, the introduction of direct services between Abu Dhabi and Dublin by Etihad Airways presents fresh opportunities to grow inbound tourism to the island of Ireland from long-haul markets. I understand, from previous statements made by the airline, that Etihad may shortly increase frequency on its Dublin service and, in 2008, add services to China to its network. The latter would be beneficial in terms of connecting flights for potential visitors to Ireland from the Chinese market.

Tourism Ireland has increased its marketing activity in the Gulf countries with the appointment of full-time representation in July 2007 and will now work to capitalise on the improved awareness of Ireland in the market.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Past success is no guarantee of future performance and we must always be on our guard. The Minister mentioned that there may be a benefit in Aer Lingus's decision in terms of further developing the United States market. However, putting all one's eggs in one basket is not a sensible approach. Moreover, that was never the intention. Aer Lingus deliberately set out to grow the United States market but also the Middle Eastern market. It is disappointing, particularly given Mr. Dermot Mannion's experience of the Middle East, that Aer Lingus should provide a flight whose scheduling was doomed from the beginning.

Depending on Etihad to enhance its services to Ireland is not the same as securing access to a major hub in the Middle East. Is there anything the Minister can do to encourage other airlines, such as Emirates, to fly into Ireland? That airline has a huge worldwide network that would be of tremendous benefit to our tourism industry. The company's marketing ability is enormous and would provide us with promotional opportunities on a worldwide scale.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and my Department constantly encourage airlines flying out of locations where we see tourism potential to provide services to

Ireland. Ultimately, however, such decisions are commercial and are made by the airlines themselves. We will continue to work hard to convince airlines to operate out of Ireland. I take on board the Deputy's useful suggestion regarding Emirates.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** I recognise that these are commercial decisions. However, this State is making a huge commercial decision in spending hundreds of millions of euro under the national development plan on international tourism. There must be some coherence between the money we are spending and, on the one hand, the markets in which it is spent and, on the other, the destinations available to us.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Aer Lingus seems to be focussing on the United States market for the foreseeable future. This suits us in some respects given our investment in that market from a tourism point of view.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** However, the growing market is Asia.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I take the Deputy's point that we should try to match investment with potential opportunities. However, private companies will ultimately make their own decisions.

#### Film Industry Development.

4. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his attention has been drawn to the now critical disadvantage suffered by the Irish film industry *vis-à-vis* other European countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31686/07]

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** 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, IFB. This agency is funded through my Department and is independent of the Department in its operations.

The task of attracting international production into Ireland is dependent on a number of elements, not all of which fall within the sphere of influence of my Department or that of the Irish Film Board. Decisions to site a film project in a particular territory involve complex funding, cultural, logistical and project-specific elements, all of which are crucial for a successful result. At present, the unfavourable exchange rate against the US dollar continues to affect the level of United States production in Ireland.

My Department's primary operational role in supporting the film sector relates to the administration of elements of the section 481 tax relief scheme. This scheme is kept under regular review in conjunction with the Irish Film Board, and any enhancements necessary to retain or regain competitiveness are addressed and brought to the



[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

attention of the Minister for Finance as appropriate. The scheme was amended and enhanced in the Finance Acts of 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005 and most recently in 2006. The Department of Finance, in conjunction with my Department, is currently examining a report prepared by Indecon International Economic Consultants on the case for further improvement in respect of the scheme. Indecon's terms of reference were to identify a structured and innovative way forward to develop and consolidate the Irish film industry, taking account of the serious international competition issues now apparent.

My aim is to support and encourage the Irish Film Board in its role of marketing Ireland as a film location. In 2006, the board opened an office in the heart of Hollywood in Los Angeles specifically to market Ireland as a film and television location. The role of that office is to facilitate inward production from the key United States market by building key relationships and providing a focal point for the Irish industry and talent in the United States. The industry in Ireland has never been stronger in terms of international recognition and commercial success. This is evidenced by both the critical and financial successes of films, including, for example, the *Palme d'Or* at Cannes in 2006 for "The Wind that Shakes the Barley"; the Oscar for the short film "Six Shooter"; the CICAÉ Art and Essai Cinema Prize at Cannes in 2007 for "Garage"; a number of awards at film festivals for "Once", including festivals in the USA, London and Moscow; and two Emmys for television series "The Tudors".

Our challenge now is to continue to build on those successes and we are committed to doing so.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** There is no point in the Minister telling us how good things are when the reality is the income from film is a tenth of what it was in 2003. We have spoken before about section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act, which is one element of what is wrong. As the Minister knows, the British have wiped our eye in that regard by copying our incentives and trumping them. That left us in a very difficult position. The very fact we have had an office in Los Angeles for over a year without even a sign or nibble at a chance to bring movies to Ireland is indicative of how serious is the matter.

There are more fundamental problems and the Minister cannot sit back and argue the Irish Film Board has to do it all. The Minister should have a hands-on approach and there is a need for some kind of direction. Our industry costs are way above everywhere else, we are uncompetitive and the only studio we have is half the required size. We have no computer-generated imaging facilities or film laboratory. With these types of serious systemic and structural problems, the industry will not grow. The Minister must show leadership and take the industry's problems seriously.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** There is fantastic potential in this area. I have no problem agreeing with the Deputy if she is saying we are only scratching the surface, as we can do much more. It is very large and competitive business. Section 481 is one aspect of our attractive features and there are issues to tackle with regard to Ardmore studios. Some of the matters of a technical nature raised by the Deputy must also be dealt with.

If the Deputy's message is that there is an enormous amount that we can do, I would agree. I am reviewing this area fairly urgently to see if we can ramp up efforts substantially. There is fantastic scope here.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** I accept that.

### Sport and Recreational Development.

5. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when it is proposed to complete the roll-out of the sports partnership network throughout the 33 local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31803/07]

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** An Agreed Programme for Government commits to the roll-out of the local sports partnership, LSP, programme on a nationwide basis to provide the development of sport at local level. The Irish Sports Council, ISC, is the statutory body responsible for the promotion and development of sport, including initiatives such as the local sports partnership network, through which sports initiatives at local level are delivered and co-ordinated. The local sports partnerships are charged with increasing participation at a local level, ensuring local resources are used to best effect and making sure the experiences of participants in sport are positive.

Following an independent review of the local sports partnerships by Fitzpatrick Associates in 2005, my predecessor gave approval to the Irish Sports Council to extend the LSP network from 2006 on a national basis. Accordingly, funding has been provided to the ISC to facilitate continued extension of the network. The LSPs have received more than €16 million in Government funding since they were first set up in 2001.

The Irish Sports Council has informed me it has now signed heads of agreement with all 33 LSP-designated sites and there are currently 22 sites fully operational. At present, eight sites are finalising recruitment arrangements and an additional three sites will advertise early in the new year. The Irish Sports Council expects all 33 LSPs will be fully operational during 2008.

The Irish Sports Council provides support and advice to the LSPs and is working to create productive relations with the local sports co-ordinators, including the creation of a network of co-ordinators. The Irish Sports Council has provided training to the LSPs and will continue to provide

regular information and training updates. It is also involved in the development of specific programmes, courses and resource materials for the LSPs.

**Deputy John O'Mahony:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I compliment all involved parties, including the Minister, in bringing the issue surrounding the grants schemes for Gaelic footballers to a conclusion. The ball was bouncing around for a long time and I am glad it has been sorted out. We will all have some work to do in the new year.

Now that problem has been solved, the Minister might help to solve this problem. I am glad to hear the 33 local authority areas will have the sports partnership network rolled out as I am conscious of the great work it does in widening the appeal of sport and increasing participation across all ages, ethnic groups and social classes.

With regard to funding, I gather the budget is minimum, with approximately 3% of a total amount spent on sport. Is there any plan to increase the funding for these sports partnerships? Many different groups would benefit. For example, at the age of 20, only 36% of women participate in sport compared to 65% of men. A recent survey indicated that 52% of older people would like in some way to get involved in activities. An activity park was recently opened in Trim in that regard. There is much potential and as our population ages, we would see significant health benefits.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** The straight answer is "yes." In the natural course of Estimate processes, the local sports partnerships will be receiving additional funding.

I thank the Deputy for his welcome of the agreement with the Gaelic footballers. I express my thanks to the Gaelic Players Association, the GAA, the Irish Sports Council and my own officials for putting in much hard work to reach agreement, which we announced just this morning. I thank the people involved for moving to a position where we could reach agreement, which was welcome.

The local sports partnerships actually form part of that agreement. One factor of the agreement I was particularly pleased with this morning was the indication that the players would work with the local sports partnerships in return for some support. They would be able to give back some kind of leadership to society through the sports partnerships. I thank them for this action in particular.

I am also commencing a review of the role of the women in sport in particular. There is much work to be done in that area and we will commence the work fairly shortly.

## Other Questions.

### National Aquatic Centre.

6. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the cost of the annual subsidy to the Aquatic Centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31502/07]

7. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the subsidy per swim undertaken during 2007 in the National Aquatic Centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31532/07]

22. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of swims provided in 2007 in the National Aquatic Centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31533/07]

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 6, 7 and 22 together.

Deputies will be aware the statutorily based National Sports Campus Development Authority has taken over the role and function of Campus and Stadium Ireland Development Limited since 1 January 2007 and that a fully-owned subsidiary of the authority, NSCDA (Operations) Limited, is now operating the National Aquatic Centre.

In order to provide commentary on the present trading and performance position it is necessary first to fill in the background. It will be recalled that the National Aquatic Centre was the first facility to be built as part of the sports campus at Abbotstown and opened in 2003. This was achieved on time and within budget. Shortly afterwards it successfully hosted the swimming events of the Special Olympics world summer games and the European Short Course Championships.

During 2005, CSID Ltd. initiated legal proceedings against Dublin Waterworld Limited, the private operators of the centre, because of the latter's failure to comply with its obligations under the lease. In November last, the Supreme Court confirmed an earlier order for possession of the centre in favour of CSID, and the facility was handed back to CSID on 1 December. Since then a primary objective has been to carry out a full "health check" on the centre and restore it to its original working standard. To this effect, to end of August last approximately €600,000 has been expended on remediation work, and that part of the work is now almost completed.

As the centre has reverted to the effective control of the authority by way of the above subsidiary company only within the last 12 months, a first full year's trading has yet to be completed. The issue of providing assistance for the operation of the National Aquatic Centre from a trading perspective, on an ongoing basis, is one that

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

is being kept under ongoing consideration by the authority as the first year's trading has proceeded. However, preliminary indications at this stage are that a subsidy of up to €1.8 million will be required to fund the operational costs of the centre in 2007. At end year the outturn will be reviewed by the authority in the context of results of the first full year's trading and I have requested the authority to endeavour to reach a policy objective of at least break even in operating costs at the centre. At present approval for new funding has been given by the authority for €1.2 million capital works only.

In overall terms, I am advised that there have been more than 532,000 visits to the NAC, that is, in terms of the categories of swimming access, swimming lessons and membership, since the centre reverted to the overall control of the authority. This is regarded as a satisfactory base from which it can continue to grow.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** I am dumbstruck by that information. I understand that is a very fine facility. It was always envisaged that it would be self-financing having had €70 million spent on it. We now find that in its first year of operation it will require a subsidy of almost €2 million. Is funding available from this year's Estimates to pay for it? How will the deficit be made up? Will a blank cheque be given to the organisation? Will it simply advise the Minister what its deficit is at the end of every year? Will it be linked to performance? Will it be linked to the number of swims it provides? Does the Minister agree the facility is costing money and is not performing as anticipated in part because it is a stand-alone facility whereas it was intended to be part of a major campus on which virtually no progress has been made over 11 years?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I am disappointed that the centre requires a subsidy. I am strongly of the view that it should reach break even at the very least and that the taxpayer should not be required to provide ongoing current subsidies to it. It is one thing to invest the capital, but it is another thing for the taxpayer to be drawn into day-to-day subsidies, which unfortunately we have been to the tune of €1.8 million, which represents the loss in running the centre in 2007. On the other hand in the calendar year there were 532,000 visits, which is a very high base on which to build. As I said in my reply it played a central role in the Special Olympics World Games and other events. There is much on which to build for the future. I do not want to tolerate an ongoing annual subsidy. I want to get to the situation where at the very least it breaks even and preferably is profitable. If we work on these numbers and keep the management pressure up, we can turn it around.

**Deputy Mary Upton:** I refer to the answer to my previous question in which the Minister said that €54 million was allocated to the Irish Sports Council in 2007 and the overall budget for sport in 2007 was €295 million. While we certainly welcome that investment, much of it was given to capital projects. We need to consider value for money. With the additional subsidy to the aquatic centre, when does the Minister expect it to reach break even? For how long will the taxpayer continue to support the centre? It is a considerable drain given that a commitment should be going into other sporting activities. One would have hoped it would have reached break even by now.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** This is the first year of an operational subsidy. I have made clear to the centre and do so again that the €1.8 million must be a once-off subsidy for this year. It must get itself to at least break even. I am totally opposed to getting involved in current day-to-day subsidies for operational facilities which should be able to break even at least. I want to examine the matter more closely to understand how I can bring that about.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** The only way to resolve the issue is by maximising usage and getting value for money for the investment that has been made. However, that will only happen by increasing the footfall on the site, which will only happen if the rest of the campus is constructed. Who is driving that project? I understand the post of chief executive officer was advertised last May. Surely even the slowest recruitment process would yield somebody to run the campus. Without a CEO nobody will drive the project which is why it is sitting there year in and year out with nothing happening. We now have the aquatic centre open and losing money. It will continue to lose money until something happens on the site, which is remote.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** It is being led by the National Sports Campus Development Authority.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Who is leading the authority?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** A procedure is ongoing to recruit a chief executive.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** It has been going on for eight months.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** It has been going on for longer than I would have liked. I hope it can be brought to a conclusion in the not too distant future. Arrangements have been made to have a professional management put in place. In the meantime a former civil servant is involved in it directly. As part of phase 1, next week the FAI headquarters will open there. We have asked the



board to review what should be contained in phase 2 and to make a proposal on the content.

### **Sports Capital Programme.**

8. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if consideration of applications under ACCESS and under the sports capital programme is in any way skewed in favour of designated gateways and hubs under the national spatial strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31489/07]

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Fully in accordance with Government policy, the national spatial strategy was taken into account, along with other relevant policies such as the Arts Council's partnership for the arts and the national development plan, when assessing applications under the recent round of the arts and culture capital enhancement support scheme, ACCESS. Of 67 successful projects 37 are in gateways or hubs designated under the national spatial strategy.

The sports capital programme is the primary means of providing Government funding to sport and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. In the assessment of applications under the programme account is taken of the various strategic considerations, including the population served by the facility in its immediate area and surrounding hinterland, distance to comparable facilities and contribution of the facility to increasing performance and participation.

While the location of projects in gateways or hubs under the national spatial strategy is not specifically one of the assessment criteria, nonetheless significant funding has been invested in sports facilities located in hubs and gateways as identified by the national spatial strategy. The Department is seeking to be more strategic in its approach to the future provision of Government funding for all sports facilities. Development of the Department's national sports facilities strategy is under way and the recommendations of the national spatial strategy are being considered as part of that strategy which should provide an improved policy base for the more effective use of public funds and will assist in the targeting, support and funding of areas of greatest need.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** It is a shame that the national spatial strategy has not been one of the criteria. I had understood all Government spending was supposed to be proofed against its coherence and consistency with the national spatial strategy. I believe that approximately €40 million remains to be spent on such sports facilities. It is essential to avoid a scattergun approach to spending. It is not that spending should not take place in other areas, but it should be of a lesser nature than that allocated to gateways. The argument for cultural centres is identical to the economic argu-

ments for gateways. A critical mass of population is needed for them to be sustainable. The smaller ones in the hubs or other towns in counties are far more likely to thrive because they can be linked to the gateway activities. There will be synergy leading to better value for money for all projects they put on.

Does the Minister agree we need a real focus on the gateways? If they are to mean anything and if we are to have a real spatial strategy this is one area in which we can make our mark and bring vibrancy to the arts in every county rather than dissipate it in a way that results in a proliferation of physical facilities and no vibrancy in the arts.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** As I said, 37 of the 67 successful projects are in gateway or hub towns.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** That happened by accident — there was no strategy.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** The designation of towns as hubs and gateways was one of the criteria taken into account. It would be wrong of me to say it was the only criterion.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** The Minister just read out a reply that said it was not one of the criteria.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Some of the other criteria related to the project and how it is considered in the artistic world. One cannot decide to subsidise an artistic project just because it is based in a town that happens to be a hub or a gateway.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** I must have misunderstood the Minister's initial reply. I understood him to say that gateway or hub status was not one of the criteria at all.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** The regional sports centres in Waterford, Letterkenny, Finglas, Tullamore and Galway — I could go through the entire list — were funded under this programme. Well over half of the projects are located in towns which have been designated as gateways or hubs.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** By accident.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** While that was one of the factors taken into account when decisions were made on funding, it is fair to say that it was not the only factor to be considered.

### **Decentralisation Programme.**

9. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of those staff choosing to decentralise to Killarney with his Department who are staff of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31560/07]



12. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of staff opting for decentralisation to Kilkenny with the Arts Council who are relocating from Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31564/07]

14. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of the staff opting for decentralisation under either phase one or two who are relocating from Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31515/07]

18. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of Arts Council staff who have requested transfer to Kilkenny under the decentralisation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31561/07]

32. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of non-Arts Council who staff have requested transfer to Kilkenny under the decentralisation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31562/07]

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the full extent to which his Department has implemented the Government's decentralisation programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31844/07]

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 9, 12, 14, 18, 32 and 94 together.

Under the Government's decentralisation programme, the entire Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism with the exception of the national archives, comprising approximately 130 posts, has been designated as one of the "early mover" Departments by the Decentralisation Implementation Group. Deputies will be aware that the Government recently reaffirmed its commitment to the full implementation of the decentralisation programme, as provided for in the programme for Government, including the movement of departmental headquarters. Significant progress has been made to that end. I expect the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism will have fully relocated to new premises in Killarney by the end of next year.

The original number of applications received under the central application facility for transfer to Killarney exceeded the numbers required for all of the grades, with the exception of the principal officer grade where there is a shortfall of five. Eight of the staff members originally serving in the Department have indicated they wish to relocate with the Department. The process of transferring staff from other Departments and offices who had applied through the CAF commenced in 2005 on a phased basis. Some 80 staff who have

opted to relocate are now in place in the Department. Some 70 staff, 24 of whom relocated from Dublin, have relocated to temporary accommodation at Fossa in Killarney in two phases. The first phase in September 2006 involved the transfer of 46 staff and the second phase in July of this year involved a further 24 staff. A further ten staff who are based in the Department's offices in Dublin are due to transfer. Seven workers who are still listed on the CAF to transfer to my Department are based in Dublin. The remaining staff in the Department who do not want to move to Killarney will transfer to other Departments in Dublin or Departments which are scheduled to decentralise to other locations. This ongoing process will proceed until all officers who are not transferring to Killarney are transferred to other organisations. Following a tendering process, the OPW selected PJ Hegarty and Sons to develop the permanent building for the Department's headquarters in Killarney, under a design-build fixed price contract. The OPW is managing the project for my Department. The construction of the new building in Killarney commenced in May of this year and the anticipated completion date is the last quarter of 2008.

Three agencies operating under the aegis of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism have also been selected to decentralise, including the Arts Council which is to move to Kilkenny. None of these bodies was designated as an early mover. All the prepared decentralisation plans which were submitted to the Decentralisation Implementation Group in 2004 are under review and are being revised. Some 49 staff are employed in the Arts Council. Forty applications have been received under the CAF from people who wish to transfer to Killarney. None of the staff of the Arts Council at the time of the announcement of the programme has opted to relocate. The employment contracts of seven staff members who have been recruited since the announcement contain a relocation condition. The Office of Public Works is assessing a number of options for suitable locations and properties in Kilkenny for the Arts Council. I have asked the chairs of the agencies under the remit of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, including the Arts Council, to renew the drive to make progress on their transfer under the decentralisation programme. Furthermore, the Secretary General of my Department, together with the CEOs of the three agencies, met the Decentralisation Implementation Group last week to discuss the progress that has been made so far and to discuss future plans for the relocation of the bodies.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Some renewed drive will be required if the staff of the Arts Council are to move to Kilkenny. Not one of them wants to go. I did not catch all the figures given by the Minister. How many of the 170 staff of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism — I do

not refer to the staff of other Departments who are prepared to work in the decentralised Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism — have opted to participate in the decentralisation programme?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism has 130 staff. Some 229 people who wish to work in the Department's decentralised offices are on the central application facility list.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** How many of them are from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Seventy officials have already moved to Killarney.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** How many of them moved from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Is the Deputy asking how many of the current Killarney staff came from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, as opposed to other Departments?

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Yes. Perhaps that information was in the Minister's answer.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Some of them came from other Departments and agencies. Some of them came from Cork. Some of them did not come directly from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** That is really my concern. The Department will end up with additional staff in Dublin that it does not need, at least for a period of time until they can be relocated, and that will have financial implications. These changes will also have implications for the running of the Department. Will the Department lose administrative staff during the relocation? Will it lose policy staff? At what level will these changes have an affect? Will all the principal officers and assistant secretaries be lost to the Department? Will the Secretary General continue to work in the Department? Who exactly is going and who is not? This move has huge potential to cause the Department to lose expertise and experience. I would like to tease out whether the Minister shares such concerns. Having the wrong staff is almost worse than having too many staff. Does the Minister agree there may be problems of co-ordination and cohesion if the Arts Council is in Kilkenny, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism is in Killarney, most of our cultural institutions are in Dublin and the tourism bodies are split between this jurisdiction and the North? The various strands of the Department's activity will be all over the place. I wonder if these plans are manageable, particularly if the Department ends up with policy staff who are entirely new to the business.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** It would be wrong of me to pretend that this is an easy process or that it is painless for the staff involved. The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism is finding it fairly traumatic to move such a large number of people and to implement the changes which are associated with that in terms of policy personnel. The Government is committed to its decentralisation policy — everybody is doing their best to make it a success — and it will settle down in due course. I appreciate that the transition period is not an easy one for many people. Those who have been based in Dublin for a long time are finding it particularly difficult. Over 80 staff in the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, which has been designated as one of the "early movers", are now based in Killarney. We intend to move all our staff down there, including our senior policy people.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Are all the senior policy people going?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** The Department will probably be the first Department to decentralise completely.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Are all of the top policy people, including the assistant secretaries and the principal officers, going to Killarney?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** That is the intention.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Have they chosen to go?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** That process, which involves the central applications facility, is ongoing.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** The Minister does not sound too hopeful.

**Deputy Mary Upton:** I am somewhat mesmerised by the subdivisions within the figures given by the Minister in respect of those who are to move out of Dublin. I am interested in the wider aspects of decentralisation. How many of those who are relocating to Killarney are moving from places other than Dublin? Will those people be included in the statistics which will be given as part of the overall monitoring of the decentralisation out of Dublin? I am curious about the transfer of public servants between offices outside Dublin, particularly if such relocations are to be counted as part of the decentralisation programme.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I acknowledge that the decentralisation process involves a strong element of relocation. Some of the numbers I have seen indicate that approximately two thirds of the staff who will move to Killarney will be relocating, as opposed to decentralising from Dublin. It depends on how the central appli-

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

cations facility finally makes decisions about different grades. It is fair to acknowledge the significant element of relocation which accounts for one half to two thirds in many cases. It is hoped this will level out as the central applications facility does its work and liaises with Departments and agencies

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** There will be additional costs incurred due to the loss of experienced staff and the loss of corporate memory and these will be over and above the obvious costs such as new buildings. Has a training budget been put aside as new staff may come from Departments which have nothing to do with arts, sport or tourism?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** My administrative budget includes whatever costs are involved in decentralisation or relocation, including necessary training.

**Deputy Seán Barrett:** Is it the intention to keep this Department together as a single unit? How does the Minister go to Killarney, to Kilkenny and to where ever the tourism section of his Department will be located? How can he possibly drive to Killarney one day and go from there to Kilkenny? Is there any intention of keeping a departmental presence in Dublin?

I wish to give an example of how the Department facilitates members of the public. I know of a club which was anxious to submit an application for a grant. The closing date for submission was near and a representative of the club took the train to Killarney to deliver the application form. He told me that there was quite a number of people who had also travelled to Killarney to reach the office. It does not make much sense that in order to submit an application form, people have to take the train to Killarney. Is there no way to organise a facility in the capital city to provide advice about grants or the lodgement of application forms or whatever may be required? I appreciate that, heretofore, people in County Kerry had to travel to Dublin but, by and large, a greater volume of people from the greater Dublin area would need the advice and assistance of the section of the Department dealing with sport.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** All Departments, the Civil Service and the public service, face significant challenges as a result of the decentralisation process. The central applications facility and the decentralisation unit in the Department of Finance are involved in the careful planning of decentralisation so that its voluntary nature is maintained and that it meets the needs of as many families as possible and with the least amount of disruption. I imagine it will be agreed with Departments as to whether individual Departments keep a facility in the capital. It

would be practical to have some facility available in Dublin city.

**Deputy Seán Barrett:** How will the Minister manage to deal with three different locations?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Decentralisation is not built around individual Ministers or ministries and it should not be. A strategic approach was adopted as to the locations. I do not see it as a matter for the individual careers of individual political people. The headquarters of a Department will be in a certain location and the Minister in charge of that Department will have to get themselves there.

**Deputy Seán Barrett:** In the case of the Minister it is not just a single Department because it is responsible for arts, sport and tourism. The three sections of the Department are not going to the one location. It is an impossible task. The Minister's senior officials will be in Kilkenny, in Killarney and in another location. Will they travel to meet the Minister or will he travel to meet them?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** If I lived in County Donegal, it would be the same problem.

**Deputy Seán Barrett:** The seat of government is in Dublin. Will the Minister outline to the House how he intends to ensure he is able to be present in the Departments for which he is responsible? Is it a case that he will never be there?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The mountain must come to Mohammed.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I have visited the Killarney offices and will do so on a regular basis.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Is it the intention that Ministers will base themselves in decentralised offices? Will the Minister maintain an office in Dublin and, if so, will it be staffed by his personal, constituency or communications adviser? Will departmental policy-makers be retained in Dublin?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** These are broader questions connected with the decentralisation programme generally and on which policy decisions will need to be taken.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** The Minister's Department is the front runner.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** It is not appropriate that I take those kind of policy decisions just for my Department at this time. We are one of the early movers and all our staff are committed to moving—



**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** At least half of them are not committed to moving.

**Deputy Seán Barrett:** Nobody is moving.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** We are committed to moving the Department.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** The Minister is committed.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** It is Government policy to move the Department.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** That is different from saying the staff are committed.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** That policy is being implemented. I believe it will be successful when it settles down. I believe it will be to the benefit of the entire nation and not just to the capital city; it will also work to the benefit of the regions. Individual arrangements about very senior civil servants and Ministers have yet to be finally worked out.

### Sports Funding.

10. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the plans he has to extend the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31519/07]

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Government support for the horse and greyhound racing industries is provided under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund, which was established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act 2001 for the purpose of further developing both racing industries. Under the provisions of the 2001 Act, the fund receives a guaranteed level of finance based on excise duty on off-course betting in the preceding year, subject to a minimum level based on the 2000 amount adjusted for inflation. Any shortfall in the amount generated by the excise duty is made up by direct Exchequer subvention.

In 2004, the Government agreed to increase the aggregate limit on the fund from €254 million to €550 million, to allow for continuation of the fund for a further four-year period to 2008. Since 2001, this fund has provided a guaranteed level of funding to Horse Racing Ireland, HRI, and Bord na gCon, which, by the end of 2007, will have amounted to over €375 million and almost €94 million respectively. In 2007, HRI has received more than €58 million and Bord na gCon has received over €14 million. Since the establishment of the fund, a major period of development of both the horse and greyhound racing industries has resulted.

This funding has allowed Ireland to develop into a world centre of excellence for horse racing. Horse Racing Ireland has undertaken a capital investment programme that has underpinned

growth in the sector. In 2004, HRI launched a €250 million capital development fund for Irish racecourses, which is being spent over five years, to continue the substantial upgrading of racecourses. HRI will provide up to €150 million in grant aid and the racecourses will finance the balance from their own resources.

The fund has also contributed significantly to the almost €90 million that has been invested in the improved facilities now available at greyhound tracks around Ireland. The allocation of €70 million under the new national development plan for capital investment for the horse and greyhound racing industries will assist long-term planning, which will result in the further development of a network of modern well-managed facilities that will continue to be attractive to the public.

To date the fund has not only helped towards providing some top class racing venues and facilities, but it has also underpinned significant employment in both industries. The prize money it has facilitated has been an important boost for both horse and greyhound breeding, which are significant net contributors to the economy and have an important role to play in generating employment, particularly in the tourism and agri-economy sectors, making it a significant regional employer and an important contributor to rural communities.

The current round of the fund is due to expire at the end of 2008. A review of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund will be undertaken in the coming year and any extension of the fund will require the approval of the Government and the Oireachtas.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** I thank the Minister, who has partially answered my question. When the funding arrangement runs out next year, would an extension to either the date or the funding cap level be effected by regulation or would it require primary legislation?

My second question pertains to the ending of the stallion regime, which I understand will expire in August. I am aware its abolition was due to pressure from the EU and from the Irish trade union movement. It is easy to dismiss this issue as being unimportant because horse breeding is considered to be the preserve of the very rich, although I am unsure whether this is the case. However, this industry is extremely valuable to Ireland and, over the years, we have developed a tremendous reputation in this regard. Certainly, Ireland is the leading horse breeder in Europe. Other countries against which we compete, such as Australia and the United States in Kentucky, have extremely generous incentive schemes. In that context, is the Minister open to replacing the stallion scheme with a measure to ensure that we will maintain our position and status in the world?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The stallion scheme is a matter for the Ministers for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Finance and is not a matter for the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Perhaps the Ceann Comhairle was not listening to the question. I asked whether the Minister was open to other kinds of incentives and aids. They do not have to be tax incentives. I accept the tax incentive has gone.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I assure the Deputy that the breeding issue is a matter for the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and she is discussing breeding.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** However, tourism is also involved in this case.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Minister may reply if he wishes.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** As I noted in my reply on the current round of the fund, this statutory fund has been of enormous benefit to both industries. The fact that it is on a statutory basis and is ring-fenced in that fashion has made it enormously successful. In the normal course of events, the current round of the fund is due to expire in 2008. A review of that fund will now be undertaken in the course of the year. It is well known that any extension of the fund will require the approval of the House.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Will it require legislation?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** Yes.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** It will require primary legislation. Has the Minister a view on the tourism potential of the horse racing industry?

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** What is the Deputy's question?

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** I refer to the need to ensure that Ireland maintains its position and the reputation it has built up over many years and on which much money was spent.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I refer to the figures I provided regarding the hundreds of millions of euro that are associated with the industry, as well as the employment levels. For example, 16,500 people are employed in the horse industry, as well as almost 11,000 people on the dog racing side. In addition, between 80,000 to 90,000 tourist visits are involved. Consequently, it is clear that the scheme has been operating highly successfully. However, this does not detract from the Government's requirement to review it next year and to bring forward any necessary legislation before the Oireachtas in due course.

**Deputy Seán Barrett:** I concur with my colleague, Deputy Olivia Mitchell. This is of tremendous importance to the entire industry and those involved in establishing this scheme must be congratulated because it has done a power of good for the image of Irish racing and the associated industry. Does the Minister agree there is much misinformed comment regarding rich people receiving money? This measure protects employment in areas where it would not exist otherwise. I refer to rural areas in particular. This industry is highly mobile and the fear is always that unless one can retain one's stallions in Ireland, the mares will not be brought into the country. Consequently, this industry could be destroyed overnight. As both the racing industry and the breeding industry are important, I urge the Minister to ensure the renewal of this scheme. As Deputy Mitchell has suggested, other schemes should be considered to ensure that our breeding industry is not affected in any way.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** I share the view that this is a major industry, which in many ways is unique to Ireland because of our association with the horse and greyhound industries. Whatever is done, care should be taken to ensure that its success will be enhanced and one should not do anything that would take from it. It has been an enormously successful story for Ireland and is one on which we should build. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the Government's obligation to review constantly legislation, which we also must do in this case.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I should have called Deputy Upton earlier. I apologise.

**Deputy Mary Upton:** I thank the Ceann Comhairle. While I appreciate the value and importance of the horse breeding and horse racing industry, lest the greyhounds feel somewhat neglected on this issue—

**Deputy Seán Barrett:** I agree with Deputy Upton.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** They are highly sensitive.

**Deputy Mary Upton:** — the Minister should comment on the greyhound industry. A major social agenda has developed around greyhound racing, which is also highly important. There are some excellent greyhound tracks in Dublin and around the country in locations such as Cork and Galway. I have visited each of the aforementioned tracks fairly recently. It is important to recognise that, to a great extent, this is a developing industry and resources should also be committed to it.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** As I noted, more than 11,000 people are employed either directly or indirectly in the greyhound sector, which is

highly significant. The Deputy is correct to suggest that apart from its intrinsic value, greyhound racing has become a major tourism and social attraction nationwide. It is a good way for everyone to enjoy themselves, perhaps as an alternative to the traditional couple of hours in the pub.

### **National Archives.**

11. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the status of the National Archives plans to invest in facilities to house them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31508/07]

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** The redevelopment of the National Archives headquarters forms part of the national development plan and €20 million in seed capital has been earmarked for the project. The Office of Public Works, OPW, has carried out significant preliminary work on the accommodation brief and the likely cost of providing the National Archives with new storage and other accommodation at its redeveloped Bishop Street headquarters.

It is now necessary to conduct an economic cost assessment on the project. When this assessment has been completed, the project will then be discussed with the OPW, the Department of Finance and the National Development Finance Agency as the likely procurement process will be on a public private partnership basis.

In recent years, significant work has been completed at the Bishop Street premises to enhance and expand the archives' footprint there. The Land Commission is co-located in the building with the archives and as the commission staff and files are being relocated in the context of decentralisation, more space is being made available to the archives. In addition, alternative propositions to Bishop Street have been evaluated, such as the former Coláiste Mhuire site. This was found to be unsuitable due to the storage requirements of the archives. The redevelopment of the Bishop Street premises is one of a number of large cultural and sports projects being advanced by the Department and the OPW under the national development plan and due priority is now being accorded to it.

The 1977 release of public records will be on schedule.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** The Minister could make a name for himself that would be long-remembered by ending the national scandal whereby the National Archives are closeted in a biscuit factory. Most of them are completely inaccessible, are piled on pallets and could be rotting away, for all Members know. This is an absolute scandal. The Minister has provided a flavour of its history. The archives moved to their current site on a temporary basis 20 years ago. It is time for someone to take this issue by the scruff of its neck and make a decision on what will happen.

While money is available in the national development plan, I foresee it running to its conclusion without anything happening.

Ireland needs a purpose-built building for its National Archives as the existing facility is a disgrace. This country prides itself on its interest in the past and in its culture, history and heritage. Although Irish people go around the world talking about it, we cannot look after it at home. The Minister must agree this constitutes a real disgrace. The Land Commission, which occupies part of the building, is in possession of extremely valuable material that is completely inaccessible. It must also be relocated from its current site. Were a fire to break out there, Ireland could forget about having any kind of National Archives. Consequently, there is real urgency in this regard. Apart from the fire issue, we owe it to ourselves and to our past to do something. If the Minister took this issue by the scruff of the neck and made decisions about it he would be very well thought of. If he were to do this, I certainly would be more than willing to say very nice things about him both nationally and in the constituency.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I am sure Deputy Mitchell would do that anyway.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** The redevelopment of the headquarters of the National Archives forms part of the national development plan. The sum of €20 million in seed capital has been allocated for this project. Given that Deputy Mitchell has specifically raised this issue today, I will ask the Secretary General and his staff to give me a special report on it.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** It is one thing having the money and the intention to do something, but there does not appear to be any direction.

*Question No. 12 answered with Question No. 9.*

### **Arts Funding.**

13. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the support he has given or proposes to give to other towns and cities here that wish to hold an event similar to the culture night held in Dublin in September 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31449/07]

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** On 14 September last, which was designated as culture night, key artistic and cultural venues in Dublin City, including the national cultural institutions, extended their opening hours until late in the evening. This provided the public with increased access to the various collections, workshops and other events hosted by the institutions.

My Department provided €15,000 and €35,000 in 2006 and 2007 respectively to Temple Bar Cultural Trust, the co-ordinators of the Dublin event,



[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

for costs associated with that event. Arising from a request by my Department, the proposal by Temple Bar Cultural Trust for the 2007 funding included an undertaking to investigate the possible extension of the culture night model to areas outside Dublin.

An important element to the success of the culture night concept is the concentration of cultural organisations. In areas where there is a vibrant hub of cultural facilities and a broad cultural offering, the event attracts a much greater level of public participation. I understand that preliminary discussions have taken place between Temple Bar Cultural Trust and local authorities in Cork, Galway and Limerick. A meeting has also taken place between the trust and representatives from the cultural community in Belfast with a view to launching a North-South culture night co-operation project for 2009.

Culture night in Dublin promotes access to and participation in the cultural life of the city. The event attracted more than 50,000 people in 2007, 64% of whom visited cultural organisations for the first time. Another major success was the large number of children, young people and active retired who participated in the event. If the culture night initiative were adopted by other cities or towns, it could support existing arts and cultural development strategies.

A key factor in the establishment of culture night in Dublin was the partnering of the cultural community with the business community, and the active participation of the tourism and transportation bodies. The extension of culture night to other cities and towns would require a similar commitment to the event from these communities and bodies.

The decision to host a culture night event is, ultimately, a matter for individual local authorities. To date, my Department has not received proposals from any organisation outside Dublin regarding such events. However, I can assure the Deputy that any proposals submitted on this matter will be considered.

**Deputy Mary Upton:** The idea of a culture night is an excellent one. I understand it was very well attended and was a great boost for many museums and cultural institutions. In my constituency, areas like the Liberties and Kilmainham have a particular claim to cultural institutions and museums and these were proactive and pleased with this development. I would like to see the idea being extended to larger towns and cities around the country.

The Minister stated his Department has not received any proposals from the local authorities in these areas. Perhaps the Department should take the initiative on this matter and promote and encourage them as they may not be aware there is a process in which they can engage. Clearly the benefits are enormous. It is also important from the point of view of individuals who cannot get

to these institutions during the day. The fact that it is free is a major enticement and would engage people and get them more involved on a longer term basis.

**Deputy Séamus Brennan:** The Deputy is correct. The Department should draw the matter to the attention of local authorities. I will arrange to do this as a matter of urgency.

*Written Answers follow Adjournment Debate.*

### Adjournment Debate Matters.

**An Ceann 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 James Bannon — the need to set up a cancer care centre of excellence unit in Longford-Westmeath General Hospital; (2) Deputy Pat Breen — the reason an extension to a school (details supplied) in County Clare has not been progressed, if the Minister will update him on the current situation, as the school was originally built for 175 pupils and now 300 pupils are being forced to operate in substandard pre-fabricated accommodation; (3) Deputy Joan Burton — the delay in opening the special unit for children with special needs in a school in Castleknock, Dublin 15; (4) Deputy Jack Wall — the need to fill vacancies for occupational therapists in the Kildare and west Wicklow area; and (5) Deputy Michael D. Higgins — the need to clarify the circumstances in which civilian aircraft, on lease to the CIA, are not being searched at Shannon Airport.

The matters raised by Deputies Bannon, Wall, Burton and Michael D. Higgins have been selected for discussion.

### Adjournment Debate.

#### Hospital Services.

**Deputy James Bannon:** I wish the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, was in the House. I hope she is not still in the departure lounge.

**Deputy Olivia Mitchell:** Shell-shocked.

**Deputy James Bannon:** A recent international study by the OECD showed that Ireland has one of the highest breast cancer death rates in the developed world and a 6% higher rate of deaths from prostate cancer than the OECD average. This is proof positive that we are at grave risk under the current health regime. Another report by the National Cancer Registry highlights the fact that women suffering from cancer in the midlands have a 30% higher chance of dying from the disease than those living in Dublin.

What has the Minister for Health and Children and the HSE decided to do in reply to these findings? Following the closure of the cancer unit in Tullamore Hospital, the cancer care services at Longford-Westmeath General Hospital were subsequently shut down, leaving 600 women without care. This makes no sense. The midlands has continually been overlooked in terms of health provision but what we are talking about here is a life and death situation. Leaving the midlands without breast cancer units is madness and, in fact, is a gross negligence of care to cancer patients. Setting up eight centres of excellence, none of which is in the midlands, condemns hundreds of cancer patients to hours of unnecessary travel, in effect, penalising them for being ill rather than easing their burden.

With the closure of the Mullingar facilities, the midlands does not have access to the 20 centres for multidisciplinary team meetings either, which according to the HSE are being set up in all but two of the 22 hospitals that are currently providing breast care services. Those two exceptions are both in the midlands, namely, the hospitals in Mullingar and Portlaoise and the people are paying the price. This is not acceptable by any standards. Something must be done for cancer patients in the midlands. I propose that the Minister reconsider cancer care in the midlands and set up a centre of excellence in the Longford-Westmeath General Hospital to cover all of the midland counties — Longford, Westmeath, Roscommon, Cavan, Laois, Offaly and south Leitrim — as provision of cancer care centres in Dublin or Galway is an insult to the people living in these counties and accessing hospitals in these cities is unrealistic for very ill people who find travelling difficult.

The Government is yet again failing to operate any form of joined-up thinking. Bringing the cancer services under eight centres of excellence based in Dublin and other major cities is tantamount to driving services back into areas that are already looking to decentralisation to ease the stress on infrastructural and service provision, in other words clogging up the very areas that decentralisation was meant to free up. While many civil servants and other personnel are vacating the cities, the demand for hospital places fills the gaps, even to the point that hotel rooms are being taken up by those awaiting hospital procedures. We witnessed this recently. The Mater Hospital and St. Vincent's Hospital are not set up to cope with cancer patients from the midlands and again the patients will pay the price. Poor quality train and bus services from the midlands put extra pressure on those who are extremely ill and the mini-bus ambulance, for those who get a place on it, does not have the siren of a standard ambulance so cancer victims are forced to sit in traffic jams for up to three hours, adding to their distress.

The provision for taxi services for patients is not satisfactory and must be updated and

extended. A young patient in my area is still waiting to be compensated for the cost of taxi services to St. James's Hospital and St. Luke's Hospital for treatment since 2003. This is a shocking way to treat cancer patients and cannot be excused by any protests of ignorance on the matter. This is a regular occurrence and until the cancer service that the people of the midlands have a right to expect is put in place, such shameful neglect of the ill and vulnerable will continue.

I support centres of excellence but I cannot understand why the Government has neglected the midlands. Parts of my constituency are over 100 km from the centres of excellence. When the Government proposed decentralisation in the budget four years ago, the objective was to move people out of the cities. It has not happened yet, but it should happen in the health sector as well as other sectors. It is important that a centre of excellence is established in the midlands to accommodate people living in the region instead of requiring seriously ill people to drive long distances for treatment. This is a good idea which should be adopted by the Government.

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Brendan Smith):** I welcome the opportunity to set out the current position with the reorganisation of cancer services, with particular reference to the midland region. Recent events, particularly with regard to cancer services in the midland region, underscore the absolute need for the HSE national cancer control programme to be implemented without delay. Let us all agree that the development of quality assured cancer control services, as set out in the national strategy for cancer control, is the best way of ensuring that the risk of such events is minimised in the future.

The HSE has appointed Professor Tom Keane as national cancer control director to lead and manage the establishment of the national cancer control programme. The decisions of the HSE on four managed cancer control networks and eight cancer centres will be implemented on a managed and phased basis. The designation of centres aims to ensure that patients receive the highest quality care while at the same time ensuring local access to services, where appropriate. Patients enjoy a 20% improvement in survival if they are treated in specialist centres which provide multidisciplinary care. Where diagnosis and treatment planning is directed and managed by multidisciplinary teams based at the cancer centres, much of the treatment, other than surgery, can be delivered in local hospitals.

The HSE has designated St. James's Hospital and St. Vincent's hospital as the two cancer centres in the managed cancer control network for the HSE Dublin mid-Leinster region, which includes Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath. University College Hospital Galway and Limerick Regional Hospital are the two cancer centres for the western region, which includes

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

Leitrim and Roscommon. Patients in County Cavan will be served by the two designated cancer centres in the Dublin north-east region, Beaumont Hospital and the Mater hospital. The HSE has confirmed that services will not be transferred until appropriate capacity has been developed in the receiving centres.

Arising from the designation of eight cancer centres nationally and to comply with the national quality assurance standards for symptomatic breast disease services, the HSE announced earlier this month that within the coming weeks, breast cancer services at the Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar, will be transferred to the Mater hospital in Dublin. It should be noted that only 19 breast cancer procedures were carried out in 2006 in the Midland Regional Hospital in Mullingar. The standards require each specialist breast cancer centre to manage a minimum number of 150 new breast cancer cases per year.

The Government is committed to making the full range of cancer services available and accessible to cancer patients throughout Ireland, including in the midland region, in accordance with best international standards.

#### Health Service Staff.

**Deputy Jack Wall:** We have been discussing putting cancer programmes in place. Unfortunately, in Kildare and west Wicklow it will be necessary to put an occupational therapy programme in place, if one takes account of the letter I received from the HSE. It states:

I am writing in response to your letter to our general Manager, Mr. Billy Quinn. As you are aware the Senior Occupational Therapist assigned to the District Care Unit in the Athy area, has been on maternity leave as of 14 9.07 and is not due to return until 6.5.08.

Under normal circumstances we would have received approval to fill her position with a temporary Occupational Therapist. Unfortunately due to the overspend by the HSE, a staff moratorium was put in place as of September 4th. We were told at that time we were not allowed to fill any previously approved new posts or replace any vacant/maternity leave posts.

On October 5th we were informed that we could make individual representations to replace vacant posts through a new derogation process. We immediately did this for the above post, and for two more upcoming maternity leave posts covering the Celbridge, Maynooth and Leixlip areas. After much follow-up by us about these posts we have been told that only one post, covering the Celbridge area, has been approved for replacement.

As Managers of the Occupational Therapy Services for Kildare/ W. Wicklow, we are acutely aware of the devastating effect this is having on clients referred to our services and the huge

stress that is being placed on our understaffed Therapists.

With our present inadequate staffing levels, we simply are unable to provide a service where posts have been made vacant. Also, due to the staffing crisis placed on our service through the moratorium, our Union has informed our Therapists that they are not to take on the roles and responsibilities of positions affected by the HSE actions.

We sincerely hope this staff moratorium can be removed as soon as possible so that we can provide a fair and equitable service to all our clients.

This letter is from the occupational therapist manager. The basic issue is that there are four areas in Kildare. The first, second and third areas each made an application for a therapist, but the applications were turned down. The HSE decided to provide an occupational therapist for the fourth area, the last to make an application.

We have discussed and debated the HSE for a number of weeks but still we see occurrences such as this. Everybody agrees that maternity leave is essential and must be granted. However, there must also be a built-in service available for those in need of it. I sent my letter because a man suffered a major tumour on his brain and needed immediate occupational therapy. It was not forthcoming and will not be forthcoming because a therapist will not be available in Athy until August 2008. The HSE spent more than €20,000 on an agency to determine if top staff in the HSE should get bonuses. In Kildare, however, there is no service for the basic needs of the community. Children and senior adults need this service but it is not available.

One can see the frustration, annoyance and torment of the staff reflected in the letter, which is dated 19 November last. One seldom gets such a reply, an honest endeavour to have the matter raised in public so something can be done about the scheme. There are three positions and only one is filled. It is impossible for people in the Kildare and west Wicklow area to get occupational therapy until next August.

I plead with the Minister. Last night, I said there must be responsibility for resolving such problems. We see them every day. Every Deputy in the House, from the Taoiseach down, encounters this type of problem. I can honestly say I have never been as angry about anything as I am about this situation. The staff are crying out for assistance in trying to secure extra staff for the service. The problem is affecting the existing staff, with attempts being made to give them extra workloads. I ask the Minister to get the HSE to reconsider this matter. People in my community are suffering because of it.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** I thank Deputy Wall for raising this issue and for giving me the opportunity to outline the current situation with regard



to occupational therapy in the Kildare and west Wicklow area. There are close to 130,000 people employed in the delivery of our public health and personal social services, the vast majority of whom provide direct service to patients and clients. Staff costs make up 70% of the HSE's overall budget and must be carefully managed if the HSE is to live within its budget.

As the Deputy will be aware, a temporary recruitment pause has been put in place as part of the HSE's financial break-even plan for 2007.

In any instance where a critical or essential vacancy arises it may be filled through redeployment of existing staff by the relevant line manager or reassignment of responsibilities based on assessment of priority need. Notwithstanding this, it has been recognised that during the period of this temporary recruitment pause, there are some circumstances where appointment of staff may be necessary in frontline services. Accordingly, the HSE has put a process in place to evaluate, monitor and approve requests for derogation from the general recruitment pause. A small group has been established which meets regularly to consider such applications. Of the applications received to date, derogations to the value of 520.8 whole-time equivalents have been approved throughout the entire HSE where posts have been identified as critical to service delivery.

Demand for occupational therapy in the health services has been significant, hence the substantial investment which has been provided over the last number of years. The number of occupational therapists, OTs, employed in the public health service has grown from 287 whole-time equivalents in 1997 to 1,102 in September of this year. This is an increase of 725 whole-time equivalents, which represents growth of almost 253%. The Government has also committed to further investment in disability services via the multi-annual investment plan, and in primary care services, and this will result in a further increase in the resources available for occupational therapy.

A particular priority for the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education and Science in recent years has been to increase the supply of therapy graduates, including OTs. New courses in occupational therapy were established in three universities, UCC, NUIG and UL, with an initial intake of 25 places on each of the three courses. The UL course is at Master's level and the first cohort graduated in 2005. The first cohorts from the bachelor's degree programmes in UCC and NUIG are graduating this year. The number of training places for OTs has increased by 86, from 29 in 1997 to 115 in 2007. This represents an increase of almost 297% over the past ten years.

The House will agree that these changes clearly demonstrate the commitment of my colleague, Deputy Mary Harney, the Minister for Health and Children, the Government and the HSE to

ensuring focus on patient care and the recruitment of frontline personnel.

On the matter raised by Deputy Wall concerning the provision of occupational therapy in the Kildare-west Wicklow area, the HSE has advised that the current complement for OTs in the area is 21.5 whole-time equivalents. Thirteen of these posts are currently filled and 8.5 posts are vacant. The Department has been advised by the HSE that of the vacant posts, two posts in primary care were advertised in June of this year and 2.5 posts in the area of older persons — one in the community, one in Baltinglass Hospital, and 0.5 posts as hospital liaison — were advertised in August 2007 locally and through the international recruitment programme. One OT is due to commence work in the near future, so 1.5 posts remain vacant. Two OTs are on maternity leave and the HSE is attempting to fill these vacancies on a temporary basis. One post in palliative care has yet to be advertised. A job description is being discussed and prepared in consultation with the recently appointed palliative care consultant and palliative care team. One post in the area of disability has yet to be advertised.

Working within the parameters of the current recruitment pause, the HSE has advised that it is committed to filling these posts as soon as possible. I will convey to the HSE the concerns outlined by Deputy Wall this evening.

**Deputy Jack Wall:** The Minister of State said that two OTs are on maternity leave and the HSE is attempting to fill these vacancies. That is not true.

### Special Educational Needs.

**Deputy Joan Burton:** A new specialist unit for children with autism has been lying idle for a number of months, almost a year, in the Castleknock Educate Together school in Dublin 15. Similarly to many other parts of Ireland, Dublin 15 — Castleknock, Blanchardstown, Mulhuddart and Clonsilla — has a significant number of children with autism. When the Department of Education and Science decided, with the agreement of the Castleknock Educate Together school, to include a special unit for the education of children with autism, there was general delight. The special facility has now been built as part of the new permanent school which was opened earlier this month amidst celebration by the Minister for Education and Science and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, for whom it was the third official opening in a year. It has a special purpose-built unit with spaces for two classes of six children, a playground, shower facilities and special rooms for therapists.

It seems extraordinary that in the context of the current crisis with respect to the number of children needing autism services, this wonderful resource could now be left lying idle. The school community at Castleknock Educate Together, the

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

teachers, patrons and parents, are all anxious to see this facility up and running. There are many children in the area who would benefit hugely from these services and who are currently facing two two-hour commutes per day to very distant services all over Dublin and, in some cases, in County Meath. Like other Deputies, I met many families affected by autism during the recent election campaign. The demand for the service is enormous.

It appears that disputes between the Department of Education and Science and the HSE over financial contributions towards the staffing of the centre are at the heart of the failure to open this facility. I am delighted that the Minister of State with responsibility for children is here. Is it true that Beechpark Special Schools, which provides services for children with autism, is ready and willing to take over responsibility for specialist service provision for this unit, including the selection of children and the provision of ancillary specialist help such as therapists? Beechpark is under the control of the HSE. Can the Department of Education and Science discuss this with the HSE and sort it out, or are we back to the HSE recruitment embargo yet again?

The Department of Education and Science has indicated several times that it is ready to open the unit and would like to see it open, but the key question is whether the Minister is prepared to resource the unit appropriately. The bulk of the money for the unit has already been spent on building this lovely facility. It is a pity to see it lying idle, particularly when there is such need. Can the Minister of State say whether the negotiations on resourcing and opening the school have been concluded? Can he tell us definitively when the unit will open? Castleknock Educate Together waited seven years for a permanent building. The board and the school community positively sought and welcomed this facility.

The idea behind the special unit is that children with autism can get the special attention and services they require while being fully integrated into the national school. This is a positive development in Irish education. However, it is unclear what the Department proposes for these units and what their policy is towards the educational philosophy of these units. The Department has so far issued no detailed guidelines, provided no additional resources and offered no special training for the primary teachers in the national school who want to work in the unit. It is difficult to envisage how the Minister expects an ordinary primary school to open up a specialist unit without some additional resources. We should bear in mind that the Castleknock Educate Together school has many classes in which there are more than 30 children. The school has been in temporary accommodation for seven years. Can the Minister specify what the Department proposes to do and when this facility will be opened?

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** I thank Deputy Burton for raising this issue. I will be replying on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Mary Hanafin.

The House will be aware of the commitment to ensuring that all children, including those with autism, receive an education appropriate to their needs. I therefore welcome the opportunity to discuss the opening of the special classes for autism in Castleknock Educate Together School in Dublin 15.

As the Deputy will be aware, the preferred approach of the Department of Education and Science is that children with autism receive the appropriate education through the primary and post-primary school network. I am pleased to report that in the past year alone more than 75 autism-specific classes were sanctioned by the National Council for Special Education, NCSE, to cater for pupils with autism, bringing the total now sanctioned to more than 275. A specific function of the NCSE, through its network of local special educational needs organisers, SENOs, is to identify appropriate educational placement for all children with special educational needs. I can confirm that the SENO with responsibility for the school in question has approved staffing for one special class for autism and is considering approval of a second class in the school to meet demand. The NCSE continues to establish additional autism classes where the need arises in both special and mainstream primary and post-primary schools.

The Deputy may be aware that the recently completed building project in Castleknock Educate Together school incorporates accommodation for the autism unit. Additional supports available from the Department for special classes for pupils with autism include start-up and enhanced capitation grants, and the school authorities in question have been advised accordingly. In addition, extra training support for staff engaged in education provision for children with autism can be accessed through the special education support service. This service will, as appropriate, consolidate, co-ordinate, develop and deliver a range of professional development initiatives and support structures to the relevant staff.

However, I understand the delay in the opening of the autism classes is associated with concerns the school authorities have surrounding the provision of therapeutic and clinical support for the autism unit which, as the Deputy will be aware, falls within the remit of the HSE. Officials in the Department have raised the concerns of the school with the Health Service Executive and will continue to liaise with the school management authorities in this regard.

The Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Hanafin, shares Deputy Burton's desire to see this purpose built facility for children with autism in Castleknock Educate Together school utilised to full potential and opened without

further delay. I thank Deputy Burton for raising the issue. I will bring her comments directly to the attention of the Minister.

### Human Rights Issues.

**Deputy Michael D. Higgins:** I thank the Ceann Comhairle for the opportunity of raising this urgent matter. It had been our understanding that with the change of Government would come an interest in implementing the capacity of the Government through, for example, the civil aviation Acts of 1978 or 1987, to achieve inspections of planes that had a record of participation in extraordinary rendition.

I raise this because of some recent events in Shannon Airport. A complaint was made to the Garda Síochána by Mr. Edward Horgan and that statement, which was recorded on 30 October 2007, has drawn the following reply of 1 November:

Dear Mr. Horgan,

I refer to the Statement you made at Shannon Garda Station on October 30th, 2007 to Garda Edward Henderson.

I wish to inform you that the Gardaí will not be taking any action on the information contained in your Statement.

Mr. Horgan was referring to the arrival in Shannon of Gulfstream VI aircraft registration No. N475LC. This aircraft, along with another, has the highest record of participation in extraordinary rendition flights, as established without doubt by the European Parliament and other European agencies. The other aircraft is No. N478GS. Between the two, they made 76 rendition flights. Anybody who has seen the conditions that prevail at Guantanamo Bay at present will know the consequences or end point of extraordinary and illegal rendition.

I do not have time to say more than this. I believe the members of Government and ourselves are opposed to extraordinary rendition, as are the Irish public. However, the Irish Human Rights Commission and several other bodies are totally dissatisfied that while we have the capacity to search aircraft under the legislation I mentioned, we resolutely refuse to do so. This is not to give sufficient compliance with the United Nations Convention Against Torture. Every legal opinion offered on the anti-torture convention suggests that compliance requires being able to say that you are certain you have not participated, even indirectly.

This plane arrived in Shannon. In plenty of time Mr. Horgan approached Garda Pat Harte and Garda Fitzgerald. As the conversations developed Garda Fitzgerald said to Mr. Horgan that they had instructions from the Attorney General not to inspect such planes. I place this statement on the record of the Dáil. It requires an answer. If such an instruction was given in this, or any, instance, it would be an outrageous

breach of international law. It would be an incredible reflection on this country, apart altogether from the substance of what is going on.

I understood that when the Green Party, for example, was deciding to participate in the Government, it had at least secured some form of commitment to inspection. I have the greatest respect for the Minister of State, Deputy Carey, but this is such a flagrant departure from what is required in international law. This is a view that is not mine only but is shared by Dr. Maurice Manning, the Irish Human Rights Commission and nearly every legal expert I know.

Is it a fact that gardaí have been issued an instruction not to inspect planes? Why are planes not being inspected? Why are planes with a demonstrated unequivocal record of participation in illegality able to put down in Shannon and take off again without being inspected, and all on the basis that we have been given a special assurance by a friendly nation? It is not the action of a friendly nation to put another country into such a position that it is not able to say to the international community that it is in full and clear compliance with the anti-torture convention. While we go on like this we are allowing our commitment to that convention, perhaps the most important in international law, to be called into question.

**Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey):** On behalf of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy Brian Lenihan, I thank Deputy Higgins for raising this matter.

At the outset, let me state unequivocally that the Government is completely opposed to the practice of so-called extraordinary rendition, and our concerns in this regard have been made clear at the highest level of the US Government over an extended period of time. In response, the United States has provided categorical, unqualified assurances that Irish airports or territory have not been used for this purpose. These assurances have been specific, unambiguous and not circumscribed by any "technical legalities".

In the current programme for Government, the Government has already committed itself to prioritising enforcement of relevant legislation, including the Criminal Justice (United Nations Convention against Torture) Act 2000. In particular, Garda investigation and enforcement efforts are being supported principally by making all necessary resources available for specialised training in the provisions of relevant statutes. The Minister, Deputy Lenihan's, Department has engaged with the Garda authorities in this regard. The goal is, of course, to ensure the practice of extraordinary rendition does not occur in the State in any form.

Moreover, although not within the ambit of the Minister, Deputy Brian Lenihan, the Government has also committed itself to seeking EU and



[Deputy Pat Carey.]

international support to address deficiencies in elements of the regulation of civil aviation under the Chicago Convention. As Deputies may be aware, this 60-year-old convention provides no requirement for the supply of information on passenger, crew or cargo if the flight is a transit flight.

Moving to the specific concerns of Deputy Higgins, the Minister, Deputy Brian Lenihan, understands that a private aircraft with registration No. N475LC—

**Deputy Michael D. Higgins:** On lease to the CIA.

**Deputy Pat Carey:** —landed at Shannon Airport on 30 October last at 1.14 a.m. and departed at 2.03 a.m. It is understood this aircraft is owned by a private company based in Las Vegas. The landing was for a technical/refuelling stop and, in accordance with the Chicago Convention, aircraft may come into Ireland for such technical stops without notifying any national authority.

The Minister further understands that the presence of this aircraft at Shannon Airport was the subject of a contemporaneous complaint to the Garda Síochána, with the complainant requesting an aircraft search. The Garda response to this complaint did not include an inspection of the aircraft in question.

**Deputy Michael D. Higgins:** Why?

**Deputy Pat Carey:** However, the Minister wishes to strongly contest any claim or suggestion that this occurred because of an “instruction” that searches in general or searches of particular types or classes of aircraft should not occur. Let me emphatically and unambiguously state in this House that no such instruction has ever been given or would or could be given by any Irish authority. On behalf of the Minister, Deputy Brian Lenihan, I cannot be clearer or more unambiguous in this regard.

In considering when and where the Garda Síochána can conduct inspections of aircraft on Irish soil, members of the Garda Síochána are as much bound — rightly bound — by the rule of law as anyone else. The Garda uniform does not entitle the wearer to dispense with common, statute or international law, as and when they please.

The legal position in the matter of aircraft inspections is relatively straightforward. So-called “State aircraft” such as foreign military aircraft generally enjoy sovereign immunity from search by Irish officials. However, in the case of all other aircraft registered to another state, whether used by foreign officials or otherwise, such as the one

mentioned by Deputy Higgins, powers of search are available to the Garda Síochána.

However, these powers can be deployed only where there are reasonable grounds for their utilisation, capable of withstanding scrutiny in a court of law. In much the same way that a Garda needs reasonable suspicion—

**Deputy Michael D. Higgins:** The plane has an outrageous record.

**Deputy Pat Carey:** —supported by hard evidence to conduct a search of a private dwelling, so too must gardaí have similar standards of suspicion before inspecting an aircraft. The mere assertion of wrongdoing by a member of the public is clearly and obviously insufficient in this regard.

**Deputy Michael D. Higgins:** We will never know.

**Deputy Pat Carey:** Moreover, that a particular aircraft is rumoured to have been associated with the CIA on, for example, certain Internet blogs does not constitute probable cause to ground an inspection.

**Deputy Michael D. Higgins:** It is on the European aircraft register of flights.

**Deputy Pat Carey:** The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform has repeatedly stated that any person with credible information that Irish airports have been used for any alleged unlawful purpose should report his or her concerns to the Garda Síochána. It remains the case that on the basis of such reporting or any other information on foot of which the Garda Síochána has reasonable cause to suspect that an offence is being committed, statutory powers of entry and arrest are available subject to international law.

To date, where complaints of alleged unlawful activity concerning the use of Irish airports have been made to the Garda Síochána, Garda investigations have ensued and, where appropriate, files have been submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions. In all cases, no further action was found to be warranted, owing to a lack of evidence of unlawful activity.

Having regard to the foregoing, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform considers that all reasonable, appropriate and sufficient measures have been and are being taken to ensure that Irish airports are not being used for unlawful activity.

**Deputy Michael D. Higgins:** Should we submit that to the Council of Europe?

The Dáil adjourned at 5.20 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 4 December 2007.

## 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 13, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Question No. 14 answered with Question No. 9.*

### **Legislative Programme.**

15. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if and when he will bring forward legislation to establish Culture Ireland on a statutory basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31552/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** Culture Ireland was established in 2005 as the new national agency for the promotion of Irish arts and culture worldwide, including music, theatre, dance, film, literature, visual arts, traditional arts, architecture, opera and circus.

Culture Ireland's Strategy recognises that arts and culture are among Ireland's strongest national achievements, which play a key role in creating global recognition for the country. They are also a key driver of Ireland's global attractiveness as a centre of creativity and innovation, and a destination for business and tourism. The agency was established to build on this competitive advantage for Ireland through strategic investment and development at a time of rapid national and international change. Culture Ireland's purpose is to promote and advance Irish arts in a global context, helping to create international opportunities for Irish artists and cultural practitioners and leading to a deeper mutual understanding between Irish and other cultures and communities.

### **Film Industry Development.**

16. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the tax

breaks for the film industry here; the steps he has taken to ensure the extension of section 481 tax relief provision which is scheduled to expire at the end of 2007; if he will publish the Indecon report into film financing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31460/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** The Section 481 scheme was unique in Europe when first introduced and was thus very successful in attracting foreign producers to make films here. In the intervening period other countries have copied it and, in some instances, offer incentives that are ahead of our approach. The UK, in particular, has strengthened funding for film and has a number of tax relief options available for film investment.

While 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, my Department's main operational role in supporting the film sector relates to the administration of elements of the Section 481 tax relief scheme.

The scheme is kept under regular review in conjunction with the Irish Film Board and the Department of Finance and any enhancements necessary to retain or regain competitiveness are addressed as appropriate. In this regard, the scheme was amended and enhanced in the Finance Acts of 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005 and in 2006.

The most recent review by Indecon arose from a commitment made by the Minister for Finance during his second stage speech for the Finance Bill 2007 to extend the scheme and, in that context, to review it to ensure that it was delivering the desired results.

In that regard, the Department of Finance, in conjunction with my Department, is currently examining the report prepared by Indecon Inter-

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

national Economic Consultants on the case for improvement in respect of the Section 481 scheme. Indecon's terms of reference were to identify a structured and innovative way forward to develop and consolidate the Irish film industry, taking account of the serious international competition issues now apparent. The publication of the Indecon report is, however, a matter for the Department of Finance as the Department that commissioned it.

I am at all times committed to ensuring that the most advantageous system is put in place that allows the Irish film industry to develop and prosper, while delivering value for money to the Irish exchequer, and I will continue to strive to achieve that.

#### Heritage Fund.

17. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the status of the heritage fund and plans to have it replenished; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31505/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** In the 1990s, the State's National Cultural Institutions, which are charged with enhancing and expanding the National Collections of cultural artefacts, had been experiencing increasing difficulties in acquiring privately owned artefacts, and collections of heritage importance, due to the high prices that such items were obtaining at sales and public auctions. In order to surmount these difficulties, the Heritage Fund Act, 2001 established the Heritage Fund with an overall limit of €12.697m over a five-year period. Funding for the Heritage Fund is held in the Heritage Fund Public Investment Account, an interest bearing account.

The five eligible institutions that may benefit from the Heritage Fund, are:

- The National Archives,
- The National Gallery of Ireland,
- The National Library of Ireland,
- The National Museum of Ireland, and
- The Irish Museum of Modern Art.

The Heritage Fund remains in place and currently contains €203,725.59 in funding. This amount is below the amount laid down in the legislation for an individual acquisition and, as the existing legislation does not allow for the replenishment of the Fund, new primary legislation will be necessary to enable a new Heritage Fund to be established.

A review of the governance and operation of the Heritage Fund has been carried out for my Department. The findings of this review are being considered at present. While it would be inappropriate for me to comment on individual find-

ings in the review, I can say that the review is very positive with regard to the Fund.

The Heritage Fund enables the relevant National Cultural Institutions to acquire heritage objects, which are outstanding examples of their type and pre-eminent in their class, and I am strongly in favour of the creation of a new Fund. As I have already mentioned, this will require new legislation. It will also require additional funding. I will be pursuing the renewal of the Fund in 2008.

*Question No. 18 answered with Question No. 9.*

#### Sport and Recreational Development.

19. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the progress made towards resolving the issue regarding Tallaght Stadium; his views on using the stadium as a multi-purpose facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31443/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** I understand that the judicial review, which was sought by a local GAA club of the decision of South Dublin County Council to develop a stadium in Tallaght as a soccer facility, was heard in the High Court last month and that final judgement in the case is awaited. As this matter is still before the courts it would be inappropriate for me to make any further comment.

#### Sports Capital Programme.

20. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when he will make a decision regarding the announcement of the 2008 National Lottery funded sports capital programme; his views on whether it is appropriate that the date of the programme be purely at his discretion; his views on establishing a fixed date, which would allow clubs and organisations to better prepare their applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31450/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** The Sports Capital Programme is the primary means of providing Government funding to sport and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. It has operated on an annual basis and is part funded from National Lottery funds.

A total of €568m has been allocated in sports capital funding since 1998 to 6,716 sports projects across the country. An additional €107.141m in capital funding has been provided towards the redevelopment of Croke Park. In 2007 €85m was allocated towards 935 separate projects.

The date of the next round of the Programme had not yet been decided. As in previous years, advertisements announcing the next round of the



Programme will be placed in the national press and application forms will be available at that stage from my Department and on the Department's website. It is open to all sporting organisations, if they have a project which meets the terms and conditions of the Programme, to submit an application.

I am confident that with the extensive advertising that accompanies the announcement of the Programme and the length of the application period means that all sporting organisations will have ample opportunity to submit an application.

The timing of the announcement of the Programme to which the Deputy refers is a matter which I will take into account in the future management of the Programme.

### **Arts Funding.**

21. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will take particular initiatives to promote the arts and associated facilities throughout the country in both urban and rural settings with particular reference to local identified need and support and the growing demand of the expanding population in conjunction with the development of a greater awareness of the arts and the need to tangibly accommodate such needs at local level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31653/07]

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his Department's policy is sufficiently sensitive to the need of locally based art groups, musical societies or others involved in local productions; if he will make changes to the criteria for qualifications of grant applications from community based groups involved in local productions with a view to ensuring a greater possibility of qualification thereby addressing a particular need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31846/07]

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his policy proposals to promote the arts at community level with particular reference to the capital requirements of such groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31847/07]

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the extent to which he might be prepared to provide grant assistance to community based theatrical groups and musical societies involved in local productions with particular reference to areas where there is a dearth of such facilities in both urban and rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31848/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 21 and 96 to 98, inclusive, together.

Government Policy on the Arts is set out in the Programme for Government and will be elaborated further in my Department's Statement of Strategy 2008 – 2010 which is currently being developed. The objective is to encourage and support the strategic development of the arts in local communities, both geographic and communities of interest, for the disadvantaged and for minority groups.

In this regard, my Department has taken a direct role in relation to the provision of grant-aid for the arts and culture infrastructure throughout the country and has provided substantial funding for the capital development of facilities in all regions in recent years, having regard to factors such as sustainability and community requirements.

The main vehicle for such capital funding is the Arts and Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme (ACCESS), under which over €75 million has been granted to 107 arts and cultural facilities to date, since the scheme commenced in 2001. The ACCESS scheme is a key element in the Government's regional arts strategy and has greatly improved participation in the arts for large numbers of people nationwide. The scheme has been widely acknowledged as a significant intervention in the provision of quality cultural spaces.

When applications for funding under the next round of the ACCESS scheme are invited through advertisements in the national newspapers it will be open to any group to make an application, should they have a project that complies with the terms of the programme.

*Question No. 22 answered with Question No. 6.*

### **State Airports.**

23. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the need from a tourism point of view of autonomous national airports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31541/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** Issues in relation to airports policy generally are a matter for consideration by my colleague the Minister for Transport, Mr. Noel Dempsey.

In relation to aviation and tourism policy, I would draw the Deputy's attention to the report of the Tourism Policy Review Group, "New Horizons for Irish Tourism: An Agenda for Action", which highlighted the fact that one of the principal drivers of success of Irish tourism in recent years has been the improvement in the range, quality and competitiveness of air and sea access. In particular, increased capacity in air access and lower air fares have enhanced the attractiveness of Ireland as a destination.

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

Competitive and convenient air access — in terms of routes, capacity, services, frequency and fares — is expected to continue to be a crucial determinant for future international demand for tourism destinations, especially in the case of an island such as Ireland. In that context, the Tourism Policy Review Group noted that the decision to establish Dublin, Shannon and Cork airports as fully independent and autonomous authorities under State ownership is intended to have the effect of introducing further competition to encourage the development of new services, particularly to the regions.

#### **Tourism Promotion.**

24. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the importance of e-marketing for tourism performance here; the policies being pursued by the Government in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31454/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** Responsibility for tourism marketing is a matter for the tourism agencies and not one that my Department engages directly in. I am aware however, of the ever increasing importance of e-marketing in the tourism sector. In fact, recent research has shown that 70% of overseas holidaymakers book at least one element of their Irish holiday on the internet. With this in mind, I note that Tourism Ireland has doubled its digital marketing spend over the past three years and it now represents 14% of its total marketing budget. Furthermore, I was pleased to launch Tourism Ireland's 2008 Marketing Plan in Dublin yesterday. This Plan contains a commitment to further increase the company's digital marketing spend next year to 24% of its total marketing spend. The company is also in the process of finalising, with input from the tourism industry, Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, a new e-Marketing strategy which will be delivered as part of the organisation's Corporate Plan for the period up to 2010.

Tourism Ireland already has 36 international websites in 15 different languages and is committed to investing in new innovative digital platforms and improving the functionality and usability of these websites in the years ahead. With this planned commitment and investment, I am confident that we will see continued strong growth from overseas markets and achieve the ambitious targets that have been set for the tourism sector in the years ahead.

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

25. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the increasing privatisation of leisure facilities here;

if he foresees a future role for the State and local authorities in extending the provision of leisure facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31447/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** I am not specifically aware of the privatisation of public leisure facilities that the Deputy's question seems to suggest. However, I am aware that some local authorities, in planning the operation and management of their municipal leisure facilities, engage the services of private sector sports facility operators on a contract basis. This has been the case in the operation and management of some public swimming pools grant aided under the Local Authority Swimming Pool programme. However, in all such cases, overall responsibility and control of the facility ultimately rests with the local authority.

That programme also provides for the grant aiding of swimming pools promoted by third parties, such as local community/swimming organisations, provided that, in the first instance, the grant application is submitted through and supported by the relevant local authority and secondly, the degree and terms public access are specifically and formally agreed in advance between the Department and the local authority.

The Government is, of course, strongly committed to continued investment in the development of sports facilities. This is done in partnership with sports clubs, national governing bodies of sport and other important stakeholders such as local authorities and the education sector. The Sports Capital Programme and the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme are the primary means of providing capital funding to sport and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country and this is given effect in the National Development Plan 2007-2013 where of the €991m provided for the provision for sports infrastructure, €420m is provided in respect of the Sports Capital Programme and €184m is provided in respect of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme.

A total of €568m has been allocated in sports capital funding since 1998 to 6,716 sports projects across the country. An additional €107.141m in capital funding has been provided towards the redevelopment of Croke Park. In 2007 €85m was allocated towards 935 separate projects.

26. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his Department has carried out an audit of local sports facilities; if the findings of the audit have been published; the areas that are most in need of additional supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31462/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** As I have previously informed

the House, 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, which focuses on national and regional sports facilities, has now been completed within my Department. A database of sports facilities of national or regional significance has been compiled including details of facilities at third level educational institutions and swimming pools. Phase Two of the audit, which will commence shortly, is a more complex undertaking to establish a record of existing sports facilities at local level and identifying the need for future provision.

The audit is part of a wider exercise to put in place a more strategic approach to the provision of sports facilities in Ireland. The Programme for Government sets out a commitment to put in place a long-term strategic plan to ensure the development of necessary local facilities throughout the country, followed by year on year monitoring of improvements delivered.

A key objective in relation to the preparation of the National Sports Facility Strategy is to ensure consistency — on a nationwide basis — in relation to the completion of the audit facility so that inter-regional planning can be undertaken. With this in mind, the preparation of a guidance pack and audit toolkit for use by Local Authorities and /or Local Sports Partnerships to assist them in carrying out local audit has been prioritised as part of the Sports Facility Strategy. This element of the strategy will greatly help in the completion of the audit and the compilation of a comprehensive database on the range and nature of sporting facilities at national, regional and local level.

#### **Tourism Industry.**

27. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the performance of the domestic market for tourism in 2007; the regional breakdown of visitors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31453/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** I am very pleased that domestic tourism continues to grow as is evidenced by the latest figures released by the Central Statistics Office. These figures, which are available on the CSO website ([www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)), show that in the first six months of this year the number of domestic holiday trips was up by more than 22% on the corresponding period of 2006, while expenditure on domestic holidays grew by over 37% in the same period.

I am particularly pleased to note that the figures show a good performance by all regions outside of Dublin, with most recording strong increases in both number of bed-nights and expenditure, compared to the corresponding period last year. The fact that Ireland continues

to be one of the favourite holiday destinations of the Irish is very encouraging.

#### **Sports Capital Programme.**

28. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of funding allocated to disability organisations and groups under the sports capital programme in 2005, 2006 and 2007 respectively; the total budget allocated under the programme for each of these years respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31666/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** Under the sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, grants are allocated to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. The funding allocated to sporting projects promoted by disability and special needs groups under the Sports Capital Programme in the years in question is contained in the table below:

	Disability/Special Needs	Total Allocation
2007	€1.138 m	€85,000,000
2006	€375,000	€75,000,000
2005	€275,000	€54,985,000

I should point out that funding allocations are made on foot of the applications received and the Deputy may be interested to note that in the most recent round of the programme, twelve applications seeking a total of €1.8 million were received from disability and special needs groups. Of these applications, ten groups received funding totalling €1.138 million and the remaining two applications were deemed invalid as they failed to meet the minimum requirements under the programme.

#### **Tourism Promotion.**

29. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on new or additional policies being pursued by the Government in order to assist the promotion of the mid west region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31455/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** The promotion of tourism to the Regions is a day-to-day function of the Tourism Agencies and I have no official responsibility in this regard. The Programme for Government provides a commitment to help the region concerned to “Seize the opportunities presented by the Open Skies arrangement with the US to substantially grow the number of US visitors”.

Subject to Government approval, I would hope that the forthcoming Budget will provide me with



[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

the resources to help the Tourism Agencies deliver on that policy commitment through a special initiative in the coming year.

30. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the steps he is taking to promote tourism in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30786/07]

40. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the plans he has to improve the regional balance of inbound tourists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30787/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 30 and 40 together.

As I advised the Deputy on 25 October last, under the National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003, the individual actions and measures relating to tourism promotion or development at regional level are day-to-day functions of the State tourism agencies, as is the promotion of individual product segments such as rural tourism.

The Government has taken a number of steps to support the agencies in that regard. During 2007 the Government provided a 13% increase in the tourism budget compared to 2006, bringing the allocation to €159 million, the largest ever Exchequer budget for Irish tourism. More recently, a pre-budget estimate of almost €164 million was announced for 2008, an increase of 3%.

The National Development Plan 2007-2013 Transforming Ireland includes the largest ever Government investment programme for the development of Irish tourism. This tourism development programme, which provides for an €800 million Exchequer investment in tourism over the seven year period, has as one of its fundamental objectives the stimulation of regional development. The programme includes an international marketing sub-programme, which provides €335 million to promote the island of Ireland in key international markets. The key objective over the seven years will be to increase tourism revenue and visitor yield and to help achieve a wider regional and seasonal distribution of business.

It includes a product development and infrastructure sub-programme, which provides €317 million to upgrade and supplement our tourism attractions and activities and to deliver a national conference centre in Dublin. It also includes a training and human resource development sub-programme, which will invest €148 million in the education and training of the tourism workforce, both domestic and non-national, as well as sustaining structured educational opportunities in third level colleges and institutes of technology

around the country. It will also provide for the continuation of initiatives aimed at improving management capability and networking in SMEs and micro-enterprises at regional level.

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

31. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will implement any of the recommendations of the ERSI report Fair Play, Sport and Social Disadvantage in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31388/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** I am aware that the Irish Sports Council, under its research remit, is striving to develop a profound understanding of sport in Ireland that can inform policy and investment over the coming years. It commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute to undertake studies on its behalf. Four major reports have already been published, each one adding to our knowledge of sport in this country.

The fourth report in the series "Fair Play? Sport and Social Disadvantage in Ireland" set out to examine the impact of social disadvantage on various forms of participation in sport. The report concludes that the large majority of people who play sport in Ireland and who enjoy the health benefits arising from this physical activity are from higher income and better-educated social groups.

The report makes a clear case in support of substantial public expenditure to increase participation in sport, given the proven benefits of physical activity. This justifies the significant Government investment in sport in recent years. The budget for sport has increased from €17 million in 1997 to over €295 million in 2007. This significant investment has supported the promotion and development of Irish sport and the provision of a modern sporting infrastructure, with high quality facilities catering for the participation, coaching, training and competition needs of all levels and types of sport. Furthermore the National Development Plan 2007-2013 includes a commitment to provide €991 million for sport infrastructure during the period up to 2013.

The increased funding provided to the Irish Sports Council from €13 million in 2000 to over €54 million this year has enabled a number of significant interventions for the benefit of disadvantaged areas. Examples include the Local Sports Partnerships (LSP) network, the Buntús programme for primary schools in LSP areas (involving children in sport from a very young age), development officers in National Governing Bodies and special funding to the FAI, GAA and IRFU.

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 coun-

try towards the provision of sport and recreational facilities. In total, since 1998, capital funding of €568 million has been allocated in respect of 6,716 projects all over Ireland at local, regional and national level. In addition, over €107 million has been allocated towards the development of Croke Park.

One of the stated objectives of the sports capital programme is to prioritise the needs of disadvantaged areas in the provision of sports facilities. In keeping with Government policy, allocations under the programme reflect special priority for the development of sports and recreational facilities in areas designated as disadvantaged i.e. RAPID, CLÁR and Local Drugs Task Force areas. My Department liaises closely with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs with regard to continuing to prioritise applications for sports capital funding from areas designated by Government as disadvantaged. My Department is seeking to be more strategic in its approach to the future provision of Government funding for sports facilities. Development of the Department's National Sports Facilities Strategy is currently underway and research in this field, including the ESRI report in question, is being considered in that context. The Facilities Strategy should provide a better policy base for the more effective use of public funds and will assist in the targeting, support and funding of areas of greatest need.

With the National Sports Facility Strategy, together with the information from this report and from the three other reports in the ESRI Irish Sports Council series, we will have gained a better understanding of the dynamics of the Irish sports sector. The Irish Sports Council, with the support of my Department, is continuing its ambitious research programme, which will generate new and important information. This will allow for policy and investment decisions in the sports sector — a sector that has benefited from heavy and consistent public investment in recent years — to meet the challenges set out in the ESRI report in question.

*Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 9.*

#### **National Stadium.**

33. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if the National Sports Campus project will qualify as a strategic planning project for consideration directly by An Bord Pleanála; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31546/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** The issue of whether the National Sports Campus Development project comes within the scope of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 does not arise as this Act encompasses energy,

transport and waste management related environmental projects only.

In relation to the Campus project and in terms of the Planning procedures, a Planning Study for the Abbotstown site, which is a requirement under a local objective of the Fingal County Development Plan, has been completed by an inter-agency group, which included my Department. This Study sets out the mix of sporting, leisure, and amenity facilities that would be appropriate for the site. The Planning Study was approved by Fingal County Council on 9 July and subsequently a Variation of the Fingal County Development Plan was adopted which will provide for the National Sports Campus. It is anticipated that planning permission will be sought in 2008 for Phase One of the Campus.

34. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the progress on the development of the sports campus at Abbotstown; when he expects the contracts to be signed and work to begin; the cost of the Abbotstown project since its inception; if he is satisfied with the amount spent here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31446/07]

90. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if the project management and design teams for the National Sports Campus have been appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31687/07]

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the latest proposals for the completion of development at Campus Stadium Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31843/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 34, 90 and 93 together.

The Government has provided an amount of €149m in the National Development Plan 2007 to 2013 for the development of a National Sports Campus at Abbotstown. Prior to that, in January, 2004, the Government agreed to proceed, as financial resources permit, with the development of a Campus of Sports facilities at Abbotstown. The Government then approved in November, 2005 the commencement of Phase One of the development of the National Sports Campus on the basis of a Development Control Plan prepared by Campus and Stadium Ireland Development Company Ltd (CSID), the predecessor of the National Sports Campus Development Authority (NSCDA). These facilities will be designed to meet the indoor and outdoor training needs of Irish elite sportspersons who compete at national and international levels and will also provide for the needs of the local community.

The Government decision for this stage of development included agreement to move the

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

HQ of the FAI to the former State Laboratory building at Abbotstown. Work on the building has now been completed and the FAI have recently taken possession of the building. It is also intended to provide a headquarters for the Institute for Sport by refurbishing an existing building on the site and preliminary planning on this project has commenced but no contractual arrangements have been entered into as yet.

A Planning Study for the Abbotstown site, which is a requirement under a local objective of the Fingal County Development Plan, has been completed by an inter-agency group, which included my Department. This Study sets out the mix of sporting, leisure, and amenity facilities that would be appropriate for the site. The Planning Study was approved at a meeting of Fingal County Council on 9 July last. Following on from this the site has been rezoned to provide for the development of the Campus. Since the Government decision early in 2004 to proceed with the Campus development, the cumulative cost of consolidating and developing the project thus far including the refurbishment of the building for the HQ of the FAI, has come to €12.39 million. Expenditure on the Campus prior to 2004, and chiefly involving the capital cost of the National Aquatic Centre opened in 2003, was €81 million of which €62.5 million (ex Vat) is attributable directly to the capital development of the Centre.

Preliminary planning for Phase One of the project has commenced and the NSCDA expects to be in a position to appoint a Design Team and a Project Management Team for the project in the near future. It is then the intention of the Authority to have detailed plans prepared, for the implementation of Phase One, and it is estimated that planning permission will be sought during the course of 2008.

The Abbotstown facilities, when completed will provide a much needed range of training and competitive facilities for our finest sportspersons. Through the National Aquatic Centre a top world class sports facility has already been provided. Now being progressed is the development of a state of the art complex of quality facilities to serve a wide spectrum of sport activities and disciplines which will benefit elite sports persons and the local community alike.

### Youth Services.

35. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his attention has been drawn to the need to provide extra grant aid to fund community based and financially assisted local initiatives involving the provision of youth services such as community centres, drop in centres and indoor facilities with the objective of providing positive alternative outlets for teenagers throughout the country having particular regard to the growing number of negative influ-

ences and their impact on young people; if he will take a strategic decision to implement such a policy to a far greater extent than has been the case heretofore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31652/07]

92. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if, in the course of the allocation of capital grants by his Department, he will give special consideration to areas experiencing rapid population expansion with a view to enhancing the availability of such facilities for young people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31842/07]

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if through the various support schemes available through his Department he will give special consideration to areas of rapidly expanding population with a view to meeting social needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31849/07]

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the extent to which he or his Department have become involved in the allocation of capital grants for the provision of community based facilities organised by groups involved in local initiatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31850/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 35, 92, 99 and 100 together.

My Department provides funding for the provision of Sporting, Arts and Culture facilities at local level. The criteria used for the allocation of such funds includes the likely level of demand for the facilities in question. Under the sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, grants are allocated to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country for the provision of sports facilities, including indoor sports facilities.

Eleven criteria are used when assessing local applications. The Department scores each application according to how well it meets these criteria. In this context, the assessment takes into account the current and planned levels of sports facilities in an area, the impact the proposed new facility will have on participation in sport as well as the priority of the proposed facility in relation to existing facilities. In this regard, the requirements of communities with increasing populations that are in need of enhanced facility provision are taken into account. There is also a focus on areas of disadvantage.

The 2007 sports capital programme was advertised in the national press in October 2006. The closing date for receipt of completed applications was 24th November 2006. Over 1,530 applications were received for the programme and provisional



allocations totalling €85 million were made to 935 projects on 5th April last. Furthermore I should maintain that in the period 2003-2006 grants to the value of €243.87m have been allocated to projects under the Sports Capital Programme.

While no date has been set for the 2008 Programme, advertisements announcing the next round of the Programme will be placed in the national press and application forms will be available at that stage. Applicants who feel that they have a project that meets the Guidelines, Terms and Conditions of the programme are free to apply at that stage.

Under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, which is also administered by my Department, grant aid is provided to local authorities towards the capital costs of a new or replacement public swimming pool or the refurbishment of an existing pool provided by local authorities themselves or by other bodies where the application for capital funding is supported by the local authority. Where a project is being undertaken by an organisation other than a local authority, the proposal must be considered, supported and submitted by the local authority. Before supporting such a project, the local authority would have to be satisfied that the proposal is viable, that the balance of funding required to complete the project is available and that the project when completed, would have a suitable level of public access.

Under the current round of the programme, the question of the location of public swimming pools is essentially a matter for local authorities. Projects are considered on a case-by-case basis and consideration is given to such issues as to whether the area is classified as disadvantaged, the number and geographical spread of similar projects within and between counties, the viability of the project, particularly in relation to operational and maintenance issues, overall funding package for the project, technical details and the Department's annual estimates provision for the Programme.

My Department is completing a Value for Money and Policy Review of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme at present. The Report 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. Thereafter, following consideration of the recommendations in the Report, it is my intention to launch a new round of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme as soon as possible. When the programme is re-opened, it will be open to all local authorities to submit applications under the terms that will apply. There is a provision of €184m in the National Development Plan, 2007-2013 in respect of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme.

Government Policy on the Arts is set out in the Programme for Government and will be elaborated further in my Department's Statement of

Strategy for 2008-2010 which is currently being developed. The objective is to encourage and support the strategic development of the arts in local communities, both geographic and communities of interest, for the disadvantaged and for minority groups. In this regard, my Department has taken a direct role in relation to the provision of grant-aid for arts and culture infrastructure throughout the country and has provided substantial funding for the capital development of facilities in all regions in recent years, having regard to factors such as sustainability and community requirements.

The main vehicle for such capital funding is the Arts and Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme (ACCESS), under which over €75 million has been granted to 107 arts and cultural facilities to date, since the scheme commenced in 2001. The ACCESS scheme is a key element in the Government's regional arts strategy and has greatly improved participation in the arts for large numbers of people nationwide. The scheme has been widely acknowledged as a significant intervention in the provision of quality cultural spaces. When applications for funding under the next round of the ACCESS scheme are invited through advertisements in the national press it will be open to any group to make an application, should they have a project that complies with the terms of the programme.

I hope that the Deputies will agree that the programmes operated by my Department are well funded, are sufficiently flexible and accommodating to ensure that local communities are able to continue to ensure that our young people have activities which enable them to make gainful use of the leisure time.

### **Sports Funding.**

36. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the progress he has made regarding the dispute between the GAA and GPA over funding; if he has facilitated meetings between the groups; if he will report on same; the solution he has proposed with regard to distributing the funding; his views on using the Sports Council as a vehicle for distributing these funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31442/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** Following extensive negotiations in recent weeks between my Department, the Irish Sports Council, the GAA and the GPA, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that an agreement has been reached on this issue. While player welfare is a separate issue for which the GAA has responsibility, I intend to make provision for the introduction of a scheme through the Irish Sports Council, which will recognise the outstanding contribution of Senior Gaelic Inter-County players to our indigenous sport, to meet additional costs associated with elite team performance and to encourage aspiring teams and players to reach

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

the highest levels of sporting endeavour. In return the players will involve themselves in a number of social responsibilities, including working in close co-operation with the Local Sports Partnerships on a programme of visits to schools and club facilities as a part of an overall policy to increase participation in their sports. An amount of €3.5 million will be provided through the Irish Sports Council in 2008 to fund the scheme.

I set out below a copy of the agreement for the Deputy's information. Agreement between the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Irish Sports Council, GAA and GPA to recognise the contribution of Senior Inter-County Players and additional costs associated with enhancing team performance.

*Rationale.*

Our Senior Inter-County players provide the window through which our National Games are viewed nationally and internationally. It is recognised that the successful teams prepare and train to the highest international standards for team sports and that the current scheme of tax relief for professional sports people cannot be applied to Gaelic players because of their amateur status. The Minister therefore, via the Irish Sports Council, in consultation with the GAA and the GPA, intends to introduce schemes to recognise the outstanding contribution of Gaelic Inter-County players to our indigenous sport, to meet additional costs associated with elite team performance and to encourage aspiring teams and players to reach the highest levels of sporting endeavour. These schemes will be based specifically on Championship participation, the GAA's blue riband competitions, commencing at the end of the National Leagues, and will operate as follows:

*Annual Team Performance Scheme.*

The Annual Team Performance Scheme will be based on the performance of teams during the championships and will apply to the 12 Gaelic football teams qualifying for the third round of the All-Ireland Qualifier series or reaching a Provincial Final, and the 12 hurling teams participating in the McCarthy Cup. The level of award available to teams will be calculated on a sliding scale increasing with continuing involvement in the Championships.

*Annual Support Scheme for the Development of Excellence in the Indigenous Sports of Hurling and Gaelic football.*

The Annual Support Scheme for the Development of Excellence will be based on the achievement of standards and performance-based criteria designed to raise/maintain the levels of preparation and skill of the teams and individuals not qualifying for the Team Performance Scheme. The GAA, the GPA and the Irish Sports Council will agree a set of standards and performance based criteria for counties and their senior team

squads eliminated in the first two rounds of the All-Ireland Football Qualifiers, and those participating in the Tommy Murphy Cup, the Christy Ring and Nicky Rackard Cups. Recognising that the achievement of excellence necessitates increased sacrifice and effort by counties and individuals, this scheme will assist them in achieving/maintaining the required standards. Support will not be made available to individuals or squads that fail to meet minimum standards.

*Funding*

An amount of €3.5m will be provided in 2008 to fund these schemes. Criteria for participation in these Schemes.

County committees, team management and players representatives in participating counties will develop improvement plans with measurable goals and objectives, agreed with the ISC, and consistent with national GAA coaching and games development policy. The supports will be based on the following criteria:

*County Committee Responsibilities:*

- Establish and agree key performance indicators with team management. This will involve identifying squad targets and objectives, formulating an appropriate training regime/plan, establishing a code of conduct to which all parties give agreement and the provision of comprehensive information and advice on the anti-doping code. These indicators, objectives and requirements will be incorporated in the proposed Charter for inter county teams and County Committees.
- Provision, as appropriate, of qualified personnel to enhance player/team development. This to include advice and support in all aspects of team and individual fitness, nutrition, health and well-being associated with playing the games.
- A system to take account of players joining or departing from the county squad will be agreed.
- Ensure the presence of certified medical personnel at all inter-county games.

*Player Responsibilities:*

- Attend at least 80% of all training sessions/matches. This commitment will also apply to injured/rehab personnel except where excused.
- Demonstrate improvement through regular fitness testing.
- Keep updated training log/diary.
- Strict adherence to anti-doping code.
- Players who violate the code will not receive awards

- Injured players will be expected to meet a set of agreed minimum requirements to demonstrate that they are participating satisfactorily in the rehabilitation process in order to receive an award.
- Players will commit to participate in an agreed level of coaching and games development work in their county on a voluntary basis. In co-operation with the Local Sports Partnerships players will visit schools and youth facilities as part of an overall policy to promote increased participation in their sports.
- Players will involve themselves in initiatives at county and national level to promote their sports as a healthy activity for all ages.
- Any Inter County Squad or Player may decline the amount.

*Conditions:*

- 1 Funding for the above schemes will be provided annually through the Irish Sports Council to the GAA and the criteria and arrangements for their disbursement will be agreed by the GAA, the GPA and the ISC.
- 2 These schemes will be additional to, and will not negatively impact on, existing funding or any future funding, provided by the Government to the GAA through the ISC.
- 3 All parties recognise the amateur status of the GAA and nothing in this agreement will undermine that amateur status.
- 4 The schemes will be administered by a National Committee with player/ administrative representatives of the GAA and GPA. Committees to administer the schemes at county level will also be established.
- 5 Dispute resolution will be carried out by the National Committee whose decisions will be final.
- 6 This agreement applies to senior inter-county football and hurling panels only. Funding will be based on panels to a maximum of 30 players.
- 7 Any tax liability that might arise from these schemes is the responsibility of the individual player.
- 8 Player welfare is a separate issue for which the GAA takes full responsibility.
- 9 The schemes will be subject to a tri-annual independent review to be carried out under the aegis of the ISC.

**Child Protection.**

37. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on establishing a child protection unit in sport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31464/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** According to “Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children” (September 1999) the two agencies with statutory responsibility for child protection are the Health Service Executive (HSE) and An Garda Síochána. Notwithstanding this, I appreciate and share the Deputy’s concerns with regard to this issue. I am assured by the Irish Sports Council, the statutory body responsible for the promotion and development of sport, that it endeavours to ensure a strong child-centred approach within sports organisations.

I am informed by the Council that in 2005, in order to ensure that it was in line with relevant current legislation, publications, policies and practices, it reviewed its “Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children’s Sport in Ireland”. This Code is built upon a number of core principles relating to the importance of childhood, the needs of the child, integrity and fair play, and relationships and safety in children’s sport and is in line with the National Guidelines. It addresses issues relating to the roles and responsibilities of all involved in children’s sport, and underpins the importance of policies and procedures in providing quality leadership for children in sport. It outlines principles of good practice and child protection policy and procedures. It is the view of the ISC that the full application of this Code of Ethics by everyone in sport will help to ensure the promotion of happy, healthy and successful experiences for children and their Sports Leaders.

In addition, the Council has informed me that it provides support and training to sporting clubs and bodies under its remit, to assist them in developing a safe and child-centred environment for sport. It is also assisting National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) in accessing Garda vetting and has worked with each NGB to help it develop its own code of best practice.

**Tourism Industry.**

38. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the performance of the British market for tourism in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31452/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** The latest figures published by the Central Statistics Office show that there was an increase of over 4% in the number of overseas visitors to Ireland in the first nine months of the year compared to the same period in 2006. While it will be challenging to maintain the record-breaking performance of 2006, these latest CSO figures confirm that Ireland’s tourism sector continues to perform at a very impressive level. The number of visitors from Britain for the first nine months of the year is down by 1% compared to the same period in 2006. It should be noted however, that the numbers coming to Ireland



[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

from Britain for Holiday purposes were actually up by almost 4% for the first half of the year.

Also, there is evidence that the decline in sea passenger traffic, seen in recent years has halted. The sea carriers are reporting encouraging numbers and this is positive for both regional dispersal and length of stay. It should be noted that the drop in visitors from Britain so far this year is consistent with a general trend of reduced numbers of outward travellers from Great Britain to European destinations. It is believed that interest rate increases may be impacting on consumer discretionary spending power. In addition, the poor summer weather probably impacted negatively on outbound travel to destinations within Western Europe other than those promising sun.

Successful marketing, in any field, does require ongoing monitoring of markets and appropriate adjustment of campaigns. Tourism is no exception. Great Britain continues to be the largest single market for the island of Ireland. Competition in this market is intense with a huge range of new destinations on offer to the consumer. Nevertheless, Tourism Ireland has set ambitious targets for growth from Great Britain over the next three years. Tourism Ireland will therefore be closely monitoring marketing conditions in the months ahead and refining marketing campaigns accordingly to ensure these targets are met.

#### North-South Ministerial Council.

39. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the discussions he has had with the North-South Ministerial Council to bring about the merger of functions between Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31451/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** I can inform the Deputy that I have had no such discussions with the North-South Ministerial Council.

*Question No. 40 answered with Question No. 30.*

#### Tax Collection.

41. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of tax payers in 2006 or the most recent year for which complete figures are available, who returned incomes of €38,000 or less; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31702/07]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated number of income earners on the income tax records in 2006 earning gross income of €38,000 or less is projected at 1,452,000. Gross income is income before adjustments are made in respect of capital

allowances, interest paid, losses, allowable expenses, retirement annuities etc. but after deduction of superannuation contributions by employees.

The figure is an estimate from the Revenue tax-forecasting model using actual data for the year 2004 adjusted as necessary for income and employment growth for the year in question. It is, therefore, provisional and likely to be revised. It should be noted that a married couple who has elected, or has been deemed to have elected, for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit.

#### Flood Relief.

42. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 73 of 11 October 2007 and further questions on the same matter dated 25 October 2007, if he will answer the question posed for the third time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31719/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Noel Ahern):** The Office of Public Works have not committed funds to works in Ballymakeera to date. Cork County Council contacted the OPW last week indicating that the Council now had a costed proposal to carry out minor works downstream of the village and inquiring whether the OPW would fund these works. The Council were advised to submit their proposals to OPW for consideration. The proposal is awaited.

#### Decentralisation Programme.

43. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the position of the decentralisation programme of his Department to Athy, County Kildare; the number assigned to the advance section of his Department; when this advance section will be placed in Athy; the number of applications received in relation to this group or personnel to receive training; the period of training envisaged; if same has commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31752/07]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that an advance party of forty-nine (49) officers are due to occupy temporary accommodation in Athy on 3 December 2007. Training has been provided on an on-going basis to staff who are due to go to Athy from the Kildare Revenue District resources. Staff have been assigned to the District during the last two years.

As new staff are assigned to the Kildare Revenue District prior to the move to Athy, further training will be provided from the Kildare Revenue District resources. Where additional formal training is required from the Training Branch, this will be prioritised.

### Drug Seizures.

44. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of drug seizures, where the estimated value of the drugs seized has exceeded €100,000, since the year 2000; and the estimated value of drugs recovered in such seizures. [31793/07]

45. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the estimated value of drugs seized and destroyed by the State since the year 2000. [31794/07]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 44 and 45 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the number of drug seizures by Customs where the estimated street value was €100,000 or greater since 1 January 2000 is 145. The total estimated street value of all such seizures is €302 million.

The total estimated street value of all drugs seized by Customs since 1 January 2000 is €319 million. All of these drugs have been destroyed apart from current seizures where disposal instructions have not yet been issued, cases currently under investigation and cases currently before the courts where the drugs are held as evidence.

### Motor Fuels.

46. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to provide a similar support to the fuel duty rebate scheme for passenger bus transport services which is being withdrawn; if his attention has been drawn to the impact this will have on the development of public transport, particularly in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31796/07]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen):** The 2003 EU Energy Tax Directive incorporated special derogations which allowed specific excise duty reliefs to be applied in a number of Member States. In the Irish context, these derogations allowed for reduced rates to apply to fuel used for public transport services which includes school transport services.

While these derogations expired on 31 December 2006, Ireland, along with other Member States, sought retention of its derogations beyond that date. However the European Commission, who are the deciding authority, have to date refused all such requests. The Commission maintain that, in keeping with the EU Energy Tax Directive, Member States must apply at least the EU minimum rates of excise on fuels in such circumstances and that any further favourable excise treatment is not allowable. In this regard the Commission's decision was published on its website in March 2007. At the Commission's behest my officials have indicated that

Ireland will avail of the forthcoming Finance Bill to make the necessary legislative changes to conform with the Directive.

In the circumstances, the relevant line Departments who have primary responsibility in this regard are, in conjunction with my Department, exploring alternative non-tax support mechanisms that could be put in place where appropriate to maintain the assistance currently being provided, subject of course to compatibility with EU State Aid requirements. In the interim the reduced rates applicable to fuel used will be maintained.

### Tax Collection.

47. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if he will take steps to have an application for VAT repayment by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath dealt with, as same has been outstanding for some months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31798/07]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the VAT claim in respect of the person in question in County Westmeath has been approved for repayment on 27 November 2007.

### Defence Forces Retirement Scheme.

48. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if Army officers are eligible to pay AVC's or pay into PRSA's; the reason these options do not apply; and when he expects to introduce the SPEARS system. [31810/07]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen):** There is an approved AVC scheme in place for enlisted personnel of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) which is restricted to death in service benefit. There is no AVC scheme in place for Commissioned Army Officers. It would be a matter for the Revenue Commissioners to consider any application for an AVC scheme if one was submitted to them for approval. In this regard, it would be open to the Defence Forces Representative Associations to pursue approval for an AVC scheme for their members with the Revenue Commissioners. It might be noted that the relevant provisions of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 preclude Revenue from approving any such scheme that allows payment of benefits prior to age 50. As regards PRSAs, it would be open to any individual member of the PDF, in consultation with a PRSA provider, to determine if they would be entitled to contribute to a PRSA. In this regard, the restriction relating to payment of benefits prior to age 50 would also be a factor.

Under existing occupational pension arrangements applying to personnel recruited prior to April 2004, members of the PDF are eligible for

[Deputy Brian Cowen.]

the immediate payment of superannuation benefits regardless of age and after relatively short periods of service. Immediate pension and gratuity is payable after a minimum of 12 years' service to Commissioned Officers and after 21 years to enlisted personnel, potentially well before age 50 in either case. There is no provision for the preservation of benefits.

The Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004 provides for the making of a new occupational pension scheme to apply to military personnel recruited as new entrants to the Permanent Defence Force on or after 1 April 2004. As provided for in that Act, there will be a minimum pension age of 50 for all new entrant personnel. This means that pensions and gratuities will not ordinarily be payable immediately on discharge/retirement except in the case of personnel who serve to age 50 years, while preservation of benefits will apply otherwise. The new scheme will bring Defence Forces pension arrangements more into line with public service pension schemes generally. In that regard, it is envisaged that in common with other public service schemes, the new military scheme will include appropriate provision for the purchase of notional service at full actuarial cost to the individual. I am advised that discussions between the Management Side and the Defence Forces Representative Associations about the detailed terms of the new pension scheme, and certain improvements in existing pension terms, are nearing conclusion.

As regards SPEARS, the Commission on Public Service Pensions recommended that SPEARS (AVC or group-PRSA arrangement) should be introduced, while at the same time, it also recommended that existing schemes for the purchase of notional service should be phased out. As agreed by the Government in September 2004, SPEARS was to be the subject of further consideration. In this regard, the Staff Side has been consulted and any decision in relation to SPEARS will have to await the outcome of such consultations. I am not in a position to indicate when this process will be completed.

#### **Freedom of Information.**

49. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if, with reference to his Department's circular number 20 of 1998, dealing with the classification of material by Departments as top secret, following upon a Government decision that the classification top secret should in future be applied to particularly sensitive material which, because of its nature or content, should receive only very limited circulation, other Departments have in the years since 1998 undertaken a formal review at Assistant Secretary level, of the amount of and necessity for material classified as top secret, on a regular basis at a minimum of once a year as required by his Departments circular; the outcome of those

reviews; the actions taken as a result of those reviews; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31863/07]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen):** Circular 20/98 deals with the classification of material as "top secret" and, inter alia, requires individual Departments to decide on the classification, necessity and amount of their own "top secret" material and to provide for formal reviews in this regard at Assistant Secretary level. Accordingly, the responsibility for carrying out reviews on their own material rests with Departments themselves. The outcome of such reviews and action taken as a result of them is a matter for individual Departments. I would like to advise the Deputy that my Department is reviewing this matter and a revised circular will issue at an early date.

#### **Pharmacy Regulations.**

50. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on the threat to jobs in the pharmaceutical sector posed by the proposed changes in reimbursement of pharmacists for drugs dispensed under the medical card scheme, both at wholesale and at retail level, as outlined in the submissions of representatives of retail pharmacists and of a company (details supplied) to Indecon, and implied by the warnings of potential negative impacts and market disruption contained in the Indecon report on pharmacy wholesale margins; if the potential negative impact of these changes in terms of economic competitiveness and viability on young pharmacists who have incurred high set-up costs in recent years is of particular concern to him; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31763/07]

57. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for Health and Children the progress that has been made towards a resolution of the issues involving pharmacists and the Health Service Executive over changes to the scheme for reimbursement of drugs dispensed under the medical card scheme; the role independent arbitration can play in achieving a resolution; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31764/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 50 and 57 together.

I have previously outlined in detail to the Oireachtas the legal provisions under competition law which prevent the Health Service Executive (HSE) from negotiating with the Irish Pharmaceutical Union (IPU) on fees, prices or margins for their members. When it became clear that the HSE could not negotiate with pharmacists or wholesalers on fees or margins, a detailed, fair and transparent consultation process, including independent economic analysis and public consultation, was carried out to inform the final



determination of the new reimbursement pricing arrangements for drugs and medicines under the GMS and community drugs schemes. 161 submissions were received by the HSE, of which 143 were from community pharmacy contractors. These new arrangements were announced by the HSE on 17th September 2007. The new price arrangements for community supply were planned to take effect from 1st January for wholesalers and, due to the structure of the reimbursement system, would have come into effect from 1st December 2007 for community pharmacists. The independent economic analysis was carried out by Indecon Economic Consultants and was published by the HSE on 13 November 2007. All aspects of the Indecon analysis were considered by the HSE in making its determination. Full consideration was also taken of public submissions received.

In regard to the new reimbursement prices, the main wholesaler companies have confirmed to the HSE that when the new arrangements are given effect, they will charge community pharmacists the same price for these drugs and medicines as pharmacists will be reimbursed by the HSE for these products. Furthermore, there are no changes planned by the HSE to the operation of the GMS medical card and community drugs schemes, and all patients continue to receive their entitlements in the normal way.

My Department understands that the HSE has not received formal notification from any community pharmacist regarding cessation of services under the GMS or the various community drugs schemes. They will be required to give three months notice in writing of any intention to cease providing this service.

To address concerns expressed by the IPU, on behalf of community pharmacists, about the implications of the legal advice on competition law on their right to negotiate fees through the Union, a process of dialogue was established, chaired by Bill Shipsey SC, to explore ways in which concerns raised by the IPU about the implications of this legal advice might be addressed. I am also exploring, in consultation with the Attorney General, the other relevant Government Departments and the HSE, the best way of progressing the development of a new contract with pharmacists. There is ongoing engagement between the Irish Pharmaceutical Union and the HSE under the auspices of Mr. Shipsey and, in view of the progress in this regard, the HSE has decided to defer the implementation of the new reimbursement rates planned to take effect for community pharmacists on 1st December 2007 to a later date.

#### **Nursing Education.**

51. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for Health and Children the proposals she has to set up a conversion course here where nurses qualified as SENs in England can upgrade

their qualifications to State registered nurse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31704/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** The State Enrolled Nurse (SEN) qualification is a United Kingdom qualification which is not recognised in this country as training for it is deemed insufficient to qualify as a nurse registered with An Bord Altranais. Persons who have obtained this qualification must undertake a nursing conversion programme in the United Kingdom in order to qualify for registration as a nurse. Unfortunately it is not possible to provide such a programme here.

However, there is a grant available from the HSE to assist State Enrolled Nurses (SENs) undertaking nursing conversion programmes in the United Kingdom. Under this initiative any SEN working in the Irish health service who wishes to undertake such a programme will be entitled to receive a non-means-tested grant of €7,618 towards the overall costs (including college fees, textbooks, travel and accommodation) involved in attending the programme in the United Kingdom. Payment of the grants will be subject to the SEN giving a written undertaking that s/he will work as a nurse in the Irish health service following registration with An Bord Altranais.

#### **Health Services.**

52. **Deputy Edward O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will investigate the medical needs of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [31706/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services is a matter for the Health Service Executive and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall Vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

53. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will investigate the case of late autism diagnosis for a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will arrange to have all necessary professional services, dietary, counselling, occupational therapy, educational and so on made available to this child. [31720/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Jimmy Devins):** The Deputy’s question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services,

[Deputy Jimmy Devins.]

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 Transport.**

54. **Deputy Noel O'Flynn** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of money paid for taxi services in counties (details supplied) by the Health Service Executive for the purpose of transporting patients and employees of the HSE with a breakdown of the figures in each county showing the amount received by each taxi operator; when was the last time the tender process was used for this service or if the service ever went to tender; the way persons or companies operating a taxi service are selected to provide the service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31737/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services is a matter for the Health Service Executive and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall Vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

#### **Hospital Services.**

55. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) will have their operation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31747/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

#### **Decentralisation Programme.**

56. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon is on the priority list for a transfer from the Department of Social and Family Affairs to the General Regis-

trar's Office in her Department in Roscommon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31761/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** Under the Government's Decentralisation programme civil servants wishing to transfer are obliged to register their application for a transfer on the Central Applications Facility (CAF). The CAF is managed by the Department of Finance. My Department has been advised by that Department that the individual concerned, in addition to a number of other officers has a priority application on CAF for the General Register Office (GRO), Roscommon. The individual concerned has not applied to be included on this Department's Central Transfer List to the General Register Office, Roscommon. The Deputy may wish to note that responsibility for the GRO is due to transfer from my Department to the Department of Social and Family Affairs from the 1st January 2008.

*Question No. 57 answered with Question No. 50.*

#### **National Treatment Purchase Fund.**

58. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of applications received to date in 2007 under the national purchase scheme; the way this number compares to other years; the cost to date in 2007 of the accepted applications; if a cap has been placed on the number of applications in 2007; if so, the number of applications on the waiting list for the service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31770/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** As the Deputy's question relates to the operation of the National Treatment Purchase Fund, my Department has asked the Chief Executive of the Fund to reply directly to the Deputy in relation to the information requested.

#### **Health Repayment Scheme.**

59. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 425 of 26 September 2007 regarding the issue of interest owing to long stay patients, the recommendations and conclusion as a result of these meetings; the estimate of the value of interest which is owed to patients; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31797/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** My Department has received legal advice on this issue indicating that any past interest retained should be repaid in full. The HSE has received independent legal advice and has clarified certain issues in advance of initiating the refund of interest retained. The HSE is preparing proposals on the administrative process

which would be most suitable and equitable to facilitate the refund of interest to clients, given the significant logistical and practical issues involved in arranging to credit all past interest due to all clients over an extended timeframe. Officials from my Department will continue to liaise with the HSE in this regard. The HSE has informed my Department that the current estimate for total past interest retained up to the end of 2005 is approximately €31m. When this figure is adjusted for inflation, using the Consumer Price Index, the total figure amounts to approximately €48m.

#### **National Treatment Purchase Fund.**

60. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of patients from County Kildare who have been treated under the National Treatment Purchase Fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31801/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** As the Deputy's question relates to the operation of the National Treatment Purchase Fund, my Department has asked the Chief Executive of the Fund to reply directly to the Deputy in relation to the information requested.

#### **Mental Health Services.**

61. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children when there will be a 24 hour psychiatric service for County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31802/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Jimmy Devins):** Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. The Executive, therefore, is the appropriate body to consider the particular matter raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

#### **Nursing Home Subventions.**

62. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she plans to increase any of the thresholds for 2008 in respect of the nursing home subvention 2007 which can continue to apply to persons who are resident in nursing homes before 1 January 2008; and the thresholds which will apply in 2008 (details supplied). [31806/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hocht):** There are no plans to change the rate of subvention, or any of the thresholds referred to by the Deputy, for

2008. The subvention scheme is being replaced by the improved nursing home support scheme, A Fair Deal. The existing subvention scheme will be phased out over time. In addition, not all of the thresholds and disregards to which the Deputy refers preclude an individual from receiving a subvention. While the legislation provides that the Health Service Executive may refuse a subvention in certain cases, the HSE Guidelines for the Standardised Implementation of the Subvention Scheme state that all such applications should be processed in full with subvention only being denied on the basis of excess means as determined in accordance with the financial assessment.

63. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the way assets other than the family home will be treated in deciding the contribution a person will be expected to make towards nursing home costs before a deferred charge against that person's share of the family home will be registered. [31807/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hocht):** Under the new nursing home support scheme, people who require long-term residential care will contribute up to 80% of their assessable income, whether for public or private nursing home care. Assessable income includes, for example, State and personal pensions, as well as a 5% contribution from liquid assets. Depending on the amount of a person's assessable income, there will also be a contribution of up to 5% of a person's non-liquid assets. The portion of the contribution relating to non-liquid assets, such as a person's house, may be deferred. This means that it does not have to be met during the person's lifetime and can be payable on settlement of the person's estate instead. The deferred contribution will be based on the actual number of weeks spent in residential care and on the cost of care and, consequently, may be less than 5% per annum. I would take this opportunity to emphasise that no one will pay more than the cost of their care.

Where the deferred contribution applies to the principal private residence, it will be capped at a maximum of 15%, or 7.5% in the case of one spouse remaining in the home while the other enters long-term residential care. This means that after three years in care, a person will not be liable for any further deferred contribution based on the principal residence. It also means that 85% of the value of the principal residence may be maintained for the beneficiaries of the person's estate. This is not something that can be guaranteed at the moment. A person or his/her family can also choose to pay the deferred contribution at the time when care is being received instead of allowing it to be levied upon the estate if they so wish. Where a spouse or certain dependants are living in the principal residence, the deferred con-



[Deputy Máire Hocht.]

tribution in respect of the residence can be further deferred until after the death of that spouse or dependant, or until such time as a person previously qualifying as a dependant ceases to qualify as such. The final details of the Bill are being addressed at present. The Minister proposes to publish the Bill as soon as possible, following Government approval.

#### **Ambulance Service.**

64. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of ambulance drivers employed by the Health Service Executive nationally; the number of drivers on permanent contracts; the number of vacancies for ambulance drivers nationally; her plans to fill such vacancies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31817/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. The Executive, therefore, is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

65. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the arrangements made to provide ambulance cover over the Christmas 2007 period; if she has satisfied herself with such arrangements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31818/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services, including ambulance services, is a matter for the Health Service Executive and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall Vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

66. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the spatial study analysis for the ambulance service is being undertaken for all counties; and if an analysis is being carried out on the ambulance service in County Wicklow. [31820/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services, including ambulance services, is a matter for the Health Service Executive and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall Vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

#### **Child Care Services.**

67. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there are genuine concerns that the new childcare subvention scheme will result in parents of children utilising the services presently provided by not for profit service creches in Cork City and County having to pay substantially higher fees resulting in some parents withdrawing their children, placing at risk the continuing financial viability of those childcare services and placing at risk the employment security of those providing the services; if she will take immediate action to address these concerns; and her proposed amendments to the proposed childcare subvention scheme. [31822/07]

68. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Minister for Health and Children the not for profit service crèches registered in Cork City and Cork County; and the ones that will be affected by the new childcare subvention scheme. [31823/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Brendan Smith):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 and 68 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, I have responsibility for the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP) and the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP), which are being implemented by the Office of the Minister for Children. Under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP), which is co-funded under the EU Social Fund (ESF), targeted support was provided through the staffing support grant scheme whereby community based not-for-profit childcare providers with a strong focus on disadvantage were awarded grant aid towards their staffing costs to allow them to operate reduced fees to disadvantaged parents. Funding under this scheme was originally awarded for a limited period during which services were expected to move towards sustainability. This funding was subsequently continued to the end of 2007, where it was considered necessary to enable services to continue to make their services accessible to disadvantaged parents. This continuation funding was subject to the condition that tiered fee struc-

tures were implemented by the services in question.

With the closure of the EOCP in December 2007, to continue to support community childcare services to provide affordable childcare to disadvantaged parents, the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS) is being introduced from January 2008 under the Exchequer funded National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP), the successor programme to the EOCP. The CCSS has been allocated €153 million over the next 3 years, representing a 16% increase in funding over the EOCP staffing scheme, and will continue to support community childcare services to provide reduced childcare fees for disadvantaged parents, complementing the universal supports in place for all parents. Under the new scheme, it will be possible to ensure that the level of grant aid which individual services qualify for will reflect the actual level of service they provide and the profile of the parents benefiting from their service. As part of their application for funding under the new scheme, services are required to ask parents using their services to complete a simple declaration form which will be included in a return to my Office and on which basis the level of subvention for each service will be determined. The subvention received by services will, in turn, be reflected in the reduced fees for parents who qualify as disadvantaged under the scheme.

In practice, this will mean that parents with children in such services and in receipt of most social welfare payments (or participating in a scheme such as Community Employment which demonstrates an underlying entitlement to same) or parents in receipt of Family Income Supplement (FIS), will see a weekly subvention in respect of their child. A higher subvention will be paid where the subvented child is a baby, in recognition of the higher costs associated with the care of children aged under 1 year. Parents who do not qualify for subvention will be charged the cost price for their childcare service, however, as community not-for-profit services will, generally, have availed of capital grant aid under the EOCP or NCIP removing the requirement to cover rent or a mortgage, and as the services are run on a not-for-profit basis, this should still be significantly below the market price.

It is considered that the new scheme will provide an effective framework for the continued targeting of additional resources towards disadvantaged parents and their children while continuing to support community childcare services generally. The scheme has been informed by and takes account of a number of enhancements recommended by the report of the Value for Money Review of the EOCP. These include the fact that the subvention to services will be more responsive to the level of service provided as well as the degree of parental disadvantage supported and the ceiling for funding, which existed under

the previous scheme, is being removed. Account will also be taken of all of the operational costs of the service rather than staffing costs alone. Services, including full-time, part-time and sessional ones, which at present are, in some cases, inaccessibly priced for disadvantaged parents, will be available to them at more appropriate rates under the new scheme.

The new scheme has clear advantages over its predecessor. There is an increase in the level of funding available under it, and a majority of services will benefit from the changes it introduces. Existing EOCP staffing grant recipients who enter the new scheme will continue to be funded at their current levels until July 2008. My Office has engaged in a series of meetings with existing grant recipients to outline to them the details of the new scheme and to gather feedback from the services themselves. A meeting with representatives of the City and County Childcare Committees has also taken place.

Transitional arrangements have been made under which existing grant recipients will continue to be funded at their current levels until 1st July 2008. This is to ensure that existing childcare services are facilitated to adjust to the new scheme, including making any adjustments necessary to their fee structures. As signalled when I announced the new scheme in July this year, the transitional period between now and 1 July 2008 is being used to monitor and review the impact it will have on individual groups, on the basis of the more detailed and comprehensive data received this month. Where appropriate, any adjustments necessary to the scheme to secure the best outcomes for childcare services and for disadvantaged parents and their children will be considered on the basis of this data and well in advance of the commencement of the new funding levels in July 2008.

Ninety two childcare facilities in Cork City and County which are in receipt of staffing grant assistance under the EOCP have been invited to apply for funding under the new Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS). Applications from Groups entering the new scheme are currently being processed and when validated, these Groups are issued with letters from the Childcare Directorate of my Office approving transitional funding under the NCIP Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS). To date thirty eight Groups in Cork City and County have been approved transitional funding. This funding will, for the first six months of 2008, be based on the level of funding currently being provided to the Group under the EOCP staffing support grant scheme and subject to the necessary contractual arrangement with Pobal, who manage the day to day operation of the EOCP and NCIP.

69. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the steps she is taking to

[Deputy Frank Feighan.]

provide play therapy in County Roscommon. [31827/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Jimmy Devins):** 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.

70. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive to Parliamentary Question No. 200 of 23 October 2007. [31836/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Jimmy Devins):** The Health Service Executive has advised that a reply issued to the Deputy on 12 November 2007.

#### Health Service Staff.

71. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the Health Service Executive or her Department will appoint orthopaedic surgeons to operate on babies and children in HSE south; the number of such surgeons currently appointed to HSE south; the number vacancies in the region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31839/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** Subject to overall parameters set by Government, the Health Service Executive has the responsibility for determining the composition of its staffing complement. In that regard, it is a matter for the Executive to manage and deploy its human resources to best meet the requirements of its Annual Service Plan for the delivery of health and personal social services to the public. The Executive is the appropriate body to consider the matter raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

#### Hospital Waiting Lists.

72. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if an urgent hospital appointment will be arranged for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31853/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** Operational responsibility for the

management and delivery of health and personal social services is a matter for the Health Service Executive and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall Vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

#### Health Services.

73. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason home help hours were withdrawn in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31855/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal 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 Repayment Scheme.

74. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children when payment under the health repayment scheme in respect of persons in residential institutions will be made to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31856/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** The Health Service Executive has responsibility for administering the Repayment Scheme and the information sought by the Deputy relates to matters within the area of responsibility of the Executive. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued to the Deputy.

#### Hospital Services.

75. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the allocation of cancer services to Mullingar, Tullamore and Portlaoise Hospitals (details supplied) were approved by her; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31865/07]

**Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney):** Between 2000 and 2004 when the Health Service Executive (HSE) took over responsibility for the funding of cancer services, a total of €5.5 million was allocated by my



Department for oncology/haematology services, including symptomatic breast disease services, to the former Midland Health Board.

### Consultancy Contracts.

76. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Transport if he will amend the terms of reference his Department has given to transport consultants Booz, Allen and Hamilton in relation to the Broadstone alignment to take into the account the ongoing preparation by Dublin City Council of a local area plan for Phibsborough/Mountjoy since the area covered by the plan includes the Broadstone alignment; if he will specifically ask the consultants to examine the two tier use of the alignment for both LUAS and heavy rail services proposed in the pre-draft submission to Dublin City Council on the local area plan by an association (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31692/07]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey):** The consultants have considered the technical and operational feasibility if a two tier use of the old Broadstone alignment and will comment on it in their report.

### Rail Network.

77. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport his plans for the provision of level crossings along the Galway to Ennis rail line in view of the opening of the western rail corridor; if a fully automated crossing will be provided for the Ballyogan Road in Barefield, County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31754/07]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey):** The detailed design and implementation of the Western Rail Corridor including the provision of level crossings is a matter for Iarnród Éireann.

### Appointments to State Boards.

78. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport if he will ensure that when appointing the two outstanding vacancies to the board of Aer Lingus, that at minimum one of the appointees would be a representative of the mid west region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31756/07]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey):** The State is entitled under the Memorandum and Articles of Association to appoint three directors to the board of Aer Lingus. Currently there is one State appointed director serving on the board and I hope to be in a position to nominate two further candidates for appointment to the board in the near future.

The State's appointees will seek to ensure that all future decisions of the Company, that have significant implications for wider government, aviation or regional development policies, including issues impacting on the mid-west regions, are considered at board level. This will give the State appointees the opportunity to raise the public policy implications of each decision and to ensure that the full commercial implications for the company are taken into account.

### Air Services.

79. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport his views on the retention and development of the Aer Lingus transatlantic routes which service Shannon Airport; his further views on the fact that Aer Lingus have only committed to serving the routes up to the end of the summer schedule 2008; if he will instruct the Government board members of Aer Lingus to work for a real commitment from Aer Lingus and that the company will continue to operate a full comprehensive transatlantic service to Shannon Airport for a minimum period of five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31757/07]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey):** In its press release of 7th November 2007, Aer Lingus outlined its planned schedule for 2008, which represents significant increased capacity on its long haul network. Aer Lingus also reaffirms its commitment to serving the transatlantic market to/from Shannon Airport operating daily direct flights from Shannon to Boston, Shannon to New York and daily flights to Chicago via Dublin.

Through a new link-up with US carrier JetBlue access to/from Shannon will be possible via 50 airports in the US, Mexico and the Caribbean.

Shannon Airport is ideally placed to exploit the vast opportunities arising from the EU US Open Skies Agreement brokered earlier this year which will come fully into effect at the end of March next year. Experience in the EU context has shown that the full liberalisation of air services leads to increased competition, lower fares and the growth and development of a wider range of air services. In this context Shannon Airport Authority is making preparations to allow it to rise to the challenges and opportunities presented by Open Skies to allow it to compete for its share of the new expanding transatlantic market, with a view to securing increased connectivity to the US over the longer term. It is important to remember that under open skies new services may be inaugurated by any US or EU carrier between any point in the US and Shannon. The future provision of transatlantic services is not a matter for Aer Lingus only. In this context I welcome the media reports this week suggesting that a US based tour operator is set to operate 12 weekly flights from six US cities to Shannon Airport.

[Deputy Noel Dempsey.]

With regard to the State's representation on the Board of Aer Lingus, the State's appointees will seek to ensure that all future decisions of the Company, that have significant implications for wider government, aviation or regional development policies, including issues impacting on the mid-west regions, are considered at board level. This will give the State appointees the opportunity to raise the public policy implications of each decision and to ensure that the full commercial implications for the company are taken into account.

#### **Air Accident Investigations.**

80. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Transport if he has received a report of an incident on 17 October 2007 at Cork Airport in which an aircraft due to depart for the UK was pushed onto the taxi way without the correct procedures being followed, that the baggage hold was left unsecured and that the aircraft had to power down its engines to enable ground staff to secure the hold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31767/07]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey):** Safety oversight for civil aviation in Ireland is the responsibility of the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA). I am informed by the IAA that they have received no reports of this incident.

#### **Tax Code.**

81. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport the steps he is taking to provide a similar support to the fuel duty rebate scheme for passenger bus transport services which is being withdrawn; if his attention has been drawn to the impact this will have on the development of public transport, particularly in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31795/07]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey):** I refer the Deputy to the Minister for Finance's replies to composite Dail Question Nos. 106 and 107 which he answered on the 14th November 2007 and Dail Question No. 161 which he answered on the 20th November 2007.

#### **Air Services.**

82. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Transport if private consultants or legal experts have been engaged by his Department in relation to Aer Lingus's withdrawal of the Shannon to Heathrow route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31819/07]

**Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey):** No private consultants or legal experts have been engaged by my Department in relation to the withdrawal of the Shannon to

Heathrow route by Aer Lingus. Legal advice is provided by the Attorney General and his office.

#### **Human Rights Issues.**

83. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he raised the case of a person (details supplied) with the UNMIK authorities on his recent visit to Pristina; if he did, then the response he received; and if he did not, if he will do so on any occasion soon. [31732/07]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern):** The case to which the Deputy refers was discussed in general terms in the course of my recent visit to Kosovo. My officials subsequently raised it with the UNMIK mission in Kosovo, which retains responsibility for justice and policing competences, and sought a report from them on the case.

In response, UNMIK have informed us that the individual in question has been indicted on charges relating to his alleged role in demonstrations which took place in Pristina on 10 February 2007. A panel of three international judges was appointed to hear the case: one has since recused himself due to other obligations and been replaced by a local Kosovo judge. A motion by the defendant to dismiss the original trial panel was dismissed by a local judge of the Pristina District Court. The trial began in Pristina District Court on 15 November, but was adjourned to 4 December to allow adequate preparation following the appointment of a new ex-officio Defence Counsel for the defendant.

UNMIK has also commented on accusations made in some quarters concerning alleged bias on the part of international judges, and the extent of restrictions on this individual's movements and on his freedom to receive visitors. They refute such allegations and note that a previous decision by the District Court to deny the prosecutor's motion to continue the detention on remand of this individual and to release him into house arrest on 7 July, was upheld by an international panel of the Supreme Court on 20 July. They note also that he received two visits from human rights organisation while in the custody of the Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS), and that he has been free to receive visitors since being released into house arrest on 7 July. On 14 November, the presiding international judge ruled that he will remain in house detention until 11 January 2008, but that he shall be free to leave the place of house detention between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. daily, except on days when the trial is taking place.

The Department will continue to monitor developments in the case, and I have asked my officials to keep the matter under review.

#### **Work Permits.**

84. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if and when the Government

will recognise an independent Kosovo; if he has plans to work towards a work permit system here for Kosovars in an effort to alleviate the dangerous level of unemployment there; if the Government will consider offering much-needed support to Kosovar agriculture and education; if he will take action at EU level in an effort to ensure that Kosovars travelling on Serbian passports will not be repatriated under the Stability and Associations Agreement between Serbia and the EU; and if he will lobby for visa facilitation for Kosovars like that accorded to Serbs under the agreement. [31733/07]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern):** The difficult and sensitive issue of Kosovo's future status is the legacy of the Balkan wars of the 1990s. The framework for post-conflict Kosovo was set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 1999, which established an interim United Nations civilian administration (UNMIK), and authorised an international security presence (KFOR). The Resolution also provided for a gradual transfer of competences from the UNMIK mission to provisional institutions of self-government.

Together with our EU partners, Ireland has consistently expressed strong support for the work of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari. In March of this year, Special Envoy Ahtisaari submitted a Comprehensive Proposal to the UN Secretary General. He recommended that Kosovo's status should be independence, supervised by the international community. A key element of the proposed settlement would be a continuing international civilian and military presence in Kosovo, with the KFOR military force remaining and a new civilian ESDP Mission.

Ireland welcomed this proposal, as providing the most practical basis for a settlement of the Kosovo issue. Regrettably, intensive efforts within the UN Security Council to agree on a new Resolution on the basis of Ahtisaari were not successful, and on 1 August, the Secretary General announced that a further four months of talks between the two sides would be facilitated by an international Troika. No agreement has yet been found, and the Troika is due to report to the UN Secretary General on the outcome of these talks on 10 December.

As regards the part of the Deputy's question which raises the issue of Irish economic and social support for Kosovars, Ireland, together with our partners in the European Union and the international community, already plays its part in fostering socio-economic development in Kosovo. Ireland has committed over €1.1 million to Kosovo in the period from 2006 to 2008. These funds have been directed towards agriculture and rural development, support for young people and vulnerable sections of the community, livelihood

and enterprise development and renovation of educational facilities.

While negotiations have been completed on the text of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU, the EU Member States and Serbia, no date has yet been set for signature of the agreement. Signature will be subject to the approval of all the EU Member States and will depend on Serbia's full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Article 135 of the SAA provides that the Agreement shall not apply to Kosovo, this being without prejudice to the current status of Kosovo or the determination of its final status.

While we will face a more complex and uncertain political and legal environment in the event that there is no agreement on final status for Kosovo, we very much hope to be in a position to maintain our presence in KFOR, to consider contributing members of the Garda to an ESDP Mission and also to continue to support the future economic development of Kosovo.

#### Whale Conservation.

85. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if the Government has added its voice to the international condemnation of the Japanese whaling fleet that set out to the southern seas to hunt fin whales and humpback whales which are an endangered species; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31750/07]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern):** Ireland has consistently opposed Japan's scientific whaling programme both at meetings of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and through direct diplomatic contact. This matter was debated at the most recent annual meeting of the IWC in Alaska in May 2007. At the meeting, a resolution was passed calling on Japan, *inter alia*, to suspend the lethal aspects of its scientific whaling programme indefinitely, with Ireland being one of 40 countries voting in favour of this resolution. As indicated above, we have also made clear our opposition bilaterally on numerous occasions to the Japanese Government, most recently at a meeting which I had in Tokyo yesterday with the Japanese Foreign Minister, Mr. Masahiko Koumura.

#### Work Permits.

86. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the status of an appeal in relation to an application for a work permit by a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; the reason the application was previously refused even though the person's references are impeccable and the person has exceptional qualifications for the job that has been applied for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31768/07]



**Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin):** The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that this application was refused on the grounds that the position on offer is currently one of the occupations ineligible for an employment permit. Having heard the appeal the Appeals Officer has upheld the original decision in this case.

87. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when a decision will be made in relation to an appeal for a work permit in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in making a decision on the original application; the reason additional documentation was sought before it was declared a late application. [31835/07]

**Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin):** The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that a work permit has now issued in this case.

#### Industrial Development.

88. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of new FDI's opened in the mid-west region since 2002, broken down by year, county, company name, address and number of employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31866/07]

89. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of visits and on-site inspections of potential locations in the mid-west by FDI companies since 2002, which were arranged by his Department and the State development agencies, broken down by year, county and location address; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31867/07]

**Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 and 89 together.

Table showing the Number of new FDI projects opened in the Shannon Free Zone in the period 2002 to 2007

Start Year	Company Name	Address
2002	Travelsavers Ireland	Universal House, Shannon Free Zone
2005	Digital River Irl. Ltd.	Westpark Business Campus, Shannon Free Zone
2007	White Horse Insurance	B89 Shannon Free Zone West, Shannon
2007	Genesis Lease	Westpark Business Campus, Shannon Free Zone
2007	PC Tools Ltd.	Shannon Business Park, Shannon Free Zone West
2007	Tranzeo Wireless Technologies Ltd.	Distribution Centre, Shannon Free Zone

For IDA purposes the mid west region consists of the counties Clare, Limerick and North Tipperary excluding the Shannon Free Zone. Since 2002 there have been 7 new IDA supported projects opened in the Mid West region and 6 new FDI projects opened in the Shannon Free Zone. Details of each of those projects and their location is set out in the attached tabular statement. This statement does not include the numbers employed in individual companies as this information is confidential to the companies.

In the same period there have been a total of 170 IDA-led visits by potential investors to the Mid West region and 76 visits to the Shannon Free Zone. Details of these visits are set out in the attached tabular statement. IDA Ireland has statutory responsibility for the attraction of foreign direct investment to the Mid West region, except for the Shannon Free Zone, which falls within the remit of Shannon Development. Both Shannon Development and IDA Ireland work closely within the promotion and marketing of these tailored property solutions. Limerick-Shannon has been designated as the Gateway for the region under the National Spatial Strategy. The Mid West has a strong base of overseas companies which are mainly located in Limerick, (Raheen and the National Technology Park), and the Shannon Free Zone. State supported employment accounts for 17.3% of total employment in the Region as compared to 14.8% nationally.

I am satisfied that the continued co-operation between the agencies, together with the roll out of the National Development Plan, will continue to bear fruit for the Mid West region as a whole.

Table showing the Number of new IDA supported projects opened in the Mid West Region in the period 2002 to 2007.

Year	Company	Location
2003	Taro Pharmaceuticals	Roscrea, Nth Tipp
2004	Monster Cable	Ennis, Co. Clare
2005	NT-MDT	*NTP, Limerick
2006	Northern Trust	*NTP, Limerick
2007	TSA	*NTP, Limerick
	AR Worldwide	*NTP, Limerick
	Rovsing	*NTP, Limerick

\*NTP — National Technology Park Limerick.

Table showing the Number of IDA site visits to the Mid West Region in the period 2002 to 2007

Year	Limerick	Nth. Tipperary	Clare	*Nth Kerry
2002	15	10	4	1
2003	13	1	7	2
2004	18	0	3	1
2005	19	0	1	3
2006	25	0	7	2
2007	32	0	5	1

\*Since mid 2007 North Kerry forms part of the South West Region and is now covered by the Cork IDA Office.

Table showing the number of visits to the Shannon Free Zone in the period 2002 to 2007

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
19	24	17	22	11

*Question No. 90 answered with Question No. 34.*

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

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his proposals for the coming year to increase capital or other grants available to groups providing for both passive and active recreational pursuits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31841/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** Under the sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, grants are allocated to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. In this regard, the 2007 sports capital programme was advertised in the national press in October 2006. The closing date for receipt of completed applications was 24th November 2006. Over 1,530 applications were received for the programme and provisional allocations totalling €85 million were made to 935 projects on 5th April last. I have not yet decided the level of grant aid to be allocated for the next round of the programme. While no date has been set for the 2008 Programme, advertisements announcing the next round of the Programme will be placed in the national press and application forms will be available at that stage. Applicants who feel that they have a project that meets the Guidelines, Terms and Conditions of the programme may apply at that stage.

*Question No. 92 answered with Question No. 35.*

*Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 34.*

*Question No. 94 answered with Question No. 9.*

#### **Tourism Industry.**

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he has satisfied himself that the tourism industry here is sufficiently competitive to meet the challenges of the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31845/07]

**Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan):** In considering the competitiveness of any industry, a key measure is the extent to which it can maintain and increase market share. For the first three-quarters of 2007, reports from the CSO show that visitor numbers are up by over 4% on the corresponding period in 2006. The revenue associated with overseas visitors for the first half of the year is up by nearly 8%. This performance is broadly in line with industry targets for the year.

However, maintaining and enhancing competitiveness is a major issue for Irish tourism as it is for Ireland as a whole. In dealing with that issue, it is important to bear in mind that competitiveness is about more than price movements and costs. Tourism is no different, in that respect, to other internationally-traded sectors.

Ireland cannot, and, indeed, should not, attempt to compete on the basis of costs with mass tourism destinations. Our competitive advantage must lie in other areas.

As highlighted recently by my colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance, priorities for building and embedding competitive advantage into the future include:

- Product development, innovation and research and development
- Cost competitiveness
- Marketing Ireland in a changing global environment
- Responding to labour supply issues by growing the necessary skills sets through education and training
- Ensuring that relevant policies are developed in a coherent, integrated way across Government Departments and State Agencies.

The question of competitiveness in tourism, like any other productive sector, must be seen in that broader light.

The two major tourism events held in Dublin this week, the Fáilte Ireland Annual Tourism conference and the Launch of Tourism Ireland's 2008 Marketing Plans have highlighted the need

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

for the Tourism industry to become the champion of the physical environment, which is a key source of its competitive advantage, and, in terms of enhancing the competitiveness of individual operators, for the industry to move to more energy efficient and low environmental impact solutions in the design, construction and operation of tourism build.

The Tourism Agencies continue to monitor Ireland's competitiveness as a tourism destination and I will encourage them to assist the industry in responding to changing conditions through a variety of programmes in marketing, human resource development, quality enhancement, product development and productivity.

Tourism is just one part, albeit a significant part, of the overall economy. There is a competitiveness challenge for the economy as a whole and that challenge will be addressed by the Government's wider competitiveness agenda.

*Questions Nos. 96 to 98, inclusive, answered with Question No. 21.*

*Questions Nos. 99 and 100 answered with Question No. 35.*

#### Social Welfare Code.

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a supplementary welfare payment can be made on humanitarian grounds in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31854/07]

**Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen):** The supplementary welfare allowance scheme (SWA), which is administered on my behalf by the Community Welfare staff of the Health Service Executive, is one of a number of social assistance schemes which, with effect from 1 May 2004, is subject to a habitual residence condition. The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that the person concerned is not entitled to supplementary welfare allowance as he does not satisfy the habitual residency condition.

#### Offshore Islands.

102. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will commission an independent ten-year plan for the development and sustainability of Ireland's offshore islands. [31710/07]

**Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív):** The Government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to supporting island development as evidenced by the significantly increased level of

funding that has been provided for this purpose over the past number of years. This funding has facilitated the implementation of a planned programme of infrastructural improvements and the provision of vastly improved island access services, in close consultation with island communities.

My Department has taken a number of further initiatives recently to assist the formulation of future development policies aimed at ensuring the sustainability of islands and enhancing the quality of life for island residents. These initiatives include:

- the provision of an annual administration grant to enable Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann employ a full-time manager, one of whose primary responsibilities is the development of policies in regard to the various issues affecting island communities;
- the proposal by Sustainable Energy Ireland and my Department to jointly fund a pilot study of the energy needs and potential of the Aran Islands with a view to implementing sustainable energy strategies on a number of populated islands, and
- the proposal to carry out a study of the cost of living on islands, including operational costs for island enterprises.

In addition, a major research study on significant issues that impact on small island communities throughout Europe has recently been completed by ESIN, the European Small Islands Network, with Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann as a lead partner. This project, which was financed under the EU's INTERREG Programme, has added to the body of knowledge available to my Department for devising and implementing strategies for the future development of the islands.

In light of the foregoing, and taking into account the ambitious proposals for the islands outlined in the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and in the Agreed Programme for Government 2007-2012, I am sure the Deputy will agree that the development needs of our populated islands are being comprehensively addressed.

#### Industrial Development.

103. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the level of grant-aid for new industries establishing in all Gaeltacht areas; the level of grant-aid that will be available in all Gaeltacht areas in 2009; the way this level of grant-aid differs from that available from other statutory agencies operating outside Gaeltacht areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31722/07]

**Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív):** General guidelines on the type of assistance provided by Údarás



na Gaeltachta to new industries establishing in the Gaeltacht are available on the organisation's website at [www.udaras.ie](http://www.udaras.ie). The maximum level of assistance that Údarás na Gaeltachta may provide is governed by EU State Aid Regulations and does not differ from other statutory agencies operating outside the Gaeltacht.

Further information on all aspects of State Aid, including the level of assistance that will apply in 2009, is available on the website of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment at [www.entemp.ie](http://www.entemp.ie).

### Comhairliúcháin Phoiblí.

104. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Brian O'Shea** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cén dul chun cinn atá déanta leis an bpróiseas comhairliúcháin poiblí a thosnú don scéim nua faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [31723/07]

**Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív):** Mar eolas don Teachta, cuireadh tús le céad Scéim na Roinne ar an 22ú Meán Fómhair 2004 le bheith i bhfeidhm ar feadh tréimhse de 3 bliana ón dáta sin nó go dtí go mbeidh scéim nua deimhnithe de bhua Alt 15 den Acht, cibé acu is túisce.

Mar thús ar réiteach na scéime nua, rinne an Roinn athbhreithniú níos luaithe i mbliana ar an dul chun cinn a bhí déanta ó thaobh comhlíonadh na dtiomantas sa chéad scéim. Is féidir liom a dheimhniú don Teachta go bhfuil tús curtha ag mo Roinn le réiteach scéim nua faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003 agus go mbeidh fógra sna meáin go luath ag lorg aighneachtaí ón bpobal ina leith.

### Forbairt na Gaeilge.

105. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Brian O'Shea** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cén dul chun cinn atá déanta faoi fhorbairt an phlean straitéisigh i leith fás a chothú in úsáid na Gaeilge agus sa dátheangachas a bheidh mar ardphlean cuimsitheach chun úsáid na Gaeilge a fhorbairt i ngach ceantar baile agus tuaithe in Éirinn; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [31724/07]

**Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív):** Mar atá tugtha le fios agam don Teach cheana, d'fhoilsigh an Rialtas Ráiteas i leith na Gaeilge i mí na Nollag 2006. Tá sé leagtha amach sa Ráiteas sin go n-ullmhófar Straitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge bunaithe ar na spriocanna atá luaite sa Ráiteas. Tá i gceist go mbeadh an Ráiteas mar bhun-chloch do chéimeanna praiticiúla chun tacú leis, agus chun forbairt a dhéanamh ar, an nGaeilge, bunaithe ar chur chuige nua-aimsire. Tá mo Roinnse faoi láthair i mbun próiseas earcaíochta le comh-

airleoirí a fhostú d'fhonn cuidiú le hullmhú na Straitéise. Tá i gceist go rachfar i gcomhairle le pobal na tíre mar dhlúth-chuid den phróiseas agus go réachtálfar sraith chruinnithe poiblí i gco-danna éagsúla den tír. Tá súil agam go gceapfar comhairleoirí roimh dheireadh na bliana seo agus go mbeidh an Straitéis féin ullamh roimh dheireadh na bliana 2008.

### Community Development.

106. **Deputy Deirdre Clune** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if there are proposals to redraw the boundaries relating to Leader areas, particularly in relation to a company (details supplied); when these proposals will be decided on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31824/07]

107. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if, as part of the rural development programme cohesion process, a formal decision has been made by his Department and by the Government in relation to the boundary between East Cork Area Development and West Cork Leader; if this decision has been implemented; and if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing concerns in the Owenabue Valley region arising from the transfer of significant parts of the West Cork Leader area to ECAD. [31829/07]

**Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 107 together.

Deputies will be aware that the core objective of cohesion process is the alignment of local, community and rural development structures to achieve full coverage by one integrated local development company within a given area. Following three years of extensive consultation with LEADER and Partnership groups to develop the most suitable configurations of groups, the Government decided on 27 March 2007 on the revised areas of coverage for local development companies.

As part of this consultation process, my Department facilitated local organisations in the communities to which the Deputy's questions relate, in conducting a review of needs based on local inputs, to determine how best to deliver services in the area in the future. This review concluded that, in the context of aligning coverage areas, the Carrigaline Electoral Area would be best served by East Cork Area Development Ltd. This was reflected in the March Government Decision, details of which were conveyed to LEADER and Partnership Groups on 4 April last. The new arrangements will facilitate the delivery of local development programmes in the entire Carrigaline electoral area, including the Owenabue Valley, for the first time.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

I am told that West Cork LEADER and West Cork Area Partnership have commenced the implementation of the Government Decision in their area. The new West Cork Development Partnership was incorporated on Thursday October 4th, 2007. I understand also that ECAD are also engaged in aligning their governance and membership arrangements with Government requirements. The realignment of local delivery structures will bring the overall number of local development delivery bodies to 55 comprising 38 integrated LEADER/Partnership bodies in rural areas and 17 Partnerships covering urban areas.

#### Wildlife Conservation.

108. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she has plans to ensure that an appropriate assessment is carried out before fishery activity takes place in areas designated for the protection of birds and their habitat under the Birds Directive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31840/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** I am fully committed to delivering on the provisions of the Birds Directive. In this regard, I have asked that the requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive as transposed by the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulation 1997, as amended are fully complied with in respect of fisheries and also aquaculture licensing. In this regard my Department is working closely with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and relevant State agencies to determine the arrangements to be followed in order to ensure that the provisions of the Directive are fully respected going forward.

#### Fisheries Protection.

109. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of staff at the Marine Institute for each year from 1998 to end of October 2007 under headings (details supplied). [31708/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** The following are the Staff Numbers at the Marine Institute for the years 1998 to 2007 under headings:

Permanent Staff for the years 1998 to 2007 and Contract Staff 2005 to 2007.

	Permanent Staff	Part-time Staff*	Contract Staff	Total
1998	82	2	18	102
1999	85	2	25	110
2000	102	2	20	122
2001	125	2	19	144

	Permanent Staff	Part-time Staff*	Contract Staff	Total
2002	147	2	24	171
2003	147	3	13	160
2004	147	3	34	181
2005	147	3	57	204
2006	147	3	55	202
2007	147	3	79	226

\*Part-time Staff form part of the Permanent Staff complement.

#### Grant Payments.

110. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be paid the disadvantaged area scheme. [31709/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** An application under the 2007 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 29 March 2007.

One of the primary provisions of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme is that applicants must maintain a minimum stocking density on their holding of 0.15 livestock units per forage hectare for at least three consecutive months. However, where the holding of an applicant is identified as not meeting this minimum stocking density requirement, the person in question is invited to submit evidence of satisfactory stocking i.e. Flock Register, Horse Passports or details of a REPS or Commonage Framework Plan, which provides for a lower stocking level.

The person named was written to and invited to submit appropriate evidence of the number of sheep maintained on her farm. On receipt of a satisfactory response from the person named, the application will be further processed with a view to payment at an early date provided that the applicant is eligible for payment.

111. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive their 2007 cattle headage grant. [31711/07]

118. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive their 2007 single farm payment. [31718/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 and 118 together.

An application under the 2007 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 15 May 2007. An Advance payment of €2,286.81 issued on 16 October in respect of the Single Payment Scheme based on the area declared. An amount of

€1,786.31 issued on 2 October in respect of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme.

Following further processing of the application, issues arose regarding the area and location of the lands being claimed, the outcome of which was that the person named was deemed to have over-claimed in respect of the forage area available to him. However, as there was more eligible land declared than the number of entitlements held and in excess of the 45 hectare limit on the Disadvantaged Area Scheme, a balancing payment under the Single Payment Scheme and a supplementary payment under the Disadvantaged Area Scheme will issue shortly, after which, the person named will be fully paid under both Schemes.

### Milk Quota.

112. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if a person (details supplied) in County Cork has applied to the milk quota tribunal for additional milk quota; when the next meeting of the tribunal is scheduled; and if this application will be considered at the next meeting. [31712/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** Allocations of milk quota from the National Reserve are granted on the basis of recommendations from the Milk Quota Appeals Tribunal. The Tribunal examines and makes recommendations on applications for additional quota from individual producers.

The person named has applied to the Tribunal in the current 2007/2008 quota year. The first meeting of the Tribunal is scheduled for 13 December 2007; however this application will not be considered until a later meeting, to take place in the first quarter of 2008.

113. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the details of the membership of the consultative committee on milk quotas outlining its terms of reference; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31713/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** I established the Dairy Consultative Committee to advise me in the evaluation of policy proposals in advance of the 2008 CAP Health Check. The milk quota element of the Commission's Health Check paper, released last week, focused on the preparation of a soft landing for the end of dairy quotas in 2015, primarily through a gradual increase in quotas but also through possible changes in other policy instruments such as adjustments to intervention or to the super levy. I want to ensure that in the negotiating position that I will adopt, I have direct access to the broadest possible views, particularly those of the key stakeholders in the industry, to assist me in that process.

The dairy consultative committee is broadly representative of the dairy sector, with representatives of the main farmer and industry organisations on it. In addition, relevant state agencies and other individuals are also participating. Mr. Jim Beecher, Assistant Secretary General with responsibility for the livestock sector in my Department, is chairman. The Committee held its first meeting in October and the membership is as follows:

Mr. Richard Kennedy	IFA
Ms Catherine Lascurettes	IFA
Mr. Dominic Cronin	ICMSA
Mr. Ciaran Dolan	ICMSA
Ms Catherine Buckley	Macra
Mr. Eddie O'Donnell	Macra
Mr. John Tyrell	ICOS
Mr. Pdraig Gibbons	ICOS
Mr. Michael Walsh	ICOS
Mr. Michael Barry	IDIA
Mr. Vincent Gilhawley	IDIA
Ms Thia Hennessy	Teagasc
Mr. Trevor Donnellan	Teagasc
Dr. Michael Keane	University College Cork
Mr. Nicholas Simms	Irish Dairy Board
Mr. Joe O'Flynn	Irish Dairy Board
Ms Tara McCarthy	Bord Bia

### Common Agricultural Policy.

114. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the details of the membership of the consultative committee advising her on the CAP health check; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31714/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** The CAP Health Check Consultative Group will comprise Government officials, representatives of the main industry stakeholders, including farming organisations and industry representative groups, and independent experts. Invitations to participate in the Group will issue in the next few days.

### Fishing Fleet.

115. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the amount of funds provided by her in 2008 to fund the decommissioning of the white fishing fleet; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31715/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** The total amount provided in the Pre-Budget Estimate for BIM for capital investment for the year 2008 amounts to €19.392 million, within which the decommissioning scheme will be provided for.



### Milk Quota.

116. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if her Department has details of quota restructuring within each co-op area since 1995; the average size of milk quotas in each co-op area in 1995 and 2007; the average amount of quota available per transaction in each co-op area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31716/07]

117. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if her Department has details of quota restructuring within each co-op area since 1995; the average size of milk quotas in each co-op area in 1995 and 2007; the average amount of quota available per transaction in each co-op area for each year since 1995; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31717/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 and 117 together.

The figures requested in respect of each Co-op area for the period 1995-2007 are being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

*Question No. 118 answered with Question No. 111.*

### Grant Payments.

119. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will receive their single entitlement payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31734/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** An application under 2007 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 15 May 2007. The processing of the application has now been completed and payment will shortly issue to the applicant.

120. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding the matter of recouping from Coillte Teoranta, circa €8 million of forestry premium grants awarded to it but subsequently excluded from community financing under the guarantee section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund and subsequently confirmed by the European Court of Justice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31739/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** The question of recoupment of forestry premium from Coillte is currently under consideration in my Department. Further legal advice is being sought from the Office of the Attorney General in relation to this matter.

### Forestry Industry.

121. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the status of the draft forestry and freshwater pearl mussel requirements and the moratorium on felling in the areas hosting the species; the number of hectares involved in each catchment; and the number and extent of suspended or pending forestry felling licenses involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31740/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** The moratorium on felling within areas with freshwater pearl mussel populations is still in place, pending final decision on the new Requirements governing forestry operations in such areas.

Approximately 945 hectares are affected at present in the moratorium areas, where felling licence applications are being held pending publication of the agreed Requirements.

The attached table provides details of the moratorium areas within each catchment, based on a 6 km hydrological distance, together with details of existing forest cover within each catchment.

Catchment Name	Catchment Area (ha)	Total Forest (ha)	Coillte Forest (ha)	Premium Forest (ha)	Other Forest (ha)
Aughavaud	1,383	187	167	13	7
Bandon and Caha	9,934	2,228	1,224	537	467
Bundorragha	2,051	88	0	0	88
Caragh	10,269	881	373	313	195
Clady	4,555	317	271	20	26
Clodiagh	7,318	1,019	528	87	404
Cloon	2,979	370	42	291	37
Dawros	3,449	264	127	3	134
Dereen	6,766	780	480	189	111
Eske	5,129	523	337	17	169
Glaskellan	1,642	101	100	0	1

Catchment Name	Catchment Area (ha)	Total Forest (ha)	Coillte Forest (ha)	Premium Forest (ha)	Other Forest (ha)
Kerry Blackwater	8,481	1,343	823	329	191
Leannan	11,147	1,865	1,114	178	573
Licky	3,228	1,573	1,303	202	68
Mountain, Aughnabrisky, Ballymurphy	2,421	164	21	120	23
Munster Blackwater	42,235	4,235	2,210	1,216	809
Newport	4,852	1,065	714	248	103
Nore	16,039	1,583	614	256	713
Owenagappul	1,147	62	0	50	12
Owencarrow	4,680	94	0	0	94
Owenea	9,160	1,607	1,199	268	140
Owenmore	2,984	267	17	88	162
Owenreagh	3,680	324	198	4	122
Owenriff	5,295	1,035	751	89	195

*Notes:* Catchments areas have been delineated based on a 6 km hydrological distance. Coillte Forest refers to forested land owned and managed by Coillte Teoranta. Premium Forest refers to forestry grant aided by the Forest Service. Other Forest includes forestry and semi-natural woodlands not owned by Coillte Teoranta or grant aided by the Forest Service.

122. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason an analysis to establish the constraints and impacts at a high level for areas designated for the freshwater pearl mussel and to construct the principles through which new afforestation must proceed, was absent from the strategic environmental assessment undertaken by her Department for the Rural Development Plan 2006 to 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31741/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** The Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Rural Development Plan 2007-2013 was a formal, systematic evaluation of the anticipated significant environmental effects of the Plan. The associated Environmental Report is positioned at the top of a hierarchy of assessment measures and requirements that are applied at implementation level.

The Report identifies threats to water quality as one of the principal potential adverse effects of forestry and pearl mussel habitats are highlighted in the context of introducing measures to improve water quality. At implementation level, a range of assessment measures and guidelines act to counter the potential adverse effects with specific account taken of the freshwater pearl mussel.

All applications for afforestation are subject to a detailed screening procedure to determine if an environmental impact assessment is necessary. The procedure includes specific reference to the freshwater pearl mussel. In addition, applications arising from within a designated site or within three kilometres upstream of such a site are referred to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Finally, all forestry operations, including afforestation must be carried out in accordance with the published Code of Best Forest Practice and associated Guidelines including Forestry and Water Quality. Specific guidelines for the further protection of the freshwater pearl mussel — Forestry and Freshwater Pearl Mussel Requirements — have been drafted and will be published soon.

#### **Milk Quota.**

123. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if additional quota will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31759/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** Allocations of milk quota from the National Reserve are granted on the basis of recommendations from the Milk Quota Appeals Tribunal. The Tribunal examines and makes recommendations on applications for additional quota from individual producers.

The person named has applied to the Tribunal in the current 2007/2008 quota year. The Tribunal will examine applications between now and the end of the quota year on 31st March 2008 and all applicants will be notified of the outcome in their case.

#### **National Reserve.**

124. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a decision will be made on an application by a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon to the national reserve; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31834/07]

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan):** As indicated in reply to a previous question from the Deputy, the person named submitted an application for an allocation under Category A of the 2006 National Reserve which catered for farmers who inherited, leased or otherwise received land free of charge or for a nominal amount, from a farmer who retired or died before 16 May 2005, and where the land was leased out to a third party during the reference period 2000-02.

Applicants who are applying on leased in land must commit to a lease for a minimum of 5 years. The person named was not successful under this Category as documentation submitted by him indicated that he was only leasing the lands for 3 years. The person named appealed this decision and his file was forwarded to the Independent Single Payments Appeals Committee who upheld my Department's decision. Subsequently the person named submitted additional documentation to the Committee that was forwarded to my Department for consideration. My Department have further reviewed this case but there is insufficient information to allow for the original decision to be revoked. My Department have written to the person named requesting clarification on the documentation submitted. When this information is received my Department will be in a position to consider his eligibility under this Category. In addition, the recent documentation submitted by the Deputy on behalf of the person named does not confirm his eligibility under Category A.

#### **Youth Services.**

125. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of registered youth clubs in the Dublin south central electoral area; the amount of funding each receives; if she will provide the answer in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31748/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey):** The City of Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB) administers grant-in-aid funding to youth projects and youth organisations in the Dublin area on behalf of the Youth Affairs Section of my Department. This funding also supports youth clubs and groups throughout Dublin city. I understand that the CDYSB has a registration process in place for youth clubs wishing to avail of its grants and services. The Deputy may wish to contact the CDYSB directly for the information sought in relation to the number of youth clubs so registered for the area in question. My Department will forward the Deputy a list of relevant youth clubs and groups which received funding in 2006 (latest figures available) from my Depart-

ment via the CDYSB as soon as this information has been compiled.

#### **Schools Building Projects.**

126. **Deputy Shane McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Science when construction work will begin on the new school (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31694/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** All applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria. Progress on the individual project concerned will be considered in the context of the multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

#### **Higher Education Grants.**

127. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason there is no provision under the maintenance grants scheme for students who qualify for grants and are attending post leaving certificate courses for the payment of registration charges; her views on whether this is a particular anomaly compared to other grant schemes; and if she will take steps to change the situation. [31695/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** My Department funds four maintenance grant schemes, three at third level, the Higher Education Grants (HEG) Scheme, the Vocational Education Committees' (VEC) Scholarships Scheme, the Third Level Maintenance Grants Scheme for Trainees and one for student attending Post Leaving Certificate Courses. Students who are entering approved courses for the first time are eligible for grants where they satisfy the relevant conditions as to age, residence, means, nationality and previous academic attainment. Third level Institutions have a Student Services Charge/registration charge which is currently €825 per annum per student. This charge is levied by the institutions to defray the costs of examinations, registration and student services. All students who are eligible for a means tested student support grant have the student charge paid on their behalf by the Local Authorities or the Vocational Education Committees, in addition to any maintenance grant and tuition fee grant to which they are entitled. As the provision of Post Leaving Certificate courses is fully funded by the State, no additional charges in the nature of the Student Service Charge at third level, should arise for the student. Under my Department's student maintenance grant schemes, I am committed to ongoing improvements in the student support schemes including increasing the rates and income limits, as resources permit.



### Schools Building Projects.

128. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the application by a primary school (details supplied) in County Wicklow for an urgently needed extension, the necessity for which has been supported by Department inspectors and by her Department, will be approved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31696/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** All applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria. Progress on the individual project concerned will be considered in the context of the multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

### Higher Education Grants.

129. **Deputy Brendan Kenneally** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will approve the application of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford, who is living independently and who applied to be assessed as an independent mature student in respect of a higher education grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31701/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** I have made inquiries with officials in my Department and I wish to advise that an appeal has been received from the candidate referred to by the Deputy which is under review and a reply will shortly issue directly to the applicant.

### Schools Refurbishment.

130. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will advise and assist on an issue (details supplied). [31705/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** The school referred to by the Deputy had applied for funding for the complete replacement of the heating system under the Summer Works Scheme 2008. Decisions on the scheme will be made later in the year. In the meantime the school authorities recently advised the Building Unit of my Department that the heating system has broken down and requested funding for emergency repair works to be carried out. Details of the estimated cost of the repairs are awaited and when received will the school authorities will be advised of the outcome as a matter of urgency.

### School Accommodation.

131. **Deputy Noel O'Flynn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason payments

are being delayed to those who provide school accommodation such as prefabs and so on for purchase, lease or rent; and when overdue payments will be made to a company (details attached) in County Kilkenny. [31736/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the Department provides grant aid to school authorities towards the cost of rented temporary school accommodation. In general, the Board of Management of a school is responsible for acquiring temporary accommodation, including procurement of prefabricated buildings. Accordingly the contract is between a school's Board of Management and a supplying contractor and any enquiries regarding overdue payments should be made directly to the relevant Boards of Management.

### Special Educational Needs.

132. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; if she will allow them a spelling exemption for their forthcoming exams and appoint an assistant to read for them during the course of the examinations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31755/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations including organising the holding of examinations and determining procedures in places where examinations are conducted including the supervision of examinations. I can inform the Deputy that the Commission operates a scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations. Applications for such accommodations are submitted by schools on behalf of their students. I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### School Transport.

133. **Deputy Noel J. Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the status of the extension of a bus route for a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; when she expects a decision to be made; if her attention has been drawn to the urgency of this situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31777/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey):** Bus Éireann which operates the School Transport Scheme, on behalf of my Department, are responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport services. In general, primary

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

school transport routes are planned so that, as far as possible, no eligible pupil will have more than 2.4 kilometres to travel to a pick up point. Bus Éireann have advised my Department that an extension to the existing service is not feasible due to operational reasons; the families referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied have been advised of this decision.

### Schools Building Projects.

134. **Deputy Noel J. Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the status of an application for building works for a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; when she expects a decision to be made; if her attention has been drawn to the urgency of this application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31778/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** The project to which the Deputy refers to is currently at an early stage of architectural planning.

A Stage 3 submission (Developed sketch scheme) is currently being examined by officials from my Department. The schools board of management will be kept informed of developments once this examination is complete. The progression of all large scale building projects from initial design stage through to construction phase, including this project, is considered on an ongoing basis in the context of my Department's Multi-Annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

The Deputy can be assured that my Department will continue to ensure that building projects are delivered within the earliest possible timeframes.

135. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will take steps to provide a new school (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31799/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** All applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria. Progress on the individual project in question is being considered in the context of the multi-Annual School Building and Modernisation Programme and will have regard to the submission recently received from the school authorities concerned.

### School Enrolments.

136. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to provide for the future demand for places in secondary schools in Maynooth, Kilcock, Johnstownbridge, Clane,

Sallins and Kill, County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31800/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** I am aware that many areas located within close proximity to Dublin, similar to those referred to by the Deputy, continue to experience population growth, a position that almost inevitably places some strain on existing educational provision. In order to proactively plan for such areas of increased growth my Department is included among the prescribed authorities to whom local authorities are statutorily obliged to send draft development plans or proposed variations to development plans for comment. As a matter of course meetings are arranged with local authorities to establish the location, scale and pace of any major proposed developments and their possible implications for school provision so as to ensure as far as possible the timely delivery of the required education infrastructure. The primary schools in Sallins and Kill are in the catchment area of Naas for post-primary purposes. In Naas at post primary level, the management authority of St. Patrick's Post Primary School, Co. Kildare V.E.C., is currently progressing plans to re-locate the school and extend capacity to 1000 pupil places. Additionally, an extension project is completed at St. Mary's College, Naas which increases capacity at the school to 900 pupils. A similar extension was recently completed at Meanscoil Iognaid Rís, Naas and a further extension at the school is currently in architectural planning. In Maynooth a project to extend the capacity of Maynooth Post Primary School to 1,000 pupil places is currently being considered. The Department's Area Development Plan for Leixlip-Kilbeggan (the N4/M4 area) took account of the fact that the population along this route is expected to increase and recognised that such a significant population increase will result in substantial accommodation requirements at both first and second levels. It is a recommendation of the Commission that in the medium/long term, the need for a second level educational facility will arise in Enfield. The provision of this second level facility will facilitate pupils from the Johnstownbridge area.

### Higher Education Grants.

137. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the price index, and the date at which it was measured, used to increase the value of maintenance payments under the higher education grant in the 2007/2008 academic year; if it is intended to index these payments in 2008/2009; and the index that will be used. [31814/07]

138. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the index of earnings, and the date at which it was measured, used to increase the value of income thresholds for higher education grants in 2007/2008; if it is intended to index those thresholds in 2008/2009; and the index that will be used. [31815/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 138 together.

It has been my Department's approach in recent years, to increase the value of the grant under the student maintenance grant schemes annually at least in line with inflation.

Similarly in relation to the reckonable income limits under the maintenance grant schemes, the practice in recent years has been to increase the limits at least in line with movements in the average industrial wage in the previous year.

I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that I have secured approval for a 10% increase in the standard rate of student grant with effect from September 2007. This very substantial increase, at twice the rate of inflation, will benefit over 56,000 students who receive a maintenance grant to attend higher and further education. This will mean an increase in the maximum rate of ordinary grant to €3,420 for 2007/2008 academic year and students who qualify will also have the student service charge paid on their behalf.

The reckonable income limits for ordinary maintenance grants have been increased by 3.5% for the 2007/2008 academic year. This increase exceeds the increase in the average industrial wage for the September to September reference period. The top limit for grant eligibility where there are less than four dependent children has been increased from €46,700 to €48,355, ensuring that a significantly higher number of students from households with moderate incomes will not have to pay the Student Service Charge of €825.

In addition, over 12,500 students in receipt of the "Special Rate" of maintenance grant will benefit from an even more substantial increase of over 14%, with the maximum rate for 2007/2008 increasing to €6,690. The prescribed income limit for the special rate of maintenance grant for the academic year 2007/2008 is €18,055.

Financial barriers have long being recognised as a major disincentive for many students who wish to access third level education. This significant increase in the ordinary rate of maintenance grant, at twice the level of inflation, will make the third level option more affordable for a broad range of students and their families. In approving an even higher increase in the special rate of maintenance grant, I am further targeting that support at those most in need, to encourage access to further and higher education for everyone.

This Government's continued commitment to supporting high rates of participation in third level education at all levels of society will ensure that Ireland continues to attract and maintain investment in high quality jobs and that the fruits of the economy can be enjoyed by all.

The new schemes can be accessed and/or downloaded from the "Students and Trainees" section of the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

### School Curriculum.

139. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Minister for Education and Science is she will make a statement in view of the concerns expressed by a person (details supplied) regarding the decision to issue Circular 0044/2007 and the National Council for Curriculum Assessment's proposals regarding language and literacy in Irish medium schools. [31821/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** The revised primary curriculum was launched in 1999 after extensive consultation with the partners in education.

Page 27 in the Introduction to the Curriculum states "It is a particular feature of Irish primary education that children, from the beginning of schooling, have experience of language learning in two languages." It also sets out a suggested minimum weekly time framework for tuition. This provides that where a first language is being taught, there should be four hours instruction per week, and 3 hours per week where there is a shorter day for the infant classes. Where a second language is being taught, the suggested minimum timeframe is 3.5 hours per week, and 2.5 hours per week for infant classes with a shorter day.

Some time ago my Department sought the advice of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment on issues relating to emergent literacy in Irish medium schools. The NCCA produced a series of reports on the matter, including a consultation paper, a literature review of research, and a report on the consultation process. The Council presented its final advice in February 2007. Having considered the advice in full, I have determined as a public policy issue that the position as set out in the curriculum, and in previous Parliamentary Questions, should remain unchanged i.e that the minimum recommended timeframe set out for a second language in the curriculum should be adhered to. Accordingly, Circular 0044/2007 requires that Irish medium schools should provide for a minimum provision in English of 3.30 hours per week, or 2.5 hours per week where there is a shorter day for infant classes, no later than the start of the second term in Junior infants.

I met the National Parents' Council and a range of Irish language organisations to discuss



[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

the matter, and my officials met the Chief Executive of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. In addition, the Council was notified formally of my decision in the matter prior to the issue of the Circular.

### Schools Building Projects.

140. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the overcrowding at a school (details supplied) in County Galway, the spiralling numbers on the roll, now at 251, that this is likely to rise substantially in the next few years, that there are some classes with as many as 35 pupils in each class, that there is huge pressure on the management committee not to take all students offering for places in the near future and that an agreement has been reached between her Department and the board of management for the building of ten extra rooms and other ancillary works; when this process will begin with a view to the commencement of building; when building will begin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31825/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** This project which has been approved to start architectural planning is being considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme.

### School Curriculum.

141. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the work that has been carried out in recent years to introduce science modules into the primary school curriculum; if this is being reviewed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment; if there is scope for visits to schools with science demonstrations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31828/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** Social Environmental and Scientific Education in primary schools is an area of learning which encompasses Science, History and Geography, and which applies to all students from junior infants to sixth class.

The revised primary curriculum was launched in 1999 and has been implemented on a phased basis over the period to 2007. There is a published curriculum and teacher guidelines for science available at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie). The revised curriculum in Science was implemented with effect from September 2003, supported by a national programme of professional development for teachers provided by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme.

In science, a basic understanding of scientific principles and methods, and a foundation of

knowledge and concepts in the domains of physics, chemistry and biology and botany, are provided for. A key objective is to encourage children to be active agents in their own learning, to engage in collaborative active learning, to develop high order thinking skills, to be able to observe, collate and evaluate evidence, question, summarise, analyse and interpret, and to develop problem solving skills.

There are four strands to the curriculum throughout, from infant to 6th class. These are Living Things, Energy and Forces, Materials and Environmental Awareness and Care.

Throughout the programme, scientific processes and skills are being developed — safe practices and procedures, questioning, observing, predicting, estimating and measuring, analysing, recording and communicating, exploring, planning, designing and making, evaluating, all important skills for life. There is a key emphasis on building on children's ideas as a starting point for science activities, encouraging practical activities and group and individual work, linking with the environment, and encouraging field trips.

Training for teachers is provided through the Primary Curriculum Support Programme and a network of Education Centres around the country. As well as providing training, a Cuiditheoir service provides school visits and support and assistance, and there are websites with resource directories. The INTOUCH magazine for teachers has published practical examples for schools of fun science activities developed by the PSCP science team, such as a field trip to investigate the sea shore, or a minibeast hunt in the school or locality.

The Discover Science, primary science website, also provides extensive supports and science activities for schools. The programme provides training sessions for teachers, a range of Discover Science Centres to visit, visiting speakers to schools, and an activity support pack which sets out exciting and fun activities for science which support the primary curriculum.

Phase II of the evaluation of the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum is now under way, focusing on Irish, Science, and Social Personal and Health Education. A report is expected to be published in mid 2008.

### Schools Building Projects.

142. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science when a design team will be appointed by her Department to a school (details supplied) in County Cork in view of the fact that the closing date for receipt of tenders was 15 October 2007; and the next step in the progression of the new school building in her Department's school building programme. [31830/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** The process of appointing a design team to the school building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage.

Tender submissions are currently being assessed by Technical Staff in my Department. Subsequent to the tender submissions being assessed a number of documents will be requested from the preferred consultants namely, Tax Clearance Certificate, evidence of Certified Turnover and evidence of suitable Professional Indemnity Insurance. Once these documents are checked and deemed appropriate, contracts will be signed and architectural planning of the school project will commence thereafter.

Progression of all projects to tender and construction will be considered in the context of my Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

#### Site Acquisitions.

143. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to a difficulty which has arisen in relation to the acquisition of a site for a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and the progress being made in the matter. [31831/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** A suitable site has been identified for this school. The site comprises of three plots of land with three separate vendors. Agreement on price and general terms (subject to contract) has been reached in respect of each of the plots and draft Contracts are with the Chief State Solicitors Office for completion of the conveyancing process.

All three plots are essential in order to make a viable and suitable site for the school, my Department has instructed the Chief State Solicitor's Office to finalise outstanding matters and to arrange for the signing of the Contracts and closure of the sales of all three sites simultaneously. My Department has been advised by the Chief State's Solicitors Office that some issues have arisen in respect of one of the vendors which have yet to be resolved. As soon as the Chief State Solicitor's Office notifies my officials that the conveyancing/contract process has been satisfactorily completed and that all three Contracts are ready to be signed, they will be signed without delay.

When the site acquisition is complete, a building project for the school will be considered for progression in the context of my Department's School Building and Modernisation Programme.

#### Adult Education.

144. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the educational facilities that can be offered to persons

(details supplied) in Dublin 15 awaiting a decision in respect of a residency application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31851/07]

**Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin):** Refugees are entitled to the same access to education and training as Irish nationals. Asylum seekers with the right to work have access under the same conditions as Irish nationals to active labour market programmes, such as VTOS, Youthreach and to PLC courses. Non-EU nationals are not eligible for maintenance grants. Asylum seekers without an entitlement to work are entitled to free access to Adult Literacy, English language and mother culture supports.

#### Defence Forces Retirement Scheme.

145. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the fact that under the early retirement options for Army officers, the pension being paid is reduced by the value of the contributory old age pension despite the fact that no social welfare pension is payable until age 65; if this was the intention of the original scheme established in 1995; if this implication was explained to officers at the time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31809/07]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea):** Officers who joined the Defence Forces on or after the 6th April 1995 are, like other public servants appointed since then, subject to full PRSI and so are entitled to the full range of State Social Insurance benefits including the Old Age Contributory Pension, nowadays known as the State Pension Contributory. Consequently, their occupational pensions are subject to a process — known as “integration” — whereby the occupational pension arrangements take account of entitlement to Social Insurance benefits. Integration is a standard feature of public service pension schemes applicable to employees in full PRSI class and had applied for many years to certain public service groups who, prior to April 1995, were subject to full PRSI. Integration does not apply to retirement gratuities.

Integration begins from the time the occupational pension comes into payment and operates on the assumption that a Social Insurance benefit is, in fact, payable. However, except in cases of ill-health early retirement, Social Insurance benefits may actually not be payable until age 65. Under public service pension arrangements, a supplementary pension may be payable in certain circumstances on retirement prior to age 65 in order to make up the shortfall in total pension. The supplementary pension is not payable where a former public servant in receipt of an integrated pension is employed sub-

[Deputy Willie O'Dea.]

sequent to retirement in any capacity which involves a Social Insurance contribution.

Certain aspects of the integration arrangements as they affect officers have been raised with my Department by the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers. Such matters are appropriate to be dealt with under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for members of the PDF. The Deputy will appreciate that, as discussions under the C&A scheme are confidential to the parties involved, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter.

146. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Defence if Army officers are eligible to pay AVCs or pay into PRSAs; the reason these options do not apply; and when he expects to introduce the SPEARS system. [31811/07]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea):** This Question was answered today by the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance, reference Question No. 48.

147. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will review the appeal of a person (details supplied) who has 19 years service in the Defence Forces with a view to continuing their service; the number of years they would have to serve to receive a full pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31837/07]

**Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea):** I have been advised by the military authorities that an appeal has been made to the relevant military authority in this matter on the 21 November 2007 and, as a consequence, it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this stage.

The minimum service required for a Private to qualify for a pension under the Defence Forces Pensions Scheme is 21 years, or 12 years if discharged "Below Required Medical Standards". Maximum pension and gratuity are payable on completion of 31 years, regardless of age.

#### **Residency Permits.**

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; the circumstances surrounding their deportation and return to their country; the reason their travel documentation was withdrawn while their application was pending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31852/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** The person in question was originally granted permission to remain in the State in September 2001 based on her parentage of an Irish born child, under the particular

conditions which existed at that time. The person concerned currently has permission to remain in the State until 2009. There are no records to suggest that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order. The person in question applied for an Irish Travel Document and was refused in September 2005 as she was in possession of a passport issued by the authorities of her country of nationality. This passport is valid until 2015.

149. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be reached on the application of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford to be allowed residency here on humanitarian grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31725/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** The person concerned arrived in the State on 20 June, 2005 with her 6 year old son and applied for asylum the following day. Her application was refused following consideration of her 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, she was informed by letter dated 9 November, 2005, that the Minister proposed to make a deportation order in respect of her. She was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why she 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.

On 10 October, 2006, regulations known as the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations, 2006, S.I. No. 518 of 2006, came into force. The person concerned submitted an application for subsidiary protection in the State in accordance with these Regulations and this application will be considered in due course.

In the event that the subsidiary protection application is refused, the case file of the person concerned, including all representations submitted, will be considered under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (Prohibition of Refoulement), as amended.

150. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be reached on the application of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford to remain here on humanitarian grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31726/07]



**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** The person concerned arrived in the State on 18 November, 2005 and applied for asylum. On 27 December, 2005 the person concerned gave birth to a baby boy in the State and included her child under her application for asylum in the State. The application was refused following consideration of their case by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and, on appeal, by the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

In accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, the person concerned was informed by letter dated 20 November, 2006, that the Minister proposed to make deportation orders in respect of her and her child. She was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why she should be allowed to remain temporarily in the State; leaving the State before an order is made; or consenting to the making of deportation orders. In addition, she was notified that she was eligible to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with regulations known as the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations, S.I. No. 518 of 2006 which came into force on 10 October, 2006. The person concerned submitted an application for Subsidiary Protection in the State in accordance with these Regulations and this application will be considered in due course.

It should be mentioned that on 1 November 2006 the person concerned applied to the International Organisation for Migration to return to Nigeria with her child. The application was subsequently approved on 27 November 2006; however, the application was withdrawn on 2 March 2007.

If the subsidiary protection application is refused, the case file of the person concerned, including all representations submitted, will be considered under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (Prohibition of Refoulement), as amended.

151. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be reached on the application of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford for subsidiary protection under the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006 SI No. 518 of 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31727/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** The person concerned arrived in the State on 21 October, 2006 and applied for asylum 4 days latter. The application was refused following consideration of his case by the Office of the Refugee Applications Com-

missioner 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 25 January, 2007, 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. In addition, he was notified that he was eligible to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with regulations known as the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations, S.I. No. 518 of 2006 which came into force on 10 October, 2006. The person concerned submitted an application for Subsidiary Protection in the State in accordance with these Regulations and this application will be considered in due course.

In the event that the subsidiary protection application is refused, the case file of the person concerned, including all representations submitted, will be considered under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act, 1999, as amended, and Section 5 of the Refugee Act, 1996 (Prohibition of Refoulement), as amended.

152. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be reached under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford seeking leave to remain in the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31728/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** The person concerned arrived in the State on 9 March, 2007 and applied for asylum. The application was refused following consideration of his case by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner. The person concerned did not appeal this decision.

Subsequently, in accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, he was informed by letter dated 15 June, 2007, 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. In addition, he was notified that he was eligible to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with regulations known as the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations, S.I. No. 518 of 2006 which came into force on 10 October, 2006.

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

The person concerned did not make an application either for Subsidiary Protection or for leave to remain in the State to my Department. However, his case 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.

#### **Citizenship Applications.**

153. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be made in respect of a citizenship application for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15. [31738/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's Question was received in the Citizenship Section of my Department in June 2004.

Officials in that section inform me that processing of the application has commenced and the file will be forwarded to me for a decision in the near future. I understand that the person concerned was not informed, at any stage, that the application would be finalised in a five week time frame. I will inform the Deputy and the applicant when I have reached a decision on the application.

#### **Decentralisation Programme.**

154. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason for the delay in granting an application by a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon employed at the Department of Social and Family Affairs in Galway for a transfer to the Land Registry in Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31762/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** Under the centrally agreed protocols which apply to the decentralisation scheme, those applicants who, prior to September 2004, listed Roscommon as their first preference on the Central Applications Facility (CAF), are dealt with first. I understand from the Property Registration Authority (Land Registry) that the person concerned is not on the CAF priority list.

The Property Registration Authority has acquired temporary accommodation in Roscommon to facilitate an advance move of staff but these offices can only accommodate those people on the priority list. The application which the Deputy has referred to will be processed in the context of the roll out of the perma-

nent accommodation and in line with the agreed protocols.

#### **Irish Prison Service.**

155. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of dangerous weapons that have been seized in prisons in each of the past five years, broken down by year and by prison. [31788/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** In the time available, it is not possible to furnish the information requested by the Deputy. I will furnish the information to the Deputy as soon as possible.

#### **Prison Staff.**

156. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount the Irish Prison Service paid out in compensation claims to injured officers in each of the past seven years. [31789/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** The table sets out the total amounts paid out by the Irish Prison Service in relation to compensation claims by injured officers during the years 2001 to 2006 and to date in 2007. The figures include payments made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal.

Year	Total Payments made by IPS
	€
2001	1,830,401
2002	2,812,733
2003	2,243,335
2004	1,061,357
2005	1,153,122
2006	1,212,227
2007 (to date)	1,208,173

#### **Sexual Offences.**

157. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the numbers of offenders whose addresses are currently known to An Garda Síochána pursuant to notification under the Sex Offenders Act 2001 who are not in prison, and are under supervision by the probation and welfare service, broken down by year, nationality and Garda division. [31790/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** I am informed by the Garda authorities that as of 26 November, 2007 there are 1,077 persons subject to the requirements of Part 2 of the Sex Offenders Act 2001. I am advised by the Probation Service that they are

currently supervising 113 offenders in accordance with the terms of the Sex Offenders Act 2001. I am informed by the Garda authorities that they do not provide information on individual cases that might lead to the identification of individuals.

#### **Criminal Prosecutions.**

158. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of females convicted of murder and manslaughter in each of the past seven years; and the number of same serving life sentences. [31791/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** In the time available it has not been possible to obtain the details requested by the Deputy. I will be in contact with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

#### **Sentencing Policy.**

159. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the average sentence served for female offenders convicted of murder or manslaughter. [31792/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** I am informed by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that all sentence related data in the Irish Prison Service has been computerised since 2001. An interrogation of this system has revealed that female life sentence prisoners released during this period served an average of 11 years in custody. This has to be treated with caution and cannot be regarded as indicative of the likely time any particular female prisoner sentenced to life imprisonment will serve. There are currently five females in prison arising from murder convictions.

No similar data is available on females convicted of manslaughter, as since 2001 there have been no releases made under this category. Consequently it is not possible to calculate an average. Furthermore there is no mandatory life sentence for the crime of manslaughter and the sentences imposed by the courts may vary. However, the Deputy may wish to note that there are currently four females in prison arising from manslaughter convictions. Records indicate that they were committed to prison in the years 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 respectively.

#### **Garda Transport.**

160. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the steps he is taking to ensure the provision of an extra patrol car in the Keshcarrigan area of County Leitrim. [31826/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** The detailed allocation of Garda resources, including transport, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner to decide in accordance with his identified operational requirements and priorities. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Keshcarrigan area is policed as part of the Carrick on Shannon Garda District, which is allocated 12 vehicles. One of these vehicles is shared between the Drumshanbo and Keshcarrigan sub-districts. The Keshcarrigan sub-district is also patrolled by the Divisional Traffic Unit based at Carrick on Shannon and the District Detective Unit. The responsibility for the efficient deployment of all official transport in a Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer who may allocate vehicles between stations as required.

#### **Residency Permits.**

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if residency status, temporary or permanent on humanitarian or other grounds can or will be offered in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31857/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** The person concerned arrived in the State on 13 December, 2001 and applied for asylum the next day. Having failed to attend for interview, the Refugee Applications Commissioner made a recommendation to the Minister that he should not be declared a refugee. Subsequently, in accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, he was informed by letter dated 5 June, 2002, that the Minister proposed to make a deportation order in respect of him. Following consideration of the person's case file under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1999, as amended, a deportation order was signed in respect of the said person on 4 July, 2003. On 3 August, 2004 the deportation order in respect of the person concerned was revoked, thus enabling the person concerned to re-enter the asylum process.

His application for asylum was refused following consideration of his case by 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 7 July, 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 con-



[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

senting 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), as amended. I expect the file to be passed to me for decision in due course.

#### **Citizenship Applications.**

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position in the matter of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31858/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's Question was received in the Citizenship section of my Department in April 2007. Officials in that section are currently processing applications received at the beginning of 2005 and have approximately 13,000 applications on hand to be dealt with before that of the person concerned. These are generally dealt with in chronological order as this is deemed to be the fairest to all applicants. It is likely, therefore, that further processing of the application will commence in the second half of 2009. I will inform the Deputy and the person in question when I have reached a decision on the matter.

#### **Residency Permits.**

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position in regard to residency status in the case of persons (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31859/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** I am informed by the Immigration Division of my Department that the person in question made a Family Reunification application in March 2005. A request for documentation recently issued to the legal representative of the person concerned. On receipt of the requested documentation, the application will be considered further and a decision will issue in due course.

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31860/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** The person in question was originally granted permission to remain in the State in September 2000 based on his parentage of an Irish born child, under the particular conditions which existed at that time. This current permission to remain in the State is valid until March 2008.

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Louth who is anxious to work in the interim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31861/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** The person concerned arrived in the State on 13 November, 2002 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 5 January, 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), as amended. I expect the file to be passed to me for decision in due course.

#### **Casino Gambling.**

166. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his views on changes in legislation which would facilitate the introduction of casino gambling here; if he has received representations favouring the introduction of casinos here; if so, the number of same and the organisations and individuals from which they were received since 1997; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31864/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** As the Deputy is aware, in mid-2006 my predecessor established an inter-departmental committee chaired by Mr. Michael McGrath BL to report on the possibilities for a legislative basis for the strict regulation of casino-style operations in the State, and related matters.

The Casino Committee presented its Report in April of this year. It is a lengthy document which deals with a range of complex and inter-related public policy matters. The Report is currently being considered within my Department and when this process is concluded I intend to bring the Report before Government.

In advance of the Government's consideration of the Report of the Casino Committee I do not propose to comment on any proposals which I may bring forward in relation to policy changes in this area.

I can confirm that I have received representations both in favour of and against the introduction of casinos in Ireland. It is a fact that some individuals may not want their names appearing in the public domain and bearing in mind the requirements under the Freedom of Information legislation to protect third party information I do not propose to provide details of the individuals who made written representation to me at this time. Since July 2006, outside the framework of the submissions to the Casino Committee, some 39 separate representations from organisations in support of casinos have been received. The attached list offers a breakdown of the representations and the organisations involved.

The response to all such representations has been that having established a Committee to consider the possibilities for a legislative basis for the regulation of casino-style operations I do not propose to comment on future policy in advance of receiving and considering the report of the Casino Committee. I can confirm also, that I have had no meetings with the organisations referred to below.

With regard to the Deputy's request for information going back to 1997 the compilation of this information would require a disproportionate expenditure of resources which I do not believe would be warranted in this instance.

Representations made in relation to the introduction of Casino from July 2006 to Date

		No.
1	Macau Sporting Club	6
2	Fitzwilliam Card Club	3
3	Gaming and Leisure Association of Ireland	23
4	Irish Amusement Trade Association	1
5	Atlantic Casino Consultants	4
6	The 21 Sporting Club	1
7	Shamrock Card Club	1
	Total Number of Representatives	39

### Drug Seizures.

167. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the esti-

mated value of drugs seized and destroyed by the State since the year 2000. [31994/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the information being sought is being compiled by An Garda Síochána and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

168. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of drug seizures, where the estimated value of the drugs seized has exceeded €100,000, since the year 2000; and the estimated value of drugs recovered in such seizures. [31995/07]

**Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):** I have been informed by the Garda authorities that it has not been possible in the time available to obtain the information requested by the Deputy. I will be in touch with the Deputy in relation to this matter when it becomes available.

### Local Authority Housing.

169. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the way rent is determined under the rental accommodation scheme; if a person in receipt of a disability allowance payment, who for therapeutic reasons takes up a training course with the choices programme is assessed on all of their income including the €30 they receive for the course; if such a payment is an actual payment or expense; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31771/07]

179. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the assessment method used by the local authority in relation to the rental accommodation scheme; if there is a means within the guidelines to facilitate a person who is in receipt of disability allowance and for therapeutic reasons takes a course choices programme; if the €30 that the applicant receives in relation to the course is taken into account in the assessing of the rent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31769/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 169 and 179 together.

Under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), households pay a contribution towards their rent to the local authority. This contribution is determined by the housing authority by reference to each authority's Differential Rent Scheme. The level of contribution will vary from authority to authority and over time to reflect

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

changes in the income and family circumstances of the RAS household.

In determining the level of contribution local authorities have regard to the household income and may exclude certain sources of income in determining the contribution. Local authorities may also, on a discretionary basis, vary the contribution in line with stated policy in their rental schemes.

#### **Fire Services.**

170. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has given further consideration to the establishment of full time fire services in areas with a population in excess of 10,000 people. [31698/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Tony Killeen):** The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs, the provision of a premises and the making of such other provisions as it considers necessary or desirable, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under section 10 of the Fire Services Act 1981.

The Department’s role is one of supporting and assisting local authorities in delivering fire services through the setting of general policy and the provision of capital funding. Under the Fire Services Change Programme a Risk Based Approach to Fire Safety Management is being developed. When this system is available it will assist fire authorities in carrying out a risk analysis in their functional areas to inform the allocation of resources.

#### **Local Authority Housing.**

171. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of vacant council houses throughout the State on dates (details supplied); the average waiting time for each local authority in reallocating same to tenants; if he has satisfied himself that houses are being reallocated in a timely fashion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31699/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe):** The detailed information sought in the Question in relation to the numbers of vacant dwellings on the dates concerned is not held in my Department.

The third report from the Local Government Management Services Board on Local Authority Service Indicators, copies of which are in the Oireachtas Library, details the performance of

local authorities in 2006 in relation to a wide range of activities. Among the data provided in that report are percentages for each local authority of dwellings that are empty; empty dwellings that are available for letting; and average time to re-let dwellings.

It is the responsibility of the local authorities concerned to ensure that their houses are re-let to households on their waiting lists as quickly as possible after they are vacated. I consider that the publication by the Local Government Management Services Board of comparative data on performance will encourage all local authorities to deliver services to the highest possible standard.

#### **Natural Heritage Areas.**

172. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the remaining appeals under the national heritage area designation will be dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31703/07]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):** The great majority of appeals against Natural Heritage Areas, which are designated under national legislation, have already been finalised. However, in order to meet the requirements of judgements by the European Court of Justice, my Department has recently begun giving priority to the completion of any outstanding appeals on sites designated under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives (Natura 2000 sites).

The small numbers of remaining natural heritage area appeals will be processed as soon as possible, once the remaining appeals on the Natura 2000 sites have been finalised.

#### **Register of Electors.**

173. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the voting entitlements of US citizens legally resident here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31721/07]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):** In order to be able to vote at elections and referenda in this jurisdiction, a person’s name must be entered in the register of electors for a constituency in the State in which the person ordinarily resides.

Subject to this primary requirement, the person’s citizenship then determines the polls at which he or she is entitled to vote. Irish citizens who are registered to vote may vote at all polls. British citizens may vote at Dáil, European and local elections; other EU citizens may vote at European and local elections; and non-EU citizens may vote at local elections only.



### Fire Services.

174. **Deputy Joe Behan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the outcome of his meeting with the Wicklow county manager, Wicklow chief fire officer and the members of the Bray Fire Brigade on 15 November 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31730/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Tony Killeen):** Minister Gormley and I met with some of the crew and management of Bray Fire Service in the immediate aftermath of the Bray fire tragedy. It was suggested that a further meeting take place and the meeting was arranged for 15 November 2007 in Bray fire station.

The purpose of the meeting was to express the Government's solidarity with the members and management of Bray fire service, to acknowledge their sense of loss and thank them for their continued service to the people of Bray and its environs, and to hear their views in the aftermath of the tragedy.

The Minister and I assured them that lessons learned from the tragedy would be utilised in the Department's role of supporting the fire services and in the context of the review of the fire services change programme.

The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs, the provision of a premises and the making of such other provisions as it considers necessary or desirable, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under section 10 of the Fire Services Act 1981.

The Department's role is one of supporting and assisting local authorities in delivering fire services through the setting of general policy and the provision of capital funding.

### Water Quality.

175. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has plans to introduce registration and monitoring of the indirect discharges into ground-water of domestic effluents from the septic tanks of more than 300,000 isolated dwellings, in view of the comments by the chairman of An Bord Pleanála regarding the fact that there must be accounting for some of the decline in ground-water standards reported by the Environmental Protection Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31742/07]

177. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has plans to introduce the registration and inspection of the indirect dis-

charges into ground-water of effluents from the septic tanks and waste water treatment units of various rural settlements and agglomerations which are in breach of the conditions, laid down in the Ground-water Directive and referred to in the recent court judgment against Ireland but for which insufficient evidence was provided by the Commission to the court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31744/07]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 and 177 together.

Clear and comprehensive best practice guidance in regard to Groundwater Protection and the Planning System was issued to all planning authorities by my Department in July 2003. The Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities, which issued in April 2005, emphasised the need for adherence to best practice in order to protect water quality. These guidelines were issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 which requires planning authorities to have regard to such guidelines in the performance of their functions.

Septic tanks installed on or after 1 June 1992 must comply with Part H of the Building Regulations which requires septic tanks to be so sited and constructed that they do not pollute, so as to endanger public health, any water (including groundwater) which is used as a source of supply for human consumption. The related Technical Guidance Document H provides guidance on how to comply with Part H. Guidance on septic tank drainage systems for single houses is contained in Irish Standard Recommendations S.R. 6: 1991 for Domestic Effluent Treatment and Disposal from Single Dwellings issued by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI). For septic tanks serving groups of houses, British Standard B.S. 6297: 1983, a Code of Practice for the Design and Installation of Small Sewage Treatment Works, issued by the British Standards Institute applies.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently developing a comprehensive Code of Practice on Waste Water Treatment Systems. The EPA intends to publish the Code of Practice under section 76 of the EPA Act, and this code will then be cited in the Annex to Technical Guidance Document H of the Building Regulations which is to be revised next year.

The Water Services Act 2007 contains a number of significant provisions in relation to the operation of septic tanks. It places a duty of care on the occupier or owner of a premises in relation to the maintenance of septic tanks and it also requires the occupier or owner to notify the water services authority where any leak, accident or other incident occurs relating to discharges of

[Deputy John Gormley.]

sewage from a septic tank, where it is likely to cause a risk to human health or safety or the environment. These sections will be brought into operation shortly.

In addition, it is open to local authorities to make and adopt bye-laws to require periodic inspections of septic tanks and other on-site proprietary treatment systems under the general powers available to them under the Local Government Act 2001.

176. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the sustainable rural housing guidelines which state in Section 4.5 Protecting Water Quality, that critical elements of Circular Letter SP 5-03 issued to planning authorities gave guidance on development control and enforcement standards and practices to ensure protection of ground-water quality; the annual programmes of testing and monitoring of individual waste water treatment and disposal systems that have taken place of developments given consent since the guidelines were issued 2003; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31743/07]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):** I refer to the reply to Question No. 638 of 27 November 2007.

As set out in my Department's circular letter (SP 5-03) of 31 July 2003 concerning Ground-water Protection and the Planning System, it is the responsibility of planning authorities to monitor the degree to which those carrying out approved development meet their obligations to comply with the terms of planning permissions granted, and to enforce such terms where necessary.

Planning authorities should ensure that the process of enforcing the terms of planning permissions for all developments involving on-site wastewater treatment and disposal, including septic tanks, is co-ordinated through a local authority-held database which would provide information such as the location and types of such systems relative to vulnerable areas as well as details such as maintenance contracts. Such a database can be used by the planning authority to structure an annual programme of testing and monitoring the performance of individual wastewater treatment and disposal systems, and is also of value in recording outputs from site assessments and providing inputs into new site assessments in terms of general drainage trends in an area. It is a matter for planning authorities to ensure that adequate arrangements are put in place in these regards and to manage such monitoring systems.

*Question No. 177 answered with Question No. 175.*

#### **Planning Issues.**

178. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of one-off houses outside areas zoned for development in county development plans 2000 to 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31745/07]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):** While my Department compiles a broad range of housing statistics for publication in the quarterly Housing Bulletin, specific data are not available on the number of one-off houses built outside of areas zoned for development.

*Question No. 179 answered with Question No. 169.*

#### **Local Authority Housing.**

180. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the rate of interest charged on the mortgage element under shared ownership; the rate charged for mortgage protection; the combined charge costs per month per €1,000 of mortgage; and if changes are due. [31812/07]

181. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the rental charge on the rented element under shared ownership; the costs of same per month per €1,000 of rented property in the first year and each subsequent year; and if changes in this are planned. [31813/07]

182. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the reason the rent chargeable on the rented portion of a home under shared ownership rises by 4.5% per year; and if such a charge continues to be justifiable at a time when house prices are falling. [31816/07]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 to 182, inclusive, together.

The variable interest rate charged by a local authority on the mortgage element of a shared ownership transaction is determined by the Housing Finance Agency by reference to prevailing rates in the financial market. The current variable rate is 5%. In addition, a mortgage protection charge of 0.598% is applied to all local authority loans. On this basis, the combined cost per €1,000 of mortgage per month, over a 25 year term,

would be €6.20. These costs exclude any tax relief due.

Rent is calculated at 4.3% of the value of the share in the ownership held by the local authority. This amount is increased annually by 4.5%. The rent per €1,000 is, therefore, €3.58, increasing annually by 4.5%. This amount excludes any rent subsidy due.

The rent charged is to cover the funding costs to the Housing Finance Agency which are based on borrowings at the prevailing interest rates. Any difference between the rent and prevailing interest rate is reflected in the capital outstanding on the property i.e. if the rent charged in any period is greater than the prevailing mortgage interest due on the local authority's share, the purchase price of the outstanding equity will be reduced accordingly.

The Shared Ownership Scheme is being kept under review in the context of my Department's consideration of a report on the broader range of affordable housing delivery mechanisms, which was completed recently by the Affordable Homes Partnership.

#### **Election Management System.**

183. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if the Government has accepted the Constituency Commission Report on Dáil and European Constituencies 2007; if he will bring forward legislation to make the changes as outlined in the report; when such legislation will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31838/07]

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):** The Constituency Commission presented its report on Dáil and European Parliament constituencies to the Ceann Comhairle on 23 October 2007.

My Department is currently preparing, for consideration by Government, proposals for an Electoral (Amendment) Bill which will, inter alia, provide for revisions to Dáil and European Parliament constituencies in accordance with the Commission's report. I expect to be in a position to publish the Bill early in 2008.

#### **Drift Net Fishing.**

184. **Deputy Peter Power** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his Department will offer a financial compensation scheme for drift net fishermen similar to the scheme presently in place (details supplied), if they surrender their licence after 21 December 2007; if the ban on drift net fishing will be reviewed by his Department in the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31773/07]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** Applicants have until the 31 December 2007 to accept any offer under the Salmon Hardship Scheme. This deadline, I believe, provides ample time for those concerned to give the scheme due consideration.

The Standing Scientific Committee of the National Salmon Commission has advised that stocks of salmon in a number of rivers in the Shannon Estuary are below conservation limit.

The Regional Fisheries Board and the Marine Institute will monitor the stocks in developing a management plan for each of the rivers with a view to identifying the extent of the recovery, if any, arising from the cessation of the harvesting of salmon and any stock rehabilitation works undertaken.

In the future event that stocks recover in each of the rivers of the Shannon Estuary and it is established from the results of the Genetic Stock Identification project that significant numbers of fish destined for other rivers are not intercepted within the estuary by commercial nets, it should be possible to exploit the identified surplus by all methods but within the constraints permitted by the Habitats Directive.

#### **Telecommunications Services.**

185. **Deputy Noel J. Coonan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary can not get broadband at their home. [31774/07]

186. **Deputy Noel J. Coonan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the areas in County Tipperary which are to be included in the roll out of broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31775/07]

187. **Deputy Noel J. Coonan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary can not get broadband at their home. [31776/07]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 to 187, inclusive, together.

The provision of broadband services is primarily a matter for the private sector. Broadband service providers operate in a fully liberalised market, regulated, where appropriate by the independent Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg).

The role of the Government is to formulate regulatory and infrastructure policies to facilitate the provision of high quality telecommunications



[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

services, by competing private sector service providers.

The widespread provision of broadband services continues to be a priority for the Government. In that regard my Department has undertaken initiatives to address the gaps in broadband coverage. These include providing grant-aid under the recently concluded Group Broadband Scheme and investment in Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs).

There are still some parts of the country where the private sector will be unable to justify the commercial provision of broadband services. Accordingly, the procurement process for a National Broadband Scheme (NBS) is under way. The NBS will provide broadband services to areas that are currently unserved and will ensure that all reasonable requests for broadband in unserved areas are met. A map of areas unserved by broadband has been prepared to help inform the tendering process and further details

are available at [http://www.dcmnr.gov.ie/NR/rdonlyres/624D8237-D8D3-4693-9BA3-448DD51D4269/0/CompositeMap\\_Sept3.pdf](http://www.dcmnr.gov.ie/NR/rdonlyres/624D8237-D8D3-4693-9BA3-448DD51D4269/0/CompositeMap_Sept3.pdf). The scheme is technology neutral, which means that the bidding service providers may use whichever technology they feel best suits the scheme's objectives.

The first phase of the procurement process, Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) is now complete and four candidates have pre-qualified. The four candidates are, in alphabetical order, BT Communications Ireland Ltd Consortium, eircom Ltd, Hutchinson 3G Ireland Ltd and IFA/Motorola Consortium.

The next phase of the procurement process involves inviting candidates to participate in a competitive dialogue process. My Department is anticipating that the award of the NBS contract will be during Quarter 2 of 2008, with rollout of the services due to begin as soon as possible thereafter. This timeline is subject to negotiations with candidates during the competitive dialogue phase of the procurement process.