



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

Tuesday, 11 December 2007.

Ceisteanna—Questions	
Taoiseach	641
Minister for Education and Science	
Priority Questions	656
Other Questions	668
Adjournment Debate Matters	677
Leaders' Questions	677
Requests to move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 32	686
Order of Business	687
Appointment of Members to Committee: Motion	693
Social Welfare Bill 2007:	
Order for Second Stage	694
Second Stage	694
Private Members' Business	
Road Safety: Motion	727
Financial Resolutions 2007:	
Financial Resolution No. 5: General (<i>resumed</i>)	751
Message from Select Committee	785
Adjournment Debate	
Patient Transport Service	785
Hospital Services	787
Institutes of Technology	790
Schools Building Projects	793
Questions: Written Answers	797

DÁIL ÉIREANN

*Dé Máirt, 11 Nollaig 2007.
Tuesday, 11 December 2007.*

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

*Paidir.
Prayer.*

Ceisteanna — Questions.

Constitutional Amendments.

1. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if there are changes to the plans he has for constitutional referendums during 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29092/07]

2. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if there are any changes to the constitutional referendums he intends holding during 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30762/07]

3. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if referendums to amend the Constitution will be held in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30966/07]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 3, inclusive, together.

The Twenty-Eighth Amendment to the Constitution Bill 2007 was published in February 2007. The June 2007 programme for Government included a commitment to establish an all-party committee to examine the proposed constitutional amendment with a view to further deepening consensus on this matter.

In October, the Minister of State with responsibility for children, Deputy Brendan Smith, brought a memorandum to Government proposing the establishment of a joint committee to deal with the constitutional amendment on children. Following consultations with Opposition parties on the terms of reference, the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children was established by resolution of both Houses of the Oireachtas in November last. The first meeting of this committee took place on 6 December, when Deputy Mary O'Rourke was elected chairman of the committee.

The text of the EU reform treaty was agreed at the informal European Council in October in accordance with the mandate given to the Inter-

governmental Conference on the Reform Treaty at the June European Council. We can now look forward to the signature of the treaty in Lisbon on 13 December. As I have said previously, while no decision has yet been taken, I expect that we will hold a referendum sometime next year, probably in the summer.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Is it the Taoiseach's intention to hold the two referendums, the referendum on children and the referendum on the EU treaty, on the same date? Are there any other plans to hold constitutional referendums in 2008? I noted the comments made by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, on reform of the Seanad which I understand would require changes to the Constitution. Is it intended to bring forward proposals for constitutional change in that area? We have had approximately ten reports from the All-Party Committee on the Constitution since 1997. How many of the recommendations for constitutional change made by that committee have been progressed? Is it intended to progress any of them in 2008?

The Taoiseach: On the first question, my preference, although it is not a strong one, is to hold the two referendums on the one day. The reason for this is that we all gave a commitment. At the beginning of the year the party leaders gave a commitment to the NGOs and those associated with the children's issue that we would hold the referendum within one year, if it was possible to do so, but it may not be. The members of the all-party committee are unanimous in the view that they need until the end of April or the other side of Easter to complete their work. A referendum Bill will then be required. We will have to see whether it is possible to link the two referendums.

After this week we will have a commitment to deal with the EU reform treaty by 1 January 2009. I will get formal advice from the Attorney General. It is obvious that there will have to be a referendum. We will talk to the Opposition leaders to see how the matter can be progressed. I think we will deal with the two issues together, as we have all given a commitment to the children's NGO group that we would hold that referendum within one year. We are also committed to dealing with the EU reform treaty by 2009.

I have no other proposals to be dealt with in the short term and, therefore, do not expect any other referendum to be held in 2008. The Seanad issue has been outstanding for some time. If I recall correctly, a number of things can be done without holding a referendum. For example, we could deal with the issue of the university panels. A referendum was held on the issue approximately 20 years ago, but the decision was never implemented. A referendum has been held to allow us deal with the graduate electoral panel. A number of other issues do not require a referendum to be held.

[The Taoiseach.]

I have extensive data for the All-Party Committee on the Constitution, usually the subject of a separate question. A number of issues raised by the committee have either been dealt with by referendum or legislation. There are others, on which, for one reason or another, different resolutions were made. I would rather deal with the committee as the subject of a separate question when we would have extensive reports from Departments and the various conclusions of the committee would be dealt with across Departments.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Some matters arise from the Taoiseach's reply. While I understand the Taoiseach's preference is to hold the referendums on children and the EU reform treaty on the same day, do I take it that this is now unlikely to happen, given the timetable the committee has set for itself?

Second, is there still some doubt about whether a referendum is required on the EU treaty? Do I understand from the Taoiseach's comment that he has not yet received the formal advice of the Attorney General in respect of the EU treaty and that there is still some element of doubt about whether there will be a referendum on it?

I would like to ask the Taoiseach about Seanad reform. He mentioned that well over 20 years have passed since we had a referendum on the university panels. In light of the outcome of that referendum and the recent comments of the Minister, Deputy Gormley, about extending university panel voting rights to all third level graduates, is it not time to consider the idea of universal suffrage for the election of the Seanad? It seems elitist and unnecessary in the modern age to give certain voting rights exclusively to graduates of universities and their equivalents without extending those rights to the entire population. A large proportion of the population would be entitled to vote in Seanad elections if the university franchise were to be extended to all graduates, whereas a small and exclusive minority of the population went to university in 1937. Would it not be better for the health of our democracy to elect the Seanad by universal suffrage, rather than by the archaic 1930s methods currently used? As those methods draw on some of the political thinking of the 1930s, they would be more appropriately confined to the history books than retained as the way we elect one of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Taoiseach: A constitutional referendum would definitely be needed to reform the Seanad in such a broad manner. The Minister, Deputy Gormley, said recently that certain reforms could be made on foot of the referendum that took place some years ago. A referendum would not be needed to allow the large proportion of people under the age of 35 who are graduates to vote in Seanad elections. Many of the reforms mentioned

by the Minister, including some of the changes recommended by the committee chaired in the last Dáil by the former Minister, Deputy Roche, can be made without referendums. While we could make a number of reforms in that way, if we were to change the entire system we would definitely need a referendum, which would probably push this matter down the agenda for a considerable number of years. The Minister, Deputy Gormley, said he was examining the possibility of opening up the university panel system, which could be done in the short term.

Regarding the Deputy's first question, it is still possible that the two referendums will be held on the same day. It might mean changing the time-scale slightly, but it is possible. I will discuss the matter with the party leaders to see what can be done. It might not be possible to have both referendums in May, but it is still possible to have them on the same day. We can discuss the matter. I have an open mind on it — I do not really mind which way we do it. Did the Deputy ask a third question?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I asked whether there is any doubt about the need for a referendum on the EU treaty.

The Taoiseach: There is no doubt about that.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: No doubt at all.

The Taoiseach: There is no doubt about it. I have not got the formal advice. We could not refer the treaty to the Attorney General until we got the final text. Having examined the preliminary draft, the Attorney General advised me that a number of aspects of it clearly necessitate a referendum. There is no doubt about it — we will require a referendum.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I would like to ask the Taoiseach three questions. I will be happy to speak to him about his views on fixing a timescale for this process. It is important that we get a fix on it. It will be difficult for the committee to do its work within a tight timescale. I am not sure it will be able to produce a report, a wording for the referendum and legislation to give effect to the referendum by May or June. The committee will do its work constructively, obviously. People might prefer to have the referendum in May. The Government needs to decide whether to have the two referendums separately or together. If the Taoiseach informs the committee that it is his intention to hold the two referendums together, the attention of the committee can be focused on doing its work so that the Bill and the wording can be quickly drafted and approved. Alternatively, if the referendum is to be held on its own as a single issue of EU reform, the Government should decide whether to hold it before or after the summer. I would like to know this because Fine Gael, in its strong support for the EU reform

treaty, wishes to lay out a work schedule for the referendum campaign, including public meetings, information seminars and dissemination of facts, without it being wasted by being held too early in the year. I am sure the Taoiseach can understand my concern in this regard.

Complacency and confusion are the two great enemies of the EU reform treaty. I would not underestimate the scale of the challenge that faces everybody who supports the treaty in putting it to the people in such a way that they can decide for themselves on the issue of approval. Could the Taoiseach elaborate on his mindset with regard to the timing of this referendum?

The treaty is to be signed on Thursday in Lisbon. I understand from speaking to my counterparts in Brussels in the EEP grouping that a timescale will be set for the national Governments to ratify the treaty. In other words, the various countries will decide for themselves the dates upon which they will ratify the treaty by parliamentary majority or parliamentary decision. I understand that they want the treaty to be ratified by a number of countries in their respective parliaments before the referendum is held in Ireland, following which it can be ratified in other countries. From the point of view of the Heads of Government, does the Taoiseach have a timescale in this regard? Have the other Government leaders been in contact with the Taoiseach indicating their views on when they would like to ratify the treaty, which will have an impact on when Ireland decides to put the case to the people?

Last week I raised the matter of the referendum on children's rights. Everybody is of the opinion that we should work assiduously in trying to obtain the best wording for this referendum. A view I articulated in Maynooth some weeks ago was that we should underpin that structure in the Constitution with a court structure dedicated to family matters. At the moment there is confusion among the District, Circuit and High Courts with regard to family law cases. These cases are often left to the end and there is no built-in mediation process. I fully appreciate that the work of the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children is ongoing in conjunction with the Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, Deputy Brendan Smith. Would the Taoiseach support the principle of a dedicated system of family courts, employing trained judges and a mediation process, in which 80% to 90% of family law cases are dealt with before reaching the general court system, as is the case in other countries?

A referendum in its own right would be required to give constitutional authority to the work of such courts, but I do not want the Taoiseach to get the impression that I am aiming to have that referendum on the same day as the others. However, would he accept in principle that if we amend the Constitution in the matter of children's rights, we should underpin that right

with a dedicated court structure focusing entirely on family law and children's issues, with trained judges and a mediation process?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Kenny asked three questions. The Twenty-Eighth Amendment to the Constitution Bill 2007, which deals with the constitutional amendment on children, was published last February. It was backed by a substantial amount of work done by the then Minister of State, Deputy Brian Lenihan, with the officials and various sections of the Departments across a whole range of areas. The issue involves children's rights in the Constitution under Article 40, personal rights under Article 41, family rights under Article 42, education under Article 43, private property under Article 44 and religion under Article 45 in addition to an enormous bank of legislation, including the Children Act, the Child Care Act, the Criminal Law Act, the Offences Against the Person Act and the Education Act. The Minister undertook the work and completed it. We had a referendum Bill and long consultations with the NGOs and we would have been able to complete the work fairly quickly. I thought it was a reasonable position to be in.

For a long time we have followed the practice of trying to have consensus around constitutional amendments. It was thought desirable that we should have an all-party committee to examine the proposed constitutional amendment with a view to deepening consensus on the issue. The committee said it would need four months approximately to do that — I would like to think that it could be done quicker if the committee met twice per week instead of once per week. I urge all of its members to do so. I have said to the Minister of State, Deputy Smith, that the committee could do it in a shorter time because a huge amount of the work, including the drafting of the entire Bill, has been done. Some changes to that might be necessary but if the committee shortens the time, it would be possible for us to try to move things forward.

If people need the time, it is because it is an important job in its own right and it should not be answerable to the fact that there is an EU referendum. It is a big task. I am not directly involved in it and people must make their own considerations. However, there is no doubt that, if they go to the end of April, draft a referendum Bill, amend the current one if they change their views on some of the considerations and set it all up, a date in the summer would be very tight. I can make up my mind in two minutes, but I would rather consult the other party leaders, including Deputies Kenny, Gilmore, Ó Caoláin and others, to see what people think. I would be glad to do so. We must set out a programme for 2008 and get on with it, but I do not want to make up my view and try to push it on anyone. I listen to the points of view of others.

On the Deputy's second point, most parliaments have their own systems. We are the only

[The Taoiseach.]

country that has both processes. As I continually remind my European colleagues, while they all have parliamentary ratification, we have their system of parliamentary ratification but we must consult the people as well. Our parliamentary ratification will be done earlier than most of theirs. Some of them might move quickly. I do not see why we should not have done our parliamentary ratification by the end of the spring session of the Dáil. The date to which most of them are working is 1 January 2009. Those who have told me that they have a definite plan tend to operate more towards their parliamentary summer sessions because they will probably have it in front of their committees for some time.

As the Deputy knows, since we discussed this question on Leaders' Questions or on the Order of Business last week, the Danish Parliament has decided, having examined it thoroughly and comprehensively, that there is nothing in it that requires a referendum. It seems, therefore, that we will definitely be the only country to have a referendum. On previous examinations, the Danish Parliament was quite near to us, but this time it says there is nothing that would require a constitutional referendum. It has ruled it out 100% in 100% of cases. It will decide sometime during the summer or autumn. That is the position.

On the Deputy's last question, I do not know what it entails but anything that would protect the best interests of children, either in the Constitution or legislation, should be taken into account and I would be prepared to examine such a proposal. In the Children Court and the myriad legislative measures there is a requirement for us to tidy up these issues. Subject to what the Deputy has in mind and having it examined, I would be in favour of anything that would help to safeguard our children.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On the proposed constitutional amendment on the rights of children, has the Taoiseach noted that the initial meeting of the new Oireachtas committee took place last week and that advertisements are now being placed requesting submissions from interested parties by 31 January? The committee's deliberations on further engagement following the receipt of submissions from interested parties will have to be determined in the coming weeks but the programme of work has yet to be finalised. Has the Taoiseach noted, arising from the meeting, that all of the participant groupings, including me, representing Sinn Féin, have indicated that they want to arrive at a situation where they are all supportive of the proposition? People are approaching it in a spirit of good will and with the purpose of arriving at the best formula of words that will ensure the delivery in the Constitution of the guaranteed rights of children.

On the other matter of the commentary by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, regarding

his intent to act on Seanad reform, the Taoiseach earlier said it would be 'some considerable time' before we reached the point where we would address Seanad reform by constitutional amendment. Did the Minister discuss in any way, cursory or otherwise, his proposed signalling of his intent to act on Seanad reform? Some of the recommendations made in the report on Seanad reform, to which Deputy Gilmore referred, involving the universities would require legislation only. I am interested to hear the Taoiseach's view because I am not clear from the reply he gave to Deputy Gilmore regarding the proposed retention of the elitist system of election by university graduates whether he would be prepared to dispense with it once and for all. I concur with Deputy Gilmore's remarks in that respect. Will the Taoiseach share with us his outlook on the matter?

The other part of the proposed reform would require a referendum on an amendment of the Constitution. It is proposed that a number of Senators would be elected directly by the people using a list system in a single constituency. Has the Taoiseach discussed the matter with the Minister and is there agreement in principle between them on that element and when the referendum might be held? On the Minister's signalled intent of acting upon Seanad reform and the Taoiseach's earlier reference, where do the two meet and into what does "some considerable time" translate in real terms? If it is the case that this reform is agreed in principle between the Taoiseach and the Minister, will he take the opportunity to seriously consider instituting an all-Ireland Seanad by the establishment of a single constituency, not of 26 counties but 32? Will they consider extending the franchise to all citizens north of the Border to exercise, as they choose, their entitlement under our Constitution to participate in such an electoral process? Does the Taoiseach agree it is not beyond the gift of our Government and State to extend the franchise to citizens living outside of the jurisdiction? This is done, as the Taoiseach has noted many times, by other democracies for their citizens living abroad. In this instance, it would be Irish citizens living on the island of Ireland.

Will the Taoiseach consider this proposal as a way of advancing his own commitment to extending his party's elected role throughout the island of Ireland? Would he see this proposal as a further out working of his commitment to Six County directly elected representation in the Houses of the Oireachtas?

The Taoiseach: I acknowledge and accept the bona fides and goodwill of members of the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children towards achieving an agreed wording that can be put to the people in a constitutional referendum. I accept it may take some time. It wants to allow people extend their views more

3 o'clock

widely than the NGO groups did in 2006. It is a good thing but there is the time factor.

If we separate it from the EU referendum, it is unlikely it will be dealt with in 2008. If it cannot be done, it cannot be done. However, I gave a firm commitment to the NGOs — I am sure other party leaders had met them too — and promised this referendum would be dealt with by Easter 2008. If it is separated from the European issue, it will not happen in 2008. That is not a reason to rush the matter but that is the reality.

I do not want to confuse the issue of Seanad reform. There are three separate positions on Seanad reform. The power to allow all graduates to participate in Seanad elections for the university panel was passed in a referendum 20 years ago. We just never implemented the decision of that referendum.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The referendum was passed in 1979.

The Taoiseach: I appreciate the help of Deputy Hayes. It is even longer than I thought; it is nearly 30 years ago.

The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, was referring to that referendum in the context of Seanad reform which can be introduced.

Other reforms came from the report of the committee on Seanad reform, which Deputy Brian Hayes will recall, which we can deal with. That is also what the Minister was referring to which I support. There was an urgency in the Upper House that we undertake some of these reforms.

If we get into deeper reform and total change of the Seanad, as suggested in this House and elsewhere, it will mean a different constitutional referendum. That is not what the Minister or I stated. There may be merits in it but it would have to be examined in a separate context.

Regarding the Deputy's points about Northern Ireland and the Seanad, I have stated as Taoiseach that there are issues we would be prepared to examine in reforming the Seanad. Some of these could be introduced without a constitutional amendment while some may need one. I am still honour bound to deal with those ones that do not require a referendum and which can be done in the short term.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Our committee must report within a four-month period on the constitutional amendment on the rights of children. I sense from the Taoiseach's response that he is sceptical about the possibility of holding the referendum in 2008, but does he think it is possible, with the date for reporting back firmly in place, that the two referendums would take place on the one day? What are the limitations on holding the referendum on the Lisbon treaty during 2008?

The Taoiseach: The decision is clear. It must be held in 2008 because it must be ratified by 1 January 2009. I have not given up on holding the two referendums on the one day, if possible. We must be fair to the considerable group behind the children's referendum, which is far larger than most groups that seek our assistance. It represents organisations across communities in every part of the country, which would be disappointed if they missed the date in 2008. It is not realistic to hold a referendum in June or September, without the children's amendment, and another for that purpose in 2008. That pushes it back to 2009.

Deputy Jim O'Keeffe: As one who is interested in the Constitution, I strongly support the EU reform treaty and underpinning children's rights in the Constitution. There will, however, be opposition to both. Most of the usual suspects will line up against any progress in Europe and no doubt some will oppose putting children's rights into the Constitution, saying that it undermines family rights. A combination of those lobbies could endanger both proposals. I caution against holding referendums on the same day although there are practical considerations such as costs.

The Taoiseach: I appreciate Deputy Jim O'Keeffe's views because he has been an eminent member of the Constitution review group for many years and I would not discount anything he says. We must make this judgment soon. Deputy O'Keeffe will agree, however, that one of the big problems surrounding EU referendums is to bring out a respectable size of electorate. We must make a call on this. The issues are beginning to crystallise quite well. We know our constitutional limitations in the EU reform treaty, which must be held in 2008, and we can be certain of that after Thursday. The committee will do all it can to complete its work but it will be a tight call for it to get its work finished and the referendum through before summer. I will try to discuss this with the party leaders before Christmas and we will make a decision then.

National Centre for Partnership.

4. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the National Economic and Social Forum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29228/07]

5. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29265/07]

6. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the recent work of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30763/07]

7. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the recent work of the National Economic and Social Forum and its planned work programme for the first half of 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30821/07]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 4 to 7, inclusive, together.

Over the past three years, the National Economic and Social Forum, NESF, has prepared reports on the following policy themes: early childhood care and education, care for older people, creating a more inclusive labour market, improving the delivery of quality public services, the arts, cultural inclusion and social cohesion and mental health and social inclusion.

In addition, the NESF has been mandated to convene meetings of the Social Inclusion Forum. This annual forum, the most recent meeting of which took place on 15 November, is designed to give those who are not directly involved in the social partnership process an opportunity to input their views and experiences on key implementation issues under the Government's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, identify barriers and constraints to progress and how best these can be tackled, and debate policy proposals for the future.

The NESF prepares periodic reports on the impact of its work both at national and local levels. A draft report covering the work of the NESF over the period from 2003 to 2006 is at present being finalised. The NESF has recently been reconstituted and a draft work programme for the forthcoming period is under consideration by its members.

The National Centre for Partnership and Performance, NCPP, was established by the Government in 2001 to promote and facilitate partnership-led change and innovation in Irish workplaces. Through a combination of research and advocacy, the NCPP is helping to create high quality, high performance workplaces throughout the country and is thereby contributing to the Government's efforts to improve national competitiveness, enhance public services, increase standards of living and deliver a better quality of working life for employers and employees alike. The NCPP is also involved in promoting the business case for workplace partnership at enterprise level across all sectors of our economy.

The NCPP work programme focuses on the following five areas: partnership, national workplace strategy, workplace innovation fund, research and policy development and communication and information dissemination.

On 1 January the NCPP was placed on a statutory footing as part of the new National Economic and Social Development Office NESDO. NESDO's other constituent bodies are the National Economic and Social Council, NESAC, and the National Economic and Social Forum, NESF.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I thank the Taoiseach for his reply. What is the formal procedure for ensuring that NESF reports serve a purpose and that its recommendations are taken on board by Government in making key decisions? Will he confirm that members of the Opposition have repeatedly raised a whole series of excellent reports by the NESF that appear not to have been taken on board by the Government.

Is the Taoiseach familiar with the detail of one of the most recent reports, published by the NESF last month, a comprehensive report on mental health and social inclusion? If so, did he note it stressed the need to fully fund and implement the recommendations of the Government's mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*? The Taoiseach must also have noted that in last week's budget we saw again the very inadequate interim arrangement for a paltry 18 additional beds for child and adolescent mental health services. I have examined the detail of this matter with alarm that these beds will not be in facilities appropriate to children and will, therefore, be in breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Does the Taoiseach agree that this is alarming and that the Government's mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*, must be progressed in line with the recommendations underscored in last month's NESF report?

I am only using this report as an example, but has the Taoiseach noted that the NESF report contains a recommendation that would require action by him and his Department? Has the Taoiseach responded to the recommendation to establish a cross-departmental team to draw up targets, priorities and an implementation schedule for implementing *A Vision for Change* and dealing with social exclusion of those with mental health problems? This NESF report has a specific recommendation for the Taoiseach and his Department in this area. Will the Taoiseach outline to the House his decision on this matter? Does he intend to implement the recommendation and how soon will he act upon it?

At our party conference in Dublin at the weekend a useful suggestion was made by a representative of the Polish community that a place be reserved on the NESF for a representative of immigrant communities. Will the Taoiseach take on board the recommendation from this source and advise us of his disposition towards such a request?

Deputy Enda Kenny: All these bodies — the NCPP, the NESF and the NESAC — operate under the overarching body of the National Economic and Social Development Office, NESDO. In terms of cohesion and sharpness, is it the Taoiseach's view that there is value in having that plethora of economic groups reporting under the NESDO?

In respect of the NCPP, did the Cabinet today decide not to accept the recommendations of the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the

Public Sector on the salaries of the Judiciary and the Cabinet in the context of no targets being set for performance?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Taoiseach addressed a seminar of the NCPP on 29 November at which he said public service pay should neither lead nor trail the market. What decision has the Government made in respect of the proposed pay increases for the Taoiseach and his Cabinet colleagues?

The Taoiseach: In response to Deputy Ó Caoláin, NESF reports go to the individual Departments and it is for those Departments to implement the proposals, many of which were taken up in the budget last week, while many others are implemented in legislation. The NESF does a good job annually in offering broad outlines of the actions it believes should be taken on various exclusion issues and other matters. Its proposals are taken on board and regularly discussed by the Cabinet sub-committees.

The NESF report on mental health is an important document that complements the Government's mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*. The report recommends major changes in the way mental health issues are dealt with by employers, local authorities, trade unions and, most importantly, the health sector. The underlying emphasis is on recovery in the broadest sense rather than on an exclusively medical model. That is the argument made in the report and it is made well. Its recommendations reach beyond the health sector to highlight how mental health services should be integrated within wider non-medical supports. This recommendation was fed back into my Department and a cross-departmental group has been established to consider how this can be done.

The report looked at mental health issues in the context of employment, housing, social supports and so on. Strategically, the focus is on placing community groups in the voluntary sector at the centre of efforts to move people out of institutions and into the community. This has been ongoing to some extent since the *Looking Forward* report in the 1980s. The changes recommended in that report were beginning to be implemented when I was a member of the health board. This report is another step in that direction. Following its initial consideration by the Government, the report's recommendations have been referred for consideration by the relevant Department. Implementation of the individual components of *A Vision for Change* is a matter primarily for the HSE. In July the executive established an implementation group to ensure mental health services would be developed in a synchronised and consistent way.

Deputy Kenny's first question was on the NESDO. NESD carries out strategic analysis of the economy, bringing together all the relevant participants to plan where we are and where we

should go. It has been the basis of social partnership and other reports on subjects such as the welfare society and housing. It does an entirely different job from NESF, which deals with day to day legislative changes, particularly in the areas of social inclusion and macro and micro issues.

NCPP is an entirely different organisation which is trying to bring best practice to industry in terms of how it should consult, bring in change, reform and modernise. They are three different but small organisations. The benefit of bringing the three together was to share administration, which cut down massively on cost. There was one office in one place and shared administration. That is the benefit of NESDO.

On the issue of pay, as many members of Government and I have previously stated, we have a Labour Court, a Labour Relations Commission and review bodies in different areas dealing with pay. I always take the view that this House should accept recommendations of bodies it sets up. The pay review for approximately 2,000 people in the Civil Service, semi-State bodies and the Judiciary carried out by the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the Public Sector should be the same.

A Government has never rejected a report by this body since it was set up 1969. The recommendations of reports have been phased in, delayed or postponed but they have never been rejected. This Government will not do so either. We believe the work was done professionally and without consultation with or reference to the Government. The body decided not to take into account the private sector because it indicated the position of Government was unrelated. However, other linkages were made in the report.

We received the report in the autumn and the Government is mindful that the November Exchequer figures were not as good as hoped. The benchmarking report is imminent and we will not know its outcome until it is finished. We are in a tighter position so taking such matters into account, it is the Government's view that to go with the phasing previously looked at perhaps would not be a reasonable thing to do.

Deputy Jim O'Keeffe: Go back a few steps.

The Taoiseach: We have decided to rephrase it, to put back the first part of it by a year and put the other part in place in 2009 and 2010. The full costs will not come on the Exchequer until 2011, which will be 11 years after the last report by the review body.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Will the Taoiseach run that by me again?

Deputy Jim O'Keeffe: We are flattening the mountain.

The Taoiseach: We have put the cost back 11 years from the last implementation of the review body's report.

Deputy Enda Kenny: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle—

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will allow a brief point of clarification as we are ten minutes over time.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: What about representation for the immigrant community on the NESF?

Deputy Enda Kenny: Did the Taoiseach—

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I ask that Deputy Kenny be allowed to put his brief supplementary.

Deputy Enda Kenny: —indicate there would be no movement on the recommendations for 2008 at all for either the members of Government, the Judiciary or the other approximately 2,000 people involved? Will the phasing in be delayed until the end of 2008?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I have asked a question that has not been answered.

The Taoiseach: The way the process is carried out in the Department of Finance means the only orders which need ratification are those for the Judiciary and politicians. The increases for the Civil Service and commercial semi-State bodies went into the system after the decision was made and the personnel in question will be paid. The Government will also pass the order for the Judiciary. The only people to have their increases delayed will be the Ministers and Ministers of State.

Deputy Brian Hayes: It is Damascus-like.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Did the Taoiseach decide that today?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That concludes questions to the Taoiseach today.

The Taoiseach: It is a good example of our goodwill.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: What about immigrant representatives on the NESF?

Deputy Enda Kenny: Did the Taoiseach decide that today?

The Taoiseach: Yes.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Will I receive a reply to my question?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will come back to the Deputy because he posed a question. I ask him to be very brief.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Taoiseach is leaving although the question has not been dealt with. I asked about the Taoiseach's consideration of representation for the immigrant community on the NESF. I take it the Taoiseach's exiting stage right is his response.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are ten minutes over time.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: This cannot be laughed away.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We will move to priority questions nominated to the Minister for Education and Science.

Priority Questions.

Water Services.

51. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science the action she will take in order to help schools pay for the considerable price increase in water following the implementation of the water framework directive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33876/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Schools receive funding by way of per capita grants to meet their day-to-day running costs and enable them to pay for services such as light, heat, water and waste disposal. The value of the capitation grants have improved significantly over the past few years and are set to increase again by €15 per pupil in 2008.

As the Deputy will be aware, the water framework directive requires that the "polluter pays" principle be applied to the provision of water and waste services to all non-domestic users. I am concerned about the considerable variance in the rates being applied by different councils, which has left some schools with significant bills.

As the Deputy may be aware, the programme for Government contains a commitment to examine the provision of waste and water allowances to schools, with charges becoming effective after these are exceeded. The implementation of this commitment is primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. My Department will have an input to and support the examination to be conducted by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and I have already discussed the issue with the Minister.

In the meantime, we are anxious to enable schools to conserve water and keep their bills as

low as possible. New school buildings are being designed with that goal in mind and measures such as the use of low-pressure spray taps on wash hand basins, dual flushing units on toilets and push button type shower controls are generally used. These will be of major benefit to the users of new buildings and resources have also been made available to assist those in existing facilities in considerably reducing their water bills.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: How?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government launched a Conserve Water in Schools resource pack last month in association with Dublin City Council. The materials, which are available for download on the council's website, www.dublincity.ie, show children how they can get involved in conserving water and put a stop to water wastage. The campaign is also aimed at school management and lists actions to reduce water consumption in the schools.

Steps are being taken to help schools reduce their water bills, give them extra funding to meet unavoidable costs and examine in the context of the programme for Government the introduction of a new system of water allowances.

Deputy Brian Hayes: I thank the Minister for her reply, the effective message of which is that she will go around the country handing out new taps to schools which will face an approximate 800% increase in water charges from the local authorities. Does the Minister accept the lamentable response to the question means the Government's answer is to establish a committee to look at the issue?

A committee between the Minister and her colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, is her only substantive response to the schools in the country. Does the Minister not accept that what is now required is for her Department to either fund the cost of the massive hike in water charges or ask somebody else to do it?

Why is it the case that at no stage did the Minister's Department or the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government seek a derogation from this framework directive under the EU? Schools are now being treated as businesses and it is happening under the Minister's watch. She is responsible for it and, effectively, asking parents to put their hands into their pockets to pay for these essential services. That is unacceptable.

Deputy Mary Hanafin: There is no committee and I did not even mention setting up such a committee. Since last year we have been in discussions with the former and current Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Govern-

ment to see how we can reduce this burden on schools.

When this was being introduced in 1999, the Department of Education and Science sought a derogation for schools but at that stage the country as a whole was fighting in Europe to seek a derogation for domestic water uses, which other countries do not have. The only derogation given for Ireland was for domestic homes, as in all other circumstances the polluter must pay.

For that reason, it is eminently sensible to be able to work with schools to reduce the amount of water charges. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle might be interested in one pilot scheme in Gorey introduced by the local authority and the Department for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. It succeeded in reducing the usage of water by up to 9,000 litres per day. The use of meters can ensure that they conserve water.

The increases in capitation will continue in coming years. I would like to see some agreement with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on water conservation. It is quite unfair on schools that they have to do this. All they are doing is transferring their domestic use into a school situation. In a school of 300 children, they must wash their hands and use the toilets. It is not as if they are wasting water all the time. However, because the only derogation available to Ireland at the time related to domestic use, we were not allowed to extend it to school use.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The Minister had a particularly difficult week last week as her broken promises were exposed for all to see. It is continuing this week. She has said this is an unfair system. She has said that schools are polluters, when effectively they are users of a system. Now she is asking schools to make up the deficit. Is the Minister aware that the capitation grant the Department gives to a 100-pupil school is €17,800? Independent assessment suggests it costs €31,000 to run those schools. The deficit will grow next year when the bills from the local authorities hit the desks of school managers. Is the Minister telling the House that she has no new measure or Supplementary Estimate to give those schools to allow them to meet the excessive hikes in water charges?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: I had a very good week last week. Any day a Minister responsible for a Department gets €9.3 billion—

Deputy Brian Hayes: They are not promises though.

Deputy Mary Hanafin: —of taxpayers' money to be spent on education is a very good week. It enables us to do many of the things in the programme for government. In future years we will continue to meet those commitments. At second level a school of 500 students gets

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

€307,000 and at primary level a school of 300 pupils gets €100,000.

Deputy Brian Hayes: What about small schools?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: We made those increases because of the needs schools have. The Water Framework Directive uses the terminology “the polluter pays”. It is just a general term indicating that those who use the water should pay for it. The charges applied to schools by different local authorities are inconsistent. We are working with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to ascertain whether the same charge can apply so that the capitation grant can go towards it.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The problem is that the bills are now hitting the desks of the school managers.

Schools Building Projects.

52. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science, further to her reply to Question No. 56 of 13 November 2007, if the promised developing area unit has not yet been established; if so, when it will be set up; the staff structure and numbers it will have; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33450/07]

Deputy Mary Hanafin: Further to my reply to Question No. 56 of 13 November 2007, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department’s developing areas unit has been established.

To date, 11 members of staff have been redeployed to the unit, comprising one principal officer, one assistant principal officer, one senior architect, one architectural assistant, three higher executive officers and four executive officers.

As some of these staff would have been looking after developing areas anyway, the consolidation of effort in the new unit will ensure that they are more effectively deployed. The process of filling some of the vacancies arising from the redeployment of staff to the new unit from other areas is in train. A further five additional posts, including a professional planner, have been approved for the unit. The necessary recruitment arrangements are being put in place. The staffing of the unit will be kept under review in light of the evolution of its work programme.

My Department has already taken a number of steps to improve provision for developing areas in recent years. More effective forward planning has been put in place through greater co-operation with local authorities and the publication of ten-year area development plans. Innovations such as the use of generic repeat designs, and design and build contracts have been introduced to ensure that new buildings can be delivered much faster. Greater authority has been devolved

to local school management to manage and deliver small building works, thereby freeing up my Department to concentrate on larger projects.

All these developments have facilitated the provision of extra school places in extensions and new schools in developing areas all over the country. The Government is very conscious of the need to ensure timely provision of extra accommodation for the estimated 100,000 extra children who will enter our primary schools over the next seven years or so. To that end, an additional €95 million, an increase of 30%, is being provided for primary school buildings in 2008, bringing total capital expenditure on the building programme to nearly €600 million next year.

The €4.5 billion included in the national development plan for school buildings will enable my Department to continue to take a proactive approach to the provision of modern school accommodation across the country, but particularly in developing areas, over the coming years.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I note what the Minister has said and I gather from her reply that vacancies have been advertised and some people have been moved from one part of the Department to another. The unit as promised in the programme for government has been established, a point to which I will return later.

Regarding the other information the Minister gave, can she confirm that schools were told last September that no further money was available for capital projects in the calendar year 2007, that 30 schools were informed by telephone by the Department that they could not proceed to tender, that her Department is now engaging through a consultancy firm, KSN Project Management Limited, in inviting tenders dated November from would-be contractors to provide by 2 January proposals for schools that would be built and operational by 1 September next year, that she has taken no steps to provide for planning permission for these schools, that it is a blind tender for either a 16-room—

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That does not relate directly to the question.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I am asking whether the Minister can confirm this. Is it true? With this massive amount of money, will we have a whole new generation of tin boxes, similar to the pre-fabs built when free secondary education was introduced in the 1960s?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: Regarding the schools contacted by the Department, in January we will notify the schools that will be allowed to go to tender. We will do it over a phased basis during the year. Quite a number of schools are at various stages in the process — design, architectural planning, ready to go to tender etc. Regarding green-field sites for the fast developing areas, a tendering document was advertised in September

of last year seeking companies to build offsite and then construct onsite. I am probably not using the right terminology. It is a kind of “drop-in” facility.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: They are called prefabs.

Deputy Mary Hanafin: No, it is not. It is permanent accommodation that will last 25 to 30 years. The buildings constructed in the 1970s have lasted 30 to 35 years. It is a speedy, efficient and good quality way to deliver accommodation. I have always outlined that the timeframe we have for many developing areas is extraordinarily tight. The tenders are due to be opened on 2 January, at which point we will move ahead. In parallel, sites are being identified and purchased through the various local authorities and in co-operation with the local authorities, and planning permission will be sought then.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: In her reply the Minister has confirmed that we will get a new generation of state-of-the-art prefabs — there is no other word for it. They will have a life expectancy of 25 years, which could be extended further. The others had such a life expectancy, but some are still being used. Can she explain what steps her Department has taken to obtain planning permission for those schools? Will these buildings be temporary structures, exempted under the requirement to apply for planning permission, thereby confirming that she is engaged upon, as is happening in Laytown, a whole new generation of prefabs to be filled with pupils whose own children will not see the permanent schools that should be built in the first place?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: What the Deputy is referring to is a very modern efficient way of construction. It is important that we should have accommodation as efficiently and as speedily as possible. The one in Laytown is not exactly what we are talking about. However, Laytown is a good example of very good quality accommodation and the people there are very pleased with it. However, that is not the one about which we are talking for future needs.

Deputy Shane McEntee: The Department is paying €60,000 per month in rent on it.

Deputy Mary Hanafin: We need planning permission for the accommodation on these sites.

Special Educational Needs.

53. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will make a statement on the report on the implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 as submitted to her on 1 October 2006. [33877/07]

Deputy Mary Hanafin: The National Council for Special Education was required by the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 to make a report on the implementation of the Act. This report is essentially advice to the Minister on the steps the council considers should be taken to implement the Act within a five-year period from the establishment date of the council, which was in October 2005. I appreciate the work of the council in preparing this report.

The report sets out an action plan, which envisages implementation of the provisions of the Act over a four-year period. The council report acknowledged that further work, analysis and discussion, especially with the key stakeholders involved, needed to take place given the extensive and fundamental developments required to implement the Act. The council further acknowledged that it would not be appropriate for it to be prescriptive nor definitive in many areas and it has put forward its views and recommendations to stimulate the necessary discussions and debate.

As the Deputy will know, when passing the Act, the Legislature also recognised that implementation would require a considerable change agenda to develop and support inclusive schools to deliver on the provisions of the Act. For this reason, the EPSEN Act 2004 specifically refers to a five-year implementation period.

I accept the core thrust of the principles and recommendations set out by the council in its implementation report and I am anxious to implement the Act in full in the quickest time possible. However, following consideration of the issues raised in the council’s implementation plan and the consultations to date with the education partners, I consider that the five-year timeframe acknowledged in the legislation is the appropriate period in which to implement the provisions of the Act.

The key to implementation of the Act is investment in the system to enable it deliver the services envisaged in the Act. Our focus must be to deliver the best outcome for the student and to ensure that schools are not overly burdened with paper and process to the detriment of the student. I am determined to put the necessary policies and programmes in place and my priority is to ensure that the education system has the necessary supports and capacity to function in accordance with the EPSEN Act.

A considerable amount of progress has been made in this regard. As I stated, a series of consultations have been held with the education partners, at which a range of issues were explored in the context of delivering the provisions of the Act and some of these groups have made further submissions in recent weeks. Arising from this process and taking account of the council’s implementation report, a working group in my Department has been developing proposals for implementation of the Act and this work will be completed shortly. In this context I am satisfied

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

that effective progress is being made to advance development of the necessary policy and supports to enable formal commencement of the remaining provisions of the Act.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The National Council for Special Education, as it is obliged under the Act, submitted an implementation programme to the Minister on 1 October 2006. Is the Minister telling the House that this programme is not the Minister's programme? Is the Minister also telling the House that the various 50 proposals are not now to be implemented within the timescale? Will the Minister accept that her effective rejection of the advice from the national council leaves her open to the charge that no progress will be made in the implementation of the EPSEN Act to help young school children with special needs?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, when first introduced, envisaged a five-year implementation period. The report from the council on its studies and recommendations also outlined that it needed further work and analysis and further discussion with the partners. For this reason I will stick with what was originally in the legislation because we cannot move more speedily if the schools are not ready for it. However, key elements have already been introduced. The National Council for Special Education has been established, as has the inclusive approach in schools. A total of 17,000 adults work in schools with young people with special educational needs. This includes a total of 6,500 teachers instead of the previous 1,500 teachers and a total of 8,800 special needs assistants instead of the previous 300. The sole duty of these 17,000 adults is to work with young people with special educational needs.

The Special Education Appeals Board has been established. The cross-sectoral group which includes different Departments has been established. The individual education plan guidelines have been issued to schools and many had already been following these guidelines as part of best practice in schools. The standards for assessment and the work which will be undertaken by HIQA in overseeing these assessments have begun. The council is also developing a database.

I draw the attention of the House to the funding of €900 million this year. I do not think anybody can question the commitment to the education for young people with special needs.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will allow a brief supplementary question.

Deputy Brian Hayes: I am questioning the commitment. In the implementation report given to the Minister on 1 October 2006 the council outlined 30 separate actions that should have been implemented by December 2007. Will the

Minister inform the House how many of those actions have been implemented? It is my understanding that various sections of the Act have not yet been implemented, specifically with regard to assessments, education plans and a co-ordinated approach. When will the Minister implement section 10 of the Act which is essential in terms of enrolment policy? She spoke on this subject quite passionately in recent years. Does she accept that unless progress is achieved on the implementation plan which the professionals have outlined, we will not meet the target of 2010?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: I have outlined the considerable progress which has taken place in a very short period of time. I referred to the number of people working in the area, the guidelines, the cross-sectoral group, the appeals board, the standards for assessment and the investment of €900 million. This is what is happening every day. The remaining sections of the Act will be implemented within the five-year timeframe, as outlined in the legislation and this will be done with the full co-operation of and consultation with the people who must implement it on the ground. They are the people who are in the schools every day and it is happening as we speak. I will not tolerate anybody casting scorn on what is being done for young people with special needs, considering the commitment that exists.

Deputy Brian Hayes: May I ask a brief question?

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

Physical Education Facilities.

54. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of primary and post-primary schools here that do not have recourse to physical education and sports facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33878/07]

Deputy Mary Hanafin: The PE curriculum has been designed on the basis that facilities in schools may vary. Many primary schools have a general purpose room and practically all schools have outdoor play areas which are used for teaching different aspects of the PE programme. A similar situation with sports halls and outdoor facilities applies at second level. In addition, many schools use adjacent local facilities, including public parks, playing fields and swimming pools. My Department does not have a comprehensive inventory which would indicate the facilities available to each school.

I assure the Deputy that the Government is committed to promoting strong levels of exercise for our children and young people, both in their community and at school.

The extent and quality of local sports facilities has been improved dramatically in recent years, with more than €450 million invested by the Government since 1998 in over 5,000 projects through the sports capital programme. At the same time, PE, general purpose and outdoor play facilities have been provided for schools all over the country through the school building programme. More than €2.6 billion was provided for school building infrastructure between 2000 and 2006 and a further €4.5 billion is to be invested under the new National Development Plan 2007-2013. New curricula for PE in primary schools and at junior certificate level have also been put in place.

Primary schools received €2,000 each in PE equipment grants last year, at a total cost of €6.5million. A similar grant of €4,000 per pupil, at an overall cost of approximately €3 million, issued to post-primary schools earlier this year. Since 2000 my Department has provided in excess of €5.5 million in grant-aid to primary schools to facilitate the provision of coaching or mentoring in connection with physical education or to purchase resource materials associated with the provision of physical education. Such materials and equipment would normally have a useful life of several years.

Through an increased focus on exercise in school and in the community, the Government is working to encourage more children and young people to become active. The report entitled, *The State of the Nation's Children*, which was published by the Minister of State with responsibility for children, found that children in Ireland are doing well on physical activity. They are ranked second across the 32 WHO countries for being physically active for at least four hours per week.

Deputy John O'Mahony: I thank the Minister for her reply but I would have preferred if she had answered my question which was to state the number of primary and post-primary schools that do not have access to physical education facilities. I will quote a statement from her Department which appeared in today's newspapers.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I remind the Deputy that quotations are generally not permitted during Question Time.

Deputy John O'Mahony: I will paraphrase what was said. It seems that the implementation of the physical education curriculum in schools depends on the meteorological service rather than on the Department of Education and Science. When will the Minister give serious consideration to the provision of physical education facilities? The recent INTO report stated that 80% of schools in County Donegal have no PE hall and the same applies in 63% of schools in County Clare and 70% of schools in County Kerry. This does not tally with what the Minister has just said. I do not wish to be negative in my

comments. The Department stated that the physical education curriculum can be implemented when these indoor facilities are provided, such as in Tuam, County Galway. The evidence is there. We all know about the money that needs to be spent on dealing with drugs but money spent on PE facilities is money spent on prevention. Has the Minister further plans to improve physical education facilities? When will PE be included as a subject in the second level curriculum, as has been promised for the past 15 years?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: All new school buildings and major refurbishments have a PE hall as a matter of course. With 4,000 schools and more than half of primary schools having four teachers or fewer, we will not provide PE halls for very small schools. Last week I opened an extension at a school with 19 children. We did not provide a PE hall in that case but, as it happens, the school in question has adequate space both inside and outside for PE classes. I am sure the Deputy is well aware from his own involvement that grants for sports facilities provided under the sports capital programme are awarded on the basis that the facilities will be made available to youth groups and schools. We are seeing more co-operation in this regard.

In addition to the building fund which I specifically outlined, under the dormant accounts fund, in excess of €6 million was spent on 447 projects for outdoor play areas. In a show of co-operation between my Department and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, significant funding has been provided in recent years for outdoor play areas in schools in CLÁR programme areas.

Deputy O'Mahony inquired about a PE exam. The NCCA has drawn up a syllabus in that regard but two issues still require serious consideration, one of which relates to how assessments would be carried out. The second is that if one were to introduce PE as a subject, one would have to ensure equity of facilities. In addition, regarding PE in schools, it is necessary to take into consideration the pressures on the curriculum, given the length of the school day.

It must also be borne in mind that children spend 20% of their time in school. It is much more important that communities and families consider whether children are walking or cycling to school, sitting in front of the television or playing with their Gameboy or Nintendo and whether their only exercise is imitating playing tennis or another sport.

Schools Building Projects.

55. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on the establishment of a new secondary school in Lucan south, County Dublin, in view of the considerable demand for post-primary education in this rapidly

[Deputy Brian Hayes.]

growing area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33879/07]

Deputy Mary Hanafin: My Department is conscious of the extent of housing developments in the Lucan area and the consequences which this has for school provision. Because of this, substantial additional accommodation has been provided in the area by my Department at both primary and post-primary level in recent years and this is set to continue for the foreseeable future.

Based on current demographic trends, my Department anticipates that there will be a need for a further post-primary school in Lucan in the medium term and has asked South Dublin County Council to identify a site for this development. A timeframe for the delivery of the school will be known when a suitable site has been identified and acquired. The local authority has a number of local area plans in train and it is likely that we will be able to secure a site under this process. My Department is conscious of the lead-in period for the delivery of a post-primary school and is anxious to conclude the site issue as soon as possible. It will continue to engage with the local authority until this matter is resolved.

In the meantime, my Department has increased capacity at the four existing post-primary schools to 3,000 places overall. The current combined enrolment is 2,500 which means that there is spare capacity for some 500 pupil places. A building project which is in train for Lucan community college will further increase capacity by 200 pupil places. In addition to this, a building project for St. Joseph's College has been assessed and the project brief which will provide an additional 200 pupils places has been agreed.

The combined total of extra places which will be available when these projects are completed will be 900, equivalent to the size of a post-primary school in its own right. These measures will assist in reducing pressure for pupil places in the short to medium term, while the process of advancing the project for a new school continues.

Deputy Brian Hayes: What is the timescale in advancing the new project? Most people in the Lucan south area will be encouraged to hear the Minister's comment that the Department will finally take this issue seriously. In 1996 this community had a total population of 7,500; ten years later in 2006 there were 7,500 children under the age of 14 years. I am sure the Minister accepts this is an unbelievable expansion of the population in this ten-year period. Will she be more specific about the timeframe involved, given the crisis in terms of the latent demand? There is a huge cohort of young children in the area who are finding it difficult to get into primary school, let alone secondary school. This is a problem that needs to be addressed urgently.

Deputy Mary Hanafin: The Deputy is correct in so far as he talks about the population of the area. In fact, that is why the expansion in the number of primary school places was so significant. Twelve primary schools now operate in the Lucan area. This has served to meet the needs to which the Deputy referred.

Site acquisition is the first issue to be addressed. We have asked South Dublin County Council to identify a site for us. Once that is done, we will be able to proceed with the planning of the school. The building projects for the other schools will progress also. I refer to the expansion of Lucan community college to provide 200 extra places and St. Joseph's College. I thank, in particular, the principal of St. Joseph's College, Siobhan Corry, who agreed to increase the number of student places to 1,000. I also thank the principal of Lucan community college.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The extensions will not address the huge population cohort. Given the positive remarks made by the Minister, will she agree to meet the Lucan south secondary school action group which has been seeking a meeting with her for some time?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: The Lucan south action group will be encouraged when it receives the reply. I am not in a position to give any further information, other than to say South Dublin County Council will identify a site for us. We will move on it and the other extensions also.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Will the Minister agree to meet the group?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: I am sure the Deputy will have told it before the evening is out.

Deputy Brian Hayes: It is not of any interest to me, as it is not in my constituency. I raise the matter as a general one. Will the Minister agree to meet the group?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That concludes Priority Questions. We will now take questions in ordinary time. Members will be aware that it is open to every Deputy to speak but there will be a one minute time limit after the Minister's initial reply.

Other Questions.

Adult Education.

56. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the implementation of the McIver report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34005/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): The social partnership agreement, Towards 2016, includes a provision which indicates that, having regard to developments in the PLC sector, including the McIver report, concrete prioritised proposals would be prepared in regard to PLC provision and be the subject of further negotiations between management and unions. The agreement also envisaged that the proposals to be developed would focus, in particular, on the larger PLC providers. The agreement further provided that the union side would engage positively in regard to commitments on future working arrangements and developments in the sector.

I emphasise that the context for considering the future development of the PLC sector and addressing the recommendations in the McIver report is the Towards 2016 agreement. The McIver report made a series of recommendations with significant resource implications. Its recommendations in regard to staffing alone would involve at least 800 additional staff at a cost of over €50 million. In that regard, the Towards 2016 agreement acknowledged that the level of resources for the PLC sector would be determined in the light of resources generally and the implications for other areas of education.

Arising from the agreement, my officials developed a series of proposals for consideration and negotiation. The union and management representatives have met on a number of occasions in the past year to discuss the proposals and endeavour to arrive at agreement. These negotiations are ongoing. I do not propose to go into the detail of the negotiations, as that would be inappropriate and might prejudice the possibility of achieving a successful outcome.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Does the Minister of State think it appropriate that the PLC sector should be held back from development and used as a bartering tool in the social partnership negotiations? Surely the Government recognises the needs of this sector in its own right? Given that PLC courses were first launched in 1985 and the McIver report was published in 2003, why is that four years later there is no prospect of its implementation because it is subject to negotiation? How can we build a high-end economy when this is the attitude of the Government?

Deputy Seán Haughey: The context is the Towards 2016 social partnership agreement. The social partners have agreed proposals for the ongoing development of the PLC sector. Negotiations are continuing between the Irish Vocational Educational Association and the TUI. They began this time last year. To date, eight meetings have been held between the Department and representatives of the social partners. I hope to be able to report progress in the new year and secure agreement between all parties in order

that the PLC sector can continue to flourish and develop.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Does the Minister of State accept that finance is the reason the Government is pushing this into a negotiating process? A total of €80 million per annum is spent on subsidising private schools. Substantially less than that would have implemented this report in full and ended the nightmare where the PLC is virtually an off-shoot of the VEC process. That is totally inadequate and inappropriate.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I very much accept that funding is an issue. As I stated, the staffing implications alone of the McIver report would involve 800 additional staff at a cost of over \$50 million. That would have implications for other areas of education as well.

We have agreed a path forward. We have initiated a negotiation process in the context of the Towards 2016 agreement and I am confident that agreement can be reached in the new year so that the PLC sector can continue to develop.

School Curriculum.

57. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on the theory of intelligent design; her plans to introduce intelligent design in both the junior certificate science curriculum and the leaving certificate biology curriculum; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33449/07]

Deputy Mary Hanafin: Every day in this job I learn something new and this is one of those.

I understand that proponents of intelligent design theory assert that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection. Those who favour this theory claim that the complexity of the natural world can be plausibly explained only by assuming an intelligent designer. Critics regard it as creationist theory reinvented to appear as science. I understand that intelligent design is not a recognised scientific theory and I can inform the Deputy that I am not aware of any plans to include it in the second level science curricula.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA, has a statutory role in advising on the curricula to be taught in schools. Following the advice of the NCCA, a revised junior certificate science syllabus, with a strong emphasis on hands-on investigative approaches and on science process skills, was examined for the first time in 2006. The NCCA, as part of the senior cycle review, is currently examining the leaving certificate biology, physics and chemistry syllabi. I understand the revised syllabi in these subjects will, in addition to a number of other changes, have an increased emphasis on science process

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

skills and on an investigative approach to the teaching and learning of science.

Intelligent design does not feature in either the junior certificate science syllabus or in the current leaving certificate biology syllabus. Instead, students learn about the theory of evolution.

It is accepted as a core belief in many religions that God created the human race. For the majority this is not seen as being in conflict with the theory of evolution. My Department has no wish to challenge the beliefs of individuals in this area. Rather, the approach is that within science, the emphasis is to explain phenomena through a well established process of observation and experimentation under controlled conditions, and the theory of evolution is taught in this context.

There is scope for other views and beliefs to be explored in the context of religious education. It should be noted that the national syllabus in religious education developed as an optional examination subject for students of all faiths or of none, includes a specific section on religion and science. One of the aims of this is to explore the tensions between science and theology and to focus, in particular, on such issues as Darwin's theory of evolution.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I welcome the Minister's confirmation that there are no proposals to introduce this in the area of the science curriculum which is the concern of many people. Will the Minister take it upon herself to ensure, through her inspectorate, that in the post-primary schools there is no attempt, despite the exhortations of quite a number, to introduce by the back door or otherwise the theory of intelligent design or creationism in the science curriculum? What happens in the religious doctrine classes is a separate matter altogether.

Deputy Mary Hanafin: I am not aware of any pressure to introduce it at all into the science syllabus or of any school which is attempting to introduce it as part of the science syllabus. I did not know where the question came from but I am glad I have had the opportunity to learn about it.

Looking at other countries, in the United States, for instances, it was rejected as a science and could not be promoted. The Council of Europe has also stated that creationism is not based on facts and does not use any scientific reasoning. In the UK, they say it is not a recognised scientific theory, and it is not included in the science curriculum but can of course be used in religion.

I can confirm for the Deputy that it is not part of the syllabus, there are no proposals to make it part of the syllabus and I am not aware of any pressure to include it in part of the syllabus.

Deputy James Reilly: I want to ask a question related to intelligent design. The Minister pro-

duced a nice document on all the plans for schools in Dublin North.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Why do I feel this might stray beyond the parameters of the question?

Deputy James Reilly: I do not think so.

A Deputy: Straying into architecture.

Deputy James Reilly: Whether or not we discuss intelligent design, we need a forum in which to do so and that forum is normally the school. Has the Minister planning permission for any of the schools which she has promised the people of Dublin North or is she, like the Minister for Health and Children, full of plans, promises and reviews but no action?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is not related to this question.

Deputy Mary Hanafin: As a Christian, I believe God created it.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Fingal.

Legislative Programme.

58. **Deputy Noel J. Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when her Department will publish the student support Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33902/07]

66. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will make a statement on the proposed student support Bill. [34004/07]

98. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason the student support Bill has not been published; if the heads of the Bill have been agreed by Government; if it has been sent to the parliamentary draughtsman's Office; if so, when; if she will introduce it in the Dáil or Seanad; if she will have it published before the Christmas recess 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33431/07]

726. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she will publish the student support Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34053/07]

Deputy Mary Hanafin: I propose to take Questions Nos. 58, 66, 98 and 726 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, I announced in June 2006 that the vocational education committees, VECs, would be given sole responsibility for the administration of the third level student maintenance grants. Following my announcement, the Government gave approval for the drafting of a new student support Bill along the lines of the general scheme presented to them.

The proposed student support Bill will place all student grants on a statutory footing for the first time and will provide for the designation of grant awarding authorities and for the general basis on which grants will be awarded to eligible students.

My main priority in bringing forward this Bill is to provide a statutory framework for reforming the administration of student grants, and a coherent basis for a new single unified scheme of student maintenance grants.

The Bill is part of a programme of legislative and administrative reform, which will facilitate the introduction of service improvements in the administration of student grants, providing for greater consistency of application, improved client accessibility and timely delivery of grants to those who need them most. It will include guaranteed timeframes for the assessment of grants, an independent appeals procedure and more efficient arrangements for handling applications and making payments.

The existing arrangements for student grants encompass a mix of statutory and non-statutory administrative schemes involving a variety of different conditions and entitlements under each scheme. Therefore in moving from the four existing schemes to a single statutory-based scheme, a range of complex issues emerged to be addressed. Officials in my Department have been working closely with the Attorney General's office to resolve all of these matters in order to ensure the new arrangements in the single scheme will be more coherent, accessible and understandable for students and their parents.

I want to reassure Deputies of my commitment to move forward with the programme of legislative and administrative reform of student grants. The student support Bill is at the final stages of preparation and my Department is currently working closely with the Office of the Attorney General to finalise the draft legislation. I hope to be in a position to have the Bill published shortly, if possible during the current Dáil session or, more likely, before the return of the Dáil in January.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The Minister will be aware that she gave a commitment in 2006 that this issue would be sorted. On at least ten occasions before the general election she stated this Bill would be published and the issue would be sorted. What are the delays at this stage?

Deputy Coonan asked when the Minister will publish this Bill. Will it be published in the next month before the new session begins and, more importantly, when will it be put before the Dáil?

This is the key question. Is the Minister giving a guarantee to the House that the new regime, in terms of placing responsibility for all maintenance grants within the VEC sector, will be in place by September 2008 so that there is a much greater streamlining of grants for third-level students?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: I am not sure Deputy Hayes heard the last line of my answer, where I stated the Bill will be published by the time the Dáil returns in January. We then intend to pursue taking it through the Houses immediately during the next term.

Our obvious commitment then is to ensure that matters can be speeded up for next year. My intention is to have the applications forms etc. ready by March of next year — it was somewhat later last year — and the publication of the schemes, which did not occur until June last, will occur in April of next year in order to provide a better service for students.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Question No. 98 relates to the same matter which the Minister has answered. Clearly, there has been an inordinate delay in the preparation of this and we do not yet have the full story as to why it has been delayed. The best promise we now have is that it will be ready towards the end of January next year.

Can the Minister confirm that the extraordinarily complex and highly bureaucratic application form which is a Kafkaesque deterrence to people attempting to apply for the grant, will be included as part and parcel of the reform of this process? I welcome what the Minister stated about the revised timetable, but can she indicate that the application form, which is part and parcel of the hurdle applicants must overcome, will be simplified and that the revision of same will form part of the debate in this House when the Bill eventually comes before us in the new year?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: Deputy Quinn is correct. One of the main aims behind this is to provide a greater service for students. The current problem, and the reason it is so complex, is there are four schemes, one of which, that for higher education, is on a statutory basis. However, the VEC scholarships, third level maintenance for trainees and PLC grants are all on an administrative basis. The aim behind the legislation, therefore, is to provide a unified scheme and form.

It is equally important that students and applicants provide all the information required of them. There has been much criticism of VECs and councils not meeting targets, etc, but, equally, many intelligent college students submit incomplete application forms. If we can get full co-operation from both sides, it will, ultimately, be to the benefit of the students.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Does the Minister accept that the requirement to supply death or marriage certificates as part of an application is somewhat excessive?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: No, because the application is based on income. It is a means tested application and, therefore, people must have the relevant information. At all times, people try to

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

be sensitive to the information required from people.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I welcome another announcement the Bill is imminent. Can the Minister give any indication as to when the legislation will be implemented and when the new scheme will begin? Is there any particular reason the USI and students have been kept in the dark with regard to consultation on the proposed legislation? I am told there has been no consultation whatsoever with them. We all welcome clarity on the issue. I am sure the Leas-Cheann Comhairle's constituency office is like mine and that every year, like me, he clears a patch to deal with the significant number of inquiries on the issue.

Deputy Mary Hanafin: The Deputy is quite incorrect with regard to USI, which has been kept involved. As recently as the past fortnight, it has been asked for its views. It was also asked to indicate whether there were delays in individual councils or VECs around the country in the payment of grants and it has not reported any this year. Therefore, it is involved.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: That is not what I was led to believe.

Deputy James Reilly: I welcome the Minister's statement today that the Bill will be published in January. Could she make the heads of the Bill available to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science before then so it can discuss the Bill with the student unions? My second question follows the line of Deputy Morgan's question. Will the Minister guarantee to the House that the new scheme will be in place for people to avail of it during next summer for the following academic year?

Deputy Mary Hanafin: I do not see any point in distributing the heads of the Bill at this stage because the Bill will be published before the Dáil returns in January. That will provide ample opportunity for people to discuss it. I have indicated some of the things we will be able to do next year with regard to forms, but most likely we will still have four different schemes in operation next year.

Student Databases.

59. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Education and Science the manner and method in which the post-primary pupil database in her Department is operated and indicate for each of the years 2004, 2005, and 2006 the number of foreign students recorded on that database and their percentage of the total of post-primary pupils; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33434/07]

Deputy Mary Hanafin: The post-primary pupils database was first implemented for the 1991-92 school year and it holds basic information on each pupil attending a post-primary school. In October of each year, all post-primary schools make a return to my Department detailing their enrolments for the year. This is known as the October return and it is used to populate the Department's post-primary pupils' database. In the school year 2006-07, the returns from 732 schools provided details on 333,718 pupils nationwide. The October return gives a snapshot of school enrolments by programme level, junior certificate, leaving certificate and class year, as at 30 September each year. Detailed information on the subject choice of each student is also collected.

A good overview of the type of information collected can be gained by looking at the second level education section of my Department's annual statistical report. Much of the data in that section of the annual report is taken directly from the post-primary pupils' database.

The in-house processing of the October returns and the provision of a helpdesk facility for schools is carried out by the post-primary pupils' data section of my Department. Processing of the October returns commences in October of each year and is completed around May. The Department uses the information supplied for a number of tasks, including payment of *per capita* grants to voluntary secondary schools and determination of the provisional teacher allocations for all sectors. An extract of the data is provided each year to the State Examinations Commission to facilitate the organisation and co-ordination of the junior certificate and leaving certificate examinations.

Among the data collected on each student is a country of origin designation. This designation defaults to Ireland, unless otherwise indicated in the schools October return. Based on this designation, I can inform the Deputy that the number of pupils whose country of origin was returned as other than Ireland was 12,037 pupils in the school year 2004-05; 13,791 pupils in the school year 2005-06; and 17,003 pupils in the school year 2006-07. It can be seen, therefore, that within a three-year period, an extra 5,000 students, other than Irish students, entered secondary school. The figure is a lot higher in primary schools.

The overall enrolment figures for all post-primary schools in each of these years were 305,808 in 2004-05; 303,031 in 2005-06; and 303,527 in 2006-07. We anticipate school numbers in post-primary schools will begin to increase again next September, but they have been declining for the past ten years or so.

The percentages requested by the Deputy for the number of children whose country of origin was other than Ireland are, therefore, 3.9% in 2004-05; 4.6% in 2005-06; and 5.6% in 2006-07. Of the many countries represented in each of these years, those from the United Kingdom consistently dominate in top spot with the United

States also consistently featured in the top five countries of origin.

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 Paul Connaughton — redundancies in the FÁS community employment schemes and the subsequent problems this creates for the workers involved and the community projects they were working on; and the matter of the continuing cap on the numbers seeking work on the rural social scheme; (2) Deputy Joe Costello — the need to construct a Luas line from the city centre to Liffey Junction via Broadstone-Grangegorman; (3) Deputy Michael Ring — the need to discuss the patient transport service; (4) Deputy Brian O'Shea — the consideration of a report on the submission of Waterford Institute of Technology for upgrading to university status; (5) Deputy Michael Creed — the need to discuss the proposed building of a new school in County Cork; (6) Deputy James Bannon — the need to provide urgent core funding for the continuation and expansion of osteoporosis services, which are currently provided by the Irish Osteoporosis Society, which is a charitable organisation and is surviving with a staff of two to cover the entire country and which will be forced to close without such funding, leaving the public and health professionals without a point of contact; and (7) Deputy Jimmy Deenihan — the need to provide the necessary resources to Kerry General Hospital to ensure that the orthopaedic service is upgraded.

The matters raised by Deputies Michael Ring, Jimmy Deenihan, Brian O'Shea and Deputy Michael Creed have been selected for discussion.

Leaders' Questions.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The country is now aware of the extent of the epidemic of cocaine and its consequences for young people. At this moment, several young people are literally fighting for their lives. The tragedy and consequences inflicted on families have been visibly evident in recent days. Garda sources say publicly that incidents such as the collapse of the two men in Longford and Westmeath are daily occurrences. Also, in some hospitals, even in fairly rural areas, between five and six people are admitted for cocaine complications every weekend. In Dublin over the past weekend, a number of people were taken to Tallaght Hospital after taking drugs and hospital staff say they see it all the time now.

RTE deserves some compliments on how it went about the business of producing last night's "Prime Time" programme, which exposed the scale of the vicious underbelly of Irish society,

where those who peddle, deal in and buy drugs are involved in the current epidemic in our country. When we consider that the majority of the 269 toilets investigated and analysed showed traces of cocaine use, this demonstrates the extent of what is involved. To date, the Government has put forward a Minister of State with responsibility for drugs strategy, Deputy Pat Carey. He is a decent man and his heart is in the right place, but he has not been given Cabinet clout to deal with the issue head on.

In previous years we had Operation Shannon, which dealt with people crossing the Shannon to raid rural houses, and Operation Anvil, which was set up to deal with gangland killings. Is it not time to have a Cabinet-led initiative to deal with drug dealing, drug barons and drug pimps, in all their forms, including those who use cocaine? Some people seem to think they are immune from the law. Unless the issue is tackled head on, it will continue to have the most serious consequences for people all over the country.

The Taoiseach said on 13 February that this was not a cause for serious concern and that he did not believe drugs were available in every town and parish in the country. Has he changed his mind now on the basis of the evidence produced on the "Prime Time Investigates" programme, which showed the blatant and public sale of cocaine at high profile locations, such as Croke Park, the Galway races, the horse show and elsewhere? People turn a blind eye to such behaviour as if it were socially respectable and acceptable. Can I take it that the Taoiseach, as Head of Government, will build on the platform put in place by the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, by leading a Cabinet initiative on this matter? People will continue to take cocaine and other drugs until they realise the Government is serious about dealing with the drug epidemic throughout the country. What is the Government's response to the exposure by "Prime Time Investigates" of the scale of what is going on?

The Taoiseach: I join Deputy Kenny in remembering those who have died over recent days. I commiserate with their families and remember the families of those who are ill. The Deputy rightly said that this is an ongoing problem. I said that last week in the House. As someone who is honoured to represent a city centre constituency, I am aware that the incidence of drug use has not changed much over the last 20 years. It has been occurring since the early 1980s. Last night's "Prime Time Investigates" was broadcast in the context of a recent focus on drug use. I acknowledge wholeheartedly the good work that was done by those who made the programme. I also mention the work done by the *Irish Examiner* a few weeks ago. It is good that there is such a focus on this issue. I do not think this is a new problem, however. We are hearing about it from those who have been to accident and emergency departments, for example. It is not new. It is good

[The Taoiseach.]

that people are being educated about the problem.

I will not repeat what I said in the House on 13 February last. Deputy Kenny knows my views on the broad-brush approach of those who think every young person is involved in drugs. That is not the case. I agree with a number of the Deputy's comments. I assure him that the work of the Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, and his predecessor, Deputy Noel Ahern, has the total support of the Cabinet, including the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and the Ministers of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. This broad issue, which affects sectors like health and education, is rarely off the Cabinet table. We consider the issue in one form or another in terms of drug-related gangland killings, seizures made by the Criminal Assets Bureau or the powers provided for in the Criminal Justice Acts. In fairness, these ongoing issues have been handled by successive Governments over a number of years.

I will raise one of the issues raised by Deputy Kenny. I reiterate that according to the latest figures, 120 people died from drug use. There are always difficulties in identifying the cause of death in coroners' reports and autopsies. Less than ten of these deaths were from cocaine use. While I welcome the fact that everybody is talking about cocaine, cocaine as a killer in terms of drugs accounted for eight or nine out of that 120. The use of all forms of drugs — new ones, old ones and everything in between — is the issue we have to combat.

I strongly agree with Deputy Kenny that a number of groups need to be considered as part of this debate. I refer to those who are peddling and selling drugs and those who are engaged in criminal activity such as the importation of drugs. I will mention all the things we are doing to deal with such people. We have established specialist units to work on security and all the other issues involved. While the middle people in the drugs sector are sometimes smaller criminals, they are certainly criminals. We should also focus on those who use drugs. If there was no market for drugs, the people I have mentioned would not be in business. Everybody has to deal with this. We have a cross-departmental group working on this. A number of Ministers are on the social inclusion committee that I chair.

I was asked whether we need to look at doing more things. A number of my colleagues spoke today about bars and pubs. As I have said previously, if some 13 year olds sit at a bar counter and start to drink beer, the publican will react because they are breaking the law. If people take drugs in the toilets or in any other part of the pub, people have responsibilities as well. I have seen in my constituency and elsewhere the Garda using its powers to close pubs which allow drug-taking, or are tacitly easy on the drugs issue. The Garda aims to identify, target and dismantle

national and international drug-trafficking networks which supply and distribute illegal drugs. If necessary, I can go through the many operations which are in force. If one looks at the figures, one will see it is not easy, and the Garda has pointed out that this is not just its responsibility.

The value of recent drug seizures demonstrates how active the Garda is and gives an indication of the amount of drugs present. Heroin worth €22 million, cannabis worth €13 million and ecstasy worth €3 million has been confiscated so far this year. I accept that the seizure of drugs worth €120 million at Dunlough Bay in County Cork probably would not have happened in the normal course of events. It seems that the drugs were destined for the international market in that instance. The Garda is also targeting people involved in the supply of drugs at the lower end of the scale and have been concentrating on this more recently. Many members of the Cabinet met senior Garda management approximately six weeks ago to discuss policing priorities, the Garda Síochána Act, the enhanced activity of the Garda drugs unit and the work of the force in general, particularly in so far as it relates to places where the presence of drug dealers and the use of illicit drugs is likely. Approximately ten new legislative measures have been introduced over the last two years to target drug use more strongly.

Dealing with this issue is not a question of Garda resources. I do not think there is a problem in that respect. We would be fooling ourselves if we were to think all the answers to the question of dealing with drug abuse lie with the Garda, or indeed with other State agencies. It is clear the State has responsibilities, which it takes very seriously, but so too have individuals. The Misuse of Drugs Acts give considerable powers to gardaí to search anyone if they have reasonable cause to believe a drugs offence, such as simple possession, is being committed. There is no problem. I have asked many times over the last week why the Garda does not go into house parties at which people are taking cocaine. The Garda has strong powers in this regard. If gardaí suspect that drugs are being taken, they have the power to act.

I will be frank — I would like the law to be enforced more strongly. I keep answering questions about the need to give the Garda more powers. The force has been given strong powers by successive justice Ministers. At none of my meetings with the Garda this year has it been suggested that its powers are in any way inadequate. It might be easier for people to understand that if they were to see the law being enforced a little more strongly. That is a matter for the Garda, however, as I cannot start directing its actions. The Garda knows the Government's views on this issue. There has been a recent spate of deaths, sadly. The Government will continue to deal with this issue as a priority on its agenda.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I thank the Taoiseach for his reply. I would like the House and the Government to send out the message that they are really serious and deadly serious about the issue of drugs. I guarantee the Taoiseach that Fine Gael will support Government initiatives aimed at dealing with drug dealers and those who break the law. I agree with the Taoiseach that it is not all down to the Garda. However, Garda activity did not prevent 92% of the toilets which were investigated by "Prime Time Investigates" from showing traces of cocaine. It is not bringing an end to the influx of drugs into this country. It is not stopping people from making starter ecstasy tablets available to young people for €2.50. It has not averted the sale of heroin on the streets of Dublin and other cities and towns. It is not discouraging those who are snorting cocaine as we speak. The message being sent out by the Government is that while we have had some spectacular successes — drugs worth €100 million were found off Mizen Head — we have not done anything to stem the flow of the drugs problem.

Perhaps the soft social perception of the respectability of cocaine use will not be jolted out of its lethargy until a high-profile personality is jailed for cocaine use. We recall the effect of the jailing of Lester Piggott, for different reasons, in England some years ago. People will begin to sit up and take notice of just how serious Government — with a capital G — can be. Speaking yesterday to 300 young people, I understood that nobody among them — I agree with the Taoiseach in this regard — wants to take something with rat poison or other mixing agents in it. Would anybody eat a slice of ham off the cistern of a toilet? Why would they put cocaine powder on an unclean cistern and snort it? Is it bravado, peer pressure or absence from reality? We must show that the Government is serious about dealing with drugs by building on the platform of the Minister of State, Deputy Carey, as a Cabinet initiative and sending out the message that the Taoiseach will lead a Cabinet charge to deal with this.

The Taoiseach mentioned one point that I know is a problem. When setting up this Cabinet initiative, the Government should call in club owners and publicans. They are given commercial licences to sell alcohol and the vast majority run their businesses in a respectable fashion. However, they have a problem in assessing the conditions or requirements for the entry of persons on to their premises. There have been instances in which people have taken legal cases because they were refused entry to a public premises. Will the Taoiseach consider the Equal Status Act 2000 and related Acts which cause difficulty for publicans or club owners where they might suspect that someone is dealing in drugs or is likely to be taking drugs? Equally, the Taoiseach should send out a clear message that premises in which drug dealing is known to be tolerated, as

distinct from going on unbeknownst to the owners, will be closed down.

The Taoiseach: I appreciate the constructive points made by Deputy Kenny. I will not stand here and say I am happy with the situation because the enforcement powers must be used. I have seen the Garda take a tough line by going to the courts and using its powers to close licensed premises in which it believes there is regular drug-taking, or at least activities around it. However, we need to see far more than that. If there are premises that are tolerant towards this activity or in which illicit drugs of any kind are used, tough measures must be taken. I do not want to say that the Garda does not already do that in some cases. In the case of under-age drinking the Garda has strong powers. I am not saying that under-age drinking should be tolerated, but if we can close down a place for abuse of the law on under-age drinking, it is even more important that tough measures are taken where the sale, distribution or use of drugs is taking place.

That is not happening in a large number of places, although I accept the points made about percentages in the "Prime Time Investigates" programme. There are not many places in any community that have a reputation for being druggie houses, as they are commonly known, although that activity may be taking place in secret. The Garda is capable of taking tough action. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform has told the Garda in meetings since the summer, as the last Minister and the one before that said, if extra powers are necessary to make it easier for the Garda to remove licences, they will be granted. I would say the same thing with regard to nightclubs. If large pubs or nightclubs do not work towards improvement in this area, they should be put out of business for six months. They would not like that, but we must consider measures such as this. I do not want to go around waving every stick unless it is necessary, but we will take measures that are necessary. Six months with no licence would cause owners of premises to lose their incomes, which is another issue.

These activities are taking place not only in pubs and nightclubs but also in homes and at parties. Nobody wants to be a spoilsport coming up to the Christmas period, but drug-taking at parties cannot be tolerated. The stories cannot all be wrong. I am not saying it is happening at every party or at 10% of parties, but everybody cannot be wrong, including Members of this House. The Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Pat Carey, has a strong knowledge of this as he spends every hour of the day with groups active in this area. I am told that crystal meth, the new drug on the beat, puts cocaine into a different perspective. It can cause enormous damage. Cocaine causes major damage to the liver and the heart. Altogether, 120 people are killed every year by drugs. If we need to strengthen our laws,

[The Taoiseach.]

we can do so. This is an issue about which the Garda and society must be serious. The message from this House is that we will take a tough line.

The current focus on this issue is welcome. This is not a new problem. I accept that it did not start this week or last week. We must be tough as a society. The powers are there. The legislation provides for ten-year or 14-year sentences for certain drugs offences. People can serve longer sentences for offences of this type than for murder. This has been provided in the legislation for a long time. As pointed out by the Garda, many people are already behind bars, including a number of gang members. Catching offenders is the difficulty, but there is a significant success rate. People are being put behind bars for 14 years, although we would like to see far more of them. That is the message from this House.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I join the Taoiseach and Deputy Kenny in commiserating with the families who have lost loved ones in the past week or so and the families of those who are still ill, the most recent victims of drugs in our society.

I was glad to hear the Taoiseach's second reply to Deputy Kenny because I was a little concerned when I heard his first reply that there may have been a sense of playing down the seriousness of the cocaine problem in this country. A number of people have been commenting on the events of the past week as representing a watershed, particularly in terms of emphasising that cocaine is not a safe or acceptable drug. There is much talk about a bad batch doing the rounds. There is no such thing as a good batch of cocaine. We have seen in recent years a dramatic increase in the supply of cocaine in this country. Convictions are up four-fold and seizures have risen by a factor of nearly 20. Large amounts of cocaine are being seized. A total of 70% of waste water in Dublin is contaminated with cocaine. We saw the excellent "Prime Time Investigates" programme on this subject last night, which showed us how widespread is the use of cocaine in our society.

The Labour Party wishes to support the actions of the Government in this area. I have great respect for the Minister of State, Deputy Carey. We support his comments and his efforts and I hope the Government will do likewise. There are, however, a number of legislative measures that need to be taken. I referred to some of these during previous Leaders' Questions. We must smash the supply chains for cocaine and other illicit drugs. We must smash the drug barons and gangs who are supplying drugs in our society. I ask the Taoiseach to consider, in the positive sense in which I make this suggestion, two legislative measures that have been advanced by the Labour Party in recent times, the Witness Protection Programme Bill and the Garda Síochána (Powers of Surveillance) Bill, which was recently published by Deputy Rabbitte. These two measures

would help in the effort to smash the drugs gangs and the supply of drugs in this country.

Will the Taoiseach consider the anomaly in terms of the powers of the Garda under the licensing laws and its powers to deal with suspected drugs offences? It is an anomaly that, under licensing legislation, a garda can enter a public house, licensed premises or night club without a warrant to inspect whether there is a breach of the licensing laws. However, if the garda wants to examine whether drugs are being used in toilets or generally on the premises, he or she must get a warrant. Some legislative change could be made in this respect to allow gardaí more freedom and ability to deal with the problem.

I accept the Taoiseach's point that much of this transpires in private houses, at private parties and so on, but there is an anomaly in the powers of the Garda under licensing laws and its general powers regarding clubs and places of entertainment. Will the Taoiseach examine these matters as a way to deal with the issue?

The Taoiseach: I will look at any suggestions. On the Deputy's point, I have seen the Garda operate in licensed premises that got out of control. The searches were done under the misuse of drugs legislation. The Garda quotes in its search warrants that it has the power to search anyone wherever they have reasonable cause to believe there has been a drug offence, including simple possession. The Garda has that power, which I have seen operating. It depends on how it operates in different areas. I will raise the Deputy's suggestion but, as I have seen it done in some places, it can obviously be done in other places.

We have raised the other legislative measures, such as on the protection of witnesses, with the Garda. It is not attached to the measure. It says that it is satisfied with its powers and how it operates those powers in the fight against drug barons. It has some concerns about fighting in another way that I need not go into. I will raise these issues.

The Garda divisions and Criminal Assets Bureau have made this their key issue in their policing priorities. They have stated that they will have enhanced liaison arrangements so that people engaging in drug dealing and the criminal elements involved — the main people bringing in large quantities of drugs — can be caught and charged under legislation passed by this House that is quite draconian. We will continue to ensure that the Garda has sufficient resources to tackle the problem but as long as there is a market, others will step forward to continue this dastardly trade even as we put people away and see that they are sentenced.

Those who use drugs are not only putting their own lives in danger, as seen recently, but they incur enormous health care costs on the rest of society. Everybody should take a tougher line.

People do not tolerate what is happening in their communities. The powers are there to put pressure on communities, both from the Garda and society generally. I will gladly bring any suggestions that are made to the Garda. The new Commissioner and the divisions want to continue with and build on their work under former Commissioner Conroy and to try to crush the people involved in drug activity. It is for the rest of us to try to convince those who use drugs and believe it to be in some way socially acceptable in pubs, clubs, halls, their homes or anywhere else.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I do not disagree with the Taoiseach on the demand for drugs. We may need a discussion on our society's deeper issues to determine why there is such an abuse of substances, but the most immediate matter that can be dealt with is supply. It is cheaper to buy a line of cocaine than it is to buy a pint in this city. Despite the drug seizures and convictions, there is an enormous supply of cocaine and other illegal drugs in this country.

At the heart of this issue is the trade benefiting from drugs. We have seen the gang wars, killings and shootings associated with the drugs trade. The Taoiseach is satisfied that the Garda has the powers he has described, but why is the trade continuing? Why is the supply of cocaine on the increase? Why are the powers so ineffective? Some answer is needed.

In getting convictions, there is a problem in producing witnesses and in witnesses coming forward. There is also a problem in assembling evidence, for which reason we have proposed the Garda surveillance Bill. Its measures are necessary to deal with this issue. If the Taoiseach says otherwise, he or, through him, the Garda owes an explanation as to why the drug trade is continuing at this level because it is on the increase.

The Taoiseach: I have said that I will look at any legislative measures. I raised directly with the Commissioner and senior management of the Garda the protection of witnesses legislation. They explained to me at some length how the system operates. There are a number of people in the scheme. They believe that moving further is not necessary because of the system they operate, but I will make the point again. I understand the Deputy is making it in good faith.

Deputy Jim O'Keeffe: It operates more effectively in other countries.

The Taoiseach: There is a large amount of drugs coming in. That is a fact and we should do whatever we need to do to help the Garda. It has put a number of special units on this issue and is engaging in a fairly large undercover activity to try to bring to justice those involved in the trade. It is using large numbers of units, not only in city areas but around the country. It is well known because it has been in the media, but gardaí pos-

ing as buyers are being used to identify and prosecute suppliers, which is something the Garda used not do. It is going after smaller individuals, as Garda activity is not confined to those who supply drugs, and thousands of people have been successfully prosecuted for simple possession, which is equally important. The new Commissioner has made clear that the Garda's priority is to give to the drugs problem, which he is reviewing with his people on the ground, all of the strategies it can and to do whatever it must on the ground. It will use Garda divisions, special units and CAB. If it is a question of resources, the Government must deal with it.

To state the obvious, this is a hugely lucrative business for the underworld because of the volume of trade. It has a sophisticated network across the world and is making large sums of money. This does not apply to every pusher, but it does to the ring leaders and criminal elements at the top, which makes it attractive. They have sophisticated intelligence and operate in every country, making it more difficult to seize them. They do not use very simple methods, which is one of the challenges for the Garda. At European level, we co-operate fully with Interpol, Eurojust and the other systems and must continue to do so.

With the focus of public opinion on the issue, it is time for the Garda to step up its activity. The Government will do whatever it must do if more legislation or resources are needed. We have introduced a huge number of Bills in the past few years, but if there are other issues, we will do whatever we must. We have given the Garda very large resources in terms of manpower, overtime and so on to deal with this issue.

We must look to the enforcement of the measures and maybe be more harsh on those businesses and so on that tolerate drugs in any way. This is not something one would ever want to do lightly, but everyone must play his or her part in trying to at least curb those activities. I did not outline all the remedial measures but I am aware that those involved in them are trying to help others in society. Whenever we speak about this issue, we do not always mention the victims but I take it as read that all the measures the Minister of State, Deputy Carey, his colleagues in the national drugs task force and others are bringing forward which are aimed at trying to assist victims should be implemented. I do not want to leave them out because some believe we look at only one side of the issue.

Requests to Move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 32.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before coming to the Order of Business, I propose to deal with a number of notices under Standing Order 32. I will call on Deputies in the order in which they submitted their notices to my office.

Deputy James Bannon: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the crisis with regard to the use of cocaine across every stratum of society which is reaching epidemic proportions and the lack of a concerted effort to eradicate the illegal drugs trade.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Notwithstanding the useful and constructive exchange of views between Deputies Gilmore and Kenny and the Taoiseach, I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to discuss a matter of national importance, namely, the mainstreaming of the cocaine culture in Ireland and the need for urgent action in the criminal justice system to curtail the use and supply of the drug.

An Ceann Comhairle: Having considered the matters raised, they are not in order under Standing Order 32.

Order of Business.

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 6, motion re appointment of members to committee; No. 2, Social Welfare Bill 2007 — Order for Second Stage and Second Stage, with the debate to be adjourned at 7 p.m., if not previously concluded; and No. 9, financial motions by the Minister for Finance [2007] (motion 5, resumed).

It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. and that business shall be interrupted not later than 10 p.m. and that No. 6 shall be decided without debate. Private Members' business shall be No. 19, motion re road safety; reform of penalty points system.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal that No. 6, motion re appointment of members to committee, be taken without debate agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I congratulate the Taoiseach on being the recipient of an invitation to address both Houses in Washington, the Congress and the Senate. I was driving when I heard him speak about this on Monday morning and, to quote former President Reagan, I said to myself, "Well, there you go again." The Taoiseach must have read the de Valera book circulated by the Minister for happiness because he said he thought he was the only one to have been invited to do so. I do not know whether he was suffering from selective amnesia but I remind him that he should not attempt to air-brush others from history because in 1926 W. T. Cosgrave addressed both Houses, as did Liam C. Cosgrave in 1976 to mark the bicentennial, Garret FitzGerald in 1984 and John Bruton, as Taoiseach, in 1996.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Cheaper by the dozen.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: That is very interesting but as Deputy Kenny well know, it is not in order.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I raise it for a particular reason, a Cheann Comhairle. In recent weeks the House adopted unanimously an agreed motion amended by the Government in respect of the undocumented Irish in the United States which referred to the establishment of reciprocal bilateral arrangements and the Government's strong commitment to continue engagement with the US Administration and the Congress to resolve the difficulties experienced by the undocumented Irish. In redressing the Taoiseach's attempt at air-brushing, will there be much activity in producing any legislation required and discussions between Irish and US representatives both about the undocumented Irish and the terms of the motion in respect of agreed bilateral arrangements? I would like that to mark the conclusion of the Taoiseach's address, whenever it is decided to arrange it.

No. 30 in the legislative programme is the Electricity (Transfer of Transmission Assets) Bill which is expected in 2008. Have we received any indication from the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources?

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service is to be commended on the way it has gone about advising people not to become stranded financially this Christmas by borrowing money and finding themselves with huge pay bills at the start of the new year. The service is to be placed on a statutory basis and publication of the Bill is expected some time in 2008. Will the Taoiseach indicate if there is there a particular drafting difficulty, or what is the reason for the delay in placing the service on a statutory basis?

The Taoiseach: The heads of the Electricity (Transfer of Transmission Assets) Bill have been approved for some time. Work is continuing to progress their preparation but the reality is that the Bill is unlikely to be presented for some time. I do not envisage it moving quickly. The Money Advice and Budgeting Service Bill is at drafting stage; the heads have not yet been prepared.

I answered the question on the bilateral agreement last week. As the Deputy is aware, it is under review. There are a number of difficulties. It is not supported strongly by—

Deputy Enda Kenny: Does the Taoiseach accept my—

The Taoiseach: I do. I would not air-brush anybody from history.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Will the Taoiseach not apologise to him?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Gilmore.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sure those representatives can look after themselves. We will look after business here.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I understand the increases in salary for the Judiciary which are to take effect immediately and for Ministers which are to take effect in 12 months' time will require the making of statutory instruments. Is it intended that both sets of increases will be covered by one statutory instrument or will separate instruments be required? When will the statutory instruments be laid before the House?

The Taoiseach: The one for the Civil Service and semi-State bodies has already taken effect; it did not require a statutory instrument. The one for the Judiciary does require a statutory instrument to take effect. There will be no increases in salary for Ministers and Ministers of State until next September, before which an order will be required.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I understand, therefore, that a statutory instrument will be introduced immediately in respect of the increase for judges.

The Taoiseach: It has to be introduced.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It will be done immediately.

The Taoiseach: Yes.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: There will be a separate statutory instrument to be introduced some time next year to allow the ministerial increases to take effect?

The Taoiseach: Yes, that has to be done.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On promised legislation, last week I raised with the Taoiseach the issue of agency workers but he did not give me an indication of the Government's intent at the Council of Ministers meeting last week. He must have been aware at the time that the Government intended, once again, to slavishly follow the British line in blocking the proposed EU directive on agency workers. In the light of this development which he did not share with us, what is the position on both the employment agency Bill and the employment law compliance Bill? In particular, have the heads of both Bills been agreed? How does the Taoiseach view trade union criticism of the dependency on both items of legislation which, if they had been drafted at the same time as Towards 2016, will hardly address the extensive abuse of those employed through the agency system? Does he intend to bring forward these legislative measures speedily? Will he ensure they will be fit for their pur-

pose in addressing the extent of the abuse within the employment system in this State?

The Taoiseach: The heads of the employment agency regulation Bill are in preparation and it is hoped the legislation will be available for this session. The employment law compliance Bill will be brought forward this session.

Deputy Joe Costello: This directive has been drafted by the EU since 2002. However, the Government, along with those of three other member states, prevented it from being passed. There are up to 30,000 agency workers in Ireland without contracts, established working conditions or the right to negotiate pay. The Polish Government has recently withdrawn its objection to the directive. The Irish Government, in a minority with the British Government, is to the forefront in blocking these rights for agency workers. How can the Taoiseach espouse entering into another social partnership with the trade union movement if this is the situation he allows at EU level? Will the Taoiseach give a clear answer as to whether the Government will continue to block a directive the EU is desperately trying to get passed?

The Taoiseach: The employment agency regulation Bill, which will put into legislation what was agreed with the social partners, will be in the House this session.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: For the past 12 months there have been major problems with subventions for nursing homes in the Cavan-Monaghan constituency. No one knows whether it is coming or going. We were first guaranteed the Bill would be before the House in early 2007 and later, before Christmas. Will there be clarification on this?

With difficulties in the financial services sector and people becoming concerned about the safety of their savings and money, when will the financial services regulation Bill be introduced?

The Taoiseach: The financial services regulation Bill will be introduced next year.

We were ready to take the nursing home support scheme Bill this week and next week. However, I was asked in the House by the Opposition to defer this. Several groups outside of the House also wish to make submissions on it. These groups are not one bit happy because they wanted it passed on 1 January. I agreed to defer it and I will leave it that way.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: The Medical Practitioners Act will regulate the hiring of locums. A serious issue has arisen concerning a locum who worked in Cork and Galway who was on sick leave from his job in Finland. When will the Act commence so the appointment of locums can be controlled?

The Taoiseach: I will ask the Minister to send the Deputy a note.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: It is an important issue, particularly after last week's case.

The Taoiseach: Yes.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: In view of the urgent necessity to combat the activities of the drug barons, will the Taoiseach consider introducing the money laundering Bill at an earlier stage?

Will he also inform the House if it is possible and feasible to enhance coastal, aerial and sea surveillance to deter the landing of illegal drugs?

The Taoiseach: The money laundering Bill will be introduced next year.

On the other matter, the Deputy can put down a question to the Minister for Defence as he has several plans in this area.

Deputy James Bannon: In light of the substantial rise in the population of older people and various reports published over the past several days on this, when will the urgently needed social housing (miscellaneous provisions) Bill be introduced to make provision for increased sheltered accommodation? A large number of people are living in care who should be entitled to a place of their own.

The Taoiseach: It will be published in 2008.

Deputy James Reilly: Will the Taoiseach inform the House what is contained in the Supplementary Estimate for the Department of Health and Children? A health committee meeting on it was scheduled for this afternoon but it has been deferred until tomorrow. It is a very difficult way to do business. It is difficult for me to feel I am representing the people of Ireland and Dublin North when I do not have a clue what is coming down the line.

Chuir mé cheist an seachtain seo chaite, I asked a week ago about the Dr. Ann O'Doherty report. The Taoiseach promised the House on 6 November that the report would be with us at the end of November.

The Taoiseach: I do not have the Dr. Ann O'Doherty report. I will ask the Minister to brief the Deputy on the other issue.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: We asked but got no briefing on the Supplementary Estimate.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: In the Twenty-Ninth Dáil I asked on several occasions about the ratification of the European convention on migrant workers and their families. Towards the end of the last session I got the impression the Government had decided not to ratify it. In anticipation of the forthcoming EU treaty refer-

endum, is it the Government's policy to ratify the convention and, if so, when?

The Taoiseach: I will have to get the information for the Deputy on this.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: According to the Simon Community, 55 homeless people died on the streets in 2006. When will the social housing (miscellaneous provisions) Bill, or other legislation, be introduced to implement the housing strategy to ensure these figures are not repeated? These figures released by the Simon Community are a record high. They probably do not reflect the real number dying on the streets, which must be higher.

The Taoiseach: The legislation will be introduced next year. The homeless strategy has been implemented and has been successful.

Deputy Olwyn Enright: The numbers are rising.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: A Leas-Cheann Comhairle. Sorry, I meant Ceann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: A rose by any other name.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: Will still smell as sweet.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: The Ceann Comhairle spent too long as Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: The report presented to the Minister for Education and Science in October 2006 by the National Council for Special Education contained a framework for appealing decisions at local level. When will the report's recommendations be implemented and an appeals system put in place?

The Taoiseach: I understand the legislation has been passed. The timescale envisaged in the legislation will see the scheme implemented.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Regarding the Taoiseach's earlier response to the nursing homes support scheme Bill, he is implying it has been delayed because of a request by the Opposition. It is important to put the record straight on this matter.

The Bill's provisions were announced by the Minister for Health and Children 12 months ago. There has been little legislation in the House since September. The main reason it has been delayed is because the Government has not got its act together to consult with the relevant agencies and bring the legislation forward. The Opposition asked, to which, in fairness the Taoiseach agreed, that the legislation not be rushed through the House in the last days before Christmas and

an opportunity to be given to different organisations concerned to be consulted before the Bill's publication. It is important the record is put right.

The Taoiseach: I did not mean to give that impression. Deputy Shortall asked me about the legislation as well as outside groups. A large number of these groups have protested strongly about my decision to delay the legislation. It was my decision and I am not blaming anyone else. A large number of the groups, which I thought wanted consultation, are now putting the blame on me. They claim they wanted it implemented sooner and that they will lose much money from 1 January.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The nursing home owners.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: There are some who claim they were not consulted at all.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: For clarification, last Tuesday in the House the Taoiseach gave an assurance that he would engage in consultation prior to finalising and publishing the Bill. However, on the following day the Minister for Health and Children said in a briefing that she intended to publish the Bill within the next ten days. Which version is accurate? Is the Taoiseach prepared to reiterate the assurance he gave the House last week on consultation prior to the Bill's publication?

The Taoiseach: Whatever about publication prior to the Bill being taken, I was asked by Deputy Shortall that the Bill would not be rushed through the House and guillotined before Christmas. That still stands.

Deputy Billy Timmins: The talks on the future of Kosovo concluded yesterday but it appears that no decision was reached. Will the Taoiseach allow for some time in the House for statements on the issue next week? I tried to establish the Government's position on this subject during Question Time but was unable to do so. The situation there is potentially difficult and could have an impact on Ireland.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a matter for the Whips to discuss.

The Taoiseach: Time will be very tight for that debate. It may be possible to deal with it on the Adjournment. The Minister will be glad to set out the position, as he did the other day, and he can do so in the House. I cannot see us having any more time for debates.

Appointment of Members to Committee: Motion.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Tom Kitt): I move:

That the following members be appointed to the Joint Administration Committee:

Deputies Barry Andrews; Ciarán Cuffe; John Curran; Damien English; Michael Finneran; Paul Kehoe; Séamus Kirk; Tom Kitt; Dan Neville; Sean Ó Fearghaíl; Aengus Ó Snodaigh; Emmet Stagg; David Stanton; Jack Wall and Mary White.

Question put and agreed to.

Social Welfare Bill 2007: Order for Second Stage.

Bill entitled an Act to amend and extend the Social Welfare Acts and to amend the Health Contributions Act 1979.

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy

Martin Cullen): I move: "That Second Stage be taken now."

Question put and agreed to.

Social Welfare Bill 2007: Second Stage.

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

I am pleased to introduce this, the first of two Bills that will implement the social welfare package of €900 million announced last week in budget 2008. This generous package, representing nearly half of all additional current Government spending announced in last week's budget, brings total expenditure on social welfare in 2008 to just under €17 billion.

At a time of moderate growth, our first priority must be to ensure that the less well-off in society are protected. The budget announced last week provides significant resources to allow us to address the needs of the most disadvantaged in society. The schemes and other supports that the Department of Social and Family Affairs administers will benefit more than 1.5 million people. Families also receive child benefit for almost 1.2 million children.

The 2008 social welfare budget package makes significant progress towards achieving the Government's target rate for social welfare contributory pensions. In addition, it greatly enhances the position of the spouses and partners of contributory pensioners who receive the qualified adult allowance. The framework of supports for family carers has been strengthened and the budget package ensures that the real value of all social welfare payments is maintained and safeguarded.

The social welfare budget package ensures that decisive steps are being taken to implement commitments in the programme for Government, Towards 2016, and the national action plan for social inclusion.

[Deputy Martin Cullen.]

The Government is committed to achieving a pension of at least €300 per week by 2012. As a first step towards achieving this target I am increasing the contributory State pension by €14 a week to €223.30 per week. The non-contributory State pension is being increased by €12 to €212 per week. Much of the debate on pensions focuses on the challenges to be met in the decades ahead as our population ages. These are major issues for our society and ones that must be faced. We must not, however, forget those who live on pensions and the need to ensure that today's pensioners have a decent income in retirement.

The increases in pensions over many years have been one of the major achievements of the Government. Since 2002, the level of the contributory State pension has increased by over 50% from €147.30 to €223.30 following this budget. This level of improvement has had a marked impact on the living standards of older people, enabling them to face the future with security and dignity.

This improvement is shown clearly in the numbers of older people deemed to be at risk of poverty, measured on a relative income basis. The most up-to-date figures from the EU survey on income and living conditions, which were published recently, have confirmed the steady improvements of recent years. The risk of poverty rate for older people has fallen from just under 30% in 2003 to 13.6% in 2006. The fall last year was 6.5 percentage points from the previous year, before the substantial improvements in social welfare pensions in 2007 and 2008 are taken into account.

The Government is also committed to increasing the pensioner qualified adult allowance to the level of the non-contributory State pension and the number of people eligible for this payment. I am pleased that it has been possible to take a major step forward in this regard in this year's budget. The Bill provides for an increase of €27 per week in the qualified adult rate which brings it to €200 per week or 94% of the target. This measure will benefit all qualified adults aged 66 and over, including those on reduced rates of payment who will benefit on a proportionate basis. This increase will be of particular benefit to women who do not have an entitlement to a contributory pension in their own right because of home responsibilities in the past.

As a result of these changes in the personal pension rate and the qualified adult rate, the household income of more than 42,000 pensioner couples will increase by up to €41 a week or nearly 11% next year. The total social welfare support provided for a contributory pensioner couple receiving the fuel allowance will exceed €23,000, an increase of almost €2,200 over their pre-budget position.

I have also lengthened the fuel season, in respect of which the fuel allowance of €18 a week

is paid, by one week, to 30 weeks with effect from April next year. This measure will be of particular benefit to older people.

The Government has concerns for the long-term future of our pension system despite the major improvements for pensioners in recent years. Given our experience of the past ten years, it is appropriate that we review our overall approach so that we have in place a pension system that is sustainable in the long term and that will deliver an adequate retirement income to all retired people.

On 17 October last I published a Green Paper on Pensions. It addresses the challenges we face in the pensions area and puts forward a number of options to tackle them. The purpose of the Green Paper is to set out the situation and the economic and social implications of the various suggested courses of action.

Progress has been slow in ensuring that those in employment have an occupational or private pension. The national pensions review target is to ensure that 70% of those aged over 30 in employment have such a pension, but we are still at 62%. There are also concerns that the contributions being made by individuals into their pension schemes may be too low.

Women continue to have a lower coverage rate than men, although the gap is narrowing, and certain sectors of the economy such as hotels and restaurants, agriculture and retail continue to be extremely difficult to reach. Upwards of 1 million people will rely exclusively on social welfare provision for their retirement income unless action is taken, despite our progress.

We have choices, as set out in the Green Paper, in how to address the many issues that arise. At EU level several common approaches to the pension challenge are emerging, including supporting longer working lives and active ageing; balancing contributions and benefits in an appropriate and socially fair manner; and promoting the affordability and security of funded and private schemes.

We can apply some or all of these principles but it would not be appropriate however for me, or the Government, to champion any particular approach at this stage as this would drive the debate in one direction and diminish the consultation process. We must be clear, however, that good pension provision is costly, whether it is achieved through personal contributions to private pension schemes or through the State by way of PRSI contributions or taxes.

Pensions policy is of major importance and should be of interest to everyone. Given that it will grow in significance, it is important that we have an informed public discussion and debate on the subject. The Green Paper is a key part of that process.

This concerns not only our pensions system but also our priorities as individuals and as a society, including how long we live, our expectations for retirement and the prospects for our children. It

is relevant to anyone with an interest in the shape of society in the decades ahead.

Our ambition must be to create a pension system that can be financially, economically and socially sustainable in the face of demographic change which entails a significant challenge and some difficult choices.

The establishment of the National Pensions Reserve Fund was a judicious and far-sighted initiative. The fund, which has a market value of €21 billion, will go some way towards easing future funding concerns.

The challenges outlined in the Green Paper are not unique to Ireland. They are at the heart of the debate on pension reform in many countries, particularly where the pace of demographic change is more advanced. The good news is that because our demographics will remain relatively favourable for some time, we have a reasonable, but by no means indefinite period, in which to learn from the experiences of other countries and to decide how best to address them. The consultation process will allow all interested parties the opportunity to contribute towards shaping a framework for addressing the pensions agenda in the long term. It will be important that all stakeholders participate constructively in this process as we work towards the achievement of a pensions system that can meet the needs of those currently in retirement and those of future generations. I look forward to moving the debate forward in this very important area in the coming year.

Carers play a critical role in ensuring our older people, people with disabilities and those who are seriously ill can remain in their own homes for as long as possible. Supporting and recognising carers in society is a priority of the Government and has been since 1997. During that period weekly payment rates to carers have been greatly increased, qualifying conditions for the carer's allowance have been significantly eased, coverage of the scheme has been extended and new schemes such as carer's benefit and the respite care grant have been introduced and extended. Recent reforms of the scheme allow persons in receipt of certain social welfare payments who are also providing full-time care and attention for a person to retain their main social welfare payment and receive a half rate carer's allowance. The amount paid varies depending on the person's means. As a result of these improvements, there are now over 34,000 carers in receipt of either carer's allowance or carer's benefit. These carers also receive a respite care grant, as do almost 10,000 other carers who do not qualify for weekly carer payments. The numbers availing of these schemes continue to increase.

The improvements to the carer's scheme have been made in the context of continued developments in areas such as needs assessment and home care packages which are also designed to facilitate the care of people in their own homes for as long as possible. One of the key Govern-

ment commitments in the national partnership agreement, Towards 2016, is the development of a national carers' strategy. This commitment is reiterated in the programme for Government. One of the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs in its "Report on the Position of Full Time Carers" was that such a strategy should be developed. I am very pleased that we are in a position to act on that recommendation. The strategy will focus on supporting informal and family carers in the community. While social welfare supports for carers will clearly be a key issue in the strategy, other issues such as access to respite care, health and other services, education, training and employment will also feature strongly. Co-operation between relevant Departments and agencies is essential if the provision of services, supports and entitlements for carers is to be fully addressed. For that reason all relevant Departments and agencies will be involved in the strategy and there will be appropriate consultation with the social partners. An inter-departmental working group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, is being established to draw up the strategy and to manage the consultation process. I expect the strategy to be completed by the summer of 2008.

The development of a national carers' strategy provides us with an opportunity to build further on the improvements made to the scheme to date and consider other areas where further progress can be made. I am delighted to provide in the Bill for further improvements to the income supports available to carers which build on the significant improvements made in recent years. As in previous years, I am increasing the rates of payments for carers in order that, with effect from January, carer's allowance will increase by €14, bringing the rate for carers over age 66 years to €232 a week and the payment for carers under 66 to €214 per week. I am also increasing the rate of carer's benefit by €14 to €214.70 per week. In addition, I am pleased to provide for an increase of €200 in the rate of the respite care grant to €1,700 from June 2008. This will allow over 48,000 carers next year to have a well deserved break from their caring duties and is a positive step towards the achievement of our commitment to increase the respite care grant to €3,000 per year over the lifetime of the Government.

The level of the income disregards for carer's allowance has been increased to €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple. This means that a couple can earn up to €60,150 per annum and still receive a reduced rate of carer's allowance, as well as the associated free travel and household benefits. This measure surpasses the commitment in Towards 2016 to ensure those on average industrial earnings can continue to qualify for a full carer's allowance. Similarly, the income threshold for carer's benefit has been increased to €332.50 per week. These improvements in the income supports available

[Deputy Martin Cullen.]

from the Department of Social and Family Affairs, together with the improvements in home care and related services in recent years, represent a further realisation of the Government's vision of a co-ordinated approach to services and supports for carers in the community.

One of my priority concerns is to maintain the value of the lowest social welfare rates in keeping with the commitments in the programme for Government and the national action plan for social inclusion 2007 to 2016. The rates of payments to people with disabilities, the unemployed, widows and those parenting alone, to mention just a few of the groups to benefit, have increased by €12 or approximately 6.5%. The value of the qualified adult allowance for these payments is also being increased by €8 a week. As a result of the budget, a couple dependent on jobseeker's allowance, with no other earnings, will be over €1,000 better off next year, while a single unemployed person will gain by over €650. These increases are ahead of projected increases in both prices and earnings. Thus, for the fifth year in a row, social welfare rates will have grown faster than prices and earnings. In fact, since 2004, the lowest social welfare rates have increased by 58% compared to cumulative price increases of 15% in the same period. In 2004 the lowest social welfare rate of payment equated to 24% of gross average industrial earnings; it will now stand at 30%. These are significant achievements and the Government is determined to consolidate them and continue to make further progress.

I am particularly pleased to provide in the Bill for an increase of €2,000 in the widowed parent grant to a level of €6,000. This is an important measure for the families concerned, giving them a timely financial boost at a time of bereavement and great personal loss, which, frequently, is also compounded by economic uncertainty and concerns about the future.

The social welfare budget package sets aside nearly €148 million, or €194 million when the early child care supplement is included, to improve the range of supports provided for children. Budget 2008 has provided for increases of 6% or above in overall child income support through a combination of child benefit, qualified child increases, back to school clothing and footwear allowance and the early child care supplement. The impact of these measures is best illustrated by way of an example. Take the case of a social welfare dependent family with three children, one of whom is under six years of age and another over 12. As a result of the budget, the combined value of child support payments to that family will increase by €718 in a full year, bringing total child income support to over €12,000 next year. This equates to an income support payment of €77 per child per week and represents an increase of over 6% in the value of current payments.

The Bill provides for payment of an additional €2 per week in the qualified child allowance, formerly called the child dependent allowance, which is paid to all social welfare recipients with children. It also provides for increases in the threshold for family income supplement by €10 per week for each child, which will result in payments increasing by €6 a week per child. These improvements will benefit some 26,500 existing families and entitle a further 2,700 to the payment.

Adequate income support is only part of the solution for people and families living in poverty. They need a lasting solution to their difficulties and the necessary supports to help them make their way to a more promising future. That is why activation and participation in employment, education, training and personal development opportunities have become an increasingly important part of my Department's activities. As a way of improving the effectiveness of these measures, it has been decided to amalgamate two initiatives run by the Department and significantly increase the funding provided for them. The revamped activation and family support programme will have a budget of €6.5 million next year. It will provide funding for projects run by third parties to assist welfare recipients and members of their families to enhance their employability through education, training and personal development. It will also provide, or co-fund, training and development programmes for particularly disadvantaged social welfare customers and their families, including very young lone mothers, other parents rearing children without the support of a partner, carers, the Traveller community and people with disabilities.

Provision has been made in the Department's administrative budget for the deployment of an additional 30 facilitators with clerical support staff next year as the first stage in a radical development of activation supports provided by the Department. This programme which is being funded under the national development plan will provide for the individual case management of all social welfare customers of working age who are not progressing into employment or accessing training or employment opportunities.

The approach will be specifically directed towards those who, because of their personal or family circumstances, face particular difficulties in engaging with the labour market. The budget makes provision for other measures designed to assist people in the progression from welfare to work. These include an increase in the upper income threshold for entitlement to one-parent family payment and a reform of the method of assessing earnings for that scheme by disregarding social insurance and other employment related contributions.

I will now outline the main provisions of the Bill. Sections 2 and 3, together with Schedules 1 and 2, provide for increases in the rates of social welfare payments, including an increase of €14

per week for recipients of the contributory State pension and for recipients of the contributory widow's or widower's pension and deserted wives benefit who are aged over 66, and for recipients of the transitional State pension or invalidity pension aged 65 and over, bringing the weekly payment to €223.30. Recipients of carer's benefit will also receive an increase of €14 per week, bringing their new weekly payment to €214.70. The Bill also provides for an increase of €14 per week for both categories of persons in receipt of carer's allowance — those aged over 66 and under 66. These increases will bring the weekly rate of carer's allowance to €232 for recipients aged over 66 and to €214 for those under 66 years of age.

Provision is made for an increase of €12 in the weekly personal rate of the non-contributory State pension, giving a new rate of €212. The rate for the non-contributory widow's and widower's pensions is being increased to €197.80. An increase of €12 is also provided in the personal rates of illness benefit, jobseeker's benefit, injury benefit and health and safety benefit, bringing the weekly rate to €197.80. An increase of €12 per week is provided for in all other social insurance and social assistance payments where the recipient is aged under 66 and for recipients of invalidity pension aged under 65. The personal rates of jobseeker's allowance, pre-retirement allowance, farm assist and disability allowance are being increased to €197.80.

An increase of €27 per week is provided in respect of qualified adults of recipients of invalidity pension, where the qualified adult is aged 66 years or over. An increase of €27 per week is also being provided for qualified adults aged 66 years and over where their spouse or partner is receiving a contributory or transitional State pension, with *pro rata* increases for those on certain reduced rates.

In the case of contributory and transitional State pension recipients, the increase is €9.30 where the qualified adult is aged under 66. For those in receipt of invalidity pensions, the increase is €8.60 where the qualified adult is aged under 66. In the case of non-contributory State pensions, the increase is €7.90 where the qualified adult is aged under 66. An increase of €8 per week is provided for all other qualified adult payments. The rate payable in respect of a qualified child is being increased by €2 per week to €24 per week. These increases will take effect from the first week in January 2008.

Section 4 provides for increases in the weekly income thresholds used to determine entitlement to family income supplement. The new thresholds range from €490 in the case of a family with one child to €1,170 in the case of a family with eight or more children. This measure will take effect from 3 January 2008.

Section 5 provides for an increase from €48,800 to €50,700 in the annual earnings ceiling up to which social insurance contributions are payable by employees. The section further provides for an

increase in the amount of weekly earnings below which PRSI is not payable, from €339 to €352. These provisions come into effect on 1 January 2008.

Section 6 provides for an increase in the earnings ceiling up to which social insurance contributions are payable by optional contributors, from €48,800 to €50,700, with effect from 1 January 2008.

Section 7 provides for a €2,000 increase in the widowed parent grant, bringing it to €6,000. This increase is effective from budget day, 5 December 2007.

Section 8 provides for an increase in the health levy exemption thresholds from €480 to €500 per week and from €24,960 to €26,000 per annum. This measure will take effect from 1 January 2008.

Pensioners who are paid by electronic methods will receive their increase in full from January 2008. Increases for recipients of jobseeker's benefit or allowance, illness or maternity benefit, one-parent family payment, family income supplement, farm assist and supplementary welfare allowance will be paid in full from January 2008.

As has been the case previously, because of the lead-in time involved in the production of personal payable orders, recipients of certain long-term payments such as pensions, carer's allowance and invalidity pension will receive their increase in mid-February, backdated to January, along with their new payable order books. Increases for certain other long-term payments such as State pensions and disability allowance will be paid by a special once-off payment in mid-February, to cover 12 weeks' payment to the end of March when new payable order books will be issued.

This Social Welfare Bill, the first of two instalments, safeguards the living standards of those who rely on social welfare income and other supports and targets the allocation of resources towards those most in need. I commend the Bill to the House and look forward to a constructive debate.

Deputy Olwyn Enright: I too look forward to a constructive debate. While I welcome this Bill in so far as it provides for increases in social welfare payments, the rate of increase only matches the increases in the cost of living in the past 12 months and falls short of the increase in wages. This debate is an opportunity to test the Government's promises against its delivery, the reality against the rhetoric.

I begin by referring to the announcements that got the biggest cheers on budget day, even if they were somewhat less enthusiastic than last year. Like others, I welcome the increases that have been announced. However, when one compares the rate of increase to the rate of inflation, it is clear they will be swallowed up almost immediately. The increase of €12 in the non-contributory State pension and €14 in the contributory pension

[Deputy Olwyn Enright.]

reflect an increase of 6% and 6.7%, respectively. Inflation is running at almost 5%, however, which shows how small an increase pensioners will enjoy.

It is important to remind the Government of its election promise, just six short months ago, to increase pensions to €300 per week over the lifetime of the Government. This promise was reiterated in the agreed programme for Government. Last Tuesday in the Dáil, however, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, when speaking about the agreed programme for Government as it affects carers and the national carers strategy, told us that completing the strategy by the end of 2007 was a “target that was unrealistic”. In the wake of last week’s budget, we can see how much of the remainder of the programme has also proven to be unrealistic. In the case of increases in the old age pension, the Government has fallen behind on its commitment at its first test. When one compares the increases our old age pensioners have received to the huge increases the Cabinet recently awarded itself — but now seems to have postponed for a brief period — we see just how sincere it is in assisting and caring for the less well-off in society.

I welcome the increase in the qualified adult allowance. Again, however, this breaches the commitment the Government set for itself when it committed to completing the scheme this year rather than merely taking another step. I urge the Minister to reconsider this decision and to complete the move to bring the payment to the level of the State pension. I also urge him to ensure that all so-called qualified adults, of which there are some 123,000, the vast majority being women, can avail of this payment independently via direct access rather than having to receive it from their spouse. The current situation, where it is the husband who must sign a form to allow the payment go directly to his wife, has caused hardship for some vulnerable women and is a practice that has no place in modern society.

The failure of the Government to offer any increase in the fuel allowance, notwithstanding the provision for an additional week, ignores the rising costs of fuel and home heating oil. In effect, it ignores the reality of the lives of many of our elderly. The Minister should talk to some of those dependent on the fuel allowance to heat their homes and he will realise just how little can be purchased for €18 per week.

An allowance that was subject to no changes in this Bill is the death grant. To avail of this grant, a person must have paid contributions. I have been asked by several bereaved persons in recent times to urge the Minister to review this, particularly for the benefit of those who never had the option of making contributions because of health reasons or special needs. The death grant is not available when such people die as adults and I ask the Minister to consider this matter.

I welcome the increase in the widowed parent’s grant, which is important. In light of this, I draw attention to the living alone allowance. I have been told by many people, particularly during the election campaign, that this has not been increased since its inception. A similar case to that of the widowed parent grant can be made for this allowance, although no children are involved.

Where a spouse has died, people have indicated that the only difference in expenditure is on clothes for the person and a slight decrease in amounts spent on food. The cost of lighting, heating, electricity, gas, insurance, car tax and household furnishings is the same whether one person or two people live in a house. The living alone allowance deserves far more attention than it has received in the past number of years.

It was interesting to read the CORI justice analysis and critique of the budget; members of that group were before a committee today. It stated that the momentum in reducing poverty has been lost for the coming year because of the failure to address the working poor issue, together with the failure to increase the qualifying adult social welfare rate to make it equal to 100% of the claimant’s rate, as I have already mentioned, and the failure to do substantially more to tackle child poverty.

It is important to remind the Minister, Deputy Cullen, of the Government’s commitments in Towards 2016, which was launched with much fanfare last year. In it, the Government committed through the national agreement to ensuring that every person had sufficient income to live life with dignity, and that social services were accessible, appropriate and adequate for all. With the failure to keep up the momentum on the anti-poverty strategy, I question the Government’s commitment to achieving this aim. Will it be consigned to being just another unrealistic target?

In terms of the Bill as it affects children, under the Government one in nine children live in consistent poverty. It is important to note that children are not considered poor in their own right but poor as part of a family. If we are to really tackle child poverty, families must also be supported. The reality of child poverty can mean children could go for a full day without a substantial meal or being cold because parents are unable to afford heat in the home.

The €2 increase in the qualified child allowance would not even allow parents to provide one more nourishing meal for their children per week. The increase is less than half the rate of inflation, so effectively it is not an increase at all. The Government has missed an opportunity to target payment support to children who are living either with welfare-dependent parents or parents on low income, despite their commitment in their programme for Government. Will the Government really tolerate a position where children go to bed hungry, cold and malnourished because they have failed to target supports to those who need them

most? I do not see any coherence in the Government's plans to tackle child and family poverty.

The Minister must agree that the family income support is a key component in attempts to support families at work on low pay. It is generally accepted that take-up of family income supplement has been a long-standing problem, with research undertaken by the ESRI suggesting that fewer than one in three of potentially eligible claimants actually receive FIS. This supplement was introduced in 1984 and it is stunning that, 22 years later, the Government has said that the take-up has remained a fraction of the potential for all that period, with the previous Minister indicating that neither he nor his officials had any real ideas on why 60% or more of eligible families were not receiving FIS. The precise words of the former Minister and Cabinet colleague of the current Minister were: "There is no definitive explanation as to why a significant group of people with a potential average entitlement of approximately €113 per week apparently decide not to apply." The Minister should outline his own views on this in his conclusion.

Some 40,000 families in this country are not receiving FIS, 40,000 families who are entitled to a FIS amount of €5,000 or more per annum. Many of them may be forced to rely on dig-outs from friends and families or, worse still, money lenders. This is unacceptable and it is a terrible indictment of the Government that the problem has persisted for more than 20 years.

The amount saved by the State by not having a proactive system is enormous. I note from statements of the previous Minister that automatic take-up was beyond the ICT capabilities of the Revenue Commissioners and his Department. Will the Minister ask the senior official recently appointed to his Department to use her knowledge of the Revenue system and administration to propose urgent measures to increase take-up?

Could he consider setting a target period of three years to achieve an 85% take-up rate? Will he examine with the Minister of Finance options to combine FIS claim information with tax return forms? This would solve two problems in one stroke by getting more people to make tax returns and ensure more people get FIS, while reducing the amount of paper in the two systems.

I welcome the Government's decision to increase the early child care supplement by €100 per year, even if it is not until April. When this supplement was announced by the Government in December 2005, the intention was to help parents meet the cost of child care in Ireland. From the time of the announcement, the Government seemed unaware of the implications of the payment being linked to child benefit and, therefore, being made available for children not living within Ireland. It is very important to point out that the supplement was introduced as a child care cost measure designed to meet the costs of child care in this country and the Government failed to introduce a special provision to ring

fence the money for the cost of child care in Ireland.

We all remember the Cabinet confusion surrounding the cost of this scheme for children who are not resident in Ireland. When asked by Deputy Enda Kenny, the Taoiseach said in January 2006 that the cost would be €1 million. Some ten days later, the then Minister for Social and Family Affairs stated it would cost €2.7 million by the end of the year, but two and a half months later the then Minister of State with responsibility for children indicated it would cost €10.8 million by the end of the year. Another month later, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs stated the cost could be up to €4 million per year, with the Taoiseach suggesting the next day the cost could be €9.5 million. These were five different figures from three different Government members.

It is clear the Government does not intend to review the scheme and make it only available to families coping with the cost of child care in Ireland. This means substantial amounts of taxpayers' money, which could be paid to parents struggling on a daily basis with expensive child care costs, is leaving the country and going to families who do not have to meet these substantial costs.

I have no difficulty whatever with the payment being made to all children under the age of six, of any nationality, resident in this country and whose parents have to cope with the cost of child care in Ireland. Had this been done, at least an extra €27 million would be available to parents of children living in this country availing of child care.

The Minister informed me in a reply to a parliamentary question in October of this year that a total of 20,000 claims from EU nationals from non-resident children were being processed. I accept that not all may be eligible, but this represents a significant number of claims which do not meet the intended purpose of the supplement.

The Minister will be aware of my views on the continued imposition by the Government of a habitual residence condition on children of asylum seekers living in Ireland. Every pre-budget submission, including one from the Combat Poverty Agency, received by the Minister and I decried this shameful practice. I raised this issue in a priority question with the Minister last week and his response showed a clear lack of understanding of the reality for the estimated 3,000 children living in these circumstances.

The Minister cannot ignore the fact that the effect of denying child benefit to these children is very visible and immediate. It is every parent's wish to protect and look after their children, but parents of these children cannot even provide for the basic requirements, such as suitable food and dietary supplements.

Deputy Martin Cullen: That is unfair.

Deputy Olwyn Enright: Items like every day, over-the-counter medicines are beyond the means of these parents. Other issues arise, including meeting the children's schooling needs.

Deputy Martin Cullen: The UN was quite satisfied that we do an excellent job. The point is unfair.

Deputy Olwyn Enright: I will get to that in a moment. Child benefit has been seen by many as the plank to remove children from poverty, with this being repeated at today's committee meeting by CORI and the Combat Poverty Agency. The policy is repeated in the Government's current national children's strategy and the social partnership document, *Towards 2016*. By imposing habitual residence on child benefit, the Government is contradicting its own policy and strategies and once again demonstrating that it has no grasp of the reality facing people. It is unfair in circumstances where the children's parents can do nothing but wait for the State to decide their status, with many parents having to wait years for these decisions.

In his reply to my parliamentary question on 4 December 2007, the Minister referred to the examination of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child undertaken by the Government when introducing the habitual residence condition. The Minister selectively made reference to Article 26 and the discretionary manner in which the State is entitled to provide a social security benefit in respect of any child in the jurisdiction. He made no reference to Article 2, which expressly refers to the obligation of the State to prevent discrimination based on the status of the child's parents.

Further, he failed to reply to my reference to Article 3, which stipulates that the "best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" in all actions concerning children, including those undertaken by social welfare institutions and administrative authorities.

I have acknowledged that the State provides food and shelter for people in direct provision but the food is often not suitable, there is no choice and it is difficult to cater for a large amount of people from so many diverse cultures and backgrounds. Parents are not allowed to decide what their children should eat and this decision is made for them. The shelter provided is often inadequate and conditions overcrowded. They are sometimes in locations where services are inaccessible for those who cannot afford transport. I am told of situations where residents of a hostel are forced to share one bathroom between 15 to 20 people. If the State is claiming to fulfil its obligations under the UN Convention on Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments, by providing food and shelter for people who are in the asylum process, then at the very least it should ensure the standard of this provision is sufficient.

I am disappointed the direct provision allowance is not being increased. Asylum seekers and those seeking humanitarian leave to remain, continue to struggle and try to cope with the same amount that has been granted to them since the introduction of the system despite the continual rise in the cost of living.

As regards the habitual residence condition in general there is still inconsistency in decisions by deciding officers on the issue and many seem to think that the two-year stipulation is still in force. However, section 246 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 was amended by the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 which states:

Notwithstanding the presumption in subsection (1), [that a person must be resident in Ireland or the common travel area for a continuous period of two years] a deciding officer or the Executive, when determining whether a person is habitually resident in the State, shall take into consideration all the circumstances of the case including, in particular, the following:

- (a) the length and continuity of residence in the State or in any other particular country;
- (b) the length and purpose of any absence from the State;
- (c) the nature and pattern of the person's employment;
- (d) the person's main centre of interest; and
- (e) the future intentions of the person concerned as they appear from all the circumstances.

In light of this I would ask the Minister to seek clarity from his departmental officials as to whether this amendment needs to be made clearer as I believe the two year-rule is still being applied in decisions relating to the HRC despite Ireland being a signatory to the European Code of Social Security. Regarding the two-year habitual residency requirement, in its 32nd report to the Council of Europe on Ireland's compliance with the European Code of Social Security, the Government stated at page 9:

Ireland is aware that the relevant jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice precludes reliance on any specific duration of residence [for example two years] for the purposes of establishing habitual residence and has ensured that no such specific period is the determining factor in any HRC decision.

Greater clarity is needed in this area, and an audit of decisions should be made to ensure Ireland is operating the system accurately as different officers seem to be taking different decisions.

In discussing the needs of carers, I am at all times conscious of the great contribution they make not only to the person for whom they are caring but also to society as a whole in addition

to the considerable cost savings they make for the State. Every week 3.5 million hours are worked by 161,000 family carers, yet less than one in six of these qualifies for the carer's allowance. The Carers Association estimates that the work of Ireland's family carers is saving the State more than €2.1 billion per annum. While I welcome that progress was made in 2007, the pace of progress has been too slow.

We need to understand better the practical issues that affect carers and we need to develop new concepts that recognise and support them. We need to avoid the types of incredible, inexplicable delays that arise when a different family member steps in to take over the carer role and to share the burden. Often the person being cared for needs to be reassessed even though his or her need for care has not changed. We need to ensure that respite grants are used for respite, in other words that there are systems and capacity, in both the social welfare and health systems, to allow carers have a real holiday. Otherwise the grant is simply a payment once a year to make up for the inadequacy of the weekly rate.

The Minister admitted to me in the Dáil last week that the much-promised national carers' strategy, which was to be completed by the end of 2007, will not be completed on time. It is clear that it will barely be started by the end of this year not to mention completed. In order to truly acknowledge and value the work of carers we need to have a national strategy that will identify their needs, decide how best to address them and ensure that adequate funding is put in place to do this.

I find it hard to be excited about this year's social welfare proposals entitled "Recognising Carers" and it is clear the Government has not adequately listened to their needs. While I accept the rates of payment for all those who are eligible has increased by €14 per week, few of the 161,000 are actually eligible. While I accept the income disregard has been given a small increase, why is the means test still applied so stringently to the income of a carer's spouse?

The budget once again seems to have blanketed over the issue of young carers with no provisions or focus on them anywhere to be seen. Caring for someone is a highly responsible role that can often impact on the young carer's education and childhood. It is thought that approximately 3,000 carers under the age of 18 are carrying out caring responsibilities. This group of carers continually get no recognition from the Government whatsoever. The Carers Association, in its pre-budget submission, highlighted the need to carry out research into the issues and effects of caring on young carers and introduce an appropriate programme of in-home supports. In an effort to allow young people be young people and take a break from caring so they can enjoy what should be the best years of their lives, measures need to be put in place to provide specific services and tailored packages for young

carers. This Government has let yet another year slip by without doing anything for young carers. The Minister never even mentioned them as a key issue for the strategy in his speech today.

We need to begin grappling more effectively with the realities facing many women who needed and still need to work part-time or intermittently because of the important duties they undertake as mothers and homemakers. They also undertake a disproportionate share of caring. After a lifetime of juggling work and home duties they get penalised by social welfare average contribution conditions that are severely outdated. The situation is getting worse not better for those women who tried to put a little in a pension plan when they were working because the pensions system only really serves those who can afford to put large amounts of money in, or those in the know who can have the law altered for their benefit. People with fragmented pension plans face all kinds of difficulty when they retire and so-called advisers are powerless, or maybe just not interested, when the insurance companies insist on penalising these women in numerous ways.

One simple thing the Minister could do, and there a precedent for it, would be to revise the alternative average contribution test to apply from 1988 when PRSI for the self-employed was introduced. The concept of using an average based on relatively recent years was adopted in 1992 mainly for administrative reasons. I believe the cost was negligible when administrative savings, increased tax take and switching from means-tested pensions were put in the balance.

I mention these matters to illustrate the absence of strategic thinking affecting, in particular, women and carers. I hope to develop these themes in the weeks and months ahead. Perhaps the Minister could show some initiative by agreeing to amend the Bill to begin reversing some of the perverse effects of the 1953 doctrinaire thinking about women's roles in society by agreeing to change the social welfare contribution test for pensions from a lifelong test to a test that evaluates a person's more recent attachment to the workforce where that would be more equitable. He could start by agreeing to use 1988 instead of 1979 immediately and then we could consider the implications, in cost terms, as well as equity in result, of taking a more daring approach such as having an average test based on the past ten years where, at a minimum, the person can demonstrate that he or she — I am equally concerned about men losing their rights because they had to emigrate or assist on family farms etc. — undertook substantial periods in homemaking or in assisting family businesses and were thus unable to pay social insurance on their own account.

Regarding making contributions, to show how badly the system can deal with individual incidences I have details of a particular case of which I believe the Minister is aware. A gentleman worked for a four-week period from 31 January 1961 in response to a request from his sister who

[Deputy Olwyn Enright.]

was a nurse. There was a crisis as a result of the influenza outbreak and he came in for four weeks at a relatively young age to help in the hospital. He started working officially with his PRSI record in 1987. However, his State contributory pension has been reduced as a result of what he did in those four weeks in 1961. It is a nonsense that the system should penalise an individual based on something he did for the benefit of society as a whole.

In a time of wealth for so many in our society, large numbers of disabled people continue to experience a lower standard of living and are at a greater risk of poverty than the general public. Despite two recent pieces of disability legislation, many people with disabilities are still waiting for essential services and supports. A cost of disability payment would have made significant inroads in addressing this issue and would prove an important anti-poverty measure, designed to offset the genuine extra cost of a disability. In its pre-budget submission, the Disability Federation of Ireland advocated the introduction of a €40 payment for all persons with disability. However, once again they were left wanting. The introduction of such a payment would have proven to be an important additional financial support for people with disability. This is an issue that will not go away as the cost of equipment and supports continue to rise.

People with disability cannot be expected to do without these vital supports and proposals must be put in place to work to ensure that they receive the highest standard of support and the most appropriate and cost effective delivery.

With regard to supports for people living in rented accommodation, there is a strong need to address these supports to reflect the reality of the true cost of accommodation.

Under the current system, rent supplement is paid in arrears to recipients and this puts them on an uneven footing with other tenants, who are able to provide their prospective landlords with a deposit and the first month's rent in advance. A landlord will choose someone who can pay immediately rather than the person who is on rent supplement. Furthermore, a landlord should not be obliged to wait for the rent to be paid in arrears, which is the case with a rent supplement tenancy.

Some tenants are forced to top up their rent with additional payments to the landlord, which is a breach of the conditions attached to the payment of rent supplement. However, they often have no option but to do so and in some cases they risk losing the tenancy if they refuse to do so and this action will jeopardise payment of their rent supplement.

I welcome the fact that the Minister has carried out a review of the supplement in 2007 and plans to do so again in 2008. However, it is not enough simply to review the situation; a reality check

needs to be taken. There is a significant and evident gap in the supplement caps and the market rent, which the Minister cannot continue to ignore.

We cannot allow tenants to continue breaching the terms of their rent supplement to provide the basic entitlement of a home for themselves. Having questioned the Minister on this in the House recently, I was disappointed by his lack of response and his inability to provide a specific answer to my questions as to when he planned to initiate real changes.

This is an issue on which I will continue to press him as I believe the current system does not address the needs of the tenants nor does it provide real and adequate support for them. The current system must be altered to provide for the advance payment of the supplement while the supplement caps much reflect the true and real market cost of accommodation.

Homelessness remains a significant problem in today's society. One need only walk out the door of Leinster House and within 200 yards one will encounter several homeless people. There have even been stories of people being forced to sleep in wheelie bins in city centres around the country.

We all remember the tragic death of Kevin Fitzpatrick, who took shelter in a commercial wheelie bin and whose body was later found in a refuse recycling centre in Limerick after he was tossed into and crushed in a compacting lorry during collection.

Today the Simon Community launched a report stating that 55 homeless people died on our streets last year. Last Sunday's *Sunday Independent* reported that in the past four weeks, four homeless men died on the streets of this city. I commend the work of organisations such as the Simon Community in providing services for homeless people. However, without sustained spending in programmes to tackle homelessness, as well as changes in rental supplement and far greater examination of the shelters to ensure they comply with basic health and safety standards, there is a strong possibility that the number of homeless people will increase due to pressures at the lower end of the housing market both in the rental and home ownership sectors.

Focus Ireland, the housing and homeless charity, has said that budget 2008 is a missed opportunity to take further action to increase the provision of social housing and to tackle growing inequalities in Irish society. It has maintained that the budget has failed to live up to previous ambitions as outlined by the Taoiseach at the launch of the Government's national action plan on social inclusion earlier this year where he said an ambitious agenda for social change which will enable us to make a decisive impact on poverty in the years ahead has been put in place by the Government. I have to ask once again where exactly this ambitious agenda is as it is certainly not contained in this Bill.

I spoke on the difficulties being experienced by people accessing the rent supplement scheme, which the Minister recently described in a reply to a question from me as being one of the most important supports provided for homeless people through the social welfare system. We are talking about some of the most vulnerable people in our society and it must be pointed out that they would not be homeless if they could access these services. Many have other problems besides being homeless which have contributed to their situation and these must also be addressed in tandem with their housing situation.

While the recent increases in social welfare are at least in line with inflation, they are still not enough to lift the most marginalised out of poverty and they contrast with the wage increases which the Government recently adopted. The Minister must see that there are many changes that need to be made not only in income support levels but in the operation of his Department and the entire social welfare system. I urge him to consider some of the points I have made and to put people and their genuine needs at the heart of this service rather than having a service-centred operation.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I wish to put on the record of the House an item that is not included in this year's Social Welfare Bill but which should have been if the Government had kept its promise. One of the key promises made by Fianna Fáil prior to the last general election was to halve the rate of PRSI. This was probably the main plank in Fianna Fáil's election platform in respect of taxation. It is arguable that a considerable number of votes received by the party in the election were as a result of this promise to cut the tax rate. Yet, there was no mention of this in the budget nor in this Bill. It is all the more reprehensible that Fianna Fáil went ahead and made that promise to the electorate while it had in its possession the actuarial report on the social insurance fund, while knowing full well it was not possible to provide for that kind of cut in PRSI rates. It would have known that the social insurance fund would run into difficulties fairly soon and that major issues would arise about the sustainability of the fund. Yet, knowing this information since last April, Fianna Fáil went ahead and the Taoiseach made that promise to the public. One must ask whether it is any wonder people are cynical about politics when this was a blatant misrepresentation of the situation and a blatant attempt to buy the election, knowing there was no possibility of that promise being kept.

The estimate for that promised cut in PRSI is €645 million. There was never any prospect of that cut being made. It is important to put on the record of the House the kind of deception in which Fianna Fáil engaged in the earlier part of this year prior to the election. It is worth reminding people of that deception and the

tactics employed by Fianna Fáil in the election. If people are fooled once, it is a shame on the Government, but if they are fooled twice it is a shame on them for believing Fianna Fáil. People have very short memories, but they fell for it again. The Taoiseach made those promises and I have no doubt the people will rue the day they were foolish enough to believe the Taoiseach that he would deliver on promises. This was a central plank of the pre-election promise and it has not materialised.

Other promises were made before the election to increase the State pension to €300 per week. I ask the Minister to provide information on the costing of this promise. The budget omitted to refer to supplementary pensions. I appreciate that the Green Paper process is in train but it is important the Minister indicates his intentions to the public, in particular with respect to the over-reliance on tax relief in the pensions area. There is effectively a rich man-poor man approach to pensions. The State is subsidising the pensions of the very wealthy. The rate of transfer to the wealthy is approximately 33 times the rate of transfer to a person on the average industrial wage, simply because the better off can afford to stash away more for their pension. There is no justification for the State subsidising the pensions of people like Michael O'Leary, for example.

In spite of this, the whole thrust of the supplementary pension policy being pursued by the Minister is, first, to provide tax relief at the top rate and then to provide a very generous ceiling up to which people can claim tax relief, which gives rise to the entirely inequitable situation where wealthy people are doing very well, whereas those who cannot afford to put away money are getting no benefit from the State. Clearly that situation has to change and I hope this will emerge from the Green Paper process. It would have been helpful if the Minister had indicated his intention in this regard in the budget because that has been the sole strategy used by him in respect of supplementary pensions and, on the grounds of equity, this has to come to an end.

I hope the Minister does not use the Green Paper process to further long-finger key decisions on pensions so that this time next year we will be here discussing a social welfare Bill that includes proposals in respect of supplementary pensions. I previously welcomed the Green Paper, which is a comprehensive document, and commended the various interests that were involved in contributing to it. I would welcome a commitment from the Minister that he intends to close the consultation process by mid-2008, that he will be in a position to bring forward proposals for the budget at the end of next year and that these proposals will be contained in the social welfare Bill we will debate in 12 months' time.

I do not agree with the position of the Government and the social partners that benchmarking the lowest social welfare rates to 30% of gross average industrial earnings is sufficient. To do

[Deputy Róisín Shortall.]

this in respect of pensions or other social welfare payments is to suggest that less than €200 a week is sufficient to live on.

Deputy Martin Cullen: I do not suggest that.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: That is clearly not the case. I challenge anybody in this House to survive on less than €200 a week. In a situation where grocery inflation is nearly 5% and where there have been extraordinary increases in the cost of fuel, by up to 17%, it is exceptionally difficult for people to survive on €197.80 per week.

I welcome the provisions of this Bill in respect of the qualified adult rate for pensioners' spouses. I acknowledge this generous increase which takes us a long way on the road to the 100% target rate. When will the Minister make the same progress in respect of other qualified adult payments?

Pensioners had a legitimate expectation that the pre-election promise of increasing the State pension to €300 per week would be honoured in some kind of an even manner over the five-year term of Government. It is estimated that to do this, the Minister would need to increase the State pension by over €18 this year. He has not done so and the increase is €14. Effectively, pensioners will be over €4 short of the expected rise next year. Given the uncertain times ahead, why did the Minister not meet that target this year? It is disappointing and it does not augur well for reaching the €300 target in the five-year period.

It is particularly disappointing that for the 14th year in a row the Minister has failed to increase the living alone allowance. This was traditionally pitched at about 7% of the maximum State pension but because it has not been increased in 14 years, it is now only worth approximately 50% of what it should be worth. If it had kept pace with inflation it would be pitched at the €15.50 mark. It is most disappointing that it has been completely ignored. I do not understand the reason for this as there has been very little discussion about it and the Minister has made little reference to it. It appears to be an unspoken, hidden Government policy not to increase this allowance. Approximately 160,000 people are in receipt of the living alone allowance. By any yardstick, we know it is much more expensive for a person living alone in terms of keeping a house and heating and food bills. It costs more than half of what it cost two people to live. Most of the overheads are the same whether one person or two people are living in a house. Will the Minister outline his thinking on this matter? Either he has a strategy in respect of that or it is a particularly miserable oversight and it should not have happened.

The Government parties promised in their programme for Government to award the over-80s allowance to pensioner spouses. The Minister has missed an opportunity to do this. It is miserable that this promise has not been fulfilled as the

cost would be negligible. The estimated total is that it would be €3 million. It is regrettable that the Minister has failed to deliver on this promise.

The number of women who were affected by the marriage bar in the Civil Service is declining. These women were forced out of the workforce through no fault of their own due to the policy that existed at the time. As they reach retirement age, many women who were thus affected find they have lost out and a special provision needs to be made for them. A woman who was forced out of work because of the marriage bar, whose husband is in receipt of a social welfare pension, may be catered for, but a woman whose husband is not in receipt of a State pension gets nothing. There is a need to recognise the situation in which some women find themselves.

The clear policy of recent years in respect of increasing the income of pensioners has paid off. I welcome the indication that consistent poverty among pensioners has declined significantly. This targeted approach has been successful. It is necessary for the Minister to take the same kind of targeted approach to other categories of people who are dependent on welfare. The primary group in need of attention is the 96,000 children who are living in consistent poverty. This approach would receive the support of all sides of the House. It brings shame on us all that the figures are so high. Incredibly, in spite of the economic success of the past decade, the numbers of children living in consistent poverty are on the increase and it is extraordinary that this Bill and the budget do nothing to reduce that number. It is quite shameful the Minister at some level decided the €22 a week qualified child allowance was inadequate, but in looking at it has decided that a €2 per week increase is somehow adequate. That increase brings the payment to €24 per week for the children who could be described as the poorest of the poor children and anybody who knows anything about rearing children will know that €3.43 per day is utterly inadequate. Is it any wonder there are still such large numbers of children in consistent poverty? This is an area that needs urgent attention and when looking at global figures it is not enough for the Minister to roll-in the child benefit payment and early childhood payment. The child benefit payment is available to every child, rich or poor. I refer to those children, numbering almost 100,000, who are living in poverty and who need additional support from the State. Such support, at present at a level of €24 per week, is completely inadequate and I ask the Minister to devote his attention to this category of person in the coming year because it is an area in which no progress is being made and which needs urgent attention.

It is important to bear in mind that the €6 increase in child benefit for each of the first two children is below the current rate of inflation. The budget has been particularly disappointing in its lack of focus on children.

Similarly, the back to school clothing and footwear allowance required serious reform, but this has not happened. The qualifying conditions should have been increased to the qualifying level for FIS and it is a missed opportunity not to do so.

For years there has been talk about creating a supplement to child benefit targeted at lower income families but this never materialised. Today we, in the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs, listened to two groups, CORI and The Combat Poverty Agency. There is not agreement among the various groups working in this area on the most effective way of targeting child poverty, but something needs to be done. Whether the Minister introduces a supplement or increases the qualified child payment or, indeed, opts for the other proposal that has come out of the proposals for supporting lone parents, targeting child poverty must be the priority for next year in order to bring up the income levels of children living in the poorest circumstances.

The promise in the programme for Government to examine the possibility of introducing a parental benefit never materialised in this Bill either. That is regrettable, given that we are so far behind other European countries in respect of parental leave arrangements.

I welcome the €100 increase in the early child care payment, but it is important to state that this is no substitute whatsoever for putting in place the kind of investment that is required in services for children. There are two elements to supporting children, obviously improving their income levels but also improving the services that are available to them. When we are talking about lifting children out of poverty and breaking that cycle, the key matter, apart from them having enough money for food and clothing, is access to decent quality services. Regrettably, there has been no progress made in providing State-funded preschool services or State-funded child care services. Indeed, another glaring omission from the budget is the lack of improvement in the primary health care teams. Those three areas, preschool education, child care and access to health services, are key if children are to be lifted out of poverty. Not only is there lack of progress on income support, there is also a glaring lack of progress on putting in place those services which would allow children to live normal childhoods and to reach their potential.

Lone parents continue to be the group in society most affected by consistent poverty. The most recent statistics show that 33% of lone parent families are on a low income and experiencing basic deprivation. As with children, the rate for consistent poverty among lone parents is on the increase. The principal reasons for this are the lack of public services available to lone parents to allow them access employment allied to the continuing poverty traps, such as rent supplement, faced by lone parents.

I note in the Minister's speech on the budget last week that 30 more facilitators are to be recruited to redevelop activation measures by the Department, but that is just one side of the coin. Where are the child care and training services to go along with this? The €6.5 million mentioned in the budget speech, and again today, will just not do it. There has been a significant under-estimation of the level of service required to help lone parents get off welfare and into the workforce, and this spans a range of public services from child care services to preschool services, mentoring services, access to education and training and supports for returning to the workforce. There is a panoply of support services required if we are serious about getting lone parents off welfare and into the workforce, and €6 million really will not make any appreciable impression on the need in that area.

In a country where public services are so sparse, parents, even poor ones, are forced to purchase everything. The Government is not providing poor parents with the income support to purchase such services, and neither is it providing the services. The Government is finding out the hard way that the policy of generous tax shelters, badly skewed tax-relief schemes and once-off tax cuts, rather than long-term investment in public services during the boom years, was a flawed policy. Now the boom is gone and we still do not have basic public services on which poor people, in particular, can rely.

Only 34,000 carers receive a weekly payment. According to the last census, there were 161,000 carers in the State. Therefore, only 21% of carers receive a weekly payment. The census figures also revealed the large number of carers who were working long hours at home and in the workplace. Some 67,500 carers spent 15 hours or more per week caring for somebody else. Over half of all carers, some 90,544, indicated their principal economic status was at work. This suggests that none of these would be entitled to a weekly payment under current rules. Welfare policy clearly is not working if so many people are forced to burn the candles at both ends.

The Government has already reneged on a clear commitment in the programme for Government to publish a national carer's strategy by the end of 2007. It is only getting around to that now. Due to this delay, budget 2008 changed very little for carers.

Public policy on carers needs to be brought into the 21st century. I strongly believe the qualifying medical criteria for carer's allowance need to be relaxed. In particular, the current dependency test is far too rigid and does not act in the best interests of the person requiring care. The test should not be a question of whether someone requires constant care and attention. Instead it should be a question of whether the care and attention provided is of such significance that it allows the person cared for to stay at home, to enjoy even a limited amount of independence, to

[Deputy Róisín Shortall.]

stay out of institutional care or to place less demand on public services. Instead it should concern whether the care and attention provided is of such significance that it allows the person cared for to stay at home, enjoy even a limited amount of independence, stay out of institutional care or place less demand on public services.

Most carers will make the point that they are saving the State a fortune by their actions. This is true. It is long past time that argument was listened to and acted upon. Many people in the State are in a situation where they provide care and attention to elderly relatives. Perhaps they call in the morning to get them up and set aside food for their day. They call again to them in the evening to get them ready for bed, give them their medication and settle them for the night. They are not caring for them on a full-time basis and many of them hold a 40-hour a week job. However, the care and attention they provide is critical to those cared for and to enabling them stay out of institutional care. There must be recognition for this.

Many other issues related to carers should also be addressed. The application form for carer's allowance is far too long and complicated. It is a great burden on those applying and a significant factor in discouraging claims. Also, the outcome of applications is far from certain, particularly with regard to medical criteria. Carers caring for more than one person lose out. There is no reason they should not receive a double carer's allowance. Why should they not get an allowance for both people for whom they care?

Carers with children may not qualify for the back to school clothing and footwear allowance, because their income from carer's allowance counts in the means test for that allowance, which is ridiculous. It is an anomaly with which the Minister must deal. Carers taking up carer's allowance from a position where they were neither paying nor receiving credits should receive credits from the date they are awarded carer's allowance so they can improve their pension qualification for retirement. This provision should be back-dated to carers who have lost out.

On the issue of people of working age, the points I made with regard to lone parents also apply to school leavers. It is wrong that school leavers should be able to move directly from school to jobseeker's allowance. This does young people a serious disservice. Often, these are the same people who have been failed by the education system. They leave school early at 17 or 18 years of age and sign on straight away. They should not be allowed to do that. We should have a sufficiently resourced system in place that picks up on those who leave school early or with little or no qualifications. We should have a system whereby these young people will be mentored and directed into training and education facilities or supported employment. The State, having washed its hands of some early leavers through the failure to meet their educational needs, again

washes its hands in terms of the employment prospects of this cohort of young people. This should not happen. Our employment services should be challenged to provide the necessary supports to these young people. We must intervene at an earlier stage so young people do not get into the bad habit of signing on and being dependent on welfare. We must ensure it is not possible for young people to go directly from school onto the dole.

Many claimants of social welfare payments lose out the first three days of their claim. I cannot understand the reason for this, which is a sore point for claimants. Why is it that people who must leave the workforce and fall back on welfare payments are not entitled to claim for the first three days? There seems to be no justification for this other than this has always been the case. Will the Minister look at this issue and give a satisfactory response?

With regard to those in direct provision, it is scandalous that we expect anybody to live on €19 odd. This is the only welfare payment that has not been increased in years. I urge the Minister to give immediate attention to that issue.

As this Bill involves costs to the Exchequer, we will be under the usual restrictions which make it difficult for us to raise amendments which might involve charges. I urge the Minister to show some consideration tomorrow when we take the other Stages of the Bill in areas where we raise genuine issues of concern. He should be generous in allowing some of our requests for reports etc.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: I wish to share time with Deputy John Cregan.

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

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: I picked up a copy of the social inclusion report, Building an Inclusive Society, on my way to the Chamber, which would have put me in the mood for this debate if that had been necessary, which it was not. I compliment the Minister on that report. Reared as I was in my political work by my former colleague and Deputy, Mr. Chris Flood, I have always been keen to stress social inclusion ideals.

I had the opportunity today to co-chair a meeting of the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs with Deputy Jackie Healy-Rae where excellent presentations were made by the Combat Poverty Agency and CORI. I would like to mention that CORI has produced an analysis and critique of the budget which I recommend to all Members as it is an excellent publication.

The Minister has already outlined the main provisions of the Bill. I will not repeat them, but I congratulate him on achieving a fine level of support from the Tánaiste through the negotiation of this welcome €900 million. This package, which represents nearly half of all additional

current Government spending announced in last week's budget, brings total expenditure on social welfare in 2008 to almost €17 billion. This figure of €17 billion demonstrates the Government's commitment to social and family affairs. At a time of more moderate growth, it will continue to ensure the less well off in society are protected, which is something we should all strive to achieve. I note from the Minister's contribution the scale of the services provided by the 4,300 staff in the social welfare area.

The 50 schemes and other supports the Department of Social and Family Affairs provide will benefit over 1.5 million people. Families also receive child benefit for almost 1.2 million children, which ensures that decisive steps are taken in implementing commitments in the programme for Government, Towards 2016 and the national action plan for social inclusion.

As the Minister is aware, I am a strong advocate of the elderly generally and in my constituency of Dublin South-West, which embraces Firhouse, Brittas, Bohernabreena, Greenhills, Templeogue and Tallaght. I am pleased the Government is committed to achieving a pension of at least €300 per week by 2012, despite the budgetary constraints, by increasing the State contributory pension by €14 a week to €223.30 per week and the non-contributory State pension by €12 to €212 per week. This is welcome in that the increases exceed inflation. The Minister will be aware of the fine pre-budget submission sent to him by the Tallaght Welfare Society, of which I am happy to be a board member. Tallaght is the third largest population centre in the country. I support the submission made on behalf of many organisations in the town.

As the Minister has stated, much of the current debate on pensions is focused on the challenges to be met in the decades ahead as our population ages. These major issues for our society must be faced. However, we must not forget that those who are living on pensions need to be catered for. We should ensure that our pensioners have a decent income. Increases in pensions over many years have been one of the Government's major achievements. The contributory State pension has increased by over 50% in recent years, from €147.30 in 2002 to €223.30 following this budget. Like many other Members, I welcome the marked impact of this improvement on the living standards of older people. The benefits of these increases was evident in the figures issued last week as part of the EU survey on income and living conditions, which confirmed the steady improvements of recent years. The risk of poverty for older people has fallen from just under 30% in 2003 to 13.6% in 2006. The decrease last year of 6.5%, when compared to the previous year, can be noted before the substantial 2007 and 2008 improvements in social welfare pensions are taken into account.

The Minister's commitment to increasing the pensioner qualified adult allowance to the level

of the State non-contributory pension represents a major step forward. This year's budget provides for an increase of €27 per week in the qualified adult rate, bringing the overall payment to €200 per week. This increase, which will be of particular benefit to women who are not entitled to a contributory pension in their own right because they had home responsibilities in the past, is to be supported. The changes in the personal pension rate and the qualified adult rate will lead next year to an increase of up to €41 a week, or almost 11%, in the household incomes of more than 42,000 pensioner couples.

Like other Deputies, I have been a supporter of the Carers Association for a long time. I have lobbied continuously for acknowledgement of the contribution that carers make in our society. I pay tribute to Deputy Penrose, the former Chairman of the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs, who did a great deal of pioneering work in this area.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: Carers play a critical role in ensuring that older persons, people with disabilities and those who are seriously ill can remain in their own homes for as long as possible. Supporting and recognising carers in society has been a priority of the Government since 1997. Over that period, weekly payment rates to carers have been greatly increased, qualifying conditions for the carer's allowance have been significantly eased, coverage of the scheme has been extended and new schemes such as carer's benefit and the respite care grant have been introduced and extended. I support the recent reforms of the carer's allowance scheme, which allow people in receipt of certain social welfare payments who provide full-time care and attention to others to retain their main social welfare payments and receive half-rate carer's allowance payments. The amount paid varies depending on the person's means.

As the Minister, Deputy Cullen, said, more than 34,000 carers now receive either carer's allowance or carer's benefit. They also receive a respite care grant, as do almost 10,000 other carers who do not qualify for weekly carer payments. These figures demonstrate the Government's commitment to carers. While we would all like the values to be greater, it should be acknowledged that we have come a long way in ten years. I will comment on some of the specific increases. The carer's allowance rate will increase by €14, bringing the weekly rate for carers over the age of 66 to €232 and that for carers under that age to €214. The rate of carer's benefit will also increase by €14. The increase of €200, to €1,700, in the respite care grant rate from June 2008 will allow more than 48,000 carers to have a well deserved break from their caring duties. This move represents a positive step towards the achievement of the Government's commitment to

[Deputy Charlie O'Connor.]

increase the respite care grant to €3,000 per year over the lifetime of this Administration. The level of income disregards for carer's allowance has been increased to €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple. This means a couple can earn up to €60,150 per annum and still receive a reduced rate of carer's allowance, as well as the associated free travel and household benefits.

The social welfare budget package provides an additional €148 million to improve the range of supports which are provided for children. Increases of 6% or more in overall child income support are being made available in this budget through a combination of child benefit, qualified child increases, back to school clothing and footwear allowance and the early child care supplement. It also provides for increases in the threshold for family income supplement by €10 per week for each child, which will result in payments increasing by €6 a week per child. These improvements will benefit 26,500 existing families and will entitle a further 2,700 families to the payment.

I agree with previous speakers that the Minister should continue to examine the payments made under the back to school allowance scheme. As I said during the debate on last week's Budget Statement, I am critical of those local authorities which ambush tenants after increases have been announced. Somebody should grasp that nettle.

Deputy John Cregan: I am pleased to have an opportunity to welcome this important legislation. The social welfare package of €900 million provided for in the Bill represents almost half of the Government's current expenditure. I am pleased that we will spend so much money in this area. I congratulate the Minister for Social and Family Affairs on the package. Like his colleagues, I am sure he has had many tough meetings with the Minister for Finance in recent months. All Ministers tried to get as much as they could for their areas of responsibility. The Minister, Deputy Cullen, has worked hard at a time of tightening finances to ensure he could deliver respectable increases across the board to social welfare recipients. An example of the welcome measures which are being put in place is the increase in the old age pension. The Taoiseach has made the provision of such increases a core value of Fianna Fáil. The last Administration kept its promise to increase the pension to €200 per week. The current programme for Government sets out an ambitious target of €300 per week. I am delighted that the Minister, Deputy Cullen, has started to work towards meeting that target by providing for a generous increase of €14 per week, which is very welcome.

While I do not intend to patronise the Minister, it is worth mentioning the service given to backbenchers by the Minister's office and the other offices in the Department of Social Welfare in

Dublin and throughout the country. Much of the work of Deputies involves trying to deal with the thousands of queries we receive each year. The queries need to be dealt with quickly because in many cases people depend on getting payments which have been delayed or on qualifying for various schemes. It is important that we have an efficient system for dealing with such cases. It is important to recognise that at this point. All Deputies have experience of tabling parliamentary questions or making representations to the Minister's office and we usually get an efficient acknowledgement of our query, followed by a holding letter and then a quick final response.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Cregan: I agree with my colleague, Deputy Durkan, who has criticised certain State agencies on a number of occasions for not providing a satisfactory service. I state clearly that such a service is the least we require and deserve.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Cregan: I expect that many Deputies will speak about carers during this debate. I do not want to patronise those who provide care in the home when I point out that they play a huge role in Irish society. Various reports which have been published over the years have found that the best place to care for old people is in their own homes. Many supports are available to facilitate such care — grants are paid to help to make homes habitable and comfortable, for example. I welcome the continued development of the carer's allowance and carer's benefit schemes, as well as the respite care grant programme. Respite is of huge importance to carers as they often have to look after others 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is important that carers are able to avail of respite care grants so they can place their elderly parents or loved ones in care at certain times.

Like Deputy O'Connor, I will be somewhat parochial by referring to my parish, where there is a respite care centre that is probably the only one of its kind in the country. While those who run it do so on a voluntary basis, they get some support from the statutory bodies. It was the brainchild of the local community council and it provides a fantastic service. Carers are able to bring their elderly relatives to stay in one of the facility's 20 beds for one, two or three weeks at a time. It is fantastic. We should have more of these throughout the country as they are good value for money. In many cases HSE establishments do not have enough beds. This is something that should be considered in future.

The qualified adult allowance is very important. As a result of changes in the personal pension rate, more than 42,000 pensioner couples will see their household income increase by up to

€41 per week, or nearly 11%, next year. This is welcome. The total social welfare support for a contributory pensioner couple receiving the fuel allowance will exceed €23,000, an increase of almost €2,200 over the pre-budget position. This is welcome.

I refer again briefly to carers in the home and the tremendous service they are providing. The alternative is for people to put their elderly parents and loved ones in residential care. We all know what is happening in this area. I am slightly digressing, but I am disappointed that legislation on the new nursing home support scheme, A Fair Deal, which was due to come before the House in the next couple of weeks, will not be dealt with before Christmas. This new system is intended to remove the discrimination that exists currently in this area of long-stay care. There are many thousands of people out there who want to see the playing field levelled. I am amazed that action has not been taken against the State in this area. Elderly people were cared for well and lovingly in our public hospitals, and we are paying back millions of euro totally unnecessarily, while relatives who must make up a shortfall on a weekly or monthly basis are being crippled by nursing home charges. It is totally unfair.

If two neighbours are living side by side, one may be fortunate enough to receive a bed in a public facility, paying part of his or her pension on a weekly basis for their good care, while the other, if not as fortunate, may have to enter a private nursing home, paying anything up to €1,000 per week. This puts a huge burden on the children in that family. There may be five or six siblings, of whom three or four do not bother to help but leave the other two or three to carry the can. It is important this legislation is introduced at the earliest possible date. I accept the point about the need for a full debate and engagement with the process, but I do not want to see this Bill delayed further because the current blatant discrimination needs to be removed from the system.

I have no difficulty with people being asked to pay nursing home charges subsequent to the death of a loved one if they can afford to pay it out of the estate of the deceased. People would gladly pay back 5% afterwards rather than being put under the financial strain of paying on a weekly basis while trying to put their own children through college and pay their day-to-day expenses. The sooner this legislation is introduced the better. I look forward to making a contribution in that regard when the time comes as I would welcome a levelling of the playing field.

Overall, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Cullen, and the Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen, have done a wonderful job at a time of tightened financial resources. We can always criticise the substance of increases. If there is an increase of €14, someone will ask why there was not an increase of €15. However, we must understand that every €1 increase adds up to a

huge amount of money across the range of schemes. While increases can be given here and there, people will always criticise, especially the Opposition. If the criticism is constructive I do not have any problem with it. However, the previous two Governments have a great track record in supporting social welfare recipients. I am glad that at a time of straitened financial circumstances we are still in a position to do this and to continue supporting the most vulnerable in our society.

I looked at the document presented to the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs by Fr. Seán Healy this afternoon. There were many positive comments welcoming the increases and changes we saw in the recent budget. Fr. Healy made an intervention a couple of years ago in which he appealed to the Government to be more focused on social welfare. However, the targets set for increases have mostly been met. At a time when our finances are not as plentiful as they were over the last number of years, I am delighted the Minister was able to secure such a decent and respectable increase in social welfare spending. I commend the Bill.

Deputy Bernard Durkan: I propose to share time with my colleague Deputy Leo Varadkar.

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

Deputy Bernard Durkan: Agreed, in the words of a former Member of this House.

The previous speaker commented on the responsiveness of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and its willingness not to avoid questions. It is very seldom that questions are referred back to us as being, allegedly, not the responsibility of the Minister. Effectively, this means the Minister is responsible for everything, so in future we will put down questions to the Minister on every subject. I compliment the Minister and the staff of the Department on the long-established tradition whereby replies to questions are given virtually instantly, within four days. My view has always been that it costs less to answer a question quickly than to answer it over a period of a few months, with three or four letters exchanged in each direction. This is good practice and should be copied by other Departments.

In general, I welcome the positive aspects of the Bill. However, it is a bit like the curate's egg. I can find little bits here and there that could do with improvement. The time has come to reconsider means tests. I know they are updated on a fairly regular basis but the reviews should be carried out more often, at least every six months. The means test should take account of inflation and the income limits should be kept to a realistic level to ensure people are not disadvantaged due to increases in the cost of living and so on.

I have some concerns about the rent support system. The means by which rent supplement is

[Deputy Bernard Durkan.]

determined leaves a lot to be desired. I have many constituents, as does every Member of the House including the Minister, who is in a much better position than anyone else to do something about it, who are affected by this. In my constituency, rents went up by €200 to €300 per month in the last three months. No account was taken of this in the determination of rent supplement under the current system. The fact that the level of rent allowed for is being rigidly maintained means parents, family or others must support the people paying rent. Alternatively, those using the system tell the supplementary welfare officer that the rent is less than it is and then make up the difference by various means. This is a dangerous route to pursue. People become vulnerable to falling foul of moneylenders or other unscrupulous people who offer them the support needed but at a price. It is this price that causes the problem. It goes up with the passage of time and if the victims fall behind on repayments it rises further. I urge the Minister to consider this as a matter of extreme urgency and investigate whether it is possible to increase the ceiling of eligibility for rent supplement or find a way to make sure that landlords do not take advantage of the system. The rent allowed for should be increased to ensure applicants are treated in a fairer and more equitable fashion than at present because they are coming under pressure.

Various people mentioned carers. This is an area we could spend a whole day talking about and one which needs to be dealt with to a greater extent than has been done by the Minister or his predecessor. We must recognise the problem, which is that carers the length and breadth of the country are providing a service that would otherwise have to be provided in an institution at massively greater cost. In fact, the cost per day would be similar to the cost of caring at home for a month or more.

I hope we will be given the opportunity to return to this debate at a later stage.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am sure you will.

Debate adjourned.

Private Members' Business.

Road Safety: Motion.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I move:

That Dáil Éireann,

- reiterates its concern on road safety and the continued loss of life on Irish roads;
- recognises the impact the penalty points system has had on road safety;

- notes with concern that the weaknesses in enforcing the penalty points system will reduce the impact of penalty points on driver behaviour;
- acknowledges the severe strain the District Court is under in hearing fixed charge penalty cases; and
- acknowledges the failure of the system when drivers on 12 points fail to voluntarily surrender their licence and continue to drive;

calls on the Government:

- to bring forward legislation as a matter of urgency to reform the penalty points system that will ensure all fixed charge penalties are collected and enforced; and
- to reform the system that requires legally disqualified drivers to surrender their licences and instead gives the Garda responsibility for collection of these licences.

May I share time with a number of Deputies? It is not a problem for the Minister.

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

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: This important motion tries to bring to the attention of the Government and the country the good aspects of the penalty points system and the reduction in deaths thanks to road safety, but also the problems in the system causing serious and sustained difficulties for the Garda, the administrators of the Courts Service and people who comply with the law generally.

It is of concern that the Government did not see fit to accept the motion. We drafted it in such a way that we assumed the Government would want to understand the nature of the problems. Effectively, nearly 500,000 people have received penalty points since the system's introduction and it works well if people pay. If one pays within the first 28 days, there is a fine and penalty points.

We want to address the problems within the penalty points system. I welcome the Minister to the debate, although he has not heard everything I have stated. This side of the House welcomes the reduction in the number of road deaths and the fact that penalty points are being issued, but we are examining problems with the issuing of points and the way in which the courts system is gummed up as a result.

I wish to refer to a document from the Courts Service that explains the problems succinctly. From 1 January to 31 June 2007, more than 88,000 summonses were issued to people who had not paid in the first 56 days. If one does not pay within that time, it becomes an unstoppable process and the case must go to court. If one is late, one cannot pay outside the system and must go

to court. When this document was drawn up, it was expected and anticipated that there were a further 20,000 summonses in the system, bringing the figure to above 100,000.

Of the summonses issued, nearly 44,000 were not served. For some reason, the Garda was unable to serve the summons on the individual or the summons, either issued through registered post or normal post, did not reach the appropriate person. There is a serious question for the Garda to answer in this respect. It is extremely busy and some of the 43,000 people to whom it tried to serve summonses were not at home or had moved address, but not all of them would have been unavailable. There is a clear issue in terms of the serving of summonses. If penalty points are to be effective and universally applicable, it is not acceptable that 43,000 people were not served with summonses for not paying fines. The number of cases struck out by the courts amounted to nearly 24,000. Of the 88,000 summonses issued, those that resulted in fines and the imposition of penalty points amounted to 14,171, a small number considering the effort involved.

The Courts Service was clear in the opinion it expressed to the Department of Transport and has good, succinct and practical ways to deal with the issue. First, it proposed that after the 56 day period has elapsed, the case should be handed over to a private debt collection agency to pursue the outstanding fine. This would make a great deal of sense because the offence would be kept out of the courts, as the idea was to deal with these "minor" traffic offences, most of which involve speeding, outside the court system. If one does not pay within the first 56 days, there is no reason a private debt collection agency should not pursue the fine.

Second, the outstanding fines could be collected with car tax at the next car tax renewal as is done successfully in other jurisdictions. Third, we should increase the penalty points incurred if the fine remains unpaid. The default position should be that a fine is automatically imposed unless the person decides he or she wants a court hearing. The current position is that summonses must be issued even though the offender has no intention of defending the case. Putting the onus on the offender to indicate whether he or she wishes to have the case dealt with in court would declog the system.

According to the Courts Service, the District Court cannot sustain the work imposed on it. Much of the time of the Courts Service, the Garda and others is wasted by not getting a result. More than 60% of summonses issued in October 2006 did not result in convictions, representing a considerable waste of time for Garda, court and Courts Service staff and a waste of public money. When the proposed new system's privatised speed cameras are introduced and detection levels increase, the number of summonses will inevitably rise with no basis for optimism that the outcome will be any better.

According to the Courts Service, the District Court cannot sustain the level of prosecution of fixed penalty points. Waiting times in Dublin in particular are unacceptably high and the potential for further deterioration when privatised speed cameras are introduced is significant. There is a serious risk of cases being challenged for delays in prosecution simply due to the volume of cases in the system.

There is an urgent need for reform of the current legislation, which is not achieving its aim of keeping minor offences out of court. Members of the Oireachtas and the Departments of Transport and Justice, Equality and Law Reform should get together to solve this issue. There is no confidence in the system as it operates. This side of the House wants the Minister to take on board specific and important opinions, for which reason I am unhappy with the way the Government has amended our motion. Despite our tabling the motion in what we believed to be an acceptable manner, the Government cannot take it on board. There is arrogance at the heart of the Government's approach to the issue.

We support the penalty points system and the downward trend in road deaths, but we realise there is a fundamental error in the law. It is not working properly, particularly in respect of Garda time. Imagine the time and resources wasted by the Garda were it to serve 88,000 summonses and succeeded half of the time. Will the Minister speak with the people concerned and change the Act?

Of the 126,000 people who have committed offences but on whom penalty points cannot be imposed because they do not have driver licences, everyone acknowledges that a significant number are from the North. While I will not go into the previous debate, we must fast-track co-operation between the North and South jurisdictions, notwithstanding that the North is working on the legislation.

If we examine the statistics on the website www.penaltypoints.ie carefully, we notice certain things. Of the 1,900 penalty points issued for careless driving, 1,800 were issued to people without driving licences. Of the 671 penalty points issued for dangerous driving reduced to careless driving, 643 of the people involved did not have a driving licence. Importantly, of the 6,778 penalty points issued to people for not having insurance, 6,485 of those did not have driving licences. A significant cohort of people, therefore, do not obey the law in any respect. They do not have licences or insurance. They are careless drivers. They are a category of people we must go after much more effectively.

The Minister must effect an immediate change in the data available to the Garda at the point of interaction with the public. When the gardaí stop a car and key in the number to determine if the occupant has insurance, unfortunately, many of the insurance discs are forged. We need joined up thinking between the collective motor insurance

[Deputy Fergus O'Dowd.]

companies and the Garda Síochána and I believe it is only a matter of connecting the Garda to the system. In that way gardaí will know immediately whether the driver has insurance. That would be an important step forward.

Many of the people who go to court, and this aspect has been commented on by the Courts Service, get the penalty points but they must bring their driving licence with them when they go to court. The law is clear in this respect. Gardaí cannot take the licence from the licence holder. The obligation is on the licence holder to give it to the gardaí but in the case of many drivers — I do not know the numbers involved; the Minister might be in a position to ask his officials to determine exact facts in this regard — when they go to court and get their penalty points they do not give up their licences and therefore the penalty points cannot be applied. That applies to the issue my colleague, Deputy Mitchell, raised earlier about drivers who have gone over the 12 points but who do not surrender their licences, and the Minister cannot force them to surrender their licences until he changes the law. I understand the police in the United Kingdom can take the licence from the driver on the spot. We cannot do that here.

I ask the Minister to examine the motion again with a view to making fundamental changes in the law. He must consult with the key players — the Courts Service, the Garda, the motor insurance bureau and all the people concerned. I emphasise that all sides of the House should be *ad idem* on these issues. We should agree and go forward together because this is about saving lives, reducing injuries on our roads and safer driving. If nine out of every ten accidents in this State are caused by driver error we must get at the cohort of people who are thumbing their noses at the law. If it is a fact that of all the cases that go to court summonses are not served in respect of half of them and that penalty points cannot be applied to a significant number of people because they do not have their licences, we are not doing enough to address the problem, notwithstanding the progress that has been made.

We must get our act together on this issue. The Minister must put in place an efficient, effective core system that will ensure only serious cases go to court. The Minister called them, in respect of penalty points, mandatory cases. If it is a mandatory case it should go to court. If not, it should not go to court.

Under section 5 of the 2006 Act, there is a provision whereby if somebody is arrested for drunken driving and he or she is over the limit, they can be required to pay a mandatory payment on the spot. If the driver is slightly, but not significantly, over the limit the Minister has the power in law to put that person off the road and make him pay the fine without going to court. That would have a significant impact in terms of compliance with the law in that if someone is caught

drink driving they are put off the road immediately and the case is kept out of court. It also saves Garda time in that gardaí can enforce the mandatory penalties and be in court for the serious offences.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: This is an opportune time to raise the issue of penalty points. I thank my colleague, Deputy O'Dowd, for bringing this issue to the attention of the House.

Having read the details of the motion I thought the Minister would want to accept it. I do not know how long he expects to be in his position — I am sure he hopes to be in it for the next three or four years, all going well, but I guarantee him that——

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Five.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: ——in that time most of the proposals by Deputy O'Dowd will become law because they make sense.

Deputy Noel Dempsey was not the Minister responsible for this area when the penalty points system was introduced but he was in Government. He will recall that at the time it put the fear of God in every motorist throughout the country, including me. It was the talking point in every corner of the country. If we do not put some restraint on people they will go crazy. The introduction of that system had a good effect for approximately six or eight months but why did it not have the same effect the following year? There was a good reason. The motoring public began to think they could get away with it and once that notion began to spread throughout the country, even more people decided it was worth taking the chance that they would not be caught. There is nothing unusual about that to anyone who has driven on the main thoroughfares from here to Cork, Galway or elsewhere at the maximum speed limit of 120 km/h. I have never been in a convoy where I was not passed out by other drivers many times before I arrived at my destination. If I was doing 120 km/h they had to be doing more. It appears that law is being broken every day of the week. That is not news to this House or to anyone. As soon as the speed cameras are operational countrywide, many more people will incur penalty points.

If my thesis is right, and I believe it is, many drivers now believe they have a better chance if they go through the courts. I believe that is the basis of Deputy O'Dowd's motion. It appears that as every month and year goes by drivers who have had penalty points applied for speeding are deciding to take their chances and go to court. I do not have time to outline the figures given earlier but I understand they have a 70% chance of a summons not resulting in a conviction. A total of 88,000 summons were issued in the six month period mentioned earlier but approximately 14,000 fines were imposed. The Minister will say in response that we will collect fines from over

40,000 but that is the problem. There must be a more clearcut way of collecting fines other than expecting the courts to do it. These recommendations are simple, and there is no constitutional reason that they cannot be implemented. If there is, the Minister must inform the House. He does not have a great history in introducing new legislation in this area, as seen with the new driving test arrangements. The Minister should note the Fine Gael Party is giving him the benefit of its knowledge and commitment to safer driving on the roads.

Deputy John O'Mahony: I commend Deputy O'Dowd on his presentation and recommendations for reforming legislation on the penalty points system.

All Members recall the dramatic and positive effect penalty points had on driver behaviour when they were introduced. People began to drive responsibly and reached their destinations safely, leading to a 20% reduction in road deaths by December 2002. From 2004 to 2006, all progress made was lost when road fatalities began to rise again. Why did people initially slow down and drive responsibly but then revert to speeding? They did so because there are too many loopholes in the implementation of the penalty points system. Careless and speeding drivers have a 50% chance, even if they are caught for speeding, of not having to pay a fine or of points going on their driving licences. Half of all speeding summonses have not been served and many of those served have been thrown out of court. Only one in three drivers surrenders his or her driving licence voluntarily.

While I understand there is a legislation issue, penalty points are not imposed on cars from Northern Ireland and other countries. If the present system is snowed under and unable to cope, what chance is there when the hundreds of new safety cameras are rolled out in 2008 and thousands more drivers will be caught speeding? The District Court system may collapse under an enormous volume of cases.

It is important that an education campaign is implemented to highlight the fact that these are safety cameras, not speed ones. This is the key to their acceptance when they are rolled out in several months' time. If only a few advertisements are released the week before they come on stream, the Minister will get it in the neck, as happened when he tried to implement the driving licence legislation over a weekend. The publicity campaign on safety cameras must be comprehensive. Safety cameras need to be placed on dangerous areas of the road network where a maximum number of lives can be saved rather than the soft targets of, say, 50 km zones.

A better attempt is needed to resolve this problem than that used to clear the backlog of driving tests. Today I spoke to an individual who applied for a job as a driver tester with SGS. The main criterion, he informed me, is to have had a clean

driving licence for the past five years. Some testers who never did a driving test in Ireland have been employed by SGS to clear the driving test backlog. It means the numbers passed on the SGS test are higher than those tested by the Department of Transport.

I recommend the motion to the House.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: I do not envy the Minister, Deputy Dempsey, in having to take over road safety. The regime is riddled with problems and loopholes. The penalty points system and the fixed charge system are prime examples of how not to do State business. The system was introduced in haste by the then Minister for Transport, Deputy Brennan, in 2002. No administrative or available technology systems were put in place which could have made it work. Neither were financial or Garda personnel resources given over to the system. No changes were introduced into the court system to deal with the large increase of cases that would result from the roll-out of the system. Most significantly, no Minister was put in charge of implementing it. It was split between the Departments of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Garda. I take some comfort from the Minister for Transport taking departmental control of the national vehicle and driver file, NVDF.

Deputy O'Dowd has again brought this motion in Private Members' time because of concern for public safety on the roads. The concept behind the penalty points system of penalising in an incremental way is a good one. The concept of punishing bad driving behaviour and rewarding good can only bring about an improvement in driving behaviour if the system imposes a penalty. The current system has reversed this with bad driving behaviour being rewarded and good punished.

The poor eijit who accepts his penalty points and pays his fine is punished. The driver who does not care takes his or her chance with the courts and is rewarded, as only one in six cases ends up paying. With such great odds one would want to be a fool not to take them. Up to 50% of offenders have already come to this conclusion, not bothering to pay their fixed charge for penalty points. Ultimately the system will collapse as people realise there is no point in paying a fixed charge. All expectations of improved road safety will be gone if people do not get the penalty points they deserve.

Many drivers caught speeding never receive any fine because they do not appear on the NVDF or their cars are not taxed in Ireland. Too many people are getting away with breaking the law. Everyone driving on our roads, regardless of where they come from, must obey the rules of the road. This is not happening.

The court system is in disarray. It should be seen as the final penalty and last resort. The idea behind the fixed penalty was to penalise bad driv-

[Deputy Olivia Mitchell.]

ers while keeping the matter out of the courts. The opposite is the case as the chances of getting any penalty from a court are slight. The courts are distracted from the work they should be doing. I foresaw this in 2006 when I warned of the dangers of clogging up the courts with the existing penalty points before bringing in the camera system, if that ever will be brought in. It seems to have had an extraordinarily long gestation. If it does come in I estimate that there at least 500,000 extra cases will go to the District Courts each year. The court system will collapse under that kind of strain.

A fundamental principle of human behaviour is that human beings act rationally and in their own interests. If that is the case they will not pay fines for penalty points because it does not make any sense. More and more people will die on the roads unless we reform the system which we have an opportunity to do.

Deputy Andrew Doyle: When the penalty points system was introduced people feared the effect it would have on their insurance premia and the loss of their licences. As time went on it became apparent that the system was flawed. When any system is introduced it should be possible to review it, identifying its flaws and strong points.

This motion seeks a general review of the system and to fine tune some points. Even the Government amendment recognises that mandatory blood alcohol testing has decreased the number of road accidents. Some weeks ago Opposition Members put forward an agreed motion seeking mandatory testing at all accident sites.

The courts have been identified as the way out of paying fines and accruing points. Summonses are not being processed and are not coming to court. The amendment seeks to impose a greater onus on the court system by recognising that people have that option. The only option to consider is that when speed cameras catch someone speeding, or committing some other offence, the onus is on the owner of the car to prove categorically that he or she was not driving. This can happen between husbands and wives or brothers and sisters, in open insurance policies. That should be the only situation in which one can make a case and give demonstrable proof that it happened.

There is a perceived inequality between drivers with Irish driving licences and those from other parts of the world. Even on the N11 in Wicklow one sees non-national drivers, with left-hand drive cars, effectively on the wrong side of the road. There is a perception that people who do not comply with basic standards of road safety and are not even aware of the rules of the road are being allowed to drive yet they cannot accrue penalty points.

If people are prepared to say they did not receive the summons the judge is not in a position to say that they are wrong. The Courts Service

has written to us with some suggestions, saying that this is a problem. It has also outlined a problem in collecting licences which have accrued 12 points. Only one in three of those affected surrender their licences voluntarily. The onus is on the individual who receives two notices but 81 have not surrendered their licences. They know they are getting away with it. People are manipulating the rules to suit themselves, as it is human nature to do.

The Minister for Transport is the person who introduced the levy on plastic bags which had to be increased recently because the 15 cent charge was losing its effect. I ask him to consider this motion and support it.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: Up to this morning 316 people had been killed on Irish roads this year, which is shocking. According to the recently published Road Safety Strategy, the 333 road deaths in the year between June 2006 and June 2007 equates to approximately 80 deaths per 1 million of the population. In the UK, this figure is 50 deaths per 1 million. A driver is therefore 60% more likely to be killed on an Irish road than on a road in the UK.

A driver on an Irish road is more likely to be killed than one in Malta, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, the UK, Switzerland, Denmark, Turkey, Germany, Finland, Northern Ireland, Iceland and France. Most research suggests that the main contributory factors to road accidents are alcohol and speeding. I recognise the efforts of the Garda Síochána and the Road Safety Authority, RSA, to educate drivers and enforce drink-driving legislation. Based on today's figures, the members of the Garda Síochána enforcing drink-driving legislation, coupled with the advertising campaigns of the RSA, can take credit for the 34 lives fewer lost this year when compared with last year. Although we have not yet reached the end of the year the figure for 2006 was 350, whereas this year to date it is 316.

How can we make Irish roads as safe as those in the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway? According to the RSA, excessive speed is a contributory factor in one in three road accidents. We have been promised a more vigorous approach to speed limit enforcement and a roll-out of mobile cameras in 2007. Will the Minister announce the introduction of the speed cameras in the few weeks remaining before the end of the year? Whatever about the enforcement, the roll-out of the cameras will be a major factor in convincing people that speed will not pay. The Garda Síochána do not have enough resources to cover the roads and enforce the traffic and other laws but the speed cameras will hopefully make people conscious of their responsibility.

I read the following article in the *Irish Independent* on Saturday last:

A loophole in the system used to administer traffic offences is allowing thousands of motor-

ists who have been caught speeding or driving without a seat-belt or using a mobile phone to escape unpunished.

This is because they allegedly did not receive official notification of the offence in the post.

A senior garda inspector has warned that the issue was one of national importance Hundreds of cases have been dismissed from district court sittings as offending motorists claim they received no ticket in the postal system.

As a result, penalty points on driving licences are not being imposed and revenue for motor-fine is not being collected.

After dismissing four cases in a row recently at Limerick District Court, Judge Elizabeth McGrath expressed concern and asked what was being done to address the problem.

Inspector Seamus Gallagher of Henry Street garda station told the court, "There is an issue there and it is being looked into nationally." [Is it being "looked into nationally"?)]

When a motorist is stopped by gardai for an offence committed while driving, he/she is told they will be given notice in the post in the coming weeks.

If a motorist fails to pay the fine within the time permitted, a summons is issued for a court appearance.

Dismissed

But hundreds of motorists are claiming that they never received notice of the fine and their cases are dismissed, effectively allowing them to get away with committing road traffic offences.

. . . . "The problem arises because when it comes to court proceedings we have to be able to prove that the person receives the fixed penalty notice and if a person is willing to state in court they did not receive it, the judge is in a predicament,"

The Minister might make reference to speed cameras and the problem that arose recently in court cases in Limerick.

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I move amendment No. 1:

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

- reiterates its concern on road safety and the continued loss of life on Irish roads;
- recognises the positive impact the penalty points system has had on road safety;
- notes that the downward trend in road deaths has continued in 2007 and recognises that in the first 12 months of the operation of mandatory alcohol testing (August 2006 to July 2007) there has been over a 20% reduction in road deaths compared to the previous corresponding 12 month period;

- supports the Road Safety Strategy for the period 2007-2012 in order to further reduce road deaths and injuries;
- commends the Government on the sustained implementation of road safety measures such as the establishment of the Road Safety Authority, the roll-out of the Garda Traffic Corps; the introduction of mandatory alcohol testing, the introduction of a graduated driving licence system for learner drivers, the doubling of penalties for drink driving offences, the extension of the penalty points system, including the introduction of penalty points for mobile phone offences;
- notes that at the end of October 2007, over 480,000 drivers have received penalty points with 93 drivers currently on 12 points resulting in six months disqualification;
- recognises the rights of a person alleged to have committed a road traffic offence, liable to a fixed charge payment, not to pay the amount specified and to opt to have the case heard by the courts;
- recognises that the amount of the fine on conviction for a road traffic offence is a matter for the court (within the limits set out in the Road Traffic Acts), as is the collection of such fines;
- notes that the Road Traffic Act 2002 provides for the requirement of persons who have accumulated 12 penalty points to submit their driving licences to the licensing authority that granted the licence not later than 14 days from the date of notification; and
- notes that the Road Traffic Act 2002 also provides for the offence of not complying with such a direction."

This amendment appears on the second supplementary Order Paper. I wish to share time with Deputy Frank Fahey.

I welcome the opportunity afforded by this motion to debate the issue of road safety. I appreciate the tone of the motion submitted by the Opposition and in particular the expressions of concern at the number of road deaths. The amendment is simply an attempt to clarify the many initiatives that have been taken and give details of those that will continue to be taken in the coming years.

I welcome Deputy O'Dowd's contribution to this debate, much of which was based on a submission to the Department of Transport made by the Courts Service in response to the Department's statement of strategy. The Courts Service made suggestions relating to fixed charge penalty offences and other areas highlighted by the Deputy. I assure him that we will consider them carefully, as we do all suggestions from the

[Deputy Noel Dempsey.]

Courts Service, the Garda and so on, and will include some of them in the next Road Traffic Bill.

The question of why our penalty points system is different from that of the UK and whether this is a constitutional matter was raised. There is a constitutional element to this subject that relates to the constitutional right of every citizen to go to court. In the UK a person can indicate if he or she wishes to go to court but, because criminal offences are in question, our constitution sees that this right is automatically given. I am not yet sure whether there are options that would allow us overcome this matter but it is something we will examine in the context of the next Road Traffic Bill.

I will refer briefly to Deputy O'Dowd's point on drink driving and the law passed in 2006 to allow for administrative fines. I would welcome another debate in the House on this matter as such a move would ease pressure on Garda time, give more resources and so on. I spoke to Assistant Commissioner Eddie Rock about this on the day of the launch of the road safety strategy and my only reservation is that taking this route could signal that drink driving is acceptable. There are many merits to this suggestion for dealing with these offences, not least the freeing of Garda and court time.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: It is the actual law.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: It is in law but has not yet commenced in practice. We should think more about the other side of this matter because we initially introduced stiff penalties, including disqualification, that included a shame factor attached to having to attend court. We must be wary of sending the wrong signal on drink driving and must balance both sides of the argument because each has merit. This matter could be discussed in the Joint Committee on Transport before the next Road Traffic Act.

The penalty points system was extended with effect from 3 April 2006 featuring 35 separate offences, with use of mobile phones added from September 2006. Fixed charges now apply to almost 60 offences. The focus of the penalty points system is on driver behaviour and highlights safety issues such as those mentioned by Deputy Deenihan earlier, including speeding, failure to wear seat belts, dangerous overtaking and failure to obey traffic lights, stop signs and yield signs. This all focuses on driver behaviour.

It must be remembered, however, that a person in receipt of a fixed charge notice is not compelled by law to pay the fixed charge amount provided therein. Road traffic offences are criminal offences. Any person alleged to have committed a road traffic offence is entitled to have his or her case heard by the courts and the non-payment of the fixed charge amount is an indication by that person that he or she wishes to have the matter

dealt with by the court. A person who opts to have the case heard in court is subject, on conviction, to an increased number of penalty points and is liable to a significantly higher financial penalty than if he or she had opted to pay a fixed charge notice.

Where a person has accumulated 12 penalty points and is to be disqualified from holding a licence for a period of six months beginning on the appropriate date, the Road Traffic Act 2002 specifically provides that he or she be directed to surrender his or her driving licence to the licensing authority that granted the licence not later than 14 days from that date. I understand that 93 people so far have reached the maximum number of points. Failure to comply with such a direction is an offence under the Road Traffic Acts. The penalties on summary conviction for the offence of failing to surrender a licence can result, in the case of a first offence, to a fine not exceeding €1,000 or, at the discretion of the court, to imprisonment for any term not exceeding three months or to both a fine and imprisonment. The enforcement of the requirement to surrender a driving licence as required by the 2002 Act is a matter for the Garda Síochána.

The penalty points and fixed charge notice system, as provided for in the Road Traffic Act 2002, has been implemented by means of the Garda fixed charge processing system, FCPS, in the Garda Síochána. Essentially, the system has automated end to end processing of fixed charge notices within the Garda Síochána and provides electronic transfer of information with the other State agencies involved, in particular the Courts Service and the Department of Transport vehicle registration unit in Shannon.

There have been significant developments in the FCPS over the past two years and, in addition, the system also became fully integrated with the PULSE system in April 2006, thereby enabling the amalgamation of summons for the same person to be issued for the same court appearance date, thus saving time and resources for both the Courts Service and the Garda Síochána.

Further automation of the penalty points system was achieved in the first quarter of 2006 through the integration of the Garda FCPS with the Courts Service criminal case tracking system, CCTS, via PULSE. This allows for the electronic delivery of summons, applications for penalty point offences from the PULSE system to CCTS and details of scheduled hearing dates from CCTS back to PULSE. The Courts Service electronically transfers details of all in-court penalty point convictions to the Department of Transport for upload to the national driver file and the Garda Síochána keeps a copy for verification of driver data.

The Garda Síochána also receives regular notifications from the Department of Transport of drivers disqualified for having accumulated 12 penalty points. The principal aim of the system is

to ensure effective and efficient processing of fixed charge and penalty point notices so that cases are dealt with as quickly as possible and in such a way as to free up valuable Garda resources for operational duties to the greatest extent possible. The majority of fixed charge notices, more than 70%, are paid on time and do not go to court. Some 500,000 of them have been issued.

My Department's national vehicle and driver file, NVDF, is critical to the administration of the penalty points system and its role can be divided into two areas of activity, namely, the issuing of penalty points notifications and the supply of NVDF driver extracts to critical stakeholders. My Department's office in Shannon receives an electronic file, normally on a weekly basis from An Post which is contracted by the Garda Síochána for the supply of computer services relating to the administration of the penalty points system. This file contains details of drivers and the penalty points offences committed by them, the number of penalty points to be imposed and dates relating to the offences. The data is validated against the core NVDF records and, in the case of successful matches, penalty points notification documents are generated. These are printed and posted to the drivers affected on the day following receipt of the file from An Post.

The notifications provide the driver with details of the offence, the number of penalty points applied and the number of points accumulated. In instances where a total of 12 points have been reached or exceeded, the driver is informed that a disqualification will apply for six months, commencing 28 days after the issue of the notice. I understand 93 such notices have been issued. The system also facilitates notification of expiry of points after three years in accordance with the provisions of the system. The core NVDF records are updated with the penalty points details, including disqualifications, and these are visible to and updateable by local motor tax office staff with on-line processing facilities directly to the NVDF.

The system also involves the provision of NVDF data extracts to assist other stakeholders in fulfilling their roles in the administration of the penalty points system. This includes An Post, the contracted agency responsible for processing payments for penalty point offences, which require access to NVDF data to validate both driver and driving licence details. An NVDF record extract which contains additional information on driver disqualifications is provided to the Garda Síochána. Special notations are used to highlight penalty points disqualifications and surrender of driving licences to motor tax offices.

In addition to these electronic arrangements, my Department issues a letter to the manager of the relevant motor tax office highlighting each instance of disqualification where the driver has reached or exceeded the 12 penalty point limit. A report based on NVDF data setting out the status of each disqualified driver, including the position

on the surrender of the driving licence, is also generated each month and this issues to the Garda Síochána and the RSA.

It is an offence not to surrender one's driving licence within 14 days of receipt of a notification advising that 12 penalty points have been accumulated. The Garda receives a report setting out the status of each disqualified driver, including whether the licence has been surrendered. It is therefore a matter for the Garda to issue summonses and pursue those who have failed to surrender their licence.

I will bring forward legislation in 2008 to deal with various road safety issues. This will involve a review of the law relating to penalty points and driver disqualifications, taking account of whether the Garda requires any further statutory or legislative clarity to assist in the enforcement of these areas. The implementation of road safety measures has had a significant impact on the level of road deaths in recent years, but such measures will not work alone. Road users must take responsibility for driving behaviour and each of us can help to reduce the level of road deaths and injuries. The RSA, other Departments and agencies will implement a range of road safety initiatives as part of the next road safety strategy for 2007-2012, which should see Ireland approaching the best practice levels of the best performing countries in Europe. I commend the amended motion to the House.

Deputy Frank Fahey: I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this motion on road safety and to outline some of the initiatives that have been implemented by the Government and those that will be implemented under the new road safety strategy. Significant initiatives realised under the two previous strategies, particularly in the last two years, include the extension of penalty points and fixed charges, stronger legislation, mandatory roadside alcohol testing, greater levels of enforcement and the establishment of the Road Safety Authority. The number of fatalities as a result of road traffic collisions in 2006, at 368, was the second lowest rate in 40 years.

Progress continues to be made in reducing road deaths, and the priority attached to this has been underlined in the recent road safety strategy for 2007-2012, launched in October, which sets challenging targets for road death reductions. The overall trend in road deaths is downward. From a total of 411 in 2001, the figure for 2007 to date is 316. Tragically, 15 people have lost their lives on our roads in the first 11 days of December. Road deaths are tragic at any time of year but there is a particular sadness in the lead-up to Christmas. Despite the increased levels of road deaths in recent days, the number killed so far this year represents a reduction of 34 on the number of deaths on the same date last year. If the current trend is maintained, this year may show one of the lowest death rates for 40 years.

[Deputy Frank Fahey.]

The decrease in road deaths comes despite an increase in population, vehicle ownership and vehicle usage patterns.

A new road safety strategy for 2007-12 was published in October. The strategy, which provides for 126 actions or initiatives to be put in place over a six-year period, aims to reduce road deaths to no greater than 60 fatalities per million of population by the end of 2012, with demonstrable downward reductions in each year of the strategy. This equates to an average of 21 road deaths per month or 252 deaths per annum. The average number of road deaths per month so far this year is 28. The strategy also aims to reduce injuries by 25% and, by the fourth quarter of 2008, to develop a reliable database for serious injuries based on data from the health care system and insurance industry. In addition, the strategy aims to implement a safety camera network to provide in the region of 6,000 hours of enforcement per month to increase conformity with speed limits. Another objective of the strategy is to increase adult front seat belt wearing rates from 86% to 95% or better and to increase the adult rate of rear seat belt usage from 63% to 85% or better by 2012.

The strategy also identifies the need to legislate for and introduce a reduction in the legal blood alcohol level for drivers. The precise level to which it will be lowered will follow consideration of recommendations to be made by the RSA advisory panel to the RSA board in early 2008. Several issues will inform those recommendations, including known driver behaviour, past offending rates, analysis of data held by the Medical Bureau of Road Safety, enforcement practicalities and best international practice. Legislation will be required to implement a revised level, and the Minister for Transport will move rapidly to introduce appropriate legislation once the advice of the RSA has been received.

The Minister introduced new regulations in October to provide for significant changes in regard to driving licences and learner drivers.

8 o'clock These changes included the replacement, from 30 October 2007, of the provisional licence by a learner permit to emphasise that the holder is learning to drive. From 30 October 2007, new applicant learner permit holders must be accompanied at all times by a driver who has held a full licence for the category for at least two years. New applicant learner permit holders cannot apply for a driving test for six months. Further changes provide that existing provisional licences will continue in force until their expiry date, after which the holder will be issued with a learner permit. From 30 June 2008, a holder of a second provisional licence or learner permit for a car must be accompanied at all times. They may, however, drive unaccompanied in the period up to 30 June 2008.

The existing rule that first, third and subsequent holders of provisional licences must be

accompanied by a person holding a full driving licence, with no minimum period necessary, continues in force until 30 June 2008 and from 1 December 2007, a learner motorcyclist must wear the letter "L" on a yellow fluorescent tabard.

Since its establishment in September 2006, the Road Safety Authority has introduced a number of measures to reduce driving test waiting times. These include contracting SGS Limited to provide additional driving tests on its behalf. Over the last year or so, the average waiting time for a test has come down by about a third and the RSA continues to drive this down.

Following on the recent changes to the driver licensing provisions, the RSA has confirmed that all 122,000 applicants on the waiting list at the end of October will have been tested by early March 2008 and that by the end of June 2008 all applicants for a driving test will be able to get a test on demand, which is within 10 weeks. This does not mean there will be no waiting list at the end of June 2008.

In addition to these two commitments, the Minister for Transport has also requested the RSA to ensure that all 120,000 people who were holders of second provisional licences at the time the changes were introduced in October will have been offered a test before the end of June 2008. As we know, from that time these drivers will be required to be accompanied by a qualified driver, a requirement which applies to all other learner drivers in any event.

The national vehicle and driver file section of the Department of Transport, based in Shannon, is directly assisting the RSA in this particular objective. Achievement of this target takes into account the historical patterns of application and pass rates, as well as the significant spike in applications following the announcement of the changes.

The road safety strategy for 2004-06 committed the Government to the introduction of a form of roadside breath testing which would address in a positive way the problem of drinking and driving. Legislation was introduced in the Road Traffic Act 2006 to provide for an appropriate form of roadside mandatory alcohol testing in order to increase the chance of being breathalysed, and it provides an increased deterrent. The Garda has been successfully operating mandatory alcohol testing checkpoints since July 2006 and the increased deterrent effect is now reflected in the significant reduction in the number of road deaths since then.

The Road Traffic Acts provide that a member of the Garda Síochána may require a person in charge of a mechanically propelled vehicle to provide a preliminary breath specimen where the vehicle is involved in a road collision. Garda discretion in the use of preliminary roadside tests in such circumstances exists, having regard to possible injuries sustained. It should be pointed out that evidence of alcohol consumption is not a

requirement in order for a garda to use the powers available.

The Road Traffic Acts also place an obligation on a person to provide a blood or urine sample in a hospital. This applies where an event occurs involving a vehicle which results in a person being injured, or a person claiming or appearing to have been injured, or where the person is admitted to or attends a hospital and a member of the Garda is of the opinion that, at the time of the event, the person had consumed an intoxicant. The definition of an intoxicant includes alcohol and drugs or any combination of alcohol and drugs.

The Department is aware that the Garda authorities have issued directions to the effect that it is expected that all drivers involved in serious road traffic collisions are tested unless there are overriding medical circumstances. The Government has recognised that there remains a serious substantial degree of public concern that, while acknowledging the medical aspect, some drivers involved in collisions may not be currently required to undergo roadside breath testing. The Department of Transport is engaging with the Office of the Attorney General to establish how the current legislation can be amended to achieve compulsory roadside testing of drivers involved in serious accidents subject to overriding medical circumstances.

There were two tragic accidents in Galway this week and it is my wish that we receive as quickly as possible the Garda reports on those accidents. It is vital the Government be made aware of the circumstances surrounding accidents which in many cases can be avoided.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I wish to share time with Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I warmly commend our Fine Gael colleagues, Deputies McEntee and O'Dowd, for initiating this important debate. It was only a few short weeks ago that we were discussing the new road safety strategy and general road safety issues in the House. However, week after week and day after day we hear of more of the awful incidents referred to by Deputy Fahey.

The press reported the tragic deaths of seven people on our roads over the past weekend, including people killed in Rathangan, County Kildare, Galway city, Tyrellspass, Ballinrobe and Poles. This highlights the ongoing scourge of deaths on our roads and the urgent need to make road safety a priority of the Government. If the Minister did nothing else but try to make this matter the main priority of Government, as other states such as France have done, he will have done a service in his time at the Department.

For 2007, the tragic death toll is currently 316, according to the latest figures I received from the Garda national traffic bureau. It is better than the

figure for last year at this juncture but it will finish up significantly over 300. It is possible the figure will match that of 2003, when there were 335 tragic deaths, although I hope it will not.

If it was possible to tonight put in place measures to save the 20 or possibly 30 other lives which could be lost over the next three or four weeks, this House would have an absolute responsibility to take those measures almost as emergency legislation. I agree with the Minister in that motorists must accept a large amount of personal responsibility for their driving behaviour but the Government has, through its 11-year life, been appallingly slow to adopt an appropriate range of targeted measures to tackle speeding and other irresponsible driving behaviour. This was especially true until about a year and a half ago. There must be fundamental political leadership on the issue.

Even with the announcement in the budget last week of an additional €11 million for the RSA for testing, the figure is perhaps insufficient for the task it must complete in bringing about a ten-week waiting period for driving tests. I had previously noted that there was a divergence between the budget's target for the driving test on demand and what the Minister has repeatedly stated.

As the Fine Gael motion indicates, there are many question marks over the current operation of the penalty points system which the Minister, Deputy Dempsey, must urgently address. There may have been a heightened sense of road awareness and safety with drivers on Irish roads in the immediate aftermath of the introduction of penalty points and random breath testing, but these initial positive effects unfortunately appear to be starting to wear off. A renewed campaign is urgently required.

In that context I warmly welcome the premiere of the Road Safety Authority's safety film and action "Crashed Lives" which will be launched by the Minister. I also noted with pleasure over the weekend that the distinguished journalist Charlie Bird, along with his colleagues Samantha Libreri and Dympna Moroney, was awarded the overall news broadcast award for their series on road safety at the Law Society's justice media awards.

That series was very valuable in trying to change driver behaviour, especially Charlie Bird's visually shocking piece filmed when he drove to work in RTE from his home. He travelled just below the legal speed limit and could see car after car overtaking him and sailing into the blue yonder towards Dublin. The speed limit on the road in question, the N11, was being flagrantly broken again and again. That is characteristic of many of our national roads and motorways. Unfortunately that behaviour then goes on to secondary roads, like the famous roads in your constituency, a Cheann Comhairle, such as the road from Castletown to Kenmare, with which I am very familiar. On that very narrow road, people try to maintain high speeds totally inappropriately.

[Deputy Thomas P. Broughan.]

The Courts Service has rightly been extremely critical of the current method of dealing with motoring offences and has claimed that the system is simply not working and is clogging up the courts. Garda figures show that up to 50% of all motorists still fail to pay fines for offences such as speeding and the non-wearing of seat belts and that only 50% to 60% of traffic fines are being paid. Fixed penalty notices are issued to motorists in order to keep them out of court. However, in the first six months of 2007, the Courts Service reported that 88,000 summonses in respect of fixed charge offences came before the courts. The Courts Service has stated that urgent changes are necessary. While I welcome what the Minister has said, clearly we urgently need to bring forward the legislation on the payment of fines.

The Courts Service has suggested a number of alternative methods for the collection of fines for motoring offences, one of which I would not agree with as it includes a reference to private debt collectors. However, we could examine other strong mechanisms which could be effective. The Courts Service has also suggested the collection of motor fines should be considered at the same time that motorists pay their annual motor tax charges. The Minister has got his hands on the national vehicle file from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. It should be possible for the national vehicle file to interface with the Courts Service records so that people applying for motor tax would not be allowed to renew unless their fines are paid. In other words, the penalty points on a person's licence should be increased if he or she has failed to pay the fine by that time. There is considerable scope to expand the role of the national vehicle file. I would like to know if the Minister is preparing such a Bill and if the heads are ready yet.

Shocking figures were released to me last week by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform — Members might have heard Deputy Gilmore raising the matter in the House. These figures revealed that 110,000 warrants are outstanding from the courts, including more than 36,000 outstanding bench warrants, which is a very serious indication of a major failure in the administration of criminal and civil justice. In reply to Deputy Gilmore, the Taoiseach indicated that only approximately 20 warrants were outstanding at any one time. However, that was certainly not the case. It makes a mockery of the court and legal systems.

A few weeks ago another report indicated that up to two thirds of drivers who accumulate 12 penalty points are not voluntarily giving up their driving licences as they are legally required to do. It is clear that the penalty points system is not operating effectively enough and if that continues, the system will be totally undermined. The Minister should bring the legislation before the House early in the new year and let us pass it.

One of the key objectives of the penalty points system was to tackle speeding on the roads. We need to consider some innovative measures in this regard. There are strong indications that speed is a fundamental factor in most road crashes. I have asked whether it would be possible to use limiters. We need to consider certain cars which are imported into this country and which have gauges showing they can achieve speeds of twice or three times our maximum speed limit. Why do we need such machinery in this country? It seems to be totally against the spirit of our legislation. I put the point to the SIMI that the Minister should take a proactive role with car manufacturers at European level. Our market for new car sales at 200,000 vehicles per year is sufficiently large and attractive for manufacturers, including the market leaders such as Toyota, Ford etc. that they should heed some of our requests like the need for a wiper on the rear windscreen of saloon cars, which most makes do not have. We should demand very safe vehicles and we should not put up with vehicles which crumble or are dangerous.

In August, it was reported that 108,000 out of 440,000 drivers who committed an offence liable to penalty points since their introduction in 2002 did not get any points put on their licences because they do not have Irish driving licences. This is one of the key problems the Minister needs to address, particularly regarding drivers from Northern Ireland, but also regarding drivers from eastern Europe and the UK. Earlier today, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport discussed how we would manage electronic tolls for people with foreign licences. In the next three or four months the Minister needs to take a very proactive role in this matter.

Mr. Conor Faughnan of the AA has asked for the instigation of a non-Irish driver licence file to be held alongside the national vehicle driver file and the Minister should take such an initiative. I commend Fine Gael for tabling this timely motion. I commend Deputies McEntee and O'Dowd for pursuing the issue in the Dáil. In some ways it is the most important issue for us to pursue. I know the Ceann Comhairle would take a leading role in anything the Dáil could do to ensure that for some of our citizens, who are now possibly leading happy lives, excited at the rest and enjoyment that comes at Christmas and the new year with family and friends and in our case with our supporters in politics, that type of atmosphere is not utterly destroyed by a tragedy in the family following a car crash. We should take a very proactive role in this regard.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Go raibh maith agat as ucht an deis seo labhairt ar an ábhar rí-thábhachtach seo. Tacaím leis an mhéid atá i rún Fhine Gael. Is trua go raibh ar an Rialtas leasú a chur leis, mar ní dóigh liom go raibh aon rud conspóideach ann. Ba chóir go mbeadh muid in ann aontú ar ábhar chomh tábhachtach ag an am

seo den bhliain. Ní raibh an rún, mar a leagadh amach é, ag caitheamh anuas ar an Rialtas, ach ag tabhairt tacaíocht dóibh siúd atá ag déanamh iarracht na bóithre a dhéanamh níos sláine do thiománaithe agus lucht úsáide na mbóithre.

The motion before us was obviously triggered by the Road Traffic Act 2002, which is the legislative basis for penalty points. Since we have already amended and increased the number of offences for which penalty points should be awarded to drivers from five to 31, it is appropriate for us to consider how the system is fully implemented. If teething problems exist, as identified in the Fine Gael motion, including the provision that drivers voluntarily surrender their licences, we need to address them. We need to tighten up the legislation to ensure that it properly reflects the desire of the legislators when they introduced the legislation in the first place.

The motion is not a criticism of the Government. It is a practical step that should have been embraced and taken on board by the Government rather than amended. We welcome the downward trend in road deaths as mentioned in the Government amendment. We agree that the sustained implementation of road safety measures such as those listed in the amendment are welcome. They need to be rolled out and fully supported to ensure that fewer families lose loved ones following tragic road accidents.

Penalty points in themselves are not deterrents. It is a combination of mechanisms that we have produced so far. There are issues we need to address. Some people are driving without valid driving licences, in some cases through no fault of their own. My father only noticed his ten-year driving licence was expired by two weeks when he was stopped on the road. The system should allow for a reminder notice to be posted out by the local authority when a ten-year driving licence is due for renewal. It would be worth the cost of the 55 cent stamp. God forbid, if my father had been involved in an accident on that occasion, he would not have been covered by insurance. It would have been a tragic outcome because he did not knowingly drive without a valid licence. A simple reminder would be a help.

I made the point recently in the House when we were dealing with issues to do with road traffic that there should be mandatory drug testing along with the mandatory alcohol testing in the case of road traffic accidents resulting in serious injuries. Given the number of people who have died in recent times as a result of cocaine and given the extent of the drug problem, it would be appropriate to consider testing. I refer in particular to the effects of cocaine use whereby those who have taken it believe they are invincible. They become more aggressive and drive faster. We must ensure this element of testing is rolled out if at all possible.

I hope the Minister and the Government will achieve their stated aim of reducing the waiting time for driving tests. For too long, people

blamed the numbers of learner drivers as being the cause of accidents. I was not one of those who believed that it was just down to those who had not passed the test. Many accidents were caused by people who had passed the test and who were cocky or confident in their driving and who exceeded the speed limit. As the previous speaker said, speed, speed and speed is the cause of many of the tragic deaths and severe injuries resulting from car accidents.

Other issues need to be addressed. There are two jurisdictions on this island and we need greater harmonisation of speed limits and penalty points. A system is required to allow penalty points to be applied to drivers from outside the State. Drivers from the Six Counties who incur penalty points should suffer the same consequences as drivers here and *vice versa*. There should be an all-Ireland approach to this issue and an all-Ireland licensing system to ensure the same licence and same grading of vehicles. These are practical steps which can be taken in the two jurisdictions by means of the British-Irish Ministerial Council which has resumed its meetings. Mutual recognition of penalty points could be fast-tracked as there is agreement between all parties on the island that road safety is paramount.

It is currently an offence to drive on or across cycle tracks and penalty points can be applied. However, it is not an offence to park on a cycle track and this is not liable to penalty points. This is dangerous for a cyclist who may turn a corner and find a stationary car in the way.

Penalty points are currently applied to a driver who exceeds the speed limit by one or two kilometres. However, a driver who exceeds the limit by 30 km or 40 km incurs the same penalty points. I suggest a graded system of penalty points with additional points for those who are well over the speed limit. I have noted drivers who are well over the limit but they will be penalised the same as somebody who has exceeded the limit by one or two kilometres.

Tacaím leis an rún agus tá súil agam go mbeidh an Rialtas sásta an leasú seo a tharraingt siar agus déanamh cinnte go ndéanfar beart de réir briathar an rún atá os ar gcomhair.

Deputy Michael Ring: I compliment my colleague for tabling this motion. The Government is not able to deal with the penalty points situation; there is no system for notifying people who are given penalty points. Many of my constituents were unable to pay their fines at the post office because the system had been computerised and had been moved on to the next section. A person should be allowed pay such fines. They must wait for somebody to call to the door. I understand 44,000 summonses have not been issued by the Department and something is very wrong.

The abuse of drugs has been talked about for the past week. Many people have been killed on

[Deputy Michael Ring.]

the roads, not because of drunken driving but because of people taking drugs. I hope the Minister will respond tomorrow night and inform the House of the situation regarding testing for drugs. Has the Government clarified the legal position with the Attorney General? There is no doubt that some people have been killed on the roads because they have been high on cocaine. Given of the level of drug-taking, there must be hundreds of people in clubs and pubs who hop into cars and think they are Roy Rogers or whoever and that they can drive at 100 km/h when they are high on drugs. I want to know the up-to-date position. When will legislation be introduced to deal with this very serious problem?

The issue of foreign drivers has been raised on many occasions. They come from England, America and Northern Ireland. When will these people be prosecuted and when will penalty points be applied to their licences? When will there be an all-Ireland system so that people who break the law in this State will have penalty points applied to their licences in whatever jurisdiction they reside?

I live in a tourism town. Drivers from England and Northern Ireland break all the rules of the road. They do not care whether they are given tickets or penalty points because they know the Irish State will not be able to do anything. They park where they like and they do not seem to mind the parking tickets on their cars because they drive back to Northern Ireland, England and America and nothing is done about it. This gives the wrong example to those who obey the law.

Driving should be part of the transition year curriculum in schools. Young people could be taught how to drive. Anyone applying for a gun licence must be given clearance by the Garda Síochána. A car is a bigger weapon. More people are killed by cars than by guns. We should educate people at a young age and train them to respect a vehicle and the rules of the road. I hope driving will be taught in schools.

Since penalty points were introduced, people have changed their attitude and have changed how they drive. They know that if they do not drive correctly on the road there is a possibility that they will lose their licence. There is no doubt the penalty points system has worked.

Debate adjourned.

Financial Resolutions 2007.

Financial Resolution No. 5: General (Resumed).

Debate resumed on the following motion:

THAT it is expedient to amend the law relating to inland revenue (including value-added

tax and excise) and to make further provision in connection with finance.

—(Minister for Health and Children).

Deputy Johnny Brady: I wish to share time with Deputy Mattie McGrath.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Johnny Brady: I compliment the Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen, on another excellent and caring budget, especially in the area of social welfare support where the increase amounted to €900 million. Total spend on social welfare in 2008 will be approximately €17 billion, which will benefit 1.5 million people. This is most welcome.

At a time when the finances of the country are not as good as they have been in recent years, I compliment not only the Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen, but the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Cullen, on being able to achieve that type of package for social welfare recipients.

As Chairman of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I welcome the supports that have been introduced for the farming community. The capital gains tax relief on the dissolution of farm partnership is welcome. This relief will run for a period of five years and it is estimated to cost approximately €5 million in 2008. A few of my constituents are affected by this measure. They gave up land in different parts of the county and acquired land from the land commission to start a co-operative farm partnership. This has worked well. Some people from your county, a Cheann Comhairle, came to County Meath from County Kerry many years ago under a partnership agreement. They were successful farmers.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is how Meath won a couple of all-Ireland finals.

Deputy Johnny Brady: That is correct. There is no doubt about that. We were very lucky to get people from Kerry and the west.

When the day came when young people were not interested in continuing farming, it was decided to divide the land. Currently, my neighbours are breaking up a farm partnership and this measure is most beneficial to them. The Minister came under much pressure from farming organisations and individual farmers. This issue was raised on numerous occasions at meetings of the agriculture committee. I thank the Minister, Deputy Cowen, for acknowledging the problem and acceding to the request to change the law.

I welcome the proposal to spread income tax liability over six years for diversification aid under the sugar beet compensation package. This measure follows on from the Finance Act 2007 provision which has already provided for similar treatment for restructuring elements of the package. The cost in 2008 is estimated to be €9 mil-

lion. Deputy Crawford will recall deputations, especially from south Leinster and Munster, at numerous committee meetings regarding this difficult problem with which farmers were confronted.

The Finance Bill includes a provision to avert a clawback of income tax when a farmer who has opted to avail of the special income tax averaging arrangements subsequently enters a milk production partnership. The farmers' flat rate addition for VAT is being retained at 5.2% for 2008. Stamp duty relief for farm consolidation has been extended which will provide significant assistance for the farming community in improving the viability of holdings through consolidation.

An additional €15 million has been provided for the suckler welfare scheme to help develop business opportunities in the increasingly competitive beef sector. A payment of up to €80 per cow, up to a limit of 100 cows, will be available to suckler cow farmers who undertake to comply with certain animal welfare measures for calves born from 1 January 2008. I compliment the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Deputy Coughlan, for pushing these changes hard in Europe in spite of opposition. This scheme is most important for the future of the beef sector.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am delighted to address the House on budget 2008. I compliment the Minister, Deputy Cowen, and his officials for the manner in which they produced this prudent document. The Minister has availed of the opportunity to be fiscally responsible and to react to the changes to the economy since last year's budget. The management of the national debt is most responsible. It has been kept to approximately 25% of GDP, which is one of the lowest in the developed world. The national development plan is an ambitious programme for investment in the future. The top priority is for our continued economic and social development. This budget continues to implement the national development plan, providing important infrastructure in transport, education, housing, environmental services and health. We are investing in building up our skills and enhancing our competitiveness internationally.

The budget also prioritises the environment through a range of measures on VRT, motor tax, VAT changes, energy conservation and research, and carbon reduction measures.

I welcome the proposals supporting home ownership. The ceiling on mortgage interest relief has increased for first-time buyers to €10,000 for a single person and €20,000 for a married couple. Stamp duty on residential property has been revised so that the first €125,000 is exempt. The above measures are very important and will help to kick-start the important house building industry.

I especially welcome the broad range of improvements in social welfare. The increase on

last year's budget will cost €980 million in a full year. This means social welfare expenditure in 2008 will be more than triple the level set by the Labour and Fine Gael parties when they were last in Government. Furthermore, as a result of the changes made in budget 2002, all social welfare weekly increases will be paid with effect from 1 January 2008, which is most important. As a result, increases for those dependent on social welfare are payable more than five months earlier than was the case heretofore.

Other key positives in the budget include increases in the carer's allowance, carer's benefit and death benefit and pension increases of €14 per week. This has been warmly welcomed in my constituency of south Tipperary. I spoke to many pensioners who receive pensions from abroad and they are envious of the rates of pension available here.

The respite care grant has been increased by €200 from June 2008. Minimum maternity benefit and adoptive benefit rates have been increased to €221. FÁS payments have been increased in line with social welfare. This is important as people employed on such schemes do valuable work and it is vital that we reward them.

Family income supplement income thresholds will increase by €10 per week, which will improve the situation for large families. I referred to old age pensions. We are honouring our election promise in 2002 to bring the pension to €200 per week. Prior to the 2007 election we pledged to increase pensions to €300 over the lifetime of this Government and we are well on the way with the increases given this year. I warmly applaud the Minister, Deputy Cowen, and his officials. I fully support the measures taken in this budget.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I wish to share time with my two colleagues.

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

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Will the Acting Chairman tell me when my time is up?

Acting Chairman: I will.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I have no doubt that will be the case. The Acting Chairman should not delay because my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Power, is always ready to tell me.

Deputy Seán Power: They are telling Deputy Durkan for a long time that his time is up but he proved them wrong.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: They tried often.

I am glad of the opportunity to say a few words on the budget. For some reason last year was one year I failed to speak on this subject.

This budget needs close scrutiny. It is a post-election budget, partly anaesthetic and partly

[Deputy Bernard J. Durkan.]

healing. On looking at it closely one will find the reasons it comes within those two categories — the shock of the public in the aftermath of the general election and the failure to deliver on a series of promises. There comes a time then when the public must be assuaged, confronted, rebutted. That is the purpose of this budget. This is the stumbling block that explains why the Government cannot deliver on its pre-election promises. That is a sad truth. I hope all Members and parties in this House, including the present multi-party Government made up of Independents, the Progressive Democrats, the Greens and good old reliable Fianna Fáil, snuggling up in the comfort of each other's company as we come up to the season of Christmas, think carefully about the promises they failed to keep and the people affected by them.

The budget proposes to increase expenditure on housing. It is no harm to welcome that, but it comes very late. In recent years there has been a process of downgrading the local authority housing programme and introducing, and replacing it with the activities of voluntary housing agencies. This has resulted in the voluntary agencies having the pick of the crop and they do not take on the difficult situations where there are serious social problems. The local authorities must provide housing and have been doing so on a diminishing scale for several years.

Additional funding is proposed for Health and the delivery of the health services. When the health boards were abolished a few years ago it was regarded by the then Minister, Deputy Martin, as a good idea because they were wasting money hand over fist. The only difference between then and now is that then there was accountability. One could raise the issue in the House and get an answer instantly. One cannot do that anymore. One could raise it at any level anywhere and there was always accountability. There was transparency and people were called to account on a regular basis. That does not happen to the same extent any more despite the employment of an extra 33,000 people in the services within the past five years.

The way the health services have gone is an appalling indictment of the failure of Government to confront the issues in the health area, to address the issues fundamentally at ground level and to ensure that provision is made so that services can be delivered to the public. The patients and the public are the most important people in this equation and they are the last to be considered. They are the ones who get second-class treatment on a regular basis. I do not propose to go through the difficulties that have arisen over the past two or three years at various locations throughout the country where serious deficiencies have been shown in the way services are delivered to the general public.

In case any Member on the Government benches might get offended at this, I emphasise that

this is not a criticism of anybody delivering the services. It is a criticism of the way the services are delivered and the rotation in which they are delivered. Unless something is done about it as a matter of urgency, there will be serious consequences. The Government will spend ever increasing sums in that area with the same result we have had to date. It is appalling.

The other area we hear much about nowadays is the environment. The Green Party started off in the life of the present Government by cycling in front of the squad cars. We must make allowances for the exuberance that follows early appointment but I am glad this practice has been discontinued and no other members of the Cabinet or junior Ministers pursue that practice. Dispose of the bicycle clips and let us get down to brass tacks. Let us look briefly at the environment. The problem with pollution of ground-water is one of the areas on which we get many lectures by Government. We are told about industry, agriculture and everything that damages the ground-water and the environment. We never get a lecture from anybody on the local authorities — which are funded directly, albeit inadequately, by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government — who are responsible for ensuring that raw sewage does not pour into lakes and rivers, that there are sewerage schemes capable of fulfilling their purpose and water treatment schemes put in place sufficiently in advance of population requirements so that the pollution of ground-water does not continue. Let this Government start by taking a leaf from its own book. Let the Government do something positive and prevent the pollution of the ground-water supply.

For many years since first coming into this House I have questioned the quality and adequacy of the domestic drinking water supply. I have always been assured that it is more than adequate, there is adequate storage, there is plenty and that all in the garden is rosy. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Government has sat idle while all this pollution occurred and failed to address the issues. It is failing to do so in the current year and will fail again. I bring to the attention of the parties this issue that requires attention.

On the economy in general, for several years some of us have pointed to our lack of competitiveness. The Government chose to ignore us. Those on the Government benches say we are unpatriotic to make such statements. We are becoming ever less competitive and are being replaced in the world markets by others who are more competitive. If the Government thinks we will survive on world markets on that basis, by all means let it continue but if it thinks a remedy is needed, it should come forward with it and do something about it now rather than wait until the economy falls apart. Tomorrow it may be too late.

In the world marketplace, that hard-headed business world, nobody cares and it is all a matter of tough negotiation. One either delivers or one fails. I ask the Government not to continue to allow jobs to be relocated to other more competitive economies. I need not enumerate the instances where it has happened in the past. The Members on the Government benches from Donegal and Dublin will know full well what I am talking about and it happens even as we speak.

My colleagues are more than anxious to contribute and I can see the Acting Chairman, Deputy Brady, becoming restive. I wish him a happy Christmas in case I do not have an opportunity to see him again before then.

Acting Chairman: I thank Deputy Durkan and wish him many happy returns.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: I ask the Acting Chairman to let me know when my time is up because I would not want to take time from Deputy Ring.

Deputy Seán Power: We will ensure that does not happen.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: Budget 2008 gives a zero gain for low income earners. These are not my words but the words of CORI through the mouth of Fr. Sean Healy. I hold in my hand the document that he presented to us today.

It is no wonder the Taoiseach realised that he would at least have to postpone his own income increase of €700 per week when a couple earning €15,000 each or €30,000 per year must look elsewhere to fund the increased prices of oil, food and the essentials of life. They did not get a 1c increase in this budget.

Certainly, benchmarking or independent groups such as those who justified the Taoiseach's €38,000 reward are not interested in the 30% of people finding it difficult to make ends meet. Recently, a person from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul advised that this year, coming towards Christmas, their clients were not looking for special toys but for the bare essentials of life such as food.

It is hard to believe, after 15 years of constant growth, that we still find so many people in such dire need, especially children. I welcome the fact the Government has agreed to previous commitments on social housing, so that 9,000 houses will start or be bought in 2008. This will also benefit the building trade, where many houses are now unsaleable. It is vital that local authorities are not used as the relieving officers for hard-pressed builders, but that they get genuine value for money.

Motorists have once again taken a hit from this Fianna Fáil Government. Many will have forgotten by now that it was Fianna Fáil that did away with car tax, along with rates on houses, in 1977, solely to get elected. This led to the serious debt

problems that brought our country close to bankruptcy. The 10% increase in car tax has nothing to do with the green agenda, but is just another stealth tax by the Government.

It is only a few months since the Government promised a reduction in taxes, increased numbers of teachers, nurses, gardaí and whatever else was wanted.

Deputy Seán Power: Money back for Eircom shareholders, what about that one?

Deputy Michael Ring: The Government should do it.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: Now all these promises have gone by the wayside and instead of a €2 billion surplus, we are now heading towards a €5 billion debt, just to meet increased wages, social welfare etc.

I welcome the increase in social welfare and, hopefully, I will get an opportunity to speak on that matter in another debate. It is vital that the Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen, not only speaks of rectifying mismanagement at every level within the Government, such as the HSE, but that he delivers on his proposals.

Over the past ten years we have had massive increases in public service employment, yet we have less frontline staff in many areas. I was advised only this week that the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government cannot deal with applications for water and sewerage schemes because it has not got sufficient quality personnel to examine the projects. If any farmer gave the same excuse with regard to pollution control, he would soon be out of business. In my constituency dental services are being removed from the town of Cootehill because in spite of all the staff within the HSE at management and other levels there are insufficient dentists.

The HSE received agreement from Government to train speech therapists and physiotherapists, but now that these people are qualified, they cannot get jobs from the HSE because they have not got work experience. Many patients are, as a result, left without a service. This is just another example of lack of management or joined-up thinking.

The budget had very little to offer to the farming community. At the time the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Deputy Mary Coughlan, announced the special grants scheme for waste management to help farmers deal with the nitrates directive, I received assurance from her — its on the record of the Dáil — that the Government had no problem with funding for that scheme. However, the Minister for Finance made a big deal of the fact that he has increased her budget by €35 million towards that end, with no guarantee for full payment. No funding has been provided for the restoration of the farm development scheme, which was supposed to last

[Deputy Seymour Crawford.]

seven years, but was suspended after four months. Many young farmers in the process of taking over holdings were badly caught by this and may no longer be able to commit themselves to full-time farming.

I acknowledge, as Deputy Johnny Brady mentioned, there have been some improvements in the tax regime as far as partnerships are concerned. The situation was ridiculous. If a partnership broke up as a result of sickness, death or a fall-out of some sort, the tax implications were appalling.

Mushroom production was an extremely important family farm project ten years ago, with almost 600 people involved. However, there are now only approximately 80 units in full-time production. It is clear from answers I received from the Minister regarding other farm production that she has no idea how many are actually involved. I will return to this issue on another occasion. Young farmers need all the support they can get to stay in business, but it is clear the Government has lost interest. It is strange that at a time when we are threatened with foot and mouth disease, or any such problem, agriculture becomes extremely important, but at budget time it is another story.

I want to address the important issue of our road network. I am delighted we have a reasonable road from Dublin to Monaghan, with the third bypass finished recently. I am concerned, however, by the Minister's statement in the budget with regard to his commitment to the Dublin area and projects currently under construction, as he makes no commitment to the Border region whatsoever. The road from Monaghan town to Emyvale and on to the Border is extremely poor and is now a bottleneck—

Deputy Seán Power: It is in the national development plan.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: It is not in the plan as it has been removed from it. We need to be sure of the direction we are taking. The last letter I received from the NRA gave no commitment to even making improvements to that road. It said that under the Good Friday Agreement, it was looking at a dualcarriageway from Derry to Dublin, but that will take some time. I plead for moneys to be made available for the project and with Deputy Blaney and others who use that road when travelling from Donegal to back me on the desperate need for improvements on the road before we have a serious accident. In the context of accidents, major question marks must be raised with regard to the way funding was made available under the DBO structure for the Castleblaney bypass, with which there are major difficulties.

Another equally important cross-Border road is the N3 which passes through Cavan, but there has been little progress on the Belturbet bypass.

This bypass has been in the pipeline for many years, but I have been told by Cavan County Council personnel that while it is fully sanctioned as far as the legal end is concerned, there is no money available for it. I have no doubt some millions will be made available this year from the NRA towards the purchase of land, but we need to see real progress on the construction of that road. If the peace dividend is to mean anything to those in the Border region, we must have proper road structures put in place immediately.

When a former Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, announced the ceasefire, I walked across the floor to him when the House closed to welcome it and suggested that he should at least provide some moneys for the reopening of the Border roads. He did that some weeks later. I make the same suggestion to the Government now. Roads such as the N2 and N3 may not be major thoroughfares in the eyes of the Government, but they are extremely important cross-Border projects that need funding.

Deputy Michael Ring: I am glad to get the opportunity to speak on the budget because many of the announcements made by Ministers are not made in this House, but in Northern Ireland or in Government Buildings where none of us can go in to hear them. They can brief and tell the media what they want, but we cannot get the opportunity to argue with them. I was glad to see my colleague went to a press briefing to hear the Minister for Education and Science last week, but the Minister did not like it and wanted him removed from the meeting. He had a right to be there as Opposition spokesman.

From 1995 to 1997, Fine Gael was in Government. I have often heard the Minister of State come in here to make announcements and compare that time to the present day. I want to make a simple comparison for him. Fine Gael and Labour handed over Government in 1997 with a surplus, the first time since the foundation of the State the Government ran a surplus.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Ring: This economy was booming for ten great years. When the choir was clapping, singing and dancing to congratulate the Minister for Finance last year, we nearly had to bring in the national orchestra to play the music for it.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It was like something from Noel Coward.

Deputy Michael Ring: Exactly.

Deputy Niall Blaney: There is plenty of music over there.

Deputy Michael Ring: Within a year, the same Minister came into the House with a deficit

9 o'clock

instead of a surplus. He will now have to borrow. I am speaking slowly because some of the Deputies opposite are a little deaf from listening to me shout. Perhaps I will be calm and quiet. The Government is going to have to borrow €5 billion to run the country.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is disgraceful.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Government, and particularly the Minister for Finance, have squandered that much money. According to what they said in May of this year, there were no problems in the economy, the health sector, the education system or the agriculture industry. The Government said it would not be able to spend all the money it was collecting from taxpayers.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Ring: The taxpayers' revenue was squandered by the Government within a short amount of time.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Robbery.

Deputy Seán Power: No.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Minister for Finance——

Deputy Seán Power: What about the national debt and pensions?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The national debt has gone up.

Deputy Michael Ring: We will talk about them tomorrow on the Social Welfare Bill.

Deputy John Curran: Our national debt is one of the lowest in Europe.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Government has squandered our money. I will remind the Deputies opposite of something of which the Government has made a total mess. The Minister, Deputy Cowen, spoke last week about the reform of stamp duty. He had three or four opportunities to deal with stamp duty over the past year, after he received warnings from everybody in the industry. I have no sympathy for the builders. I am delighted by what has happened.

Deputy Seán Power: What happened to the Deputy's promise to be calm?

Deputy Michael Ring: I hope every second one of them goes bankrupt because they robbed, blackguarded and destroyed young people in this country. I can give an example from last Thursday's *The Irish Times*. There might not be as many builders running into the Fianna Fáil tent at the Galway Races next year. They might be on

the Green Party's bicycles next year because they will not be in their Mercs.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: They will have their bicycle clips ready.

Deputy Michael Ring: They will not have the money next year to be throwing it into Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Seán Power: Fine Gael has a tent at Punchestown. The Deputy should not lecture us about the Galway Races.

Deputy Michael Ring: *The Irish Times* reported last Thursday that builders and developers had been able to drop the price of houses — not by €1,000, not by €5,000 but by €100,000. Shame on them because if they could sell the houses for €100,000 less last week, they should have sold them for €100,000 less last year.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is a good point.

Deputy Michael Ring: They were robbing the young people of this country by mortgaging them in a way that puts them under pressure for the next 40 years. Thanks be to God that the good days are over for the builders because they ripped off the young people of this country when they had the opportunity to do so. They blackguarded them. Having spoken to auctioneers, I know they were not satisfied to be getting €400,000 for houses which had been valued at €180,000. People are not buying houses off the plans — or off *The Irish Times* or the *Irish Independent* — anymore. I sometimes wonder whether there is a God, but I know now there is when I see what is happening to the builders who misbehaved over recent years.

The Minister for Finance could have helped young people by reforming stamp duty and doing something in relation to mortgages, but he did not do so. He thought the boom would never end. The Government has squandered the boom and destroyed the country. The Minister, Deputy Cowen, who thinks he will be Taoiseach within a few months, is depending on increased growth next year. He was sitting where the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Power, is sitting now when he told us last year there would be a budget surplus of €1.7 billion this year. Instead of that, we will have to borrow €5 billion this year.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is appalling.

Deputy Michael Ring: Shame on the Minister.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Absolutely.

Deputy Michael Ring: He could not manage the country——

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is a disgrace.

Deputy Michael Ring: —at a time when it was going well.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Ring: He squandered our boom. He squandered our future.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Ring: Now we are back to the hairshirt budgets again.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Curran: This is not a hairshirt budget.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Government will know before next year that the increase of 7% or 14% in the health budget will not pay for the wage increases under the benchmarking process. It will not even meet inflation, and by God will we have inflation given that medical inflation is twice as high again. People protested about cancer services outside the Dáil a few weeks ago. People are waiting for hip operations, or heart operations. I spoke the other day to a 92 year old woman who has been waiting for 15 months for a cataract operation that takes six minutes.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is not unusual.

Deputy Niall Blaney: Deputy Ring should have told the woman about the National Treatment Purchase Fund.

Deputy Michael Ring: Deputy Blaney's uncle would turn in his grave if he heard that. The Minister for Health and Children, the Department of Health and Children and the Government, rather than the National Treatment Purchase Fund, should be providing such services. We should not have to send our loved ones to England or Northern Ireland to be operated on.

Deputy John Curran: We are not.

Deputy Michael Ring: We are not able to do it here despite all the money we are spending on health. We should be doing it here. Is the National Treatment Purchase Fund the best answer Deputy Blaney can come up with? His comments remind me of the reply I received today when I tabled a question to the Minister for Education and Science about the results of a young man's junior certificate examination. The Deputies opposite should listen to this as an example of the kind of country we have now. Deputy Blaney was very quiet when he was an Independent. Has he found a mouth now that he has joined Fianna Fáil?

Deputy Niall Blaney: It is not as loud as the Deputy's mouth.

Deputy Michael Ring: Has the chairmanship improved the Deputy? I want to tell him about a young man whose future was affected by the Government.

Deputy Niall Blaney: What about the budget?

Deputy Michael Ring: We are paying people to correct exams. Perhaps Deputy Blaney once worked as a teacher — if so, he will understand what I am about to say. The young man in question did his examinations and got his results. His teacher said that the result of one examination, which the young man had supposedly failed, could not be correct because he was the best in his class at the subject in question. When the result was reviewed, it was discovered that a mistake had been made and the grade was changed to an "A", rather than a fail. When I asked the Minister, Deputy Hanafin, about it today, she told me she has no responsibility for the matter. Deputy Blaney made a similar comment a moment ago. That is what is wrong with the Government — it takes responsibility for nothing. The country is being run by report, commission and regulation.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Ring: Ministers are not responsible for anything anymore. The country is being run by commissioners, regulators and EU officials.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: And consultants and advisers.

Deputy Michael Ring: I would like to return to the issue of health. What are we doing with medical cards? People on social welfare do not even qualify anymore, when the rules and regulations are implemented strictly, because the guidelines have not been changed properly in the last few years. We are to have another review. More consultants will be asked to look at the matter. It is very simple — we should increase the limits and look after those who need to be looked after.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is not rocket science.

Deputy Michael Ring: It is like another matter I used to raise in the House.

Acting Chairman: The Deputy has one minute remaining.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is a pity.

Deputy Michael Ring: I am only getting going.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Deputy Ring has plenty of material.

Deputy John Curran: He will be able to sit and listen.

Deputy Michael Ring: If the best the Deputies opposite can come up with is a reference to the National Treatment Purchase Scheme, like Deputy Blaney, I do not want to hear what they have to say.

Deputy John Curran: That is the problem.

Deputy Michael Ring: I am sure the scriptwriters have handed the Government Deputies their scripts and they will have to read them. Who wrote Deputy Curran's script? Which Department is responsible for it? Was it the official in the Chamber? Was it the programme manager? Was it John Dowling? Who wrote it? That is the new thing now.

Deputy John Curran: I am sure the Deputy will stay in the Chamber to hear it.

Deputy Michael Ring: I want to finish by talking about the carbon tax — the green tax.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Yes.

Deputy Michael Ring: It is a tax increase for rural Ireland. I think the carbon tax should be introduced in the cities only because that is where all the carbon is being used. Where I live, there are nothing but potholes on our bad roads. We have no infrastructure and no water and sewerage schemes.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is right.

Deputy Michael Ring: We should have proper roads and proper infrastructure before we start to introduce a carbon tax and an extra road tax.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Ring: Instead of having proper train and bus services, we have——

Deputy Seán Power: That is a great advertisement for Mayo tourism.

Deputy Michael Ring: It is a bit like the football team in the Minister of State's county. Mayo has been waiting as long for the Government to look after it as Kildare has been waiting for an All-Ireland.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: There will be a small crowd in the tent the next time.

Deputy Niall Blaney: I wish to share time with Deputies Curran, White and Gogarty. It would be hard to follow that rant.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Deputy can bring his prepared script.

Deputy Bernard Durkan: It was not a rant, it was a well-delivered body blow.

Deputy Niall Blaney: That is one thing about Deputy Ring. I look forward to his coming to the House because he provides a bit of entertainment, although that is about all he does.

Deputy Michael Ring: I am not a turncoat like Deputy Blaney.

Deputy Niall Blaney: We will see who can listen now.

Deputy Michael Ring: He took the Queen's shilling.

Deputy Niall Blaney: Deputy Durkan referred to jobs in Donegal. I must inform him that employment has never been as high in Donegal as it is at present. The workers who lost their jobs were re-skilled and they are now back in employment.

Deputy Bernard Durkan: There have been 10,000 job losses.

Deputy Niall Blaney: That is the reality. How many are out of work?

Deputy Bernard Durkan: Ten thousand jobs have been relocated from Donegal. That is only one county.

Deputy Niall Blaney: The Deputies only want to look at the negative side.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Unemployment in Donegal is the highest in Ireland.

Deputy Niall Blaney: Deputy Crawford referred to agriculture. He has always talked a lot about dairying. He did not refer to dairying tonight because milk is doing a lot better than it has in recent years as a result of work done by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Deputy Mary Coughlan. Deputy Crawford also referred to a motorway and the N2 and N3. I do not know how many times the Taoiseach needs to announce the amount of money being set aside for that motorway — £400 million — before the Deputy will realise that the money is there and waiting. As soon as the authorities and the NRA get things up and running that money can be spent. Even Ian Paisley, while on a visit to America last year, acknowledged the £400 million that has been allocated by the Irish Government. I do not know why Deputy Crawford is looking for more money for a motorway from Dublin. He is not up with the facts at all.

[Deputy Niall Blaney.]

Deputy Ring referred to builders. His party had a period in charge of finance. If this had continued there would be no jobs left in this country.

Deputy Michael Ring: There are not too many in Donegal.

Deputy Niall Blaney: The Deputy fails to realise——

Deputy Michael Ring: Ten thousand jobs are gone. It has the highest unemployment in the country.

Deputy Niall Blaney: I listened to the Deputy shouting for long enough. He should listen for a while.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Deputy is talking about sterling even though he lives in Donegal.

Deputy Niall Blaney: The Deputy should calm down and listen for a while.

Deputy Michael Ring: Is the Deputy mixed up? He thinks he is in the Six Counties.

Deputy Niall Blaney: There would not be a job left in the country if the Deputy's party got going.

Health and the pay increases in this area were mentioned. There would be nobody working in any sector if the Deputies' party had its way. Let us consider current issues such as the cancer strategy, to which Fine Gael is opposed.

Deputy Michael Ring: Not in Letterkenny.

Deputy Bernard Durkan: It is closing down hospitals.

Deputy Niall Blaney: Let us go back and revisit Portlaoise.

Deputy Bernard Durkan: It is closing down hospitals all over the country.

Deputy Niall Blaney: The problems at Portlaoise began while Fine Gael was in Government, with Deputy Noonan as Minister for Health. The Deputies, who were on the back benches, got him to overturn his strategy. He was trying to do then what the current Minister, Deputy Harney, is trying to do now.

Deputy Bernard Durkan: Who abolished the health boards?

Deputy Niall Blaney: If the Fine Gael Deputies had any guts at all——

Deputy Michael Ring: The HSE abolished them. Has the Deputy ever heard of it?

Acting Chairman: Please allow the Deputy to continue.

Deputy Niall Blaney: ——they would support the cancer strategy for the good of the patients.

Deputy Bernard Durkan: Who abolished the health boards? This is appalling, Chairman.

Deputy Niall Blaney: Instead they are looking after their own backsides and the seats in their own areas.

Deputy Michael Ring: I have no responsibility for the HSE. Did the Deputy ever hear of it?

Deputy Niall Blaney: It is time the Deputy took some responsibility for health rather than looking after his own seat, which is all he is doing.

Deputy Bernard Durkan: The Minister is powerless.

Deputy Niall Blaney: The last few speakers failed to realise that we are supposed to be debating the budget. I do not think they knew what they were speaking on. Much has been said about the budget delivered by the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Cowen, last week.

Deputy Michael Ring: We will have to get the Deputy a scriptwriter.

Deputy Niall Blaney: Most of it was positive but we have had the usual claptrap from the negative quarters across the way. I find it amusing that the only argument some politicians could muster was that some of the measures should have been introduced before now. That makes for a pretty good budget.

The most talked about element of the budget was, rightly, stamp duty reform as most would agree with it. The Government took a brave step and I commend the Minister, Deputy Cowen, for doing this. We will reap the benefits of this measure over the next year. The slowdown in the housing market has begun, but it will level out again. Equally, the rise in mortgage interest relief will benefit many who have already invested in homes, thus easing the burden on those who are currently investing in our economy.

The environment was a hot topic in the budget, in which a range of measures planned for the coming year and the years ahead was introduced. Motor tax and VRT have been mentioned. Due to the changes in the VRT regime, many cars already in the Irish market will become much cheaper. I have been informed that a BMW 320 could be reduced in price by €8,200 as a result of these measures. This is a brave step by the Minister because it puts the onus on those producing the cars to build cars that produce fewer emissions. It is a smart measure which is typical of the other measures introduced in what is overall a smart budget.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: What about the Greens?

Deputy Bernard Durkan: I hope the poor Greens come out as well in this.

Deputy Niall Blaney: On the matter of energy conservation research and carbon reduction measures, while some might feel that the planned VRT and motor tax measures are harsh, one must look beyond initial reactions. We owe it to our environment to introduce such measures based on CO₂ emissions rather than engine size. Our children will thank us in years to come.

The changes in personal income tax affect all of us, including the increase in personal tax credits of €70 for single persons and €140 for married persons and the increase in PAYE tax credit of €70 per year. The home carer tax credit was also hiked by €130 per year, increasing it to €900.

Acting Chairman: The Deputy has one minute remaining.

Deputy Bernard Durkan: One minute to midnight.

Deputy Niall Blaney: There are so many items, I could go on.

Deputy Michael Ring: We do not mind. The Acting Chairman should let the Deputy continue.

Deputy Niall Blaney: The figures that the Deputies across the way——

Deputy Michael Ring: We want to hear it.

Acting Chairman: The Deputies got their time.

Deputy Niall Blaney: The Deputies across the way are blind to some of the more positive figures. I could go on but I will finish by saying that I am very proud to be associated with the budget as delivered in the House last week by the Minister, Deputy Cowen. This forward-thinking Government continues to lay strong foundations for this country's future. Our children will look back and thank us for the sensible measures introduced in the budget. History will prove that by the actions of this Government in its third term in office Ireland will be continue to be a proud example to other economies around the world.

Deputy John Curran: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I compliment the Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen, on delivering a balanced budget in more difficult economic times than in recent years. It was a prudent budget which maintains public services while providing for significant growth in our capital programme. Listening to the delivery of the Budget Statement and reading the reports in the newspapers, it is clear that it inspires business confidence, which is important.

I acknowledge the fact that Deputies Ring and Durkan have stayed in the House for a few minutes.

Deputy Michael Ring: We wanted to hear the Deputy's speech.

Deputy Bernard Durkan: Bring it on.

Deputy John Curran: It is important that they hear our views on where we see Ireland. It is certainly not the picture that the Deputies tried to portray earlier. Deputy Ring referred in his comments to the budgets of 1995 to 1997 and made a big issue of delivering a budget surplus. He was critical of the Government's borrowing of €5 billion.

Deputy Michael Ring: Yes.

Deputy John Curran: I will go back to 1995 and 1997 in a moment, but to put it in context, the reason we are borrowing this money——

Deputy Michael Ring: It is because the Government squandered it.

Deputy John Curran: The reason we are borrowing €5 billion is to maintain a significant capital programme. We will not have stop-start development of infrastructure. The money we are borrowing is about 0.9% of GDP.

Before Deputy Ring leaves, there is one comment I want to make which he might find interesting. He comes in here——

Deputy Bernard Durkan: Actually, he is disappointed.

Deputy John Curran: I will let the Deputy go after this.

Deputy Michael Ring: I wanted to hear Deputy Curran's speech, but it is rubbish.

Deputy John Curran: I do not have a prepared script, but I have been making notes on comments made earlier.

Deputy Michael Ring: Did the Deputy throw away the prepared script?

Deputy Bernard Durkan: His scriptwriter has been made redundant. It is another job loss.

Deputy John Curran: Deputy Ring made a big issue of the fact that in the period 1995 to 1997 the coalition Government returned a budget surplus. It did so but, to its shame, it did it by abandoning those in need. It delivered the most miserable social welfare increases——

Deputy John Browne: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Curran: ——at that time.

Deputy Niall Blaney: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Curran: It was on the backs of the vulnerable people in this country.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Bernard Durkan: We created 4,000 new jobs a week.

Deputy John Curran: It was on the backs of those people that Deputy Ring stood up tonight to boast about the budget surpluses. The Deputy's party walked away from them.

Deputy Michael Ring: Deputy Curran's party squandered it.

Deputy John Curran: It was the most miserable——

Deputy Michael Ring: They let the poor get poorer and the rich richer.

Acting Chairman: Allow the Deputy to continue.

Deputy Niall Blaney: Those are the facts.

Deputy John Curran: It was the most miserable increase in social welfare ever, but the Deputy boasted that his party produced a budget surplus.

Deputy Michael Ring: We had a better economy than the current one.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Much better.

Deputy John Curran: Fine Gael did not have a better economy by any stretch of the imagination.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The emphasis was on people, not horses.

Deputy John Curran: Deputy Ring is living in a dream world. To turn around and say that the economy of 1995, 1996 or 1997 was better than the economy we have now is a load of rubbish.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It was improving. One could buy a house.

Deputy Michael Ring: On one salary.

Deputy John Curran: Fine Gael had a budget surplus in one respect, but it abandoned the vulnerable people and its social welfare budget was a disgrace.

Deputy Niall Blaney: That is why the Deputies are over there.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Deputy Blaney will be over here soon enough. He will recognise the furniture.

Deputy John Curran: Deputy Durkan spoke about Ireland being less competitive and jobs moving from Donegal and so forth. We heard Deputy Blaney refer to the workforce being reskilled and re-employed.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The jobs are gone.

Acting Chairman: Order.

Deputy John Curran: It is worth noting that we have the highest ever number of people working, approximately 2.1 million. The Deputies should not talk us into a recession because that is not where we are going. It is important to remember——

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: We are not talking. The Government is creating a recession by itself.

Deputy John Curran: The Deputy is correct in that we will not be competitive if it comes to making T-shirts, but we are creating jobs in products higher up the value chain, such as research and development, biotechnology and so forth, and adding value.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Explain it to the world's economists.

Deputy John Curran: The Deputy should not talk us into a recession.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: We are in it.

Deputy John Curran: I acknowledge that we are not competitive when it comes to making T-shirts.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The problem is that the Government did not take preventive measures.

Acting Chairman: Deputy Durkan should let Deputy Curran continue.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I am sorry, but he is upsetting me.

Deputy John Curran: A number of speakers stated that the good times are gone and we have squandered the money, but we have not. We have invested the money in a significant range of services and infrastructure. Less than a decade ago, special needs education did not exist in this country. Between resource teachers and special needs assistants, there are approximately 17,000 people employed today. When people on the opposite side stand up to speak, they do not acknowledge this fact. There are 8,000 SNAs alone. We have invested the resources we have created in the past decade.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: And increased the national debt. The Government has increased the burden on the people.

Deputy John Curran: In a range of services, we have looked after the most vulnerable, the poor and the elderly in ways that had not been done previously.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: What of the homeless?

Deputy John Curran: There have been real increases in child benefit. We introduced the early child care supplement. This range of services would not have been possible one decade ago.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: What of medical cards?

Deputy John Curran: To say this is a waste or squander is untrue. Those people who are the beneficiaries and recipients—

(Interruptions).

Acting Chairman: Allow the Deputy to continue.

Deputy John Curran: —of the payments would not agree with the Deputy. How many minutes have I left?

Acting Chairman: The Deputy has more than two minutes remaining.

Deputy John Curran: On a serious note, I have listened to many contributions on the budget debate. During the Minister's pre-budget outlook, we discussed existing levels of service, ELS. I sit on the Committee of Public Accounts, which examines Department's outturns and was chaired by Deputy Noonan in recent years. It is not fair to suggest that changes do not take place because they do. In the five years I have been a member of the PAC, all of the new projects in our roads programme are coming in on time and within budget because of the changes that have been made instead of coming in late and over budget consistently.

Deputy John Browne: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Curran: We must tackle and perform a major review of ELS across the public service.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Benchmarking.

Deputy John Curran: Were it a private company, we would expect and anticipate to—

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It would be relocated to a more competitive economy.

Acting Chairman: Allow the Deputy to continue.

Deputy John Curran: —continue providing ELS at a reduced cost, that there would be innovation and an increased use of technology. Everyone needs to buy into it, not just frontline managers, but unions, workers—

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Programme managers.

Deputy John Curran: I am discussing the public service.

Deputy John Browne: Fine Gael is the only party to have had programme managers.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Advisers and soothsayers.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Spin doctors.

Acting Chairman: No one interrupted Deputy Durkan.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I am sorry and will not do it again.

Acting Chairman: Please, or I must ask the Deputy to leave.

Deputy John Curran: If we are to maintain existing levels of service and introduce new programmes and services, we must find greater efficiencies in the public service. The services being delivered across all Departments must be analysed with a strategic view to providing them next year at a reduced level, not at this year's level plus the rate of inflation. This is what private industry strives to and succeeds in doing. We must introduce the same levels into the public service.

Deputy Mary Alexandra White: I am pleased both to be speaking this evening and to be a Member of the House at the time of the first green budget in the history of the State.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is telling the Fianna Fáil Deputies.

Deputy Mary Alexandra White: It is a proud moment for the Green Party. There are three areas of the budget that I would like to discuss, namely, the environment, social justice and increased provisions for women.

On the issue of the environment, I would like to share the sentiments expressed by my party leader last week that this budget is the first to include significant green measures and that is due to the presence of the Green Party in government. The overhaul of vehicle registration tax so that the tax is centred on a car's CO₂ emissions and not engine size, combined with the extension

[Deputy Mary Alexandra White.]

of incentives for hybrid cars and VRT exemption for electric mopeds, will increase awareness of the need to minimise carbon use. It is long overdue, but nevertheless welcome. As someone who has converted to the merits of bio-fuel, I believe the budget announcement on VAT reduction on certain seeds and bulbs for growing bio-fuels will help the industry to develop.

The battle to address climate change requires more than just more energy efficient and smaller engines; it requires a societal and industrial revolution away from oil towards renewable energies. The targeted incentives for businesses to switch to renewable energies, such as the tax credit allowing companies to write off 100% of capital spending on energy-saving technologies, the €13 million provided for energy conservation and €7 million for energy research, including the study of ocean energy, are all examples of forward thinking measures that have been delivered. The measures announced by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in Ireland's first ever carbon budget last Thursday complemented these measures. The initiative of banning the incandescent light bulb by 2009 is the talk of the town in Bali this week.

Social justice has always been and remains at the core of the Green Party's political philosophy. The budget is socially progressive. More than half of this year's budget has been allocated to social welfare and child benefit. All tax credits and bands were increased in line with inflation. Low income earners were kept out of the standard rate band and middle income earners were kept out of the higher rate band, as was promised in the programme for Government. The Green Party has worked hard to ensure that the qualified adult allowance for over 66 year olds was increased in this budget by 15%. The Green Party is also proud of its influence in ensuring the respite care grants will increase next year by €200 to €1,700. These provisions are targeted at some of the neediest in society and all sides of the House should support the increases. Those most in need in the developing world have also been remembered in this budget, as seen in the overseas development fund increase of €83 million to 0.54% of GDP in 2008.

As the Green Party spokesperson on women's affairs, I welcome the provisions for women and mothers in the budget. The €100 increase in the early child care supplement will mean the payment is increased to €1,100 per year. The Minister, Deputy Cowen, has taken on board a key component of the programme for Government by doubling the income eligibility for parents of children less than six years of age and the trebling of the income eligibility for parents of children with an intellectual disability less than 18 years of age. These measures will hopefully give some comfort both to parents of children with special intellectual needs and parents trying to pay for the costs of child care.

Much more needs to be done in many areas of social welfare, tax reform, State funding and environmental protection. One budget will not address all the challenges of redistribution and equality, increased spending and investment in services and human capital and the immense environmental challenges upon us such as climate change. It is only the first of five budgets the Green Party will deliver with its partners in Government. It is only a beginning. I am aware of my party colleague Deputy Gogarty's hope for more targeted spending on education in the budget. Like him, I look forward to well targeted funding for primary, secondary and third level education. However, this is a start. This is a progressive and environmentally responsible budget.

Deputy Paul Gogarty: Deputy Ring mentioned scripts. I put one together and assure him, if he is watching on the monitor, that it is made up entirely of my own words. No one has put a muzzle on me or tied one of my hands behind my back. I can express my opinion. It is a free country and I am in a free party.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: We will convey the message.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: We will tell them.

Deputy Paul Gogarty: When my Green Party parliamentary colleagues and I signed up to the programme for Government, we pledged to vote as part of a three party coalition, barring exceptional circumstances, until the end of the Government's five year term of office. The Government has my vote but no Government will take away my conscience. In all conscience I cannot give the budget a ringing endorsement. It is like the proverbial curate's egg — good in parts but with bits that would turn one's stomach, no more so than in the area of education.

The programme for Government expressly states the Government will commit each year to allocate an additional €350 million over and above existing levels of service. That in itself falls well short of the investment needed but it certainly pointed in the right direction. Instead, if we add the figures, we get a figure of approximately €95 million, a clear breach of the programme for Government and not a good start.

I can take all the snipes about sell-outs on Tara, Shannon Airport and stopping current incineration projects, knowing wholeheartedly that these were never going to happen with just six Green Party seats, regardless of which of the two larger parties headed the Government, but a breach of promises and achievements made as part of negotiations is a different story.

When a well respected and highly competent Minister for Finance says money is tight, we must listen but at the same time it is one's duty to query where the sword fell and why. There is some welcome extra money for education thanks

to the efforts of the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Hanafin, and also due to the Green Party's participation in government, but it falls well short of what was promised following negotiations, budgetary fiscal caveats or not.

At least, more funding has been provided for school buildings. I look forward to the new developing areas section of the Department working to identify and provide new schools alongside housing development, aided by forthcoming legislation from the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, but other than that increases for education have been relatively paltry and are stretched to meet even the existing national development plan commitments, let alone additional projects. I am aware the economic outlook is tightening but that is all the more reason for investing in the education system.

The Minister for Finance had a number of options. He could have reprioritised existing spending. The stamp duty changes come to mind. Given that the housing market will continue to fall and perhaps correct itself and allow first-time buyers obtain more affordable houses, the real measures should be aimed at those facing negative equity. He could have reprioritised existing spending in that or other areas. He could also have raised taxes, a brave decision which was not going to happen on any side of the House, or borrowed more to fund educational projects. As I will continue to say until I am blue in the face, investment in education makes sense. It is the morally and fiscally correct thing to do but, perhaps regrettably, not the politically astute thing to do.

The trouble with the political system is that everything is geared towards the next election. That is perhaps one reason the Minister did not see the benefit in investing in education now to reap rewards in ten or 12 years' time and the reason potential Ministers in the Opposition did not give any indication in the past 12 months that they would do anything different. Investing to address the adult literacy problem helps to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage. Investing in educational welfare officers and backup services helps to break the cycle of school absenteeism which leads to the dole queue, a dead end job or a prison cell. Those are all forthright reasons for investing in education but also taxpayers' money goes down the drain if we put someone into a young offenders centre or prison. It is a no brainer.

The same applies to investment in National Educational Psychological Service psychologists, further education and training, breakfast and after-school clubs, and sports and recreational facilities in schools. It applies also to investment in training for life skills, tackling bullying, coping with our drug and alcohol addicted society — I saw more than one Deputy in the Dáil bar tonight drinking alcohol while the Dáil was still in session, of which I do not approve — and prepar-

ing for a future of climate change and energy shortages. That is a more austere scenario, whichever way one looks at it, but one to which we can make the transition successfully if we can mobilise society to maximise the long-term potential of the island.

Deputy White mentioned some of the welcome investments in research and development in the energy field. That investment must be matched at the higher education level also. We must be innovators in that technology, rather than simply facilitate companies in coming here. We could export energy supplies in 20 or 30 years' time. We must maximise that potential. It will cost money but in real terms it would cost far less taxpayers' money to deal with the problems now instead of after elections some years from now. We have a mixed bag instead.

My esteemed colleague, Deputy Mary White, outlined a long list of positive achievements in the budget. Like her, I welcome the measures, particularly those that move us towards a sustainable green economy. I welcome the increases over the rate of inflation for pensioners, the additions to the respite care grant, increased child benefit and the extension of the medical card scheme.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: When will they be brought forward?

Deputy Paul Gogarty: The Minister, generally, showed prudence, responsibility and a firm hand but what the Government, collectively, did not show was a vision on the education front to transform society, ignore short-term political considerations and invest prudently for the future. I am embarrassed by this aspect of the budget, especially considering the work I put into outlining the case for educational investment in the past few years, although the Government is not alone in its lack of vision for education and commitment to substantially increase funding in the long term. As I pointed out in Dáil debates earlier this year, before the general election, the major Opposition parties had not taken education seriously either. They sniped but refused to commit to a long-term funding package—

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Everybody is wrong but the Deputy.

Deputy Paul Gogarty: That is no consolation, even from a petty political point scoring point of view.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Why did the Deputy not vote against them?

Deputy Paul Gogarty: I am talking about a vision.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: What about the vision when the Deputy walked through the lobbies with the Government?

Deputy Paul Gogarty: I will tell you.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Let us hear it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Will Deputy Gogarty refer his remarks through the Chair?

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Let us hear it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Connaughton should allow Deputy Gogarty to conclude.

Deputy Paul Gogarty: As I said in the first sentence of my contribution, I signed up to vote with the Government as part of the programme for Government and will continue to do so. My vote is given but my conscience is not.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: I understand. The Deputy wrestled with his conscience and it lost.

Deputy Paul Gogarty: I want to see a country where the education needs of the citizenry are recognised and funded, where potential is realised and cost savings are made through lower crime rates, lower incarceration costs and a healthier, more literate and more creative population. That is not just my vision; it is the vision of many education partners the length and breadth of the island. It is clear, however — Opposition Deputies might listen to this aspect — that we need another Tallaght strategy, this time on education. There must be cross-party agreement that investment is needed, that this issue is beyond point-scoring and that any short-term pain will be addressed in the medium term. Would that not be a legacy for the elected representatives of today to look forward to?

Deputy Paul Connaughton: We did it before.

Deputy Paul Gogarty: We would be able to say we looked beyond covering our own political backsides. I urge elected representatives of all parties to put the short-term view aside—

Deputy Paul Connaughton: When you are in trouble.

Deputy Paul Gogarty: —and put pressure on the Minister and Opposition Finance and Education spokespersons to commit to funding education in a serious way, to move well beyond the figure of €1 billion in additional investment outlined by the Green Party and to make thinking about education part of the everyday vocabulary, until such time as voters and the political establishment see it as second nature. Until we act in this visionary and collective manner, we will continue to short-change existing and future generations. We will continue to place higher costs on the nation than we need to, particularly hard-pressed taxpayers in the middle income brackets.

We will continue to favour the privileged over those who most need our help.

I welcome many of the measures in the budget but I also regret that it did not live up to its potential. I am an optimist, however, and there is always next year. I will be watching the Minister closely and sincerely hope the deficits in an otherwise good budget will be addressed in 12 months' time. All parties failed to show the necessary commitment to education. They failed to outline the costings and from where the money would come. We need that type of vision now. Politics and petty arguments must be put aside and a Tallaght strategy put in place for all to work together for the future.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: I wish to share time with Deputies Paul Connaughton and Joe Carey.

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

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Like my colleague, Deputy Connaughton, I have witnessed many Budget Statements in the House. Some were good, some bad and some mediocre. It is difficult to state into what category this budget fits.

There has been a dramatic change between last year's circumstances and Wednesday's. Last year, the Exchequer had a surplus of almost €5 billion but this year it has a deficit of €2 billion. A problem was created somewhere along the line. No matter what spin is put on it, the Government must accept responsibility for this development.

The spin doctors did a great job for once when they primed the country to expect the hardest hairshirt budget in memory. It turned out otherwise because the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance failed to face up to the realities of the situation.

This year, €5 billion will be borrowed for capital purposes. We cannot quibble with this as infrastructural development must be brought up to average European levels if we wish to be competitive economically and to hold on to jobs. I am long enough in the House, however, to recall how it could lead to a slippery slope in borrowing. I hope we do not fall into a cycle of borrowing for every budget until we reach the similar situation reached some years ago when all income taxes went to service the national debt. We will never allow Fianna Fáil to get away with that.

Up to €21 million has been set aside for the decommissioning of the whitefish fleet. Some years ago, a similar scheme was announced but with a €59 million package. Some €59 million to €21 million is a drastic reduction.

There is an undertaking to amend the tax code to assist and maximise the take-up of the decommissioning payment. I have nothing against that as it happens in other lines of business. A laid-off factory worker's redundancy payment will be tax free. This year when drift net fishing was terminated and salmon fishermen were no longer

allowed to pursue their traditional methods of fishing, their compensation package was not as generous as the whitefish fleet one and was liable for tax. Why can the same tax code applied to the whitefish fleet not be applied to the salmon fishermen? The Minister of State in his previous post will be familiar with this and I ask him to bring it to the attention of the Minister.

The Green Party's fingerprints are all over the proposals on vehicle registration tax, VRT. All parties are in favour of this. While it does not belong to one party, I accept the Green Party led the way. It is well known that many people purchase new vehicles in the first six months of the year. Many have already done their deals and will collect their new vehicles in the first fortnight in January. One man I know will be buying a Renault Laguna, the VRT on which will be reduced next July from 25% to 16%, a saving of €2,000. Since he already has the deal concluded for January, he will lose that saving. It is not fair that he is penalised. Can the new VRT regime be introduced in January? Failing that, can a refund can be organised for those affected when the new regime comes into effect in July?

Whatever is claimed about the schools building programme, a new stealth tax, water charges, will be imposed on every school in the new year. I am a former school principal and have been in touch with many schools in the Donegal South-West constituency on this matter. This year schools will have paid €336 for water but next year, when they are metered, it could rise to thousands of euro. These are schools where the boards of management, principals and teachers are engaged daily in raising money to keep their schools going. These new charges will put an intolerable burden on them. Will the Ministers for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Education and Science examine this issue?

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Much has been said about this budget and I have heard many Budget Statements in the House. I will give the Government one bit of credit on this. As far as spin is concerned, it is top of the pops. It conditioned the entire electorate into believing this year's budget day would be the darkest day in history. However, we knew better.

This time the Government balanced the books by borrowing €5 billion. This country is fortunate that it has the flexibility to do that and there is no wrong in it. As Deputy McGinley asked, however, how did it get so bad so quickly?

I was on the hustings on the first week of May—

Deputy John Browne: I was too.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: —when the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance stated at one of their great press conferences that, on a predicted growth rate of 4% for 2008, the Government would be able to do A, B, X and

Y, reduce the top and bottom rate of tax, reduce PRSI by 2% and give out medical cards like confetti. Only the Government knew what was really in the books. The Opposition did not because it did not have its hand on the tiller.

Deputy John Browne: The Opposition made plenty of promises too.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: We were reading the tea leaves.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: All we could do was read between the lines. Six months ago, the Government led the country astray. Outright lies were told about the state of the economy. What would have happened if the economic growth rate for 2008 was only 1% or 2%?

Many great opportunities were lost. When the Dáil met in June, the Opposition implored the Government to tackle the stamp duty issue to give the housing market a chance. The Taoiseach said over his dead body would there be changes to the stamp duty regime as it was not what the building industry needed. The Minister of State knows what happened on the road to Damascus. Suddenly reforming stamp duty was the thing to do in the budget. Why was that conversion so dramatic? The Government had an eye to the tent in Galway. They are the lads who call the tune to which the Government dances.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: They call it inside and outside the tent.

Deputy John Browne: Many of the builders support Fine Gael.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Many commentators gave the thumbs up to the budget although it has little to do with agriculture. The Minister received credit for making available another €30 million to continue the 60% grant for the farm pollution scheme. Why would she not? It was announced three years ago and there is a written contract with every farmer to the effect the grant is available. It was announced approximately five times. Had she not made it available she would have broken a contract with every farmer in the country.

Deputy John Browne: The Minister is doing a great job.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: I know that well and the Minister of State is good too.

The Minister was not so forthcoming with the 40% for the farm improvement scheme. Just before the general election, on a fine morning at the great press conferences, I heard there would be a 40% grant for every farmer in the country for matters relating to the environment, up to 2013. Lo and behold on 31 October the hatch was raised and there is no grant available. That was

[Deputy Paul Connaughton.]

not mentioned in the budget. I am probably the only person who has spoken about it.

Promises were broken and there is no value for money and it does not appear that through benchmarking there will be a process to create better value for money. Unlike the famous day when the former Minister for Finance, Mr. Charlie McCreevy, started his budget speech by talking about decentralisation there was not a squeak out of the Minister about it this time because the Government knows it has made a hames of the programme.

My party is totally committed to decentralisation.

Deputy John Browne: Not really.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: We did as much as anyone else on it when we were in Government but we never excluded the stakeholders. That is where the Government made a terrible mistake.

How much time do I have, a Leas Cheann Comhairle?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is seven minutes left in the slot.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: I will leave it at that because I do not like to cut into my colleagues' time. I am sorry, however, we do not have another half an hour.

Deputy John Browne: I was in Galway recently visiting the Marine Institute which has 200 staff.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: The Government is making a hames of it.

Deputy Joe Carey: I welcome this opportunity to speak on the first budget since I became a Member of this House.

I am deeply disturbed that this Government sees fit to borrow €5 billion in the face of a modest slow down in the economy because this sets a mark of things to come from this supposedly new Green Government. It is alarming that the Minister for Finance has overseen such a plunge in the public finances from a €2.3 billion Exchequer surplus in 2006 to a €4.9 billion borrowing requirement in 2008.

In years to come, if this borrowing continues, we will be back to where we were, in debt up to our eyes with nothing to show for it but a wasted opportunity. The Minister for Finance blamed global markets for the slowdown in this country. The Minister and the Government have allowed the economy to rely too much on the building sector. That was fine while there was confidence in the housing market but now we are feeling the pain as tax receipts have plummeted because of the loss in confidence and the Government stood idly by.

I welcome the reform in stamp duty, but why has it taken so long for the Government to realise

that change was necessary? Rising interest rates and building inflation suggest the Minister has missed the boat. I hope this will stimulate the housing market but I have reservations.

This summer the economic future of the mid west and County Clare was plunged into great uncertainty when Aer Lingus announced its withdrawal from the Shannon-Heathrow service. The fall-out from this nonsensical decision will have far-reaching implications for the business and tourism interests in the mid west. The Government holds 25.4% of the shares in Aer Lingus to protect the country's strategic interests. It could intervene in this decision but refuses to do so. The Minister for Transport continues to ignore these facts and I urge him to meet with the British authorities to discuss this and agree to designate the Shannon-Heathrow service as a public service obligation, PSO, route. This option remains open to the Minister but to judge by replies I have received to parliamentary questions he and his officials are not giving it a fair deal. It would restore connectivity to the mid west.

Prior to this year's general election the former Minister for Transport stated that a large package would be put in place for Shannon in response to the publication of the tourism and economic development plan published by the Mid West Regional Authority. I am disgusted that the new Minister for Transport, Deputy Noel Dempsey, and the Government seem to be renegeing on this promise as there is no provision for it in this budget.

The Government has lost significant support in the mid-west because of its inaction on the Shannon-Heathrow issue. Budget 2008 provided a great opportunity to regain some of this support but instead the Government is breaking another promise by not delivering the €53 million package to Shannon. This package could help Shannon Airport to secure 30% of the direct transatlantic market and provide a vital leg-up to the Shannon region in an open skies era. It is incredible that the Minister and officials from the Department of Transport who had an input into the formulation of the plan are ignoring it. I can see no provision in the budget for movement on the rail link to Shannon Airport. Every modern functioning airport in the Western world has access to rail except those in Ireland. I ask the Minister to prioritise the delivery of the rail link to Shannon Airport in the interest of the region.

This budget does not go far enough in provision for education. There will be no action next year to reduce class size. This is a clear breach of the agenda set out in the programme for Government. It is not acceptable that students continue to be educated in overcrowded classrooms. The Government's record on this issue is damning. This budget provided it with an opportunity to address class size and it failed.

I urge the Minister for Education and Science to announce in early January what projects will

go ahead next year because so many schools are held up waiting for this announcement.

I am most disappointed that the Minister for Finance did not announce any reform of the medical card. It is clear the thresholds need to be dramatically increased.

As Fine Gael spokesperson on juvenile justice I am disappointed with the reduction of €5 million in the capital budget for the youth justice service. While I acknowledge that much work has been done recently to establish the service one of the shortcomings in the system is the need for capital improvements. The capital spend in this area is designed to provide for the physical development of the service which cannot happen without the proper funding. The youth justice service works with children and deals with the consequences of their being in trouble with the law. It focuses on rehabilitation and, only as a last resort, detention. This system could provide many young people with a lifeline which would keep them out of the revolving door justice system and give them a chance to lead a crime free life. It is a disgrace that the Government has not taken this opportunity to help young people in trouble and in the long term reduce crime rates.

Debate adjourned.

Message from Select Committee.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimate for public services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2007: Vote No. 31.

The Select Committee on Transport has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimate for public services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2007: Vote No. 32.

Adjournment Debate.

Patient Transport Service.

Deputy Michael Ring: I do not mean to show disrespect to the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science, Deputy Seán Haughey, but it is outrageous that no representative of the Department of Health and Children has attended this adjournment debate. The health issue I am raising is very important and the Minister for Health and Children and the many Ministers of State at that Department have shown total disrespect for it. I am so angry that I am considering whether to raise it at all. When Ministers will not listen to what is happening, it is no wonder my constituents are finding that people in the health service are hanging up when they call.

10 o'clock

I wish to raise the issue of the transportation of patients to hospital appointments. A march was held in Castlebar on this issue some weeks ago and the Health Service Executive gave a commitment that people with cancer, and others, would be taken to their hospital appointments, but this is not yet happening. Yesterday morning I met a very sick person who was waiting on a call from the Health Service Executive but did not receive it and so had to cancel a hospital appointment. The option of using a private transport operator is now being pushed. Constituents of mine must get up at 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. to be in Bangor by 6.45 a.m. and in Castlebar and Galway by 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. Last week a patient with leukaemia arrived at the hospital at 9 a.m., got treatment at 10 a.m., was violently sick at 11 a.m. and had to wait until 3 p.m. for the return bus service. In the end he went home using private transport because he could not wait.

The Health Service Executive is not taking people with cancer to their hospital appointments. Yesterday a wheelchair-bound constituent of mine tried to get on a privately operated wheelchair accessible bus but could not do so and had to cancel her appointment. Shame on the Government and shame on the Health Service Executive.

There was a very good service until two years ago but Mr. Bonner, who has responsibility for the Health Service Executive in this regard, has destroyed the service because he will not help sick, weak people travel to their hospital appointments. He has attended committee meetings here in the past and he will come in again shortly. We cannot expect people with leukaemia, cancer and those on social welfare to cancel appointments. There will be a situation like that in Portlaoise and people will die, but Mr. Bonner does not care because he and his staff have a jeep for emergencies that has televisions, television cameras and radios; it cost a fortune and might never be used. People are missing their hospital appointments because of this issue.

I am disappointed that neither the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, nor one of the Ministers of State at her Department has attended this debate. I know they forwent their pay increases today but she is still on €230,000 per year and the Ministers of State are on €170,000 or €180,000. They should be here tonight to listen. The HSE will not listen but will hang up phones when people call and will not bring them to hospital appointments. I will raise this issue on the Order of Business every morning until it is sorted out because it is shameful that we cannot bring sick, old and weak people to their hospital appointments. Shame on the Government and Fianna Fáil that they have failed to ensure the provision this service.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: This is the case all over the country, including Donegal. I know an old woman with Alzheimer's disease who needs to travel 65 miles for treatment and is affected by this issue.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): I will take the adjournment debate on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney. The Health Service Executive, HSE, provides transport to hospital appointments for patients who, because of the nature and extent of their illnesses or disabilities, are unable to use conventional modes of transport. The type of transport provided depends on whether the person requires transport by ambulance. Ambulance transport is prioritised within the categories of emergency, urgent and non-urgent. The HSE's ambulance service is complemented by the use of private ambulance services when necessary. Where there is no need for ambulance transport the HSE uses other vehicles, including taxis, to provide transport for patients. This service is also complemented by the use of private hire operators and this has been the case for a number of years.

The HSE is currently conducting a major review of the patient transport service and this will extend to the entire country. It is anticipated that the outcome of the review will inform the development of a more comprehensive national patient transport policy. Ultimately this will lead to a more equitable, integrated, needs-based service.

In general terms, the purpose of the patient transport service is to enable appropriate integrated care services to be provided. While many patients can readily avail of the standard service, it is sometimes necessary to put in place specific arrangements to meet the particular needs of individuals. In particular, the HSE recognises that some oncology patients may require specific transport arrangements and these will be considered on the basis of individual needs.

Deputy Michael Ring: I mean no disrespect to the Minister of State but his answer was rubbish and a waste of time. I will raise this matter on the Order of Business and cause such a row tomorrow that the Government will know all about this issue.

Hospital Services.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: I understand Deputy Ring's frustration and feel it is a disgrace that, with one Minister and four Ministers of State, no representative of the Department of Health and Children could attend this evening to listen to the matters raised on the adjournment by Deputy Ring and me. It makes a farce of the adjournment

debate, though I mean no disrespect to the Minister of State, Deputy Haughey.

Yesterday evening three consultant surgeons in Kerry General Hospital took the unprecedented measure of inviting all Oireachtas representatives of Kerry to a meeting at the hospital to discuss its future. They are concerned at the future of the provision of cancer treatment at the hospital and wonder what will happen as a result of the creation of a centre of excellence in Cork. They referred to the need for an endoscopy unit, a high dependency unit, staff for the day care ward, a maternity ward and orthopaedic services at the hospital. I am glad to have the opportunity this evening to outline the lack of orthopaedic services in Kerry General Hospital.

The out-patient waiting list at the moment for orthopaedic procedures at Kerry General Hospital consists of around 600 adults. Some 200 have been waiting more than two years and 300 more than 12 months. I do not believe there is another part of the country with such a long waiting list. The in-patient waiting list is shorter and around 46 people have been waiting more than three months. A reason is that consultants use the treatment purchase fund to send patients to other hospitals for procedures.

Many people have problems with their knees, especially the elderly, but knee replacement procedures are not done at the hospital. Operations on patients on the trauma list, that is, patients with broken bones, can only be carried out on Fridays. If one breaks a bone in one's leg or finger one must, generally, wait until Friday to be operated on. The trauma list should be dealt with every day, as in most hospitals, and a person who breaks a leg or hand should be operated on immediately.

Patients with broken bones require rapid assessment and treatment by an orthopaedic surgeon and anaesthetist. Early discharge to a comfortable environment with adequate rehabilitation facilities is also vital. Unfortunately, this level of back-up is not available and patients are generally discharged into mixed wards.

There is an urgent requirement for a daily trauma operating theatre list with adequate radiographic back-up. Only one radiographer is on call out of hours, including the weekend. There should be at least two. There is also an immediate requirement for a dedicated ward space, including a day ward facility, so that minor injuries such as finger and wrist fractures can be treated on a one-day basis.

The population of Kerry almost doubles during the summer because of the influx of tourists. Many of these tourists engage in activities such as horse riding, hill walking and rock climbing, which can result in accidents. Thus, Kerry General Hospital is under significant pressure to provide services not only for the local population but also for visitors. The resources are simply not

available. I understand members of the HSE review issues that are raised in the House. I call on them to do what is necessary to make Kerry General Hospital a centre of excellence in orthopaedic services.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I am taking this matter on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney. In recent years, the demand for orthopaedic services in Kerry has consistently increased due to the growing population as well as significant elderly and visiting tourist populations. In response to this, the HSE has endeavoured to ensure that a comprehensive orthopaedic service is provided.

Since July 2007, the medical staffing of the orthopaedic department at Kerry General Hospital has increased by an additional registrar and now consists of three orthopaedic consultants, four senior house officers and three registrars. The department currently provides the following services: elective, or planned, and trauma, or emergency, surgery; six consultant-led outpatient clinics; on-call ward rounds; and trauma admissions. Activity in the orthopaedic department is intensive. Twelve elective orthopaedic surgery sessions are carried out each week, while trauma orthopaedic surgery has three dedicated sessions. However, some trauma cases are included in the elective sessions. Orthopaedic emergencies are managed within the general emergency theatre lists on a Saturday, Sunday and out of hours.

Within the hospital structure, there are 30 beds dedicated to orthopaedics. The complete upgrading of this ward has been flagged as a priority by management and funding in excess of €3 million has been approved for this purpose in 2008. This project will involve structural changes including the making available of high-quality facilities, including an isolation room, and will separate elective and trauma patients to reduce risk of cross-infection.

Management at Kerry General Hospital is working closely with the national treatment purchase fund towards reducing waiting times for orthopaedic patients. So far this year, 60 inpatients have been referred for surgery and a further 41 persons have been referred for outpatient consultation to the Bon Secours Hospital.

The HSE is committed to providing the best possible quality of care to all orthopaedic patients attending the hospital. The executive is undertaking a review of acute hospital services in Kerry and Cork with a view to developing acute health care that minimises risk to patients and is in line with best international practice and national policy. The review will identify the appropriate model for acute service provision in the HSE southern region and will recommend how best to configure acute hospital services in Cork and Kerry to deliver on this model.

Institutes of Technology.

Deputy Brian O'Shea: The formal application to the Department of Education and Science by Waterford Institute of Technology seeking upgrading to university status was lodged in February 2006. A spokesman for the institute stated at the time:

The expectation is that a national and international panel of respected higher educationalists will adjudicate on the merits of the institute's case and their report will be submitted to the Higher Education Authority. This expectation is absolutely in line with section 9 of the Universities Act 1997.

When I raised this matter in an Adjournment debate in October 2006, I pointed out that this panel had not been set up. That is still the position in December 2007.

In reality, the position is even worse. In her reply to a recent parliamentary question, the Minister for Education and Science failed to confirm that consideration of the report of Dr. Jim Port on the submission of Waterford Institute of Technology would be concluded in her Department by the end of 2009. It was in November 2006 that the appointment of an independent expert, Dr. Jim Port, to conduct a preliminary assessment of the Waterford Institute of Technology submission was announced. I stated at the time that this was nothing other than a political ploy to carry the Government through the upcoming general election. It gave the impression that something was happening, when the opposite was the case. Events have borne out my judgment. This is an unnecessary additional step that effectively postpones the implementation of the statutory process laid out in the Universities Act in regard to the application process for the setting up of a university of the south east.

The Minister admits she is cognisant of the strong support that has developed in the south-east region for the application from Waterford Institute of Technology for university status. However, neither the Taoiseach nor the Government has the slightest intention of approving this concept, which would allow for a hub campus in Waterford and associated centres in other counties in the region.

Figures published by the Central Statistics Office in February 2007 show that, in 2004, disposable income per person in the south-east region was 8.8% below the national average. This is the lowest in the eight regional authority areas. The 2005 report by Goodbody Economic Consultants, commissioned by Waterford Chamber of Commerce, found that the move to university status would generate €96.7 million annually for the region's economy and create 2,215 direct and indirect jobs. If Waterford Institute of Technology remains as it is, the study estimates the

[Deputy Brian O'Shea.]

employment it generates will remain static and it will produce €70 million for the economy.

This illustrates the great need for a university of the south east. The benefit of such an establishment will not be confined to the region but will be nationwide. Without a university, the region will continue to under-perform particularly in regard to the knowledge economy where the potential for job creation must be urgently developed. Even if the statutory process set out in the Universities Act 1997 were set in motion today, the various stages would take considerable time to conclude.

The Government must conclude its delaying game and implement the report of Dr. Jim Port. It must cease inhibiting the vital progress of the south-east region and let the submission from Waterford Institute of Technology be assessed as the law provides. The Government cannot continue to ignore the 460,000 people in the south-east region and their vital interests in terms of development and of the prosperity of their children and grandchildren. The good effects of the establishment of a university in the region will go beyond this. This sham must come to an end without delay.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. In February 2006 the governing body of Waterford Institute of Technology wrote to the Department of Education and Science requesting a review of its status under section 9 of the Universities Act 1997.

The provisions of section 9 state that the Government may appoint a body, which will include international experts, to advise the Higher Education Authority on whether, having regard to the objects and functions of a university, an educational institution should be established as a university. On the advice of the body and the recommendation of the Higher Education Authority, the Government may, by order, provide that the institution shall be a university for the purposes of this Act.

To assist the Department in its assessment of Waterford IT's application, the Minister, Deputy Hanafin, appointed Dr. Jim Port in February 2007 to provide preliminary advice on the merits of the submission by WIT. In particular, he would have regard to the national strategy for the development of higher education; implications for regional development in the south east in the context of the national spatial strategy; and any likely implications for the overall structure of higher education in Ireland. Dr. Port's report was received in late July 2007 and is currently under consideration.

Aside from consideration of the nature of the statutory review process that is provided to progress an application for designation as a university, there are also significant wider issues that

must be considered in the context of a decision to institute a statutory review. For example, there have been important and relevant wider policy developments in the overall higher education sector. In particular, it is important that account is taken of the very significant recent changes in the overall legislative framework governing Irish higher education, with the commencement of the new Institutes of Technology Act 2006 on 1 February 2007. There is also a wider Government policy on foot of the review of Irish higher education carried out by the OECD in 2004, the broad thrust of which was endorsed by the Government.

A central conclusion of the OECD review was to support Ireland's strategic ambition of placing our higher education system at the front rank of the OECD in the context of the wider national objective of Ireland developing as a world-leading knowledge economy and society. A key recommendation made in the OECD report to the Government was that Ireland should retain the differentiation in mission of the university and institute of technology sectors, which it identified as a key strength of our system, and that there should be no institutional transfers into the university system for the foreseeable future.

The report also recommended that the universities and institutes of technology should be brought together under the remit of a single authority for the purpose of achieving a unified higher education strategy. It further recommended the extent of external regulation of the institutes of technology should be lightened, giving them greater managerial freedom in responding to the opportunities and challenges of supporting regional and national social and economic development.

The Institutes of Technology Act 2006 addresses significant elements of these recommendations and marks a major milestone for the sector and the development of higher education in Ireland. It provides for greater autonomy for the institutes to fulfil their missions and by bringing them within the remit of the Higher Education Authority, it supports an integrated and cohesive strategic approach to the development of higher education in line with national priorities.

The Act means, in practice, that the HEA and the institutes of technology will now engage in a way that is very similar to the way the HEA and the universities engage. The new arrangements provide for a more autonomous and strategic relationship with Government, through the HEA, reflecting the dynamic and competitive nature of the environment in which the institutes are now operating.

The Minister is cognisant of the strong support built in the south-east region around the application from Waterford IT for university status. An application for designation as a university has

also been received from the Dublin Institute of Technology and my Department is currently examining the submission and supporting documentation provided by DIT. The relevant wider policy developments I have outlined above are also fundamental to the Minister's consideration of the appropriate next steps in both applications.

Schools Building Projects.

Deputy Michael Creed: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me the opportunity to raise this matter. I will provide some background information on the application for funding a new school. St. Colman's boys national school has 135 pupils, 14 teachers, 12 special needs assistants, a secretary with an office in the corridor of the school, a caretaker, a part-time foreign language teacher assisting non-national students with the English language and a music teacher.

The school is currently located on the side of a national primary road, the N22, which in itself poses a traffic hazard and a major concern for parents and teachers over pupil safety. There are five prefabricated classrooms, as well as an autism unit catering for 13 pupils in three separate classroom environments. A unit in the school caters for three pupils with Down's syndrome.

I visited the school recently and, notwithstanding the cramped and almost Third World conditions under which the school is operating, it is a credit to the staff, teachers and parents in that it is an excellent school delivering excellent results for pupils. In particular there is the more recent development of the autism unit and the unit for children with mild disabilities, which is achieving tremendous results in the most appalling circumstances one can imagine.

We feel somewhat aggrieved in the constituency of Cork North-West by Government failure. In Macroom there was the closure of the GSI plant and the Molex plant in Millstreet has also closed. The closure of Delta Homes has contributed to employment loss in the area and there has also been a failure to deliver a bypass for Macroom or Charleville. Decentralisation of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was also promised. We desperately need some indication that this Government will honour its commitments.

There is a background to the case for a new school for St. Colman's. In April 1997 the board of management applied to the Department of Education and Science to extend accommodation facilities at the school and in February 1999 a design team was appointed. In September 2000 a new school site of 2.25 acres was offered to the board of management of the school by a developer in exchange for the existing school site. In November 2001 the developer also offered to construct a temporary school on-site, trusting the Department would have a new school in place for the 2003 to 2004 school year. In January 2002 the

Department's procrastination resulted in the developer withdrawing the offer to provide a temporary school and in July 2005 permission was granted by Macroom Town Council for a new development which was to include a new national school. In September 2005 the tendering process was completed and a letter of intent issued to Western Building Systems, the contractor appointed at the time. In July 2007, the developer commenced his work on the preparation of the site.

I urge the Minister of State to depart from his prepared script because I know the Department is dancing on a pinhead with regard to quantity surveyor reports and recent cost increases. A letter of intent issued to Western Building Systems in 2005 and they are now looking for accommodation for inflation in construction costs because it has not gone ahead since 2005. I appeal to the Minister of State to act immediately on the consultant architect's report on the revised sums demanded by Western Building Systems on the grounds of inflationary costs accruing since the letter of intent issued on 15 December 2005.

It is an open and shut case which has gone on for ten years since 1997. The pupils deserve better as the teaching conditions are appalling, to say the least. There is great unity of purpose evident among the board of management, staff and parents but they desperately want a signal of commitment from the Government. If they get such a signal, they could be in a new school by September of next year.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I thank the Deputy for giving me the opportunity of outlining to this House the position of the Department of Education and Science regarding the provision of new school premises for St. Colman's boys national school in County Cork. It is proposed to provide a design and build turnkey package to comprise a permanent system-built, two-storey school with ten classrooms, a double autistic unit, specialist resource rooms and ancillary accommodation. A revised report with updated costings on the project has been received in the Department and is under examination.

Under the national development plan €4.5 billion is assigned to the capital requirements of the primary and post-primary sectors. More than €540 million will be spent this year on school buildings. The level of construction alone in the primary and post-primary sectors in 2007 is such that it will deliver more than 700 classrooms to provide permanent accommodation for approximately 17,500 pupils.

The progression of all large-scale building projects from initial design stage through to construction phase is considered on an ongoing basis in the context of the Department's multi-annual school building and modernisation programme. The progression of this school project, as with all

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

large-scale projects, will be considered in this context. The Minister intends to announce in January the first tranche of projects that will be proceeding to construction in 2008, with further announcements throughout the year as the school building programme is rolled out.

I assure the Deputy that the Department is committed to providing suitable high-quality accommodation for a national school in County Cork at the earliest possible date.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.35 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 12 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 7, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 8 to 50, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 51 to 59, inclusive, answered orally.

Schools Building Projects.

60. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Science when construction work will begin on a new national school in Laytown, County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33961/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department has already provided a 16-classroom facility to meet the immediate accommodation requirements in Laytown. The new 24-classroom school building will be provided by my Department under a design and build contract. The procurement process for this project is now nearing completion and it is expected that the contract will be awarded very soon. As part of the tender competition, the initial design and layout for the school has already been done and some pre-planning discussions have taken place with Meath County Council in order to help ensure that it meets their requirements.

Following the placing of the design and build contract, the first task for the successful contractor will be to submit the application for planning permission for the new school. Given the preparatory work already done it is expected that the application for planning permission can be done within a matter of weeks following the appointment. I want to assure the Deputy that my Department is committed to commencing construction of the new school as soon as possible following receipt of planning permission.

Last week I outlined details of how €594 million is to be spent on school building projects in the coming year. The majority of this funding will be targeted at primary level and will enable my Department to continue the process of providing new school places and modernising existing facilities in schools throughout the country with a particular emphasis on meeting the new and emerging needs in developing areas such as Laytown. Since 1997 a total of €3.6 billion has been invested in school buildings and this has delivered over 9,300 school building projects. This further investment of €594m will build on these achievements and will focus in particular on the provision of school accommodation in areas where the population is growing at a rapid rate. The NDP investment of over €4.5 billion will enable my Department to continue to transform the standard of school facilities throughout the country.

Language Support Services.

61. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science the steps she will take to implement the outstanding recommendations in the Joint Committee on Education and Science report for the provision of educational services in a multi-ethnic multicultural society; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24884/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Conor Lenihan): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that significant progress has been made since 2004 on the recommendations in the Joint Committee's report. Recommendation 1 relates to additional teaching support. Earlier this year, the limit of two Language Support Teachers per school was removed and provision was made for a pupil to receive assistance for more than two years where necessary. There are now in the region of 1,900 langu-

[Deputy Conor Lenihan.]

age support teacher posts in our schools, compared with just 262 in 2001/02.

Recommendation 2 relates to the use of dictionaries. The rules set by the State Examinations for the certificate exams allow for the use of bilingual dictionaries in most subjects for candidates whose first language is not English or Irish. The number of students availing of this has risen from just over 800 in 2004 to more than 1,500 in the current year. Recommendation 3 relates to the appointment of a national co-ordinator. My appointment as the first Minister of State for Integration and the establishment of my Office for Integration was designed to bring a co-ordinated and cohesive response to the integration of newcomers to Ireland.

Recommendation 4 relates to teacher training. Language support teachers are provided with in-service training. Intercultural resource materials have also been developed for teachers and schools. In fact, yesterday I along with the Minister for Education in Northern Ireland, Caitríona Ruane, MLA jointly launched a “Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School”. Recommendation 5 proposes that separated children should not be moved into direct provision, even if they have reached their 18th birthday, until after they have completed the Leaving Certificate. My colleague, the Minister for Children, Brendan Smith, T.D. is responsible for the provision of services to separated children seeking asylum. The HSE has advised that children in their 5th or 6th year of post-primary are not moved into direct provision, after they reach their 18th birthday, during the school year, subject to availability of beds. The Reception and Integration Agency, which is responsible for the operation of the Direct Provision system, is not involved in the above determination process of the HSE and moreover, the person's accommodation situation has no direct bearing on the processing of his/ her asylum claim.

Recommendation 6 relates to school admission policies. Enrolment in individual schools is the responsibility of the managerial authority. However, schools must act in accordance with Section 7 of the Equal Status Act 2000 which, subject to very limited exceptions, prohibits discrimination in enrolment procedures. Recommendation 7 relates to the role of Youth Services, Adult and Non-Formal Education. Funding for youth services for young people of all backgrounds has improved significantly in recent years. The number of migrants benefiting from access to adult literacy training has increased in recent years— with over 12,000 availing of the VEC service in the last school year. A national English language training policy and framework for legally-resident adult immigrants is also being developed.

Capitation Grants.

62. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the fact that local authority charges have risen by 104% since 2002 and that this is having an adverse affect on the budgets of the voluntary secondary schools sector as the schools are now required by their local authority to pay domestic refuse disposal and water charges; the steps she could take to increase the allocation of funds to the voluntary secondary schools sector in order to assist it in meeting this increased charge; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33427/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Secondary schools receive funding by way of per capita grants, to meet their day-to-day running costs, including refuse and water charges. The value of the capitation grants have improved significantly over the past few years and are set to increase again by €15 to €331 per pupil in 2008. In addition, voluntary secondary schools will benefit by an increase of €15 in the support services grant, bringing that grant to €204 per pupil.

The total increase of €30 per pupil in a voluntary secondary school will bring the aggregate grant to €535 per pupil. The Deputy should be aware that these grants are in addition to the per capita funding, of up to €40,000 per school, that is also provided by my Department to secondary schools towards secretarial and caretaking services. Accordingly, in the case of a secondary school with 500 pupils, the annual grants towards general expenses and support service will be more than €300,000 in 2008. This represents an increase of 92% approximately since 2000. These significant increases are a clear demonstration of my commitment to prioritise available resources to address their needs.

The Deputy will be aware of the commitment in the Programme for Government to examine how local authorities might grant allow schools a reasonable level of usage of water and waste services without charge, and that charges would only apply when a school exceeded the allowance. The Deputy will appreciate that it is a primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, to determine precisely how this commitment will be implemented. A key consideration from my perspective is to ensure that any proposed scheme ensures that schools are treated consistently across the country. My Department will of course input to and support the examination to be conducted by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The Deputy should note that my Department is to the forefront of design with respect to energy efficiency in school buildings, including measures to conserve water in schools. Typically these involve the use of low-pressure spray taps on

wash hand basins rather than the traditional type taps. Dual type flushing units are provided on individual toilets. Where showers are provided, push button type shower controls are used to conserve water usage. Given the scale of my Department's school building programme in recent years many schools have already benefited from these energy saving measures. In addition, my Department has undertaken initial studies into the feasibility of recycling rainwater in schools and the viability of grey-water recycling continues to be kept under review. The performance of my Department in relation to low energy design has been recognised at both national and international level with sustainable energy awards for excellence in design and specification.

State Examinations.

63. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Science if, in view of the rising number of foreign national students in the school system here, she will introduce an international junior certificate and leaving certificate examination in which non-anglophone students would do non-core subjects in their native language; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33441/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I am aware of the rising number of foreign national students in our school system, and also that there are over one hundred languages, other than Irish or English, spoken in Ireland. The facilities we currently provide for our newcomer students in the examination system are expanding each year and are kept under regular review by my Department. In addition, the number of language support teachers has increased dramatically in recent years.

Apart from the eleven curricular languages studied and examined in the Leaving Certificate examination, the State Examinations Commission provides examinations in a range of non-curricular languages. These are languages which do not appear as part of the normal school curriculum but which students may opt to be examined in under certain conditions, chief among which are the requirements that:

- the candidates for these examinations be from a member state of the EU
- they speak the language in which they opt to be examined as a mother tongue
- they are following a programme of study leading to the Leaving Certificate and
- they are taking the Leaving Certificate examination in English

In 2007 there were candidates in fifteen such languages, facilitating EU students who might be described as 'non-anglophone' in sitting an examination in their own language. This number has

increased from nine in 2005. Logistically, it would not be possible to extend this service to the model envisaged in the question. This would require a whole new group of experts in those languages, whose skills also extended to the many curricular subjects offered in our certificate examination system in schools.

A key focus of educational policy is to ensure that newcomer students are integrated successfully into the Irish education system and that they have access to the same learning opportunities as are available to other students in the system. The Irish Leaving Certificate is widely respected internationally, and in 2004 agreement was concluded with the UK that from 2006 Irish Leaving Certificate awards at Ordinary and Higher Level would be included in the UCAS Tariff, the points system for admission to higher education colleges in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. This is an indirect mechanism through which achievement in the Leaving Certificate can be compared with awards in a wide range of countries.

In 2005, an information leaflet "Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries" was agreed with the UK and Irish certification and quality assurance agencies which offers a ready reckoner to learners, employers and institutions showing how levels of qualification in Ireland and the UK align with each other. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has also established Qualifications Recognition Ireland which provides information and advice on the comparability of international qualifications. The service is networked with similar information centres throughout Europe. Awards in Ireland are included in the National Framework of Qualifications. As developments in regard to the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) progress in various Member States, Ireland will be well placed to have its awards included in the EQF, further promoting recognition and mobility.

School Accommodation.

64. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the lack of facilities at a school (details supplied) in County Laois which has no physical education hall, computer room or library and has had eight prefabs serving as classrooms for the past nine years; and if she will make a statement on the matter particularly in relation to the school's need to secure a permanent site with a fully resourced school building to ensure it caters for the growing demand for Irish-medium education. [34006/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Department's long term plan for Portlaoise is to provide three new post primary schools and to amalgamate and expand primary provision to meet the growing needs of the area. Educational provision at post primary

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

level in the town needed to be addressed first and a new V.E.C. school building has already been delivered. The two other post primary school building projects are due to go on site next year.

Now that the accommodation requirements of the town at post primary level are well on the way to being addressed, it is proposed to deal with the primary school requirements. Approval in principle has been given for five large scale primary building projects in Portlaoise which will improve conditions for the schools concerned and provide much needed extra school places. Two new greenfield site schools will be built to facilitate the amalgamation of Scoil Náisúnta an Chroí Naofa, St Paul's Primary School and Scoil Náisúnta Mhuire. The new facilities will be configured as a junior and senior school and they will cater for some 1,600 pupils.

The third project is the extension of Scoil Bride, Knockmay to create a 32 classroom school catering for 800 pupils. The fourth is the extension of The Heath National School which will enable it to cater for 200 pupils. Funding is also being made available to Maryboro National School on a devolved basis to enable the construction of a new three classroom school for 75 pupils. The accommodation needs of the school referred to by the Deputy will be addressed in the context of the overall developments for primary education in the town. However, at this early stage, I am not in a position to say when the project will proceed to construction. My Department will, of course, keep the school informed of developments in relation to the provision of accommodation.

School Inspectors.

65. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Education and Science the duties and responsibilities of primary school inspectors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33446/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Inspectorate is a division within the Department of Education and Science and at present has a complement of over 160 primary and post-primary inspectors. While inspectors are generally recruited to work in either the primary or the post-primary sector, the work of the Inspectorate is managed as a unified service headed by the Chief Inspector. The Inspectorate has a statutory quality assurance remit in relation to educational provision in primary and post-primary schools as set out under Section 13 of the Education Act 1998. The annual inspection programme includes mainstream evaluation of the work of teachers and schools, and thematic evaluations of particular aspects of educational provision.

In accordance with Section 13 of the Education Act the roles and functions of inspectors include the following:

- to support and advise recognised schools, teachers and Boards of Management on matters relating to the provision of education,
- to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the provision of education in the State,
- to conduct research into education and to support policy formulation,
- to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching, development, promotion and use of Irish in schools, and
- to advise on any matter relating to education policy and provision, including curriculum, assessment and teaching methods.

The Rules for National Schools provide further detail in relation to the regulations underpinning the inspection of schools and teachers at primary level. A major part of an inspector's work is the external evaluation of schools through Whole School Evaluation (WSE). A primary inspector may work alone or as part of an inspection team to evaluate the school under the areas of management, planning, curriculum provision, teaching and learning, and student support.

Another major part of the work of primary inspectors is the inspection of probationary teachers. Because I have been able to increase the numbers of teachers at primary level at an unprecedented rate in recent years, the number of newly qualified teachers in primary schools has risen rapidly. As a consequence, the evaluation of newly qualified primary teachers now represents a very significant element of the overall inspection programme at primary level. For example, during the school year 2007/2008 primary inspectors will conduct inspections and report on more than 2,500 primary teachers on probation. In addition to mainstream evaluation activity inspectors are involved in conducting in-depth thematic evaluations which examine the quality of selected educational programmes or services across a sample of schools.

All reports arising from WSE inspections or thematic inspections are published on the internet website of the Department of Education and Science. Between June 2006 and mid-December 2007 the Inspectorate will have published 1401 reports on 862 different primary and post-primary schools or centres for education on the Department's website. 284 of these reports are Primary WSE Reports. In addition to the formal inspection activity I have outlined, primary inspectors sit on appeals committees dealing with cases taken under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998. They are also engaged in developing evaluative instruments and undertaking research. Inspectors also provide policy advice in relation to the following:- initial teacher education, induc-

tion and in-career development,- the implementation of school/teacher curriculum support programmes and initiatives,- teacher qualifications — curriculum and assessment issues,- the teaching of Irish, and — special education.

Senior inspectors assigned to my Department's Regional Offices throughout the country provide support and advice of a regional nature, liaising with educational bodies and educational providers within the regional catchment areas. They also undertake some evaluations of centres for education and manage the visiting teacher services.

Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 58.

Language Support Services.

67. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the plans in place to cater for the growing number of non-English speaking students attending both primary and secondary schools here; her views on whether teachers and schools are well enough equipped to deal with the surge in the number of foreign students enrolling in schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33977/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): In May this year I approved the issue of Circular 53/2007 to the Management Authorities in primary and post primary schools outlining the resources available to meet the needs of pupils for whom English is a second language. I removed the limit of two Language Support Teachers per school and extended the provision of language support beyond two years, where a specific request is made. In fact, it is now possible for some schools with over 121 such pupils to have 6 language support teachers. There are now in the region of 1,900 language support teacher posts allocated to primary and post primary schools, compared with just 262 in 2001/2002.

These additional resources will assist schools in providing an inclusive school environment to meet the needs of pupils for whom English is a second language. Such an inclusive school environment reflects values and affirms linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity. In addition to the language resource teachers there is a significant amount of resources available including the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) Guidelines — "Intercultural Education in the Primary School" and "Intercultural Education in the Post- Primary school". The NCCA has also published "English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools". Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) has produced a resource book "Up and Away" for English language support in primary schools.

IILT in collaboration with the Southern Education and Library Board (in Armagh) yesterday

published a "Toolkit for diversity in the primary school — Together towards Inclusion". This was a joint North South project. This toolkit will be provided to every primary school on the island. In addition, early in the new year a language assessment kit, prepared by IILT, will be provided to all primary schools. This will enable accurate initial and on-going assessment of the language proficiency of newcomer children.

Since 2001 my Department has funded Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) to provide Language Support Teachers with in-service training. I have just established an Integration Unit to ensure that education policies take account of the need to integrate immigrants and their children. This Unit will be assisted by the Department's Steering Committee on the Educational Needs of Newcomers which identifies emerging issues, proposes solutions and arranges for the implementation of agreed solutions and policies. I have commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute to undertake a large scale study into how an increasing diversity of students impacts upon resource requirements and day to day teaching and learning in both primary and post-primary schools. The report from the research findings is due in autumn 2008.

In addition, in 2008 the Inspectorate will start to conduct an evaluation of the provision of English as an additional language in a number of schools and it plans to publish an analysis of its findings as a composite national report in 2009. These latter two reports along with the advice of the Integration Unit and the Department's Steering Committee will provide me with evidence based data on whether we are meeting the needs of pupils for whom English is a second language, particularly in the context of the increased resources that have now been provided.

School Curriculum.

68. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will review the proposed changes to early immersion education in Irish medium schools. [34000/07]

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

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

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. The right of parents and children to choose education through the medium of Irish is fully respected, but this does not obviate the need for schools to implement all aspects of the national curriculum. The achievement of the curriculum objectives in every curriculum area at each of the four levels of primary schooling is an over-riding requirement of all schools.

The issue of Circular 0044/2007 is now the subject of a legal challenge in the High Court, and it would not be appropriate for me to make any further comment on the matter.

School Transport.

69. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children who have to travel from the islands to the mainland for a primary education and a secondary education; the means of transport available to the children; if she is satisfied that this is the best method of providing for the education of island communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32589/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): It is my policy that, where possible, education should be provided on islands for both primary and post primary pupils. Where it is not feasible to provide a second-level school on an island, island families are eligible for financial assistance under the Remote Area Boarding Grant Scheme to facilitate a child's attendance at school on the mainland. Under the Scheme, grants are paid towards the cost of boarding in or near second level boarding schools under Catholic religious management in the Free Education Scheme for pupils whose homes are outside the range of public transport services to a day school providing suit-

able post primary education. This Scheme provides for the payment of grants up to €4,725 in each case towards the cost of boarding or lodgings.

The information requested by the Deputy regarding the number of children availing of transport from islands under the school transport scheme is not readily available. My Department has requested Bus Éireann to provide the relevant information and, as soon as this is available, I will arrange to have it forwarded to the Deputy. I can assure the House that I am committed to ensuring that all persons living on our offshore islands have reasonable access to quality education.

Third Level Courses.

70. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Science, further to Parliamentary Question No. 276 of 20 November 2007, her Department's policy in relation to ensuring that practical training and work experience is accessible to persons trained under special educational schemes to train health professionals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33997/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The responsibility for curriculum development is a matter for the higher education institutions, having regard to internal and external quality assurance systems, and institutional strategy. I would fully expect that institutions in so developing such curricula would have regard to the needs of all students participating. I would be happy to consider any specific details further should they be brought to the attention of my Department.

It is my understanding that the higher education institutions who provide such courses generally reach agreement with local hospitals or other clinical settings to provide clinical training opportunities for students. The actual arrangements for delivery of these training opportunities are a matter for the Department of Health and Children, and the Health Services Executive.

School Planning.

71. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the extent to which information is available to her Department to facilitate adequate preparation and forward planning for the provision of extra schools and classroom accommodation particularly in areas of expanding population growth and well in advance of actual requirement thereby eliminating the use of temporary accommodation and prefabricated structures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34008/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The process of assessing the need for new or additional educational facilities at primary or post-primary level in any given area

entails consideration of all relevant factors, including enrolment and demographic trends, housing developments and the capacity of existing schools to meet the demand for places. Liaison with existing schools is also an important part of the process. In this way, every effort is made to ensure that there is adequate existing provision and that timely arrangements are made to extend capacity or provide new infrastructure where necessary.

In addition, Local Authorities are obliged by statute to refer draft local area development plans to the Department for observation and comment so that lands can be zoned for future education use. There are numerous sites reserved for education purposes, particularly in the rapidly developing areas, under this process so as to ensure that there will be sufficient land set aside and available for the future development of education infrastructure.

Over and above the statutory consultation provisions in relation to local authority draft area development plans, my Department has in recent years worked to strengthen contacts with local authorities to enable informed decisions to be made in planning future educational provision. My Department also makes extensive use of data from the Census of Population for a variety of purposes including long-term projections of enrolment at national and local level. The census results for 2006 are of use in identifying broad trends in total population by county and local area. My Department also uses census data when drafting its own area development plans and planning school provision for likely enrolment at local area level.

The Deputy may be aware that the Programme for Government includes a commitment to establish a Developing Areas Unit in my Department. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that this Unit has been established. It is located in Tullamore and forms part of my Department's planning and building division already based in that location. The unit will be solely dedicated to progressing school planning in rapidly developing areas building on improvements that have already been made in school planning in recent years. Staff in the unit will liaise with local authorities, identify where new schools are needed and ensure that they are delivered in the fastest possible timeframe.

To date, 11 members of staff have been redeployed to the unit, comprised of:

- 1 Principal Officer
- 1 Assistant Principal Officer
- 1 Senior Architect
- 1 Architectural Assistant
- 3 Higher Executive Officers and
- 4 Executive Officers

Some of these staff would have been looking after developing areas anyway, and so the consolidation of effort in the new unit will ensure that they are more effectively deployed. The process of filling some of the vacancies arising from the redeployment of staff to the new unit from other areas, is in train.

A further 5 additional (ie non-redeployed) posts — including a professional planner — have been approved for the unit. The necessary recruitment arrangements are now being put in place. The staffing of the unit will be kept under review in light of the evolution of its work programme.

With regard to expenditure on the rental of temporary accommodation, including prefabs, every effort is made to keep this expenditure low. It should be noted that less than 5% of the almost €495 million that was invested in school buildings last year, went on the rental of temporary accommodation. Where accommodation is needed at very short notice, however, a temporary solution can be the only option. Such accommodation may also be used where the need is short-term, such as when a school requires a temporary building while it is awaiting the completion of construction of permanent facilities.

Schools Building Projects.

72. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science, further to her reply to Parliamentary Question No. 64 of 13 November 2007, the location of the 700 classrooms which were due to begin construction in 2007 as part of her Department's school building programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33421/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The budget for 2007 is the first year of the roll out of the National Development Plan 2007-2013 which will involve an investment of over €4.5 billion in school buildings. This funding will enable the Department to continue to take a proactive approach to the provision of modern school accommodation particularly in developing areas. The Department is planning for an expected 100,000 additional school places over the lifetime of the Plan. This year alone over €540 million will be spent on school building infrastructure with over 1,500 projects on the Department's school building programme. Construction in 2007 alone will ultimately deliver over 700 classrooms to provide permanent accommodation for over 17,500 pupils, mainly in developing areas. Department will target funding, as appropriate, in order to ensure that additional school accommodation is provided in developing areas within the earliest possible timeframes.

The location of the schools where the 700 classrooms are being provided is included in the table.

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

List of projects delivering 700 classrooms

	County	Roll No.	School
1	Carlow	14837L	SN Peadar agus Pol Ballon Carlow
2	Carlow	18090D	S N Cill Damhain Cill Damhain Inis Corthaigh Co Loch Gorman
3	Carlow	18615N	SN Ceartarlach Green Road
4	Carlow	19315G	St Laserians Special School
5	Carlow	19958C	S N Naomh Fhiach Graiguecullen Co Carlow
6	Cavan	11541V	Dromaili SN Cavan
7	Cavan	19432K	Crosskeys Central N S Crosskeys Co Cavan
8	Cavan	19983B	St Clares NS Ballyjamesduff
9	Clare	17026M	Clarecastle BNS
10	Cork	07242M	Cloghroe Mxd Blarney
11	Cork	12203G	S N Naomh Antaine Ballinlough Cork
12	Cork	12382J	Curriglass NS Curriglass Mallow Co Cork
13	Cork	13747F	Riverstown NS Glanmire
14	Cork	14225D	Scoil Bhríde Ballydehob Co Cork
15	Cork	16259H	Kilcolman N S Enniskeen Co Cork
16	Cork	17050J	SN Naomh Sheamuis, Durras
17	Cork	17528N	St Catherine's NS, Conna, Mallow
18	Cork	18279A	Carrigaline 3 NS Carrigaline
19	Cork	19433M	Holy Family SS, Charleville
20	Cork	19908K	Gaelscoil Mhachan Carraig Dubh Corcaigh
21	Cork	20204E	Kilworth NS, Cork
22	Cork	62320R	St Mary's SS Macroom
23	Donegal	17018N	Scoil Phadraig Dobhar
24	Donegal	17036P	SN Naomh Colmchille Killmacrennan
25	Donegal	18295V	Meenaneary NS, Carrick
26	Donegal	19411C	SN Baile Raighin, Letterkenny
27	Donegal	19553W	Dungloe Central
28	Donegal	71242B	Gairm Scoil Chú Uladh Leifear
29	Donegal	81010J	St Colomba's Comprehensive Glenties
30	Dublin	11638N	Whitechurch National School Whitechurch Rathfarnham Dublin 16
31	Dublin	12448N	Gardiner St Convent Gardiner Street Dublin 1
32	Dublin	13612F	Presentation Convent
33	Dublin	16629O	Kiltarnan Church of Ireland NS
34	Dublin	16786H	St. Brigid's Convent NS, The Coombe
35	Dublin	16893I	SN Naomh Lorcan Stillorgan
36	Dublin	17083B	S N Muire Gan Smal B , Inchicore ,Dublin 8
37	Dublin	17979A	S N Cnoc Ainbhil Lr Kilmacud Rd Stillorgan/Blackrock Co Dublin
38	Dublin	18038B	St Margarets N S St Margarets Co Dublin

Physical Education Facilities.

73. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Science the provisions her Department will make to facilitate primary school pupils with adequate access to swimming pools, in order for them to complete the aquatics and water safety programme as part of the primary school curriculum in view of a recent report (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33443/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The curriculum in Physical Edu-

cation at Primary level provides for activity across six strands, athletics, dance, gymnastics, games, outdoor and adventure activities and aquatics. Five of the strands are outlined for implementation at all levels from junior infants to sixth class, while the aquatic strand is outlined for implementation at any one of the class group levels or over a number of levels. The Physical Education curricula at both primary and second level have been developed on the understanding that facilities available to schools vary. Consequently, they offer a level of flexibility that allows each individual school to design a programme that can

be delivered using the resources and supports available to it.

Where schools decide to provide pupils with swimming classes in school time, they are expected to fund them from resources already available to them. Primary school's running costs are met by my Department's scheme of capitation grants. These grants are intended to contribute towards the general operating costs of schools which would include heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, painting, teaching aids and other miscellaneous charges.

The primary school capitation grant has been increased substantially in recent years. Since 1997 the standard rate of capitation grant has been increased from €57.14 per pupil to €163.58 with effect from 1st January, 2007. This represents an increase of over 186% in the standard rate of capitation grant since 1997. Enhanced rates of capitation funding are paid in respect of children with special educational needs who attend special schools or special classes attached to mainstream schools. The current rates range from €418 to €805 per pupil. The capitation grant is in addition to the Ancillary Services Grant which provides additional funding for primary schools towards the cost of secretarial and caretaking services. The standard rate of grant per pupil under the scheme was increased from €102 per pupil in 2002 to the current rate of €145.50 per pupil.

Under the Programme for Government, we are committed to doubling the standard capitation grant for primary schools over the next five years. Grants to schools for the employment of secretaries and caretakers will also be increased significantly.

Student Support Schemes.

74. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has plans to ensure that the fund for students with a disability, the student assistance fund and the millennium partnership fund are entitlement based. [34003/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): A key goal of the National Development Plan 2007-13 is to widen participation and increase student and graduate numbers at third level. The Fund for Students with Disabilities, the Student Assistance Fund and the Millennium Partnership Fund, co-financed by the Government and the European Social Fund, form part of the strategy to achieve this goal. The three funding programmes are administered on behalf of my Department by the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (National Access Office), with assistance from Pobal in relation to the Millennium Partnership Fund.

The Fund for Students with Disabilities has increased significantly over the last few academic years. The Fund has grown by approximately 20% per annum. Between 2003-4 and 2006-7 there has been an increase of 63% in the number

of applications, reflecting steady improvements in the participation of people with disabilities in further and higher education. In 2006-7 over 2,400 students were approved for gross funding of some €9,986m. The Student Assistance Fund continues to be a vital avenue of financial support for students experiencing particular financial difficulties in third level institutions, assisting with such supports as rent, childcare and food costs. A gross allocation of €6.219m will be made in the current academic year for this fund. 9,886 students benefited from the SAF in 2005-6.

The Millennium Partnership Fund continues to support students from disadvantaged areas with regard to retention and participation in further and higher education. A budget of €1m was made available under the Fund for 2001. The 2006-7 allocation of €2.1m was distributed among 55 Partnerships/community groups around the country. 3,957 students benefited from the Fund in the 2005-6 academic year. There are currently no plans to place the Fund for Students with Disabilities, the Student Assistance Fund or the Millennium Partnership Fund on an entitlement-based footing. Any such change in these supports in the future would require detailed consideration of the full range of issues concerned and would be subject to the availability of resources.

My Department is currently working with the National Access Office and Pobal in relation to the re-orientation of the Millennium Partnership Fund to support the development of a whole-community approach to equity of access to higher education. Community partnerships have been informed and consultations are to start with the partnerships in the New Year. In respect of the Student Assistance Fund, a plan to develop good practice guidelines is currently being implemented by the National Access Office. It is expected that the new guidelines will enhance the effectiveness of this funding programme. The guidelines will be published in the second quarter of 2008, with a view to being implemented for the 2008-9 academic year. As outlined in the current NDP and Towards 2016, these three funds will remain important elements of the Government's overall strategy to alleviate educational disadvantage and to promote social inclusion.

School Accommodation.

75. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Science, further to her reply to Parliamentary Question No. 65 of 13 November 2007, the exact number, name and location of the schools in the Dublin south east constituency who were amongst the 9,000 projects in schools nationwide in receipt of €3 billion from her Department over the past seven years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33419/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Deputy will be aware from my previous replies that this €3 billion investment

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

delivered over 9,000 projects in schools throughout the country over the last 7 years. This investment has significantly increased capacity and transformed the standard of accommodation in many schools. Given the scale of investment and the number of projects involved it would require an inordinate amount of staff time to assemble the requested information. However, if the Deputy wishes to clarify the situation in respect of investment in individual cases then I would be happy to provide him with the information.

Official Engagements.

76. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of dedicated school visits which she has undertaken since June 2007 in her capacity as Minister and as reported in recent newspaper profiles; the purpose of such visits; the name and location of the

schools; if, on all occasions, all of the representatives of the Houses of the Oireachtas for the area in which the school was located were notified by her Department of her intended visit and invited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33436/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The table lists the school visits undertaken by me since June 2007. There are 32 in total, of which 21 are primary schools and 11 are post primary schools. It is a matter for individual schools to issue invites to events being hosted by them. A list issues to the media each week by the Government Information Services outlining all Ministerial public engagements. Events such as school openings and visits by myself are included on this list. My personal assistant keeps Oireachtas members informed of planned visits to particular areas of the country, on a regular basis.

School	County		
St. Kevins NS Sallynoggin	Dublin	Primary	Green Flag
Hollyparks GNS Foxrock	Dublin	Primary	Green Flag
Pres. Sec. Sch. Thurles	Tipperary	PP	Leaving Cert. Results
St. Patricks NS Cork	Cork	Primary	Visit
Trinity Comp.Sch. Ballymun	Dublin	PP	Official Opening of new €9million School
Wandesforde NS Kilkenny	Kilkenny	Primary	Visit
Kilkenny College	Kilkenny	PP	Opening of Extension
Kilkenny mixed NS	Kilkenny	Primary	Visit
Clinstown NS	Kilkenny	Primary	Opening €345,000 Extension
Clogher NS	Kerry	Primary	Visit
Castleisland	Kerry	Primary	Visit
Castleisland St. Pats Col	Kerry	PP	Visit
Whitechurch NS Rathfarnham	Dublin	Primary	Opening New €180,000 extension
Malahide Community Sch	Dublin	PP	Opening of new €14 million School
Blackrock College	Dublin	PP	Opening new senior school building
Cabinteely Comm. Sch	Dublin	PP	Launch new Education Prog. With Ceann Comhairle
St. Lasarians Sch. Carlow	Carlow	PrimarySp Sch.	Opening of Early Intervention unit at school
Maynooth Post Primary	Kildare	PP	Official opening of new €3million extension
St Conleth's Derrinturn Carbury	Kildare	PP	Opening early intervention centre linked to St Conleth's
St. Farnhams Prosperous	Kildare	PP	Official opening of €2.3million extension
St. Bernards NS Abbeylara	Longford	Primary	Official opening of new €500,000extension
Sc. Mhuire Aughnagarron Granard	Longford	Primary	Opening of New €380,000 extension
Colmcille Aughnacliffe	Longford	Primary	visit
Lanesboro Community Col.	Longford	PP	Official opening of €900,000 refurbishment
Castleknock Educate together	Dublin	Primary	Official opening of new €5million School
St. Louise Rathmines	Dublin	Primary	Visit
Glenageary & Killiney NS	Dublin	Primary	Opening New €830,000 extension
St. Claires NS Harold's	Dublin	Primary	Launch of assessment guidelines for NCCA
Knockconnon NS	Monaghan	Primary	Opening new €1.3million school
St. Comgall's NS Connons.	Monaghan	Primary	Opening of €320,000 extension
St Oliver Plunkett Loughmore	Monaghan	Primary	Visiting newly opened pre-school
Sc. Na Gcailini Castleblayney	Monaghan	Primary	Digital school awards

Site Acquisitions.

77. **Deputy Shane McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Science if the purchase has been completed for the site of a new national school in Laytown, County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33825/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The new 24 classroom Primary School for Laytown will be positioned on that part of the site which was purchased by my Department in May 2007.

Schools Building Projects.

78. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of projects that fall into each of the four bands categorised in the school building programme development for the years 2003 to 2007 respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33438/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): As I have indicated previously I intend to continue to move through the School Building and Modernisation Programme in a planned way over the next number of years. This is possible with the availability of €4.5 billion capital funding for first and second level school infrastructure development under the new NDP 2007-2013. This will build on the major investment of over €2.6 billion on school infrastructure in the period of the last NDP 2000-2006.

The priority rating of each individual project is established in accordance with the Criteria for Prioritising Capital Projects which allocates each project to an appropriate priority band rating on the basis of objective criteria. A review of the criteria for prioritising large-scale projects was undertaken in consultation with the Education Partners early in 2004 to ensure that the criteria have the optimum precision and are fully tuned to meeting the priority accommodation needs of primary and post-primary schools and in general the feedback from the Education Partners to the review has been positive. The revised criteria have been seen as bringing greater clarity and focus to the system. The amended criteria are applied to all projects that proceed to tender and construction.

The numbers of building projects under consideration can change on a day to day basis as new applications are received and existing applications are progressed in my Department. The Deputy will appreciate that this investment must continue to be targeted using the published prioritisation criteria. Details of projects to move forward under the programme will be published as and when they are ready to be advanced in the context of capital expenditure requirements.

School Planning.

79. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for

Education and Science, further to her reply to Parliamentary Question No. 64 of 13 November 2007, the new procedures agreed and implemented by her Department and local authorities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33422/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): As part of the Government's strategy for the provision of school places for 2008 and onwards, a commitment to establish a Developing Areas Unit in my Department is given under the Programme for Government. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that this Unit has been established. It is located in Tullamore and forms part of my Department's planning and building division already based in that location.

The unit will be solely dedicated to progressing school planning in rapidly developing areas, building on improvements that have already been made in school planning in recent years. Staff in the unit will liaise with local authorities, identify where new schools are needed and ensure that they are delivered in the fastest possible timeframe. My Department has also initiated a tender process for a drawdown contract facility that will be used to provide additional school places in the rapidly developing areas for 2008 and onwards. This drawdown contract facility is aimed at providing school accommodation in very short time-scales using modern methodologies such as off-site construction.

Both I and my senior officials have met with the relevant local authorities in relation to the acquisition of suitable sites for new schools and, where possible, pre-empting any planning issues that may arise. This close cooperation with local authorities will help ensure that additional school places are provided in the developing areas within the earliest possible timeframes. These strategies are being underpinned by a budget of €4.5 billion over the lifetime of the National Development Plan.

School Accommodation.

80. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she is satisfied with the educational facilities available to the island communities on the islands; the advancement of education on the islands; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32590/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): It is my policy that, where possible, education should be provided on islands for both primary and post primary pupils. School building projects are progressed in the context of the Department's multi annual school building programme and are prioritised in accordance with the published criteria which has been agreed with the Education Partners.

School Inspectors.

81. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of primary school inspectors currently employed by her Department; the number of vacancies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33447/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): There is currently a full staffing complement in my Department's Primary Inspectorate. The overall staffing of 82 inspectors is made up of 36 divisional inspectors and 46 district inspectors.

Schools Building Projects.

82. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science the steps that she will take to reform the planning and building unit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24885/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department's Developing Areas Unit has been established. To date, 11 members of staff have been redeployed to the unit, comprised of:

- 1 Principal Officer
- 1 Assistant Principal Officer
- 1 Senior Architect
- 1 Architectural Assistant
- 3 Higher Executive Officers and
- 4 Executive Officers

Some of these staff would have been looking after developing areas anyway, and so the consolidation of effort in the new unit will ensure that they are more effectively deployed. The process of filling some of the vacancies arising from the redeployment of staff to the new unit from other areas, is in train. A further 5 additional (ie non-redeployed) posts — including a professional planner — have been approved for the unit. The necessary recruitment arrangements are now being put in place. The staffing of the unit will be kept under review in light of the evolution of its work programme.

School Management.

83. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the fact that following the significant reduction in the number of religious personnel who traditionally provided extensive management and administration services as well as teaching services in the voluntary secondary school sector, the burden of management has fallen heavily on the shoulders of the principal and deputy principal of such schools; her views on the necessity for the creation of a new role of

administrator in the voluntary secondary school sector with the grade of senior administrative officer responsible to the principal and having responsibility for all matters of school management relating to finance, buildings including contents, non-teaching staff in general and administration; if she will enter into negotiations with the relevant secondary school authorities to discuss the establishment of such a post and have it funded with additional funds from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33430/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The issue raised by the Deputy has already been the subject of discussion between officials from my Department and representatives of the relevant secondary school management authority. My Department has also received a submission from the management authority in regard to the matter. The submission is currently being considered and I can confirm that officials of my Department are available to discuss the matter further with the secondary school management authority.

State Examinations.

84. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of fees collected for the junior certificate examination and the leaving certificate examination for each of the years 2002 to 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33429/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Generally speaking, examination fees are increased each year in line with the consumer price index. The costs associated with the certificate examinations have been spiralling in recent years due to the introduction of new methods of assessment in various subjects and to continuing increases in special arrangements for students with special needs. I should point out that the income received from examination fees each year amount to only a fraction of the total cost to the taxpayer of running the examinations.

The Deputy may be aware that medical card holders, or candidates whose parents or guardians hold a current medical card, are exempt from payment of examination fees. It is estimated that approximately 30% of all examination candidates benefit under this scheme annually. The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

Junior Certificate

2002:	€2,960,301
2003:	€3,062,772
2004:	€3,363,147
2005:	€3,589,773
2006:	€3,726,812

Leaving Certificate

2002: €3,628,637

2003: €3,813,522

2004: €4,244,184

2005: €4,342,536

2006: €4,046,679

Third Level Courses.

85. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Education and Science the steps she has taken since June 2007 to discuss with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Foreign Affairs, to provide for coherence, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in the system of allocating visas to foreign nationals outside the EEA, who seek to come here to pursue their studies in recognised Irish institutions as recommended in a recent report (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33433/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Since June 2007 my Department has had formal meetings with officials from the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform on two occasions. At one of these meetings the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment and other agencies involved in the internationalisation of Irish education were also present. In addition to this, there are continuing contacts between officials by phone and e mail on the general approach to these matters. My Department and the D/Justice Equality and Law Reform are also represented on the Advisory Council for English Language Schools, and issues concerning student immigration also arise in this forum.

Responsibility for the allocation of student visas, and immigration generally, is a matter for the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform and the immigration authorities. The position in regard to students from outside the EU/EEA and Switzerland entering Ireland to study has been clear from the outset and is set out in the Report of the Internationalisation of Irish Education published in 2004. The immigration regime provides that such students must be attending full time programmes of at least 15 hours per week, pay the full economic fee and be fully self financing.

My Department has also established an Internationalisation Register setting out the programmes which have been approved for the purpose of access to work by such students. This is updated on a monthly basis, is posted on my Department's website, and is made available to the immigration authorities.

School Management.

86. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will keep her

commitment to establish a new model of national school with the VEC as its patron by September 2008; the location of the school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32959/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Historically, the church authorities acted as patrons or sponsors of primary schools by initiating the process of establishing a new school when one was needed to serve a specific geographic area. The vast majority of primary schools are privately owned, publicly-funded institutions, the denominational character and ethos of which is respected by the State. This model of school provision has been incrementally evolving to reflect changes in demand and in the expectations of society, notably the demand for diversity. With these changes, there has been an increase in the number of patron bodies seeking recognition for new schools.

To meet the challenges posed by demands for greater diversity, I announced on 17 February 2007 my intention to introduce a new model of primary school patronage on a pilot basis. This new model will have the capacity to cater for the wishes of parents for denominational, multi-denominational and non-denominational education within the framework of a single patron model and a single board of management structure. The framework for the new model will be representative of and designed to cater for the diversity of religious beliefs within an area served by a primary school. The new model of patronage will be used particularly in growing areas. It is not intended that the new model will replace the existing models. The existing models will continue as heretofore but the proposed model will be an option available where the specific local circumstances warrant the new approach.

Following my announcement, officials in my Department engaged in consultations with the Education Partners and the County Dublin Vocational Education Committee to explore the detailed implementation measures that will need to be in place prior to the introduction of the new model. The initiative has been broadly welcomed by the Education Partners. Work on the development of the new patronage model is on-going within my Department, in consultation with the Education Partners, and it is intended that the pilot project will be operational by September 2008.

State Examinations.

87. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Science when a standard assessment for non-anglophone pupils will be introduced in secondary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33440/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): A key focus of educational policy is to ensure that newcomer students are inte-

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

grated successfully into the Irish education system and that they have access to the same learning opportunities as are available to other students in the system, albeit with additional language support where needed. In the region of 1,900 additional teachers are being provided across primary and second level schools to support the language needs of pupils with a deficit in English.

Newcomer students avail of the same assessment arrangements as are available generally under the Certificate Examinations. In addition to the 11 languages provided for in the curriculum, the State Examinations Commission provides examinations in a range of non-curricular languages. These are languages which do not appear as part of the normal school curriculum but which students may opt to be examined in under certain conditions. Chief among these conditions are the requirements that:

- the candidates for these examinations be from a member state of the EU
- they speak the language in which they opt to be examined as a mother tongue
- they are following a programme of study leading to the Leaving Certificate and
- they are taking the Leaving Certificate examination in English

Candidates may undertake examination in only one of these language subjects.

For the 2007 Leaving Certificate examinations, candidates were entered for 15 non-curricular EU language subjects, an increase from nine in 2005. In regard to language proficiency, the Department has commissioned assessment packs from Integrate Ireland Language and Training to assist teachers in determining the English language proficiency levels of newcomer pupils. The packs have been designed for primary level, and are currently being adapted to make them age appropriate for second level use. Schools may use the primary packs in the interim.

Third Level Courses.

88. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department will carry out a comprehensive top level review of higher education here in view of a recent report (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33444/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I am aware of the details of the survey. The higher education sector makes a significant contribution to sustaining Ireland's economic prosperity and the creation of a dynamic cohesive society. Recent years have witnessed significant improvements in support for universities and institutes of technology, reflecting the priority afforded by Government to the con-

tinued reform and development of the sector. I agree that it is important that the sector be provided with a clear sense of direction for the future and I will be addressing this matter further in the New Year.

Departmental Expenditure.

89. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason the OECD reported that in 1994 Ireland spent 5.5% of GDP on education yet in 2007 the OECD Education at a Glance report indicated Ireland spent 4.6% of GDP which places us in joint last place in a range of thirty OECD countries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33417/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Between 1995 and 2004, in real terms (allowing for inflation), total public and private spending has increased here by 74% at primary, second and further education levels and coincidentally by 74% at higher education. At primary and secondary levels, this scale of increase was the second highest of any OECD country while at third level it was 6th highest.

So, total spending grew faster, here, in absolute terms than in most other OECD countries over that period. The OECD in its recent report has remarked (page 202): 'In Ireland, the strong growth of GDP hides a significant increase in spending on educational institutions when spending on education is considered as a proportion of GDP.' It should also be noted that the OECD report to which the Deputy refers relates to 2004 and hence does not capture the extra investment that has been put into Irish education in the past three years. In fact, the Department's expenditure for this year was €8.6 billion — €2 billion more than in 2004 and the estimate for 2008 is over €9.3 billion.

The OECD Report also showed how Irish students are performing significantly better than those in other developed countries on a whole range of important measures. More recently data published by OECD from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has confirmed that, in 2006, Irish students continued to perform above the OECD average in Science and especially in Reading. In Mathematics, students in Ireland were average.

Departmental Agencies.

90. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will establish Education Ireland on a statutory basis as recommended in a recent report (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33432/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Preparations are well advanced to establish Education Ireland in the first instance

as a company with responsibility for promoting the development of Ireland as a centre of excellence for international education. Draft legislation is also being prepared to establish Education Ireland on a statutory basis in the course of 2008.

School Records.

91. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the provisions, in view of a recent report (details supplied), she will make to supply schools with adequate storage facilities for student test scores; if an electronic database will be established alongside the hard copy files; if additional administrative staff will be appointed to manage, collate and store these files; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33437/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The advice in the Guidelines on Assessment issued by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment recommends to schools that they keep assessment information for 17 years, until the child enrolled has reached 21 years of age. This is not a legal requirement under the Data Protection Acts but rather stems from legal advice given by the Department to the NCCA in response to a query asking whether there was a statute of limitations for holding this type of information. The Statute of Limitations varies depending on the type of case. Where litigation arises for alleged failure to education, the statute of limitations provides for a timeframe equal to 3 years after the child's 18th birthday — ie when the child reaches 21 years of age. It is for this reason that the guidelines advise schools to hold information on assessment until the pupil reaches 21 years of age. Data Protection requirements also specify that personal information may not be kept for any longer than necessary.

The guidelines on storage relate to a one page summary for each child showing how they performed in the test. The test booklets themselves do not have to be stored. The volume of documentation which should be retained is therefore not excessive for an individual pupil. This information can also be recorded electronically or scanned for electronic filing. All schools have access to computer facilities for administrative purposes.

The Guidelines were approved by the Council of the NCCA prior to the launch. Therefore, unions, management bodies, parents' council and other representative bodies had the opportunity to examine them fully before finalisation. These are Guidelines for teachers. I do not believe this issue will give rise to significant difficulties, but if such arise, my Department will be happy to examine the matter in collaboration with the partners in education.

Schools Building Projects.

92. **Deputy Shane McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Science when planning permission will be submitted for the building of a new national school in Laytown, County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33826/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department has already provided a 16-classroom facility to meet the immediate accommodation requirements in Laytown. The new 24-classroom school building will be provided by my Department under a design and build contract. The procurement process for this project is now nearing completion and it is expected that the contract will be awarded very soon. As part of the tender competition, the initial design and layout for the school has already been done and some pre-planning discussions have taken place with Meath County Council in order to help ensure that it meets their requirements.

Following the placing of the design and build contract, the first task for the successful contractor will be to submit the application for planning permission for the new school. Given the preparatory work already done it is expected that the application for planning permission can be done within a matter of weeks following the appointment. I want to assure the Deputy that my Department is committed to providing the new school in Laytown at the earliest possible stage.

93. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science, further to her reply to Parliamentary Question No. 64 of 13 November 2007, the name, location and cost of the 1,500 school projects in receipt of €540 million as part of her Department's school building programme for 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33420/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Deputy will be aware from my previous reply that this year's investment in schools infrastructure of over €540 million, the first year of the roll out of the new National Development Plan, will deliver over 1,500 projects in schools throughout the country. This investment will significantly increased capacity and transform the standard of accommodation in many schools. Given the scale of investment and the number of projects involved it would require an inordinate amount of staff time to assemble the requested information. However, if the Deputy wishes to clarify the situation in respect of investment in individual cases then I would be happy to provide her with the information.

Capitation Grants.

94. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

been drawn to the significant discrepancy in the funding for the voluntary secondary schools compared to other schools in the post-primary system having regard to the fact that almost 60% of all second level students attend the 400 voluntary secondary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33425/07]

106. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for Education and Science the steps she has taken to ensure that equal funding for all schools in the post-primary sector would be achieved within the next two budgets of 2008 and 2009 in line with the commitment given in the programme for Government 2007 to 2012; the amount, based on the present numbers of pupils in the post-primary system, of additional funds that will be required; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33424/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94 and 106 together.

My Department provides funding to secondary schools by way of per capita grants, which afford schools considerable flexibility in the use of these resources to cater for the needs of their pupils. There have been significant improvements in recent years in the level of funding for voluntary secondary schools, and I am pleased to advise the Deputy that increases will continue to be applied in 2008. As I announced last week, with effect from 1 January 2008, the standard per capita grant will increase by €15 to €331 per pupil. In addition, voluntary secondary schools will benefit by an increase of €15 per pupil from 1 January 2008 in the support services grant, bringing that grant to €204. This increase is inclusive of a €10 increase in equalisation funding for voluntary secondary schools.

The total increase of €30 per pupil in a voluntary secondary school will bring the aggregate grant to €535 per pupil. The Deputy should be aware that these grants are in addition to the per capita funding, of up to €40,000 per school, that is also provided by my Department to secondary schools towards secretarial and caretaking services. Accordingly, in the case of a secondary school with 500 pupils, the annual grants towards general expenses and support service will be more than €300,000 in 2008. This represents an increase of 92% approximately since 2000. These significant increases in the funding of voluntary secondary schools are a clear demonstration of my commitment to prioritise available resources to address the needs of schools. It is estimated that an additional €14.64m is required to complete the process of equalisation of funding at second level.

Schools Building Projects.

95. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Mini-

ster for Education and Science when a technical team will visit a school (details supplied) in County Kerry to enable the design work for a new school to commence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34017/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): An application for capital funding towards the provision of an extension at the school to which the Deputy refers was received and assessed. The long term projected staffing, on which the future accommodation needs of the school will be based, has been determined and notified to the school authority. In order to determine how best to provide for the school's accommodation needs into the future, it will be necessary to have a technical assessment of existing buildings carried out. Officials from the Department will be in contact with the school authority to arrange a date in due course.

Multi-Denominational Schools.

96. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number, arising from the announcement to construct 13 new schools in north Dublin, of these schools that will be multi-denominational; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33439/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): No decision has been taken yet on the number of new multi-denominational schools which will open in Fingal in the 2008/2009 school year. However, I can say that Educate Together has lodged a number of notifications of intention to apply for the recognition of new schools in the north Dublin area for next September with the New Schools Advisory Committee (NSAC). The NSAC is an independent advisory group established to process applications for the recognition of new primary schools and to make recommendations to me. I would expect that the NSAC will produce its report early in 2008.

Second Level Education.

97. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on a recent report (details supplied) highlighting the rising number of students entering third level colleges from fee paying grind schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33442/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I am aware of the article to which the Deputy refers. The schools referred to by the Deputy are not recognised by my Department. Parents are entitled to opt to have their children educated in schools that are not recognised post-primary schools and to have them prepare in that way for the Leaving Certificate Examination and entrance to third level institutions. While I respect the right of parents in that regard my

focus is on supporting recognised schools in continuing to provide a high quality of education that enables students to reach their full potential in terms of all aspects of their personal development.

Question No. 98 answered with Question No. 58.

Third Level Fees.

99. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Education and Science the plans she has to increase the fees for foreign nationals outside the EEA enrolling on a post-leaving certificate course to cover the cost of tuition, administration and normal student support services provided by the school or college; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33435/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Students from outside the European Economic Area, (EEA), other than refugees and those with humanitarian leave to remain in the State, are required to pay the full economic fee when participating on programmes in further and higher education. This includes students attending Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. This is a normal process as part of Irish immigration procedures and is in line with the 2004 Report on the Internalisation of Irish Education. The admission of persons to the State from outside the EEA is a matter for the immigration authorities. The basic conditions for a student visa require that the student attend a full-time programme of education and training and that they are financially self-supporting. The current cost for participation on a PLC courses for students from outside the EEA is €3,653 per annum. There are no plans to increase this fee at present.

State Examinations.

100. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on whether lower standards for the leaving certificate and junior certificate examinations have led to grade inflation over the past decade; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32960/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The increase in the numbers of candidates achieving high grades in the more recent examinations can be attributed to a number of factors. In particular, teaching which is focused on the requirements of the examinations programme, access by students and teachers to all elements of the examination programme including past examination papers, the facility to view examination scripts, marking schemes and Chief Examiners reports, and well resourced and researched text books. Likewise, the significant increase in professional development provision

for teachers since 1994 can be regarded as having a positive impact on examination achievement.

Throughout the period 1989 to date, a number of syllabi were revised on the advice of the NCCA. Individual subject course committees have seen syllabus change as an opportunity to make syllabus content and examinations more student friendly and more accessible. Accordingly, when syllabi change, statistical comparison with earlier figures becomes difficult. Today's examination candidates are better prepared, better supported and better resourced than ever before. Students and teachers prepare for the examinations in order to achieve the maximum results.

Early School Leavers.

101. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the specific steps she proposes to take, in view of her reply to a previous parliamentary question to enable her Department to have a comprehensive set of statistics which would indicate the number of pupils who left school before sitting their junior certificate examinations; if such statistics would include PPS numbers and addresses in order to enable education and training bodies to maintain contact with the individual concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33418/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I can assure the Deputy that my Department is committed to further developing high-quality, relevant and timely statistical information relating to all levels of education in order to contribute to the development of policies and services to the public and to meet the needs of learners, education providers and other users of education data, nationally as well as internationally.

In that regard my Department, is currently finalising a Statement of Data Strategy for 2008-2010, which will examine the question of data sharing between the Department and its agencies. An important element in addressing such issues would clearly be the use of a unique identifier which would be used by all agencies in tracking an individual's progress through the education system over time. The Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) is clearly the most efficient numerical identifier to use since it, potentially, links information to other public data holdings and can serve as an effective way of correctly identifying individuals across a number of policy interfaces from education to health, training or employment, based on appropriate data protection protocols.

The PPSN is already used as the key identifier on my Departments Post-Primary Pupils Database. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to develop a Database at Primary level and the implementation issues involved are currently being examined. It should be noted that

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is currently developing its own Case Management System to enable tracking of students who drop out of school or who record more than 20 days absence in any school-year. Section 21 the Education Welfare Act 2000 requires the principal of a school to give notice in writing to an Educational Welfare Officer of a student's name if, for whatever reason, his or her name has been removed from the school's register.

The Deputy will also be aware that the emphasis placed by this Government on tackling educational disadvantage in recent years is absolutely unprecedented. Since 2003, we have increased investment in educational inclusion measures at all levels by no less than 60%, to €730 million in 2007. We are determined to ensure that young people from disadvantaged areas get the support they need to encourage them to finish school. To this end, we have provided additional investment in a wide range of areas, including extra teachers, grants for books, homework clubs, school meals and summer camps. We have also expanded access to important services such as the Home School Community Liaison scheme and the School Completion Programme which work with students at risk of early school leaving and their families.

Indeed, there are now approximately 620 staff working in services such as these, including over 130 extra posts allocated under the DEIS Action Plan over the past two years. In addition, the National Educational Welfare Board now has over 100 staff, and is specifically tasked with tackling attendance problems that if left unchecked can culminate in young people dropping out of school. There is an emphasis under DEIS on helping children to make a smooth transition to second level. Initiatives such as familiarisation days and week-long transfer programmes have been shown to have been very successful in that regard. Schools participating in the School Support Programme under DEIS are being encouraged to prioritise the development of effective transfer programmes for pupils making the transition to post-primary education.

In terms of achievement at post-primary level, it is important to look at the issue in terms of attainment of second level education or equivalent rather than just school completion. Focusing just on school devalues the hard work of students who continued their education in Youthreach centres, went on to train for apprenticeships through FÁS, or acquired qualifications through other equally valuable routes. The Government is encouraged by data that shows that the attainment levels of our young people have improved significantly in recent years. By 2006, 85.4% of Irish 20 to 24 year olds had obtained upper second level education or equivalent -up from

82.6% in 2000 and significantly ahead of the EU average of 77.8%.

The improvement in the proportion of 20-24 year olds with at least second level education or equivalent in recent years is testament to the success of the Government's dual strategy of both improving school completion levels and increasing access to second chance and further education. We are also conscious that the content and perceived relevance of the school curricula have an important effect on students' motivation and desire to finish school. Under the DEIS plan, more students in disadvantaged areas will have access to the Junior Certificate Schools Programme and the Leaving Cert Applied programme.

To conclude, there is evidence that the Government's focus on improving school completion rates and attainment levels in recent years is making a difference. I assure the Deputy that further improvements in this area will continue to be a priority for us in the years ahead. Social inclusion measures across other Government departments have also been prioritised under the Towards 2016 agreement, the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and the National Development Plan.

Third Level Fees.

102. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on whether all students attending part-time education for the first time should be enabled to access free education on the same basis as full-time students. [34001/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Students pursuing approved part time undergraduate courses are eligible for tax relief on their fees. The Towards 2016 agreement also contains a commitment to put in place a targeted scheme to alleviate the fees in public institutions for part-time courses at third level for those at work who have not previously pursued a third level qualification. The Higher Education Authority, in consultation with my Department, has been developing a scheme in response to this commitment and a pilot programme in Pharmaceutical Technology has commenced in IT Tallaght. It is expected that a number of other pilot programmes will commence in 2008. The Strategic Innovation Fund which the Government introduced to incentivise reform and modernisation of higher education also provide opportunities for institutions to review their structures to provide better opportunities for part-time provision. For example, in the institute of technology sector, Cork IT is leading a project to enhance opportunities for people in employment to access learning to enhance their skills for current and future occupations.

The Programme for Government also includes a commitment to introduce a more extensive new

system of means-tested free fees, with a view to enabling more people with work or family commitments to avail of opportunities at third level. The timescale for implementing this commitment will depend on the resources available in future Budgets.

School Planning.

103. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Education and Science, further to her reply to Parliamentary Question No. 56 of 13 November 2007, the number of area development plans that have been published; the location where copies can be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33423/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Five Draft Area Development Plans have been published by the Commission on School Accommodation to date. The areas covered by the Plans are:

- Mountmellick/Mountrath
- The N4/M4 corridor
- Newport/Westport
- North Kerry
- North Dublin

The Commission is currently finalising a Plan for the East Meath and South Louth area. All Plans, which will be the blueprint for capital investment for the areas concerned for the foreseeable future, are available on the Department's website www.education.ie.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the extent to which class sizes have been reduced in all schools throughout the country since the beginning of the 2007/08 school year; the way this compares with the previous year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34007/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information on class sizes for the 2007/08 school year is currently being compiled in my Department. As the Deputy will be aware, major improvements have been made in staffing at primary level in recent years. There are now in the region of 6,000 more primary teachers than there were in 2002. By the 2006/07 school year, we had reduced the average class size in our primary schools to 24, while the pupil teacher ratio was 16.4:1, including resource teachers etc. In that year, schools were staffed on the basis of a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 28 children. Given that the national average was 24, many schools benefited from much more favourable staffing ratios than this.

Extra teachers were provided by the Government for the 2007/08 school year to improve

primary school staffing so that schools would generally get at least one classroom teacher for every 27 children. A further initiative in recent years that has been of direct benefit to primary schools has been the change in the criteria for developing schools. For the current school year the threshold for getting a developing school post was reduced specifically to help schools that are seeing large increases in enrolments each year. Over 330 such posts have been sanctioned in the 2007/08 school year compared to 280 in 2006/07.

The improvements we have made in school staffing in recent years are absolutely unparalleled. The Government is committed to providing more teachers to our primary schools over the next five years in order to reduce class sizes. We will also continue our focus on measures to improve the quality of education in our primary schools to ensure that increased resources lead to better outcomes for our children.

Youth Services.

105. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the action she will take to safeguard the future of groups (details supplied) in County Donegal in view of the fact that the building they occupy is up for sale; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33976/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): My Department supports a number of schemes and initiatives which provide non-formal educational opportunities for young people throughout the country through voluntary participation in youth work. This support consists mainly of grant-in-aid assistance for national and major regional youth work organisations under the Youth Service Grant Scheme, targeted youth work responses for young people through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme and support for youth clubs and groups at a local level through the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme.

Donegal Youth Services is in receipt of annual grant-in-aid funding for the Daybreak Programme and the Donegal Outreach Project under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme and for a Youth Information Centre in Letterkenny. This funding is channelled through Co. Donegal VEC and Youth Work Ireland. My Department has no role in the management of youth work facilities, nor does it provide for capital funding in the youth work area.

Question No. 106 answered with Question No. 94.

Local Authority Charges.

107. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will enter into negotiations with the Department of the Envir-

[Deputy Ciarán Lynch.]

onment, Heritage and Local Government to see if it is possible to establish an agreed countrywide regime for local authority levies for schools in the free education scheme that would result in schools being treated as non-commercial premises and thereby have their operational costs reduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33428/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Deputy will be aware of the commitment in the Programme for Government to examine how local authorities might grant allow schools a reasonable level of usage of water and waste services without charge, and that charges would only apply when a school exceeded the allowance. The Deputy will appreciate that it is a primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, to determine precisely how this commitment will be implemented.

A key consideration from my perspective is to ensure that any proposed scheme ensures that schools are treated consistently across the country. My Department will of course input to and support the examination to be conducted by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Capitation Grants.

108. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department will provide financial aid to the schools in Adamstown that are facing bankruptcy in view of a recent report (details supplied). [33445/07]

744. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the start up grants that have been provided to each school in an area (details supplied) in County Dublin; if she will provide extra funding for these schools in view of significant additional costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34190/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 and 744 together.

The schools referred to by the Deputy are recognised primary schools and attract funding in the same way as all recognised primary schools. The Deputy will be aware that schools' running costs are met by my Department's scheme of capitation grants, and capitation grants have been increased substantially in recent years. I announced further improvements in grant rates last week in the context of the Budget. The primary capitation grant will increase by €15 to more than €178 per pupil. The ancillary services grant for primary schools will also be improved by €6 to €151.50 per pupil.

Taken together, these increases mean that primary schools eligible for the full ancillary

services grant will get €330 per pupil — or €21 extra — next year to cover their day to day running costs, with a primary school of 300 pupils getting €6,300 more. In fact, this 300 pupil school will get almost €100,000 from my Department next year to meet day to day running costs. The Deputy will be pleased to know that following the recent budget announcements, overall education expenditure has increased from circa €1.9 billion in 2002 to €9.3 billion next year, an increase of 8% on the funding position after Budget 2007. This will enable my Department to consolidate the major service improvements that have been put in place in recent years and to make further progress in a wide range of areas.

Extra investment of more than €690 million in education next year will enable me to put about 1,200 extra teachers in place, to deliver improvements in school buildings and to increase day-to-day funding for schools. The funding arrangements for newly established primary schools currently include a start up grant of €6,348.69. I intend reviewing this grant following consideration of the additional funding allocated to the primary sector in Budget 2008.

School Curriculum.

109. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will reverse the decision directing all Irish medium schools to teach two and a half hours of English every week from no later than the start of the second term of junior infant class. [33999/07]

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.

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 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.

While the right of parents and children to choose education through the medium of Irish is fully respected, this does not obviate the need for schools to implement all aspects of the national curriculum. The Circular on this issue is now the subject of a legal challenge in the High Court, and it would not be appropriate to make any further comments about the matter.

State Examinations.

110. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Science, further to Parliamentary Question No. 242 of 3 October 2007, if the Circuit Court has issued a judgment on her Department's appeal regarding the Equality Tribunal recommendation on annotations on leaving certificate transcripts of students with disabilities; if not, when she expects her Department to receive same; the action her Department has taken or will take as a result; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33998/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Circuit Court issued its Judgement on 19th October last on my Department's appeal on the findings of the Equality Tribunal in relation to annotations on examination certificates. The Court found that the practice of including an explanatory note on examination certificates where a core element was not assessed is not discriminatory. My Department has been served notice that one of the students involved will be appealing the Judgement to the High Court.

Special Educational Needs.

111. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Education and Science the percentage of both primary and secondary school students who require special needs assistance for learning difficulties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33448/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Special needs assistants are allocated to schools to support the care needs, rather than the learning difficulties, of certain children with special needs. Some children with learning difficulties may have no care needs and do not need the support of a Special Needs Assistant. These children can be supported by the learning support teacher in the school. Schools which have enrolled children with certain special educational needs may also be sanctioned additional resource teaching support.

As the Deputy will be aware, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers, for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support children with special needs. As a result, the information requested by the Deputy is not retained by my Department. I will forward the Deputy's question to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

Schools Insurance.

112. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Science the steps that need to be taken by her Department, the Department of Finance, and the voluntary secondary school sector to enable that sector to be covered for insurance purposes by a company (details supplied) which currently provides insurance to local authorities, the health sector, the VECs, higher education institutions and other public bodies having regard to the high cost of insurance being experienced by this sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33426/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Deputy may be aware that my Department is currently undertaking a review of insurance arrangements in schools throughout the primary and post-primary sectors as part of the VFM and Policy Review Initiative. The Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative was introduced in June 2006, replacing the former Expenditure Review Initiative and is part of the wider public service modernisation agenda.

The review includes schools in the voluntary secondary school sector and will address current insurance arrangements as well as possible potential alternatives, such as that referred to by the Deputy, as part of its terms of reference. The review is being undertaken in full consultation with the relevant management bodies in the post-primary sector. It is intended that the review will provide an evidential basis for future policy formulation in this area by my Department.

National Statistics.

113. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Taoiseach the approximate population of the islands within the remit of the local authority of Donegal County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34394/07]

115. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Taoiseach the approximate population of the islands within the remit of the local authority of Mayo County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34418/07]

116. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Taoiseach the approximate population of the islands within the remit of the local authority of Galway County

[Deputy Jack Wall.]

Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34419/07]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Tom Kitt): I propose to take Questions Nos. 113, 115 and 116 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the table.

Population of inhabited Islands off the coast, Census 2006

	Persons
<i>Co. Donegal</i>	
An Chruit	53
Árainn Mhór	522
Aughnish	3
Gabhla	4
Inis Bó Finne	36
Inis Caorach	7
Inis Fraoigh	9
Inis Mhic an Doirn	13
Oileán an Bhráighe	13
Toraigh	142
Uaigh	27
Total	829
<i>Co. Galway</i>	
An Ros	12
An tOileán Mór	1
Árainn	824
Eanach Mheáin	140
Fornais	65
Garmna	1,010
Inis an Ghainimh	2
Inis Bearachain	1
Inishbofin	199
Inisheer	247
Inishmaan	154
Inis Ní	28
Inis Treabhair	1
Inishtrurk	1
Leitir Mealláin	213
Leitir Móir	528
Maínis	140
Omey	2
Roisín an Chalaídh	7
Total	3,575
<i>Co. Mayo</i>	
Acaill	2,620
Clare	136
Clynish	5
Collan More	18
Inis Bigil	24
Inishcottle	3

	Persons
Inishgort	1
Inishlyre	7
Inishnakillew	3
Inishturk	58
Inisraher	0
Island More	1
Total	2,876

Departmental Agencies.

114. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Taoiseach why funding was not provided to the Law Reform Commission to provide legislative drafting expertise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34414/07]

The Taoiseach: The matter of resources for Government Departments and Agencies is dealt with in the general context of the estimates process, which must also have regard to the overall management of the State's financial resources. The funding allocated to the Law Reform Commission was determined in that context and in the context of Government policy in relation to these matters.

Questions Nos. 115 and 116 answered with Question No. 113.

Departmental Committees.

117. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Taoiseach if his Department has a management advisory committee or an equivalent management committee; if it meets regularly; if so, the frequency of same; if he and the Ministers of State attached to his Department attend the meetings; if a special adviser or advisers attached to the ministerial office or offices attend such meetings; if the minutes are circulated subsequent to each meeting with an indication as to the action to be taken by whom and when; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33214/07]

119. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Taoiseach if he convenes specific policy meetings with officials in his Department; the way a policy meeting with officials is different from that of a management meeting such as a management advisory committee meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33216/07]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 117 and 119 together.

The Management Advisory Committee in my Department meets regularly to deal with all relevant aspects of the implementation of the business plan of the Department in furtherance of the Statement of Strategy, to deal with the management of the Department's resources and com-

pliance with the various obligations relevant to the work of the Department and to assist the Secretary General of the Department in carrying out his responsibilities under the Public Service Management Act, 1997. Minutes of the meetings are circulated to the Department and specify the action points arising.

I do not routinely attend meetings of the MAC but I am briefed regularly on issues arising by the Secretary General. Having regard to the nature of the work of the Department, and its relatively small size, I am in frequent discussion with the Secretary General and Assistant Secretaries about all aspects of the work of the Department. In particular, I meet regularly with them to discuss the work programme of the various Cabinet Committees which are one of the principal means by which my Department contributes to the development of policy under the Programme for Government.

Meetings are regularly held to discuss the development and implementation of policy in respect of social partnership, public service modernisation, developments in respect of Northern Ireland and issues relating to security. The Government Chief Whip and the Minister for European Affairs attend these policy meetings as appropriate.

Departmental Staff.

118. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Taoiseach the number of programme managers, special advisers, policy assistants, personnel on secondment and other personnel who are not part of the existing Civil Service who make up his Department, including permanent civil servants attached to the office of the Minister and Ministers of State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33215/07]

The Taoiseach: There is one Programme Manager employed in my Department who is my Special Advisor. I have three Special Advisors, the Government Chief Whip has one Special Advisor and the Minister of State for European Affairs also has one Special Advisor. In addition, the Government Press Secretary and two Deputy Government Press Secretaries are employed by my Department. Of the seven Personal Assistants in my Department, four are permanent civil servants. I do not have policy assistants. Fifteen staff are seconded into my Department as a result of Cross-Departmental recruitment arrangements for specific purposes, none of whom is a political appointee.

The seconded staff are assigned to various Divisions within my Department including the Government Chief Whip's Office, the Government Press Office, the Communications Unit, the Organisational Review Programme Team and the EU and International Affairs Division. Currently, there are 25 contract staff in my Department, 18 of whom are political appointees. The total

number of core staff is 196. Of the 12 staff assigned to the Government Chief Whip's constituency and private offices, nine are civil servants. The other Minister of State in my Department has a staff of four, three of whom are permanent civil servants.

Question No. 119 answered with Question No. 117.

Energy Resources.

120. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Taoiseach the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33285/07]

The Taoiseach: The contract for the supply of electrical energy to Government Buildings, my Department and its agencies, is not specifically for 'green' energy but does of course include a component of 'green' energy as connected to the national grid. The supply is at medium voltage and the electrical supply companies that specialise in 'green' energy are not active in this area of the market. The source of heating energy for the entire Government Buildings complex, which includes my own Department, is natural gas. There is a central plant serving the whole facility and this includes a combined heat and power unit (CHP) which is a 'green' energy source.

The Office of Public Works is in the process of bringing forward proposals for a new energy centre for the complex and this will be presented to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission on Wednesday, 12 December, 2007. It is intended that the new energy centre will provide for a number of alternative sources of energy for the complex which will include increasing the number of combined heat and power units as well as other viable 'green' energy sources which are currently being examined.

Departmental Expenditure.

121. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Taoiseach the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33344/07]

122. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Taoiseach the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33359/07]

123. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Taoiseach the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33374/07]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 121 to 123, inclusive, together.

The total expenditure on mobile phones by my Department was €176,897 in 2006 and €166,938 to date (end November) in 2007. Detailed information of the kind sought by the Deputy is not available in aggregated format. However, on examination of records for one sample month, the following breakdown of mobile phone use is available, which may be helpful to the Deputy:

Type of Usage	Cost in Sample Month	% of cost compared to overall Cost in sample month
	€	%
Total expenditure in Sample Month	12,161.71	
Calls Abroad	1,728.77	14
Data Charges — National	2,175.79	18
Data Charges — International	412.25	3

Note: All figures are inclusive of VAT.

In addition, mobile phone bills are not paid in the form of expenses to staff in my Department nor has any Departmental mobile phone been assigned to me.

Departmental Staff.

124. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who

are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33514/07]

The Taoiseach: I do not personally appoint staff to the media monitoring unit. There are currently four Executive Officers and one Clerical Officer working in the Communications Unit. It has a vacancy at EO level. The staff are established civil servants, four of whom are on secondment from other Departments. The total projected cost of the Communications Unit for 2007 is €338,607, with €123,464 being a direct cost to my Department. The pay scales for the Unit's staff are those applicable throughout the Civil Service for serving EOs and COs. The current scale ranges from €29,093 to €50,510 for EOs and from €23,221 to €38,469 for COs.

The Unit is manned for 18 hours each day, by means of a flexible rota of three working shifts and the staff are accordingly paid a shift allowance of one sixth of their salary. The Unit provides a media information service to Government Ministers and their Departments by furnishing news updates and transcripts. The staff in the Unit report directly to an Assistant Principal in the Government Information Service.

Departmental Expenditure.

125. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33529/07]

The Taoiseach: My office is provided with 1,560 newspapers annually at a cost of €2,184. The Minister of State's office is provided with 1,352 newspapers annually at a cost of €2,410.20. The table* outlines the number and name of the newspapers purchased by my Department daily and weekly at an estimated annual cost of €132,228.20.

Newspapers purchased by my Department	Number of newspapers purchased daily by my Department	Number of newspapers purchased weekly by my Department
Irish Times, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, Financial Times, Financial Times (Saturday), Daily Star, Daily Sun, Sun (Saturday), Mirror, Irish Daily Mail, Irish Daily Mail (Saturday), Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, Herald Tribune, Le Monde, London Times, London Times (Saturday), Daily Telegraph, Lá, Frankfurter, Evening Herald, Sunday Independent, Sunday Business Post, Sunday Times, Sunday Tribune, Sunday Observer, Sunday Telegraph, Mail on Sunday, News of the World, Sunday World, Sunday People, Sunday Mirror, Star on Sunday, Farmers Journal, Irish Catholic, Bray People, Donegal Democrat, Wicklow People, Tipperary Star, Nenagh Guardian, Foinse, Derry Journal, Kerryman South, European Voice, Athlone Voice, Galway Advertiser, Wicklow Times, An Phoblacht, Athlone Advertiser	277	1,636

*Figures are inclusive of my office and the office of the Minister of State.

Departmental Staff.

126. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33544/07]

128. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33574/07]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 128 together.

There are four press officers based in my Department, one at Assistant Principal grade and three at Higher Executive Officer grade. Their pay is at the current rate for these respective grades. The Government Press Secretary is paid the max of the Assistant Secretary scale, while both of the Deputy Government Press Secretaries are paid at Principal Officer higher scale level. The duties of the Government Press Secretary and of the press officers in my Department are to liaise with the media on my behalf. The Deputy Government Press Secretaries have particular responsibilities in respect of the Green Party and the Progressive Democrats, respectively.

The Government Press Office provide a comprehensive information service on Government policy to the public through the national and international media on behalf of myself, my Department and the Government. Political correspondents are briefed on a daily basis by the Government Press Secretary and Deputy Government Press Secretaries. Through regular contact with Departmental Press Officers, they ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to media matters.

Press releases, statements and speeches are e-mailed simultaneously to news desks daily and all important speeches and policy documents are posted on my Department's website. Staff of the office and Departmental Press Officers are available after hours and at weekends to answer media queries. The Government Press Secretary and his staff strive to ensure that relevant information and replies to press queries are communicated accurately, speedily and efficiently to the media. The cost of the Press Advisors (i.e. successive Government Press Secretaries and Deputy Government Press Secretaries) for each year since 1997 is detailed in the table.

Year	Cost
2007 — up to 31st October	€233,730
2006	€227,723
2005	€217,428
2004	€206,171
2003	€189,980
2002	€165,181
2001	IR£118,245
2000	IR£107,126
1999	IR£106,514
1998	IR£102,883
1997 — from 27/06/97	IR£48,385

Consultancy Contracts.

127. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33559/07]

The Taoiseach: I attach a table which contains details of the cost, nature of work done and name of media consultants employed by my Department each year from 1997 to date (November 2007).

Media Consultancy

Year	Name	Type of Consultancy	Amount
			€
1997	Nil	Nil	Nil
1998	Hall Public Relations	PR consultant for the 1798 Commemoration	12,697.00
1999	Nil	Nil	Nil
2000	Nil	Nil	Nil
2001	Nil	Nil	Nil
2002	Nil	Nil	Nil
2003	Nil	Nil	Nil
2004	RTE	PR Consultancy EU Presidency	35,256.79
	Grayling Gilmore	PR Consultancy EU Presidency	29,803.65
	Carr Communications	Disability Bill — Public Relations	12,147.74

[The Taoiseach.]

Year	Name	Type of Consultancy	Amount
2005	The Design Consultancy	Short Jpeg Film- Asia Strategy	€ 145.20
2006	Nil	Nil	Nil
2007 (End of Nov)	Nil	Nil	Nil

Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 126.

Departmental Expenditure.

129. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33589/07]

The Taoiseach: The total number of credit cards currently held by my Department is 29. The annual cost of supplying credit cards, the amounts purchased and any interest payments for each year from 2000 to date are detailed in the table.

Year	Total Payments (excl. Charges)	Charges (incl. Stamp Duty)	Interest
	€	€	€
2000	185,852.33	3,079.11	0.00
2001	83,882.81	3,498.13	0.00
2002	83,583.51	2,932.05	0.00
2003	70,207.31	4,077.84	0.00
2004	102,746.20	4,245.25	0.00
2005	98,198.72	2,075.92	0.00
2006	135,039.13	2,361.80	0.00
2007	117,375.02	1,324.05	0.00

Credit cards are allocated to Office Holders and Officials where this facility will be of practical use in meeting the requirements of official business, for example, to facilitate meeting of travel expenses and official entertainment, the procurement of goods and services such as on-line conferences bookings, air travel, purchase of IT equipment and library supplies. In general, credit cards are allocated to office holders and senior officials including Ministers, Secretaries General, Assistant Secretaries, Special Advisers, Private Secretaries and Heads of Divisions where appropriate.

While a credit card has been assigned to me by the Department, I have not had occasion to use it. The current holders are myself, the Chief Whip, Secretary General, Private Secretary to the Taoiseach, Private Secretary to the Minister of State Roche, Assistant Secretaries (5), Press

Officer to the Government, Head of Government Information Services, Special Adviser to Taoiseach (2), Special Adviser to the Minister of State, Programme Manager Green Party, Principal Officers (5), Finance Officer (2), Personnel Officer, Assistant Principal Officer — Protocol, Higher Executive Officer — Management Services, Chairman — National Forum on Europe, Director — National Forum on Europe and Director — Ireland Newfoundland Partnership.

130. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33604/07]

The Taoiseach: The total cost of photographers used by my Department from 1997 to date is detailed in the table.

Year	Cost of Photographers per year
	€
1997 (July to December)	13,633
1998	17,733
1999	18,810
2000	22,280
2001	9,020
2002	45,624
2003	39,446
2004	27,424
2005	44,814
2006	80,827
2007 (to end November)	51,559

The costs in question relate to the engaging of photographers by the Government Information Service for the purpose of recording events of public importance and the dissemination of the photographic records to the media.

131. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33619/07]

The Taoiseach: The total spend by my Department on make-up services from 1997 to date are detailed in the table.

Year	Cost of Make-up Service per year
	€
1997 (July to December)	4,819
1998	21,117
1999	17,221
2000	20,330
2001	17,600
2002	18,439
2003	19,051
2004	27,722
2005	26,037
2006	25,583
2007 (to end of November 2007)	15,593

With regard to the use of make up services, since the advent of television, people appearing before camera under artificial lighting conditions are required to use make-up to counter the effects of the strong lighting that is used by media organisations in such circumstances. The Taoiseach is no exception in this regard. Successive Taoisigh have been required to use make-up under these conditions when being interviewed for television or video broadcast, etc.

132. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33634/07]

The Taoiseach: My Department's expenditure on entertainment for each year from 1997 to date is detailed in the table.

Year	Entertainment Expenditure
	€
1997	371,000
1998	232,000
1999	311,000
2000	362,000
2001	383,000
2002	421,000
2003	320,000
2004	399,000
2005	287,000
2006	641,000
2007*	262,633

* Expenditure for the period January to November 2007.

Most of this expenditure is in relation to State protocol, such as State dinners and receptions organised in association with visits by Heads of State or Heads of Government. It also includes entertainment of other foreign dignitaries and

other official entertainment such as arises in association with official meetings and events.

Government Information Services.

133. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33649/07]

The Taoiseach: I do not receive a daily summary of stories relevant to my Department from the Government Information Services. However, the Communications Unit furnishes news updates in electronic format to me, the Ministers of State in my Department, departmental officials, the Government Information Service and my political advisors. These summaries are not specific to the Department of the Taoiseach but are a synopsis of the news as broadcast. The Government Press Secretary verbally briefs the Taoiseach on news stories and developments relevant to his work and that of his Department as they occur.

Official Engagements.

134. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33664/07]

The Taoiseach: The Taoiseach is generally accompanied by the Government Press Secretary or a government press officer on official visits. There have been no official trips in the last year on which a press officer has not accompanied the Taoiseach.

Departmental Transport.

135. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33679/07]

The Taoiseach: My Department does not provide transport to any member of staff, including Ministers of State. However, staff are entitled to claim mileage where privately owned cars have been used for the purpose of official business. All mileage payments are made in accordance with Department of Finance rules. This also applies to Ministers of State assigned to my Department.

136. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the cost of him using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the

[Deputy Fergus O'Dowd.]

cost of providing similar services to Ministers of State and staff for the same period. [33694/07]

The Taoiseach: The cost to my Department in respect of the use of public transport (buses and trains) from 2002 to date is detailed in the table.

Year	Cost of using Public Transport
	€
2002 (July to Dec)	1,642
2003	3,003
2004	7,280
2005	5,618
2006	6,181
2007 (Jan-Nov)	2,947

Personally, I have not incurred any expenditure in this regard.

The information requested by the Deputy for the years 1997 to July 2002 is not readily available. However, it is being compiled at present and will be forwarded as soon as possible.

Departmental Communications.

137. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach if his Department carries news summaries on its internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33724/07]

The Taoiseach: The Communications Unit post the news summaries on the Department of the Taoiseach's intranet which can be accessed by staff in the Department. The Unit updates this information on a daily basis and at no additional cost to the Department.

138. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33739/07]

The Taoiseach: No Departmental mobile phones have been assigned to me.

139. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33754/07]

The Taoiseach: The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available. It is being compiled and will be forwarded.

Departmental Reports.

140. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Taoiseach when the value for money review of the National Economic and Social Council, National Economic and Social Forum and the National Economic and Social Development Office was completed; the value of the saving to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33808/07]

The Taoiseach: As part of the implementation of the Government's Value for Money Review and Policy Review Initiative, my Department is undertaking a review of the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) and its constituent bodies — the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP). This Review was deferred under the first round of expenditure reviews while the legislation establishing NESDO as a statutory body was put in place. The provisions of this legislation came into effect on 1 January, 2007.

Since then, a steering group, chaired by my Department, has been established to oversee the Review, terms of reference have been agreed and work is now underway. It is envisaged that the Review will be completed in the first half of 2008. In line with the objectives of the Value for Money and Policy Review initiative, the Review will analyse in a systematic manner what is being achieved by Exchequer spending and will provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities. More specifically, the Review aims:

- to analyse the outputs of the grant-in-aid funding provided to NESDO;
- to determine the impact on the development of public policy in line with the objectives of the Department of the Taoiseach and other relevant public organisations for NESDO; and
- to inform future funding, administration, structural and policy decisions in relation to NESDO.

Departmental Transport.

141. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34099/07]

The Taoiseach: The cost to my Department on a yearly basis from 2002 to date for transport hire is detailed in the table.

Year	Cost of Transport Hire
	€
2002 (July to December)	68,174
2003	44,724
2004	77,751
2005	83,922
2006	117,865
2007	50,534

The reasons for the hire of transport include refunds to the Department of Foreign Affairs in respect of car hire for official functions when travelling abroad, for specific state functions where transport is required for dignitaries and to facilitate business meetings including those in connection with Northern Ireland. The information requested by the Deputy for the years 1997 to July 2002 is not readily available. However, it is being compiled at present and will be forwarded as soon as possible.

Departmental Communications.

142. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34228/07]

The Taoiseach: 68 staff in my Department are provided with blackberry devices or similar mobile e-mail equipment.

143. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Taoiseach the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34243/07]

The Taoiseach: There are over 300 internal databases in use in my Department. These are operated solely internally within the Department. My Department also owns three cross departmental extranets and these applications are hosted within the Department. In addition to this, one database is operated within the Department by security-cleared staff from a contracted external organisation. Another database is operated off-site in a shared services facility run by the Department of Finance. My Department's websites are hosted by the LGCSB (Local Government Computer Services Board) on our behalf.

144. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Taoiseach the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under

budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34258/07]

The Taoiseach: The information sought by the Deputy is outlined in the table.

Project Title	On Budget	On Time
EU Directives Extranet	Yes	Yes
Active Citizenship Website	Yes	Yes
On-line OECD Review	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Committee System	Yes	Yes
Move HRMS System to shared service facility	Yes	Yes

In addition to these, systems are regularly developed in-house to meet business needs. These projects are usually completed over a short period of time using our normal resources and budget.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

145. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Taoiseach the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34273/07]

The Taoiseach: I refer the Deputy to the answer given today by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to an identical question.

Data Protection.

146. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Taoiseach if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34288/07]

The Taoiseach: To protect personal data within my Department, we comply fully with the provisions of the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003, the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003 and the National Archives Act 1986 in managing both electronic and paper based records. My Department applies best practice and uses industry standard security protection devices and software to protect its network from hackers. In addition to this, access to personal information held electronically within my Department is controlled by application security and confined to relevant authorised personnel only.

Management Information Framework System.

147. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Taoiseach the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this sav-

[Deputy Brian Hayes.]

ing was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34310/07]

The Taoiseach: The Management Information Framework has been fully implemented in my Department. While the actual savings resulting from the use of the system have not been specifically quantified, the use of the system has resulted in increased efficiencies and greater productivity across a range of activities, in particular through:

- the provision of an integrated modular financial management system which automates and streamlines financial transaction processing, thus eliminating duplication and increasing productivity;
- use of technology to provide electronic processing, for example electronic funds transfer for payments to suppliers and staff, thus eliminating unnecessary delays and providing enhanced service to the Department's customers;
- the ability to record financial data at a more detailed level which enhances the management information available to my Department, including the availability of cost allocation and both cash and accruals data;
- improved reporting capacity, allowing for the development of reports to meet a broad range of statutory reporting and management information requirements, including for financial management and budgeting, statutory accounting and reporting, evaluation of value for money, resource allocation and decision-making purposes;
- and the provision of enhanced controls over expenditure and compliance requirements.

148. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Taoiseach if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34325/07]

The Taoiseach: The Management Information Framework system has been fully implemented in my Department. This system provides the Department with a flexible system of financial management, integrated with performance and output measurement so as to enhance accountability, efficiency and performance. The MIF system ensures more efficient processing of financial transactions and accounting and provides a range of reports for management information. The system provides and facilitates the use of better financial information including the allo-

cation of costs to the Department's objectives, which, in turn, provides enhanced information for management decision making and allocation of resources.

Performance Indicators have been developed to measure performance across the range of Departmental activities as set out in the Department's Statement of Strategy and are reported in the Department's Annual Report. Performance Indicators are also defined at operational level and are used by managers at Divisional level to monitor progress against annual Business Plans. Given the nature of my Department's role and the objectives which are being pursued, the use of quantitative indicators has not always been found to be appropriate. However, an appropriate mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators has been identified to assist in measuring and evaluation of progress against objectives.

The MIF system also provides the framework for information presented in the Department's Annual Output Statement, which expands on each of the Department's Strategic Objectives. This Statement explicitly links the inputs and resources associated with each Strategic Objective to the outputs achieved, thus providing transparency on the use of the Department's resources and a means for evaluation of the use of those resources against achievements.

Proposed Legislation.

149. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if he will amend the Electoral Act 1997 to give the Standards in Public Offices Commission the power to appoint an investigation officer to assess compliance with ethics legislation on the part of public representatives and officials; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33237/07]

150. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if he will amend the Electoral Act 1997 to give the Standards in Public Offices Commission the power to initiate an investigation without a formal complaint; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33238/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149 and 150 together.

The Ethics Acts (i.e. the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 and the Standards in Public Office Act 2001) already allow the Standards in Public Office Commission, where it considers it appropriate to do so, to launch 'own initiative' investigations, where no formal complaint has been made. Issues concerning non-office holding members of the Oireachtas would be, in the first instance, a matter for the Select Committee on Members' Interests of the relevant House.

As regards inquiry officers, the Ethics Acts already allow the Standards in Public Office

Commission, where it has received a formal complaint, to request an inquiry officer to carry out a preliminary inquiry into the complaint. As I have already stated in response to other parliamentary questions, I do not intend to amend the legislation to allow the Standards Commission to appoint inquiry officers where a formal complaint has not been made.

Question No. 150 answered with Question No. 149.

Salary Agreements.

151. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if, in view of the pay increase that An Taoiseach has awarded himself and other Government Ministers and the projected pay restraints in the public sector, he will make provision for a Christmas bonus for the political staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas, in line with practice in the private sector and the Department of Social and Family Affairs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33241/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The pay of political office holders is covered by the terms of reference of the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the Public Sector. The Review Body, which was established in 1969, is an independent standing body whose primary function is to advise the Government on the general levels of remuneration appropriate to higher public servants (civil service, local authorities, health boards, non-commercial State bodies, Garda Síochána, Defence Forces, hospital consultants, etc.), members of the judiciary, and political office-holders.

It is seven years since the last general review was carried out by the Review Body in relation to the pay of those covered by its remit. It is established Government policy to accept the recommendations of this independent review body. This has been accepted by successive Governments.

When the Deputy refers to political staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas I assume he means staff appointed by the deputies e.g. Secretarial Assistants and Parliamentary Assistants. The pay of these grades is encompassed by the public service benchmarking process (via linkages to civil service grades). They benefited from increases recommended by the first benchmarking exercise, which report some five years ago (compared to seven years for the last Review Body report). The Public Service Benchmarking Body is currently finalising its second report. Towards 2016 provides that the implementation of the recommendations of the Benchmarking Body should be discussed in the context of discussions on whatever arrangements on pay and conditions are to be put in place on the expiry of the current public service pay agreement under Towards 2016.

The terms and conditions of public service employees do not in general provide for the payment of bonuses. The 'Christmas bonus' paid by the Department of Social and Family Affairs is not made to the staff of the Department but to Social Welfare recipients.

Question No. 152 withdrawn.

Energy Resources.

153. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33280/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): In relation to the heating of my Department's offices the fuels used are natural gas and oil, which are from non-renewable sources. The supply of electrical energy to my Department is provided by two of the major suppliers of electricity to the national grid. While the supply from these providers is not principally from renewable sources, I understand that this supply does include a component of green energy. This would be typical of the situation that applies in the agencies for which my Department has responsibility.

The Office of Public Works has informed me that they are in the process of bringing forward proposals for a new energy centre for the Government Buildings complex, which includes the principal offices of my Department. It is intended that this energy centre will provide for a number of alternative sources of energy for the complex which will include a combined heat and power system.

Casino Licences.

154. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if he or his Department approved of the involvement of the national lottery in discussions with the Sonas consortium relating to a proposed casino in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33327/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): No request for such approval has been presented to me since my appointment as Minister for Finance. However, as the Deputy will be aware from my response last week (Dáil Question No. 87 answered on 6 December 2007), in February 1998, the Chairman of the National Lottery Company wrote to the Department of Finance about the Company's intention to go into a 12-month non-disclosure agreement with Sonas Centre Ltd, stating that Sonas had "expressed an interest in considering the NLC [the National Lottery Company] in some role in relation to casino gaming and for this to be evaluated by the

[Deputy Brian Cowen.]

parties, a non-disclosure agreement is necessary". Having considered the matter, and with the agreement of the then Minister, the Department replied in March 1998 informing the National Lottery Company that it would have no objection to the National Lottery Company's entering the agreement.

155. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if officials of his Department ever attended meetings with representatives of the national lottery and the Sonas consortium relating to a proposed casino in north Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33328/07]

210. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the meetings his Department officials had with representatives of Sonas or Ogden in 1990 to 1994 inclusive to discuss the location of a casino in the Phoenix Park, Dublin; and if these meetings took place, if a person (details supplied) attended. [34327/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155 and 210 together.

I am advised by my Department that the only relevant report on file in my Department concerns a meeting on 7 November 1995, between a promoter of the Vector Ogden/Sonas proposal and Department officials. This dealt with the general remit of the Task Force then examining the pros and cons of licensing casinos, and not with particular proposals.

156. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if any reports of meetings between the national lottery and the Sonas consortium relating to a proposed casino in north Dublin were submitted to him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33329/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): No such reports have been submitted to me since I was appointed other than reports arising from recent questions and enquiries into what transpired during the 1990s.

Departmental Expenditure.

157. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33339/07]

158. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to

staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33354/07]

159. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33368/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 to 159, inclusive, together.

Staff in my department do not ordinarily claim expenses in respect of mobile call charges. If necessary, staff are provided with a mobile phone on a temporary basis where appropriate. The cost of mobile charges incurred by me in 2006 was €1,677.89 and to date in 2007 is €2,077.58. The cumulative cost of mobile charges for my Department in 2006 was €69,653.56 and to date in 2007 is €91,874.13. In the time available it was not possible to compile the information on data and roaming charges. This information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Reports.

160. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance when the value for money review of the Information Society was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33480/07]

161. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance when the value for money review of the Economic and Social Research Institute was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33481/07]

162. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance when the value for money review of Ordinance Survey Ireland was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33482/07]

163. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance when the value for money review of Civil Service child care initiative

will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33483/07]

164. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance when the value for money review of the procurement management reform will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33484/07]

Value for Money Review	Completion
Economic and Social Research Institute	July 2006.
Information Society Fund	August 2006.
Ordnance Survey Ireland	January 2007.
Departmental Procurement	Due to be completed by the end of 2008.
Procurement Management Reform	Expected to be completed in early 2008.
Civil Service Childcare Initiative	Expected to be completed in early 2008.

The Value for Money and Policy Review of the Grant-in-Aid payment to the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) contained five recommendations, all of which are in the process of being implemented. The recommendations are intended to improve the overall value for money for the grant-in-aid. Among other things, they are directed at relating funding to outputs; benchmarking the ESRI with comparable institutes in other EU member states, and periodically reviewing the policy relevance of the Institute's research. The level of the grant in aid has not changed significantly as a result of the review.

The Information Society Fund terminated at the end of 2005 in line with its intended lifespan. As a result, an annual allocation for the fund is no longer required. However, work continues in Departments and Offices on the Government's e-Agenda through the normal business planning and budgetary process.

The objectives of the Value for Money and Policy Review of the Grant-in-Aid to Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) were to assess the objectives of the grant; to identify improved output definitions and monitoring arrangements for future editions of the Service Level Agreement with OSI so as to drive increased operational efficiency across the organisation; and to assess whether OSI should remain under the aegis of the Department of Finance, be assigned to another Department or be merged with another appropriate body. While the focus of the Review was largely on policy aspects relating to the payment of the grant-in-aid, several of the recommendations, should contribute to the efficiency of the organisation and reduce not only the direct Exchequer grant, but also the payments for services made to the organisation by both the public and private sector. It is however not practicable at this early stage to calculate a specific

165. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance when the value for money review of departmental procurement will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33485/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160, 161, 162, 163, 164 and 165 together.

The table sets out the completion schedule for the reviews in question.

value for the savings to the Exchequer that will be delivered on foot of the recommendations, which are currently in course of implementation.

With regard to the reviews of departmental procurement, procurement management reform and the civil service childcare initiative, it is not possible to anticipate the consequences of these reports until their findings are finalised and considered.

Tax Code.

166. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if he will assist a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 with their query. [33492/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, given the basis on which the taxpayer is employed, he is liable to tax under Schedule E PAYE. Therefore, it would not be in order to classify the person as a self-assessed taxpayer. On 29 November 2007 the Revenue Commissioners wrote to the taxpayer's agent outlining the reasons why this is so. A copy of this letter also issued directly to the taxpayer.

Departmental Staff.

167. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33509/07]

169. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33539/07]

171. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33569/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I propose to answer questions 167, 169 and 171 together.

There were no Press Advisers in my Department for the period concerned. The Press Officer is responsible for management of the Press Office, the functions of which comprise responding to questions regarding the Minister for Finance or the Department of Finance from all members of the broadcast and print media, as well as members of the public; organising press events to inform the press and public on Departmental matters; making necessary arrangements in association with the Minister's Private Office for public events at which the Minister for Finance is speaking, both at national and international levels; and editorial control of the Department's web site.

There is no formal media monitoring system in the Department. However, staff in the Press Office review newsprint and other media on a daily basis and where appropriate bring media articles to the attention of the Press Officer or to the attention of relevant management staff. In addition, management staff throughout the Department have access to both print and on-line media reports.

The salary ranges of the staff in the Press Office are as follows:

- Press Officer — €69,179 — €86,504 plus a 10% attraction allowance.
- Higher Executive Officer €47,000 — €58,130.
- Executive Officer €29,093 — €47,980.
- Clerical Officer €22,766 — €36,913.

Departmental Expenditure.

168. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33524/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The cost of newspapers purchased

by my Department in 2006 was €77,050 and to date in 2007 was €76,907. The table sets out the number of each paper purchased on a daily and weekly basis for Departmental staff and papers supplied to my offices in Dublin and Tullamore and to the Minister of State's office.

Daily and Weekly Newspapers supplied for Departmental Officials	No. of Copies
Irish Independent	30
Irish Times	84
Irish Examiner	9
Wall Street Journal	2
Financial Times	41
Evening Herald	7
The Guardian	1
Mirror	1
Star	1
Irish Daily Mail	2
The Sun	1
Lá	1
Herald Tribune	1
London Independent	1
Daily Telegraph	1
London Times	1
Farmers' Journal	3
Irish News	1
Sunday Papers	
Sunday Independent	4
Sunday Business Post	5
Sunday Tribune	4
Sunday World	2
Sunday Star	1
Sunday Telegraph	1
Sunday Times	2
Sunday Observer	1

Daily and weekly newspapers provided to Tánaiste's offices	No. of copies
Irish Independent	2
Irish Times	2
Irish Examiner	2
Sunday Independent	1
Sunday Tribune	1
Sunday Business Post	1
Sunday Times	1
Tullamore Tribune	2
Offaly Express	2
Offaly Weekly	2

Papers provided for the Minister of State's Office to June 2007*	No. of copies
Irish Independent	1
Irish Times	1
Irish Examiner	1
Irish Examiner	1
Evening Herald	1

*From this date newspapers supplied to the Minister of State were provided by the Office of Public Works.

Question No. 169 answered with Question No. 167.

Consultant	Amount	Purpose	Year
	€		
Brindley Advertising	318,030	Design and delivery of Euro advertising campaign.	1998
Brindley Advertising	581,869	Design and delivery of Euro changeover advertising campaign.	1999
Brindley Advertising	226,403	Design and delivery of Euro changeover advertising campaign.	2000
Adept Creative Services Ltd;	445,746	Design and delivery of Euro changeover advertising campaign.	2000
Curtin Communications	402,758	Provision of publicity services relating to NDP/CSF.	2000
Drury Communications Research	51,334	Public awareness research on NDP/CSF 2000-2006.	2000
Fleischman-Hilliard Saunders	41,272	Consultancy on National Development Plan (NDP) Communications Strategy.	2000
Brindley Advertising	6,288	Design and delivery of Euro changeover advertising campaign.	2001
Adept Creative Services Ltd;	1,294,176	Design and delivery of Euro changeover advertising campaign.	2001
Curtin Communications	357,643	Provision of publicity services relating to NDP/Community Support Framework (CSF)	2001
Adept Creative Services Ltd	129,838	Design and delivery of Euro changeover advertising campaign.	2002
Q4 Consultants	83,400	Arrangement of informal ECOFIN meeting.	2003
Curtin Communications (later merged with and became Grayling)	332,883	Provision of publicity services for NDP/CSF.	2003
Grayling	128,032	Consultancy Fees in relation to Provision of publicity services for NDP/CSF (excluding third party fees).	2004
Lansdowne Market research	14,822	NDP public awareness research.	2004
Curtin Communications	239,152	Provision of publicity services relating to NDP/CSF.	2004
Drury Communications Research	79,051	Public awareness research on NDP/CSF 2000-2006.	2004
Grayling	128,032	Provision of publicity services for NDP/CSF	2004
Grayling	102,424	Provision of publicity services for NDP/CSF	2005
Grayling	67,276	Provision of Publicity Services for NDP/CSF	2006
MRPA Kinman Communications	38,720	Provision of Publicity Services for NDP/CSF	2006
Grayling	66,106	Provision of publicity services for NDP/CSF.	2006
MRPA Kinman Communications	125,293	Provision of Publicity Services for NDP/CSF	2007

Question No. 171 answered with Question No. 167.

Departmental Expenditure.

172. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of

Consultancy Contracts.

170. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33554/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): Details in relation to expenditure by my Department on the provision of advice by media consultants over the period in question are as set out in the table.

credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33584/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): There are currently eight departmental credit cards issued to office holders and officials in my Department. I, as Minister, hold one credit card, and my Private Secretary, Press Officer and Special Adviser have each been issued with one credit card. One senior official has also been issued with a credit card. These cards are used generally for official expenses in connection with travel, including accommodation and subsistence expenses, and official hospitality.

The three remaining cards are for the general usage of the Department in the purchase of a range of goods and services, mainly the on-line purchase of publications and for booking training courses and conferences. It is the practice of the Department not to incur interest charges on credit cards, and such bills are generally paid on or before the due date.

The table sets out the cost of official purchases associated with credit cards. The table includes costs from 2003. Prior to 2003, records were not held in a manner which would facilitate the identification of such costs without undue administrative effort.

Year	€
2003	66,298.00
2004	73,451.00
2005	70,128.00
2006	42,399.00
To date in 2007	41,180.00

173. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33599/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The cost to my Department of photographers used by the Ministers and Ministers of State in my Department in each year since 2003 is listed in the table. Prior to 2003, before the Department introduced its new financial management system, records were not held in a manner which facilitates the identification of such costs without undue administrative effort.

Year	Photographers
	€
2003	570
2004	11,160*
2005	5,440
2006	2,880
2007 to date	5,893

*Ireland's Presidency of European Union.

174. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33614/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The cost of make-up for each year since my appointment as Minister for Finance in 2004 is outlined in the table.

Year	Make-up
	€
2004	550
2005	No costs
2006	750
2007 to date	No costs

175. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33629/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): Subhead A3.1 (Incidental Expenses — Entertainment) of Vote 6 (Office of the Minister for Finance) provides for entertainment related expenses within my Department's budget. Within the A3.1 allocation expenditure arises for Ministerial, State and official entertainment as well as for routine office catering for business purposes. A breakdown of the total to isolate expenditure on entertainment over the last ten years is not available. However, for the year 2006 approximately 70% relates to routine office catering as distinct from entertainment.

The table sets out the outturn for the subhead for each year since 1997 to 2006 and the expenditure to date in 2007.

Vote 6 Subhead A3.1 (Incidental Expenses)	Expenditure €000
1997	67
1998	101
1999	56
2000	69
2001	103
2002	123
2003	138
2004	132
2005	70
2006	115
2007 YTD	100

Government Information Services.

176. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33644/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The press office receives electronic communications from the Communications Unit, Department of the Taoiseach which sets out the headlines from daily print media and radio programmes. The Department's press office only brings media headlines and reports to Management's attention and/or my attention if it is appropriate to do so.

Official Engagements.

177. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33659/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): As Tánaiste and Minister for Finance I do not have a press advisor. My Department's Press Officer attends most public engagements at home and abroad. On occasions where the Department's Press Officer was not in attendance on official visits, my Special Adviser undertook the necessary press functions.

Departmental Transport.

178. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33674/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): In the time available it has not been possible to collate the information requested by the Deputy. This process is currently under way and the information will be forwarded to the Deputy when the process has been completed.

179. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the cost of him using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to Ministers of State and staff for the same period. [33689/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): In the time available it has not been possible to collate the information requested by the Deputy. This process is currently under way and the information will be forwarded to the Deputy when the process has been completed.

Departmental Expenditure.

180. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if any refurbishing or improvements have been made to ministerial offices since 1997; the nature of such improvements; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33704/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The information requested by Deputy Fergus O'Dowd is not in a format which is readily available. Accordingly, the information is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy in due course.

Departmental Communications.

181. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if his Department carries news summaries on its internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33719/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): My Department does not carry news summaries on the internal web.

182. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33734/07]

183. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33749/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I propose to answer Questions Nos. 182 and 183 together.

Since becoming Minister for Finance the annual cost of mobile phone charges incurred by me is as in the table.

[Deputy Brian Cowen.]

Year	€
2004	195.15
2005	1,891.86
2006	1,677.89
To date in 2007	2,077.58

The cost of mobile charges incurred by staff appointed directly by me is as in the table.

Year	€
2004	431.83
2005	4,440.94
2006	4,284.15
To date in 2007	5,054.67

Tax Code.

184. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if he will accept the recommendations of the IFA to have EU compensation to former beet growers calculated as capital rather than income for tax purposes as it is not a capital disposal and should not be liable for capital gains tax. [33756/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): There are 3 elements to the overall sugar beet compensation package: Compensation to growers, Restructuring Aid, and Diversification Aid. The tax treatment of sugar beet compensation payments to former sugar beet growers is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. I am informed by the Commissioners that, based on the information available to them on the current proposals for the payment of such aid, the payments are regarded as income and will be subject to income tax. The payments are not, therefore, regarded as a capital receipt and the issue of whether an asset disposal takes place does not affect their tax treatment.

In Budget 2008 I announced that the income from diversification aid payments would be spread over 6 years for the purpose of calculating income tax liability. This follows a similar provision in Finance Act 2007 for the restructuring aid element of the compensation package.

Departmental Reports.

185. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance when the value for money review of the provision of flood relief schemes will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33785/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Noel Ahern): The value for money review of the OPW Flood Relief programme is due for completion by the end of 2007.

186. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance when the value for money review of the property management scheme will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33786/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Noel Ahern): The value for money review of the OPW Property Management Service is due for completion by the end of 2008. It is not possible at this stage to make assumptions on what the outcome of this review will indicate.

Tax Collection.

187. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the amount of money that has been collected by the Revenue Commissioners special investigation unit in each of the past five years. [33804/07]

188. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the annual running cost of the Revenue Commissioners special investigation unit for each of the past five years. [33805/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I propose to take questions numbers 187 and 188 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, over the years Revenue initiated a number of Special Investigation Projects related to particular methodologies which had been used by taxpayers to evade taxes. To date recoveries of almost €2.4 billion have been made. Some of these projects have been completed or are nearing completion while others are ongoing. The yield for each of the past five full years (2002 to 2006) from these projects is set out in the Table. For completeness the yield for the 11 months to the end of November 2007 totals €111.08 million.

The estimated annual running costs for the years 2003 to 2006 of the Special Investigation Project Units which have been coordinating these projects are set out in the Table. The figures relate to staff salaries and other non salary costs. Due to Revenue restructuring, it is not possible to be very precise about the running costs for 2002, but they would broadly be on a par with those of subsequent years.

Yield from Special Investigations 2002 to 2006

Heading	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
DIRT Audits	1.0	1.0	3.0	—	—
Bogus Non-Resident Accounts	112.0	138.8	84.2	47.0	15.5
Offshore Assets	—	127.8	585.4	83.5	55.3
Single Premium Policies	—	—	—	382.0	33.0
Ansbacher	5.2	5.3	19.1	10.35	10.67
NIB/Clerical Medical	17.6	6.1	4.65	3.44	1.9
Tribunals	0.24	6.42	1.36	10.44	3.21
Total	136.04	285.42	697.71	536.73	119.58
Estimated Running costs		3.12	3.45	3.38	3.65

189. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of prosecutions and the number of convictions that have arisen out of investigations undertaken by the special investigations unit in each of the past five years. [33806/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to investigations undertaken by the Investigations and Prosecutions Division of the Revenue Commissioners. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the following is the up to date position on court convictions for tax evasion since 2002.

- In 2002, there were three cases and three convictions. Fines totalling €5,540 were imposed and there was one custodial sentence of six months.
- In 2003, there were six cases and seven convictions. Fines totalling €29,365 were imposed and there was one custodial sentence of two years suspended.
- In 2004, there was one case and one conviction. A fine of €5,000 was imposed and 180 hours community service was imposed in lieu of a three months custodial sentence.
- In 2005, there were ten cases and these in fact resulted in thirteen convictions — a prosecution for tax evasion can involve more than one person, or a case may involve both individual and corporate culpability. There were three custodial sentences, one of six months suspended on each of four counts to run concurrently and two of three months each. In a further two cases 240 hours and 120 hours of community service were imposed in lieu of custodial sentences of six months and three months respectively. In the other five cases fines totalling €204,457 were imposed.

- In 2006 there were three cases resulting in three convictions. One case received a six-month suspended sentence and a fine of €3,200. In the other two cases fines totalling €35,481 were imposed.
- In 2007, so far, there have been eight cases concluded resulting in eight convictions. In one case a custodial sentence of twelve months suspended together with a fine of €500 was imposed. In another two cases custodial sentences of 18 months suspended and 9 months suspended were imposed. In the other five cases fines were imposed totalling €14,667. In another two cases guilty pleas were entered and sentencing has been adjourned until 2008.

In addition to the figures outlined above, another 16 cases are currently before the Courts, the DPP has given directions to prosecute in another 12 and is considering a further 6 cases that have been referred to him. There is a bench warrant outstanding in 1 case and there are another 43 cases under investigation for potential prosecution in connection with suspected tax evasion.

Disabled Drivers.

190. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance when a decision will be made on an appeal under the disabled drivers and disabled passengers tax concession scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33807/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The initial application for a Primary Medical Certificate under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994, is made to the Senior Medical Officer of the relevant local Health Service Executive administrative area. If the Primary Medical Certificate has been refused

[Deputy Brian Cowen.]

in this case, the named person may appeal the refusal to the Medical Board of Appeal, National Rehabilitation Hospital, Rochestown Avenue, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. I would point out that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions.

Tax Code.

191. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if he will introduce tax incentives in the Finance Bill to encourage families to use biodegradable nappies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34037/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I can inform the Deputy that children’s nappies are not subject to VAT or any other indirect tax. Consequently the option of incentivising the use of specific types of children’s nappies such as biodegradable nappies through the tax code does not arise.

192. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the circumstances where first time buyer stamp duty relief can be provided to persons who purchased a house jointly, but where one of the parties had previously purchased a dwelling as a joint applicant with a third party. [34050/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The stamp duty relief for first time buyers is provided for in section 92B of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 and the term “first time purchaser” is defined in the section. In the definition, a first time purchaser is referred to as a person who has not previously purchased a house or a part of a house or previously built a house on his or her own behalf. In addition, a first time purchaser is a person who has received a gift of a house after 22 June 2000 or received a gift of part of a house after 27 June 2000.

To qualify for relief, the purchaser or purchasers must declare that they have not purchased property previously and that they will occupy the property for at least two years. Where a property is purchased jointly, each purchaser must satisfy the conditions in order to qualify for first-time buyers exemption. This position has existed since the first-time buyers exemption was introduced.

The only exception to this general position is in relation to divorced and separated persons which was most recently addressed in the Finance Act 2007. A person whose marriage is the subject of a decree of divorce, judicial separation, nullity

or a deed of separation can be regarded as a first-time purchaser once, and only once, where the person buys another house to live in. The main conditions for this treatment are that the person no longer retains an interest in the former marital home and that following the granting of the decree or the making of the deed of separation, the spouse (or former spouse) of the person occupies the former marital home, as his or her only or main residence. However, the spouse does not necessarily have to still be occupying it at the time when the person, who originally left the marital home, purchases a new home. First-time purchaser relief will be denied to that person, where at the date of the decree or at the date the deed of separation is made, the person has an interest in another house/apartment apart from the former marital home.

Tax Collection.

193. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of companies and individuals who have taken advantage of the tax relief available under section 234 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in each year from 2002 to 2006; the maximum, minimum, average and median amount of relief granted to companies in each year, without identifying the companies involved; the maximum, minimum, average and median amounts of relief granted to individuals in each year, without identifying the individuals involved; his views on whether this is a useful way of encouraging research and development and the use of intellectual property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34061/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that returns of income from patents for years prior to 2004 were not captured in such a way as to provide a basis for compiling the information sought by the Deputy. Patent income was aggregated in the Revenue Commissioners’ records with other forms of income and could not be distinguished without conducting an extensive investigation of those records.

The relevant information available is based on returns by individuals and companies of tax exempt income arising from patents for the tax years 2004 and 2005, the latest year available, and is as set out in the table. Because of the Revenue Commissioners’ obligation to observe confidentiality in relation to the taxation affairs of taxpayers, figures for the maximum relief claimed by individuals and companies have not been provided due to the very small numbers claiming at that level.

Tax relief Claimed under Section 234 of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997

Item	2004 Individuals	2004 Companies	2005 Individuals	2005 Companies
	€	€	€	€
Maximum relief	—	—	—	—
Minimum relief	10	19	3	48
Average relief	49,451	154,127	48,293	150,617
Median relief	12,406	25,371	16,741	23,824
Number of cases	635	214	760	270

The estimated relief claimed has assumed tax foregone at the 42% rate in the case of individuals and 12.5% in the case of companies. The figures shown correspond to the maximum Exchequer cost in terms of income tax and corporation tax. The tax returns which have been recently filed for 2006 are being processed and information for that year corresponding to that in the above table will not be available until 2008.

The scheme of tax exemption for patent income which has been in place for over 30 years was reviewed last year by external consultants. The consultants report on the scheme is available on my Department's website. The consultants concluded, among other things, that "it is clear that the benefits of the Scheme exceed costs by some margin".

194. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Cork, is due a refund of tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34062/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I have been informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the taxpayer has been in employment in this country since 2006. To enable Revenue to determine if the taxpayer is entitled to a refund of tax for 2006, a form P60 for that year should be submitted to the following address: Revenue Commissioners, PAYE Mail Centre, PO Box 63, Ennis, Co Clare. No refund will be due for 2007 unless the person has a claim for additional tax credits for that year.

Proposed Legislation.

195. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if he will introduce an amendment to the Valuation Act 2001 to exempt non-profit making voluntary sporting organisations from the requirement to pay water rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34071/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): Water charges are levied by virtue of Local Government legislation and not the Valuation Act, 2001. As Tánaiste and Minister for

Finance I have no role, therefore, in relation to the setting of water charges.

Management Information Framework System.

196. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the financial cost of the roll out of the management information framework system across all Government Departments since 2000 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34075/07]

208. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34305/07]

209. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34320/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196, 208 and 209 together.

The Management Information Framework (MIF) project covered all central Government Departments and Offices — numbering 33 in all. Based on their reports to my Department, the total costs of the MIF roll-out was €59.3 million up to end-2006, by which time installation was completed, compared with the €60 million estimate submitted to the Government in 2003. Most of the expenditure was for replacement of outdated systems with modern, computerised financial management systems: these include, for example, a shared services project which now covers the Justice Group of Votes (the Gardaí, the Prison Service, the Courts Service, the Property Registration Authority and the parent Department) as well as the Vote of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism.

My Department has fully rolled-out its financial management system in support of the MIF project and already has an extensive range of per-

[Deputy Brian Cowen.]

formance indicators in its Statement of Strategy, on which it reports annually. A more focussed set of performance indicators has been developed for use in its Annual Output Statement from 2007 onwards. My Department will be reporting on these early in 2008 when presenting to Dáil Éireann its Annual Output Statement for 2008, which will include information about the achievement of the 2007 targets. Costing is undertaken at both subhead and strategic priority level. The Department's finances are systematically monitored, subhead by subhead, from reports produced by the system. The system also produces reports for use by individual business unit managers and for use in response to ad hoc queries, parliamentary questions, etc.

Like all modern systems, the MIF requires higher levels of staff skills and periodic upgrades, etc., than the old systems. As against that, the MIF, with its modern financial management systems, has facilitated streamlining of financial processes, faster processing of accounts and greatly-increased use of electronic financial transfers. For example, the number of payable orders processed by the Paymaster General's Office in my Department for Government Departments and Offices has fallen from 4.2 mil-

lion in 2001 to an estimated one million in 2007 — part of this is due to the reduction in the number of annual payments made to farmers under the CAP and the greater use of electronic fund transfers by farmers. In addition, of course, the old financial management systems would have had to have been replaced in any event. The Comptroller and Auditor General is conducting a value-for-money review of the MIF and will, presumably, take all of these factors into account in arriving at his conclusions.

Departmental Transport.

197. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34094/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The table provides details of the cost of transport hire in respect of myself and my staff for attendance at meetings since my appointment as Minister for Finance. Car hire for the trips outlined was arranged by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Year	Purposes and location of car hire	Cost
		€
2004	Attending ECOFIN meetings in Brussels	1,562
2005	Attending ECOFIN meetings in Brussels St Patrick's Day programme in Atlanta/Savannah Attending function at the Irish College Leuvene Brussels Beijing ASEM meetings Meeting with the German Finance Minister in Berlin Attending a meeting in Washington in relation to IMF and World Bank matters. Attending ECOFIN meeting in Luxembourg	21,446
2006	Attending ECOFIN meetings in Brussels St Patrick's Day programme Australia Attending European Council meeting Brussels Attending ECOFIN meetings in Luxembourg.	13,204
2007 year to date	Attending ECOFIN meetings in Brussels Attending NDP Business Breakfast in Belfast St Patrick's Day programme in Chicago Attending European Council meeting in Brussels	18,021

Tax Code.

198. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of persons registered as availing of tax exile status in the country; if he has plans to provide conditions whereby a greater proportion of the tax forgone might be available to the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34134/07]

199. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the conditions and criteria that apply for persons who are availing of

tax exile status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34135/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 198 and 199 together.

I am assuming that the reference by the Deputy to 'persons who are availing of tax exile status' is a reference to Irish domiciled individuals claiming to be non-resident for tax purposes. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the 2005 income tax year was the first year for which it was possible to capture the number of returns

of income and gains made by persons based outside the State who are not resident here for tax purposes. There were 3,030 individuals in that category in 2005. Returns for 2006 were due to be filed by 31st October 2007 (or, in the case of returns made on ROS, Revenue's on-line system, by 15 November 2007). The statistics from these returns are not yet available.

Under the 1994 Finance Act rules a person is regarded as resident in the State for tax purposes in a tax year if he or she spends: (a) 183 days in the State in that year, or (b) 280 days in aggregate in that tax year and the preceding tax year. An individual who is present in the State for 30 days or less in a tax year will not be treated as resident for that year unless he or she elects to be resident. Also, a day will only count if the individual is present in the State at the end of the day. However even if an Irish domiciled person establishes non-residence he or she remains liable to Irish tax on income arising in Ireland (e.g. income from directorships, a trade or profession, rented properties etc.). The only income which escapes Irish tax for individuals in this category is income arising elsewhere in the world outside Ireland.

As regards gains, Irish domiciled non-resident individuals remain liable to Irish capital gains tax on disposals of land, buildings or shares deriving their value from these assets and certain other assets such as minerals in the State or other assets related to exploitation of such minerals. They are not liable to Irish capital gains tax on assets outside this category e.g. shares or equities in companies not deriving their value primarily from land, buildings etc. The tax residency rules were last updated in the 1994 Finance Act. These rules are similar to the rules that apply in many other developed countries and these are constantly kept under review.

200. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if private child care facilities that provide an education module both for pre-school and after school can have part of their premises exempted from rate liability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34176/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The Valuation Act, 2001 which came into effect on 2 May 2002 provides that all buildings used or developed for any purpose including constructions affixed thereto are rateable. In regard to the Valuation Act, 2001, I should point out that the Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the exercise of his duties under the Act, and that I, as Tánaiste and Minister for Finance, have no function in decisions in this regard.

The basic premise under the Act is that all interests (including buildings) are rateable unless expressly exempted under schedule 4. Schedule 4 of the Valuation Act 2001 outlines the categories

of property and the various uses that are deemed to be non rateable under the Act. Paragraphs 10 (education) and 16 (charitable purposes) are two areas in that schedule which may be relevant to the rateability of child care facilities. Accordingly, purpose-built childcare buildings designed and used to make profit are rateable as commercial buildings. Houses which have been adapted for commercial use in a dedicated area (i.e. converted garage for exclusive use as childcare) are rateable, for that specific area.

The Valuation Act, 2001 maintains the long-standing position that commercial facilities — including all private childcare facilities such as play schools, pre-schools, crèches and Montessori schools — are liable for rates. It was not intended that the Valuation Act 2001 would expand or contract the valuation base.

The rateable valuation of commercial property is based on net annual value (NAV) i.e. the rental value of the property. Any individual ratepayer who has concerns about the valuation of their property or of any part thereof, including its rateability or the method of calculation may, on payment of a statutory fee of €250, apply to the Valuation Office for a revision of the valuation. If dissatisfied with the outcome, they may appeal to the Commissioner of Valuation in the first instance and subsequently to the independent Valuation Tribunal. There is also a further right of appeal to the High Court and ultimately to the Supreme Court on a point of law.

Public Service Contracts.

201. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the advice and assistance available to small start-up businesses offering services and supplies to public bodies; the steps he has taken to ensure that such businesses can access the same information and competitions as large well-established preferred bidders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34213/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): Government recognises the important business opportunities that public service contracts represent for small businesses in the local and national economy and encourages participation to the greatest extent possible. Public procurement guidelines issued by the National Public Procurement Policy Unit (NPPPU) in my Department recommend that contracting authorities ensure that recently established firms, or firms with no previous experience of public contracts, are not excluded from the tendering process.

Significant measures have been introduced which make it easier to bid for public contracts. A national public procurement website (www.etenders.gov.ie) was developed by my Department in recent years where all significant public sector contracts are now advertised. This

[Deputy Brian Cowen.]

central facility, which is available free of charge, increases transparency and greatly facilitates access to public sector contracts for all suppliers. On average, about 1,000 tendering opportunities are open at any given time. The small and medium enterprise sector has been actively targeted through a marketing campaign and suppliers receive free email alerts to tender notices of interest to them. Figures show a steady increase in the number of registered suppliers competing for business. In addition, the site offers access to contracting authorities' buyer profiles and contacts as well as general information on public procurement, regulations and guidance.

From time to time, the NPPPU arranges and participates in public procurement events with the aim of highlighting opportunities and providing information on public procurement for small businesses. The Unit recently consulted and invited submissions from stakeholders in the public procurement market on possible obstacles to small and medium sized enterprise participation with a view to addressing them. Responses have been received from interested parties and these are currently being examined to identify possible actions that can be taken.

Tax Yield.

202. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the *per capita* tax revenue and Government expenditure in the Border Midlands Western region, Dublin region, south-west region and east and south-east region; and if he will provide the information in tabular readable form. [34214/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that statistics on tax receipts are not recorded in such a manner as would enable the information requested by the Deputy to be provided. Such information could not be obtained without conducting a protracted investigation of the Revenue Commissioners' records. I refer the Deputy to the recent combined answer to PQs 32018/07 — 32023/07 on 4th December last, which provided information for some tax heads on the basis of county divisions. Expenditure information is not collected in such a way as to show a breakdown of public expenditure by region.

Departmental Communications.

203. **Deputy Damien English** asked the

Number of information technology projects undertaken by my Department since 2004	Delivered over budget	After original deadline	On budget	Under budget	On original deadline	Ahead of original deadline
13	1	1	11	1	11	1

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34223/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The staff provided with mobile access to e-mail varies in accordance with business needs. At present, twenty-one (21) members of staff have such access.

204. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34238/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The table shows the number of databases used by my Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within my Department.

The number of databases used by my Department	The number of databases wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals	The number of databases operated solely within my Department
19	2	17

205. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34253/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): The table shows the number of information technology projects undertaken by my Department since 2004, the number delivered over budget, the number after their original deadline, the number on budget, the number under budget, the number delivered on their original deadline and the number delivered ahead of their original deadline.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

206. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34268/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): On foot of the commitment in the Programme for Government on carbon offsetting of official air travel, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is developing a scheme for use by all Government Departments and bodies under their aegis. My Department will fully implement the terms of the scheme outlined as soon as they become available.

Data Protection.

207. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34283/07]

Tánaiste and Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Cowen): All of my Departmental databases including those holding personal information relating to members of the public are protected from hackers by modern firewall infrastructures. The first layer of protection is provided at the Government Network Internet access point with a further layer located at the Department's access point to the Government Network. Both infrastructures provide industry standard intrusion protection and are constantly monitored on a 24/7 basis. Within my Department's IT infrastructure, all of the databases are further protected from unauthorized access through the use of individual access permissions set up by the IT system administrators. These access permissions are multi-layered at PC, server and application level.

Questions Nos. 208 and 209 answered with Question No. 196.

Question No. 210 answered with Question No. 155.

Garda Stations.

211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance the position in regard to the future use of the old Garda station, Carbury, County Kildare; the extent to which plans have been formulated in this regard; if it is intended to re-use or dispose of the premises; the expected future use; the extent or degree to which discussions have taken place with other individuals, groups or bodies in this regard; the

future plans for the site and the premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34373/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Noel Ahern): It is proposed to place the former Garda Station in Carbury, County Kildare for sale on the open market early in 2008.

Child Care Services.

212. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a decision will be made on an application for grant assistance for a crèche (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33233/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Brendan Smith): 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. With regard to the application for capital grant assistance under the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 referred to in the question, I understand that it is currently in the assessment process. The applicants will be informed of the outcome in due course.

Mental Health Services.

213. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the latest NESF report on mental health and social inclusion; the way the senior officials group will take these recommendations forward under the national action plan for social inclusion; if the senior officials group will publish regular reports on the implementation of the NESF's recommendations; if so, when the first will be produced; if targets, implementation schedules, performance indicators and outcomes will be published and established; if so, when; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33298/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Jimmy Devins): The Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy, "A Vision for Change", which was launched in January 2006, acknowledges links between social inclusion and mental ill-health and the pervasive impact of stigma and discrimination on those experiencing mental ill-health. The report provides strong evidence linking poverty and mental ill-health and recognises the impact that the lack of housing and education can have on an individual's mental health and well-being. "A Vision for Change" makes a number of key

[Deputy Jimmy Devins.]

recommendations designed to promote greater social inclusion for people with mental health problems.

The National Economic Social Forum's report on Mental Health and Social Inclusion is consistent with "A Vision for Change". It is the responsibility of each Government Department to implement the recommendations relevant to their Department. A cross-departmental structure is already in place under the Senior Official's Group on Social Inclusion to address the preventative aspects of health including mental health. In addition, the proposed Office of the Minister for Disability and Mental Health will oversee cross-departmental cooperation in the area of mental health.

Health Services.

214. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if persons (details supplied) will be assisted. [33415/07]

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.

215. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the extent to which she has put in place new measures to improve the availability of speech and language therapy services to enable adequate access throughout the whole country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34360/07]

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 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.

Vaccination Programme.

216. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Health and Children the date the first child will be vaccinated against pneumococcal disease; the person who is responsible within the Health Service Executive for making this happen; and if

she will make a statement on the matter. [33219/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Services Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Pension Provisions.

217. **Deputy Beverley Flynn** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the parallel benchmarking for retired group VIII rationalisation salary scale will be applied. [33228/07]

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, including the payment of pension entitlements to eligible personnel, has been provided as part of its overall vote. The Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular issue 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 Homes Repayment Scheme.

218. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a decision will be made on an application for nursing home rebate for a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a decision on the matter. [33231/07]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities.

219. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will supply home support for a child (details supplied) in County Cavan with cerebral palsy and worster drought syndrome; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33234/07]

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 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.

220. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will investigate a situation in relation to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [33259/07]

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.

221. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the criteria used by the Health Service Executive to determine if a child's dental issues are serious enough for work to be done under the public orthodontic services. [33267/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Deputy's question regarding the way that children are assessed and deemed eligible for orthodontic treatment relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

222. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be called to Galway for an appointment, in view of the urgency of the situation. [33269/07]

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 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 this case investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Energy Resources.

223. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Health and Children the percentage of energy consumed in her Department and in all agencies for which her Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33282/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): At present most of the energy used in my Department doesn't come from renewable sources. Following a tendering process conducted under the auspices of the Office of Public Works, a contract is now in place with Energia for the supply of electricity to my Department's offices. It is understood that a small portion of the electricity supplied by Energia comes from renewable sources. The procurement of energy supplies by Agencies under the aegis of my Department is a matter for the Agencies themselves.

Health Services.

224. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will receive an appointment for further investigation of their health problem in view of the fact that their last appointment was 21 May 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33299/07]

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.

225. **Deputy John Cregan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a consultant led cystic fibrosis service is available in the mid-west region in order to continue the care at present being provided for children up to the age of 18 years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33301/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Operational responsibility for the

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

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 issue 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.

Proposed Legislation.

226. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Health and Children the time-scale for the implementation of the fair deal scheme. [33302/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): The final details of the Bill to provide for the new Long-Term Residential Care Scheme — A Fair Deal — are being addressed at present. The Minister proposes to publish the Bill as soon as possible, following Government approval.

Food Safety.

227. **Deputy Edward O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will take action to protect consumers in view of the advertisements by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland informing the public about food labelling which are misleading to consumers. [33306/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher): The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) has overall responsibility for enforcing food law — including legislation relating to food labelling. The legislation is enforced by Environmental Health Officers of the Health Service Executive (HSE) on foot of a service contract with the FSAI. It is a requirement of the labelling legislation that the consumer should not be misled. As part of its work in this area, the FSAI recently published a report *The Labelling of Food in Ireland 2007* which consolidates information on this issue. Any issues of concern in regard to misleading labelling should be brought to the attention of the FSAI for appropriate follow-up.

Departmental Reports.

228. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Health and Children the response by her Department to the recommendations made to her Department by the Competition Authority in its June 2006 report on competition in the optometry profession; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33319/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The executive summary of the Report to which the Deputy refers commences “The optometry profession in Ireland is an example of a profession where competition is generally working well.” The Report makes five recommendations, four of which fall within my remit. The first of these recommendation is to “allow optometrists to provide State-funded eye examinations to children identified at national school exit screening”. My Department has informed the Competition Authority that children over the age of eight years could be referred directly to optometrists from the school medical service. The mechanics of introducing this change are being examined at present in the context of a H.S.E. review of the role of the community ophthalmic physician.

The final three recommendations concern the removal of unnecessary restrictions on advertising, setting out the functions of the Opticians Board in legislation and changing the composition of the Opticians Board. My Department has informed the Competition Authority that these recommendations will be considered in the event of a review of the Opticians Act, 1956.

229. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Health and Children the response by her Department to the recommendations made to her Department by the Competition Authority in its October 2007 report on competition in the dental profession; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33320/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I welcome the Report on Competition in the Dental Profession prepared by the Competition Authority. I will consider its recommendations in the context of the National Oral Health Policy, launched by me on the 18th October last.

Voluntary Sector Funding.

230. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide core funding to the Irish Osteoporosis Society to enable this charity to continue and expand its vital work for osteoporosis sufferers and the general public; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33324/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): 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. Therefore, the Executive 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.

Cigarette Prices.

231. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the process by which the minimum price of various packets of 20 cigarettes is calculated; the legislative provisions that support this measure; the reasoning behind the recent increase in the minimum price of some cigarettes which occurred on 19 November 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33330/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department sets a minimum price for three categories of cigarettes (plain unfiltered cigarettes, filtered cigarettes of less than 80 mm in overall length and filtered cigarettes of 80 mm and over in overall length) based on data compiled annually by an independent firm of chartered accountants. The Tobacco Products (Control of Advertising, Sponsorship and Sales Promotion) Regulations (S.I. No. 326 of 1991) as amended by the Tobacco Products (Control of Advertising, Sponsorship and Sales Promotion)(Amendment) Regulations, 2000 (S.I. No. 35 of 2000) provides the legislative basis for this measure.

Smoking is the largest single cause of preventable mortality in Ireland, killing 6,500 people every year. Maintaining a floor price for cigarettes is an important component in national tobacco control policy, particularly in preventing young people's initiation and subsequent addiction to tobacco.

Departmental Expenditure.

232. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by her Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33341/07]

233. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by her Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33356/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 232 and 233 together.

The amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by my Department are as follows:

Year	Total Amount	Roaming	DATA
	€	€	€
2006	146,514	29,024	26,734
2007	149,785	27,492	28,269

My Department does not pay telephone bills in the form of expenses to staff.

234. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the Departmental mobile telephone assigned to her by her Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33371/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The information requested by the Deputy is as follows:

Year	Total Cost	Data	Roaming
	€	€	€
2006	5,845	241	3,559
2007	4,773	805	1,105

Health Service Staff.

235. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of positions that remain to be filled by the Health Service Executive in each of its 32 local areas (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33390/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Almost 130,000 people work full-time or part-time in our public health services. In recent years, the Government's ongoing high level of investment in health has achieved and maintained significant increases in the numbers of doctors, nurses and other health care professionals employed in the public health services. The Government has also invested heavily in the education and training of such personnel in order to secure a good supply of graduates to provide for the health care needs of the population into the future.

Subject to overall parameters set by Government, the Health Service Executive has the responsibility for determining the composition of

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

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.

Hygiene Standards.

236. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the suite of sanctions available to enforce hygiene standards in hospitals; her views on whether the sanctions are adequate to address the recent hygiene report issued by HIQA and other hygiene situations that could arise in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33411/07]

237. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the action she will take to address the concerns and results of the recent National Hygiene Services Quality Report into hygiene in hospitals; her proposals to monitor or enforce changes in regulations pertaining to hospitals to enforce accountability for hygiene on the hospital management, individual hospital managers and hospital staff in a similar manner to the accountability enforced by health inspectors in restaurants where both the owner of the restaurant and the employee can be summonsed and fined for engaging in unsafe, unhygienic work practices; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33412/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 236 and 237 together.

Achieving and maintaining the highest possible standards of hygiene in our hospitals and health care facilities generally is a priority for this Government. The National Hygiene Services Quality Review on acute hospitals was published by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) on 13th November, 2007. The report represents a thorough assessment of how hygiene services are provided and managed in 51 HSE funded acute care hospitals. The method of assessment and criteria used are substantially different to previous audits carried out by the HSE and therefore the results are not comparable. The results do, however, set a very good benchmark for the future. Following on from the publication of the report, it is my belief that the Authority will revisit some hospitals reviewed to check that immediate measures have been put in place. The focus within the HSE at this point is

to work with and support hospitals to improve practices rather than impose sanctions.

The HIQA review not only looked at the immediate service delivery elements of hygiene but also examined the critical areas of governance and corporate management. Hospitals generally performed well on hygiene in the service delivery area with most hospitals achieving either extensive or exceptional compliance with the standard. However, the results were poor on governance. While the good hygiene practice of front-line staff highlighted in the report is vital, real improvement in this whole area also depends heavily on good leadership and a system of governance. A quality improvement plan now needs to be drawn up by all the hospitals and the HSE. This will continue to be monitored by HIQA as part of its ongoing quality assurance programme.

HIQA is currently working with managers and clinicians to develop national standards for Infection Prevention and Control which should be finalised in March 2008. When completed these, along with the national hygiene standards, will provide a comprehensive framework to help reduce the spread of infection and improve the quality of our health care. In addition, the Authority has submitted views to the Commission on Patient Safety and Quality Assurance to consider measures to create an impetus for change in the form of a framework of incentives and sanctions. The work of the Commission will be finalised mid 2008 and I will examine their recommendations at that time.

Care of the Elderly.

238. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the proposals in place to fund, staff and resource HIQA to meet its remit under the fair deal, to have in place an inspectorate to inspect and evaluate private and public nursing homes here and to supply details of the amount of extra funding, staff numbers required and number of homes that have to be inspected; when all nursing homes will be inspected under the proposed new nursing home standards; when new regulations will be introduced by her Department to facilitate those new nursing home standards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33413/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hackett): The safety and well-being of older people living in nursing homes is of critical concern to this Government. We are committed to ensuring that quality care and patient safety comes first and that everyone receives the same high standard of quality-assured care.

A fundamental principle of the Health Service Reform Programme is to put the users of health and personal social services at the centre of the

services. The Health Act 2007 reflects this principle and provides for the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA). The objective of the Authority is to promote safety and quality in the provision of health and personal social services. The existing inspection and registration systems for residential services will be replaced by a strengthened and expanded system and the Act strengthens and modernises the registration and de-registration process.

Statutory responsibility is given to the Chief Inspector of Social Services for inspecting and registering children's residential centres, residential centres for people with disabilities and residential centres for older people, including private nursing homes. The Health Service Executive (HSE) is liaising with HIQA to facilitate this and transitional arrangements will be agreed as we move towards the new system of inspection.

Formal standards are a key requirement for inspection and registration. A new set of draft national standards for residential care was published in January 2007. The draft standards are designed to ensure the protection of residents, to safeguard and promote their health, welfare and quality of life and to ensure that there is a focus on the well-being, dignity and autonomy of older people. They set service providers the goal of providing a setting in which older people can experience a good quality of life.

The standards were developed by a working group which was chaired by the Department of Health and Children, and included the HSE, Social Service Inspectorate and the Irish Health Services Accreditation Board. As the Health Act, 2007 provides that the enhanced inspection function will be taken over by HIQA, the draft standards were formally referred to the Authority for consultation and finalisation.

HIQA published draft standards on 8 August, 2007 for public consultation. Members of the public, service users, their families, service providers and all those with an interest in residential care for older people were invited to submit their views on the draft. The results of the public consultation were discussed at the most recent meetings of the HIQA Working Group. It is expected that the standards will be finalised shortly. The next step will be to refer the standards to the Minister, following which Regulations will be drafted to give statutory underpinning to the Standards.

Since its establishment in May 2007, HIQA's priority has been to commence building its organisation and operational capacity. It has at this stage a staff of 60 which includes 18 in the Social Services Inspectorate. In 2007 it has a budget for current expenditure of €9.667m available for its overall operations. HIQA is now in the process of arranging the transfer of further inspectorate staff from the HSE and will also be carrying out

direct recruitment for this function in 2008. The budget for HIQA for next year is currently being finalised and will represent a significant increase in its allocation over the 2007 funding.

I am satisfied that the resources required to carry out inspections under the new 'Standards' regime will be in place when the necessary Regulations are made. HIQA will not have a direct remit under the Fair Deal, but as described here, will have important functions relating to the safety and quality of nursing homes.

Hospital Services.

239. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on the proposal to develop a national cancer biobank infrastructure starting off with two hospitals; and if she will work closely with Biobank Ireland Trust on this matter. [33414/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): In June 2007 I established an expert group to develop proposals for the establishment of a National Cancer Biobank. Membership of the group includes representatives of the US National Cancer Institute, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland, the Health Service Executive, the Health Research Board, the Irish Co-operative Oncology Research Group and the Irish Cancer Society. The group will also make recommendations on North/South collaboration and potential for an all-island biobank. It is expected that the group will report to me early next year.

Cancer Screening Programme.

240. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she has reviewed the evidence in support of her policy of ending the application of free BreastCheck at age 65; her estimate of the extra cost of extending the age for providing BreastCheck; the way this compares with the benefits that would be conferred by picking up illness early; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33479/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The expert advice from BreastCheck and from the National Cancer Forum, as contained in the National Strategy for Cancer Control, is that following the national extension of the programme, the upper age limit should be extended to women aged 69 years. The priority of BreastCheck is to screen women who have not yet been screened and accordingly it is fully focussed at present on the completion of the first round of screening in the West and South. I will consider extending the age limit as recommended when the national roll-out of the prog-

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

ramme is sufficiently developed and it is assured that a quality service is being delivered. Any woman irrespective of her age who has immediate concerns or symptoms should contact her GP who, where appropriate, will refer her to the symptomatic services in her area.

The Deputy's specific question in relation to the cost of extending the age range of BreastCheck is the responsibility of the National Cancer Screening Service. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Chief Executive Officer of the Service to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the matter raised.

Hospital Services.

241. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will confirm that a patient (details supplied) of Cork University Hospital was informed that their brain scan files had become mixed up with those of another patient and that they were requested to make an appointment for six months hence; the reason for this occurrence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33486/07]

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.

242. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of primary care facilities in County Kildare; her plans to roll out further facilities in a growing area like Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33487/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Primary Care Strategy aims to increase health service capacity through the development of services in the community to give people direct access to integrated multi-disciplinary teams of general practitioners, nurses, home helps, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and others. It has been estimated that up to 95% of people's health and social services needs can be properly met within a primary care setting and the establishment of new Primary Care Teams can contribute greatly to enhancing community based health services.

The provision of the appropriate infrastructure to facilitate the delivery of primary care services is being considered by the HSE, having regard to a number of factors. These include the type and configuration of the services involved, the mixed public/private nature of our health system, the suitability of existing infrastructure and the capital requirements of the health services generally over the coming years. As the Health Service Executive has the operational and funding responsibility for Primary Care services, it 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 this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

243. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork has been waiting since June 2006 to have a cataract removed from their left eye from which they have no sight at the present time; and if it cannot be done by their consultant will they be referred to the National Treatment Purchase Fund to have this urgent operation carried out. [33488/07]

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. Patients waiting more than three months on a surgical waiting list may qualify for treatment under the National Treatment Purchase Fund. It is open to the person in question or anyone acting on their behalf to contact the Fund directly in relation to their case.

Hospital Car Parks.

244. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health and Children the contractual arrangements relating to parking at Cork University Hospital and Cork University Maternity Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33499/07]

266. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health and Children the revenue secured through pay parking across public hospitals in Cork city and county in 2006 and 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33821/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 244 and 266 together.

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 issues raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matters investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Staff.

245. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in her Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by her or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33511/07]

247. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of press officers and press advisers in her Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33541/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 245 and 247 together.

There are 5 Civil Servants assigned to the Department's Press Office as follows: 1 Higher Executive Officer; 2 Executive Officers; and 2 Clerical Officers. The associated annual pay cost for these civil servants is €346,489 (calculated on the mean of the scale). There is also one Special Advisor in my Department who acts as my Press Advisor, and has responsibility for media related activities. The annual salary of this Special Advisor/Press Advisor is € 116,487.

A press cutting service is provided to my Department, with cuttings received made available to staff on the Department's intranet. From time-to-time, officials may request transcripts of media interviews which may require follow up responses or contain new information and the services of two external media companies are used as required this purpose. Payments made to date this year for media monitoring amount to €85,135.

The main areas of work in my Department's Press Office involves the timely processing of, and response to, a large volume of media queries

and requests for information on health issues from a wide range of media outlets. This includes broadcast and print media at both national and local level and specialist medical publications. The Press Office also makes necessary media and communications arrangements around health announcements and liaises with the Government Information Services, other Departments, and relevant health agencies in that regard. Press Office staff do not have any specific or significant role in media monitoring.

Departmental Expenditure.

246. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number and name of newspapers purchased by her Department daily and weekly; the number provided to herself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33526/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): 158 newspapers are purchased daily, consisting of the Irish Times, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, Irish Star, Irish Sun, Irish Mirror, Irish Daily Mail, Irish News, Financial Times, Daily Telegraph, Guardian and Evening Herald.

20 newspapers are purchased weekly, comprising the Saturday Independent, Saturday Irish Times, Saturday Sun, Sat Guardian, Sunday Independent, Sunday Star, Sunday World, Sunday Mirror, Irish Mail on Sunday, News of the World, Sunday Business Post, Sunday Observer, Sunday Tribune, Sunday Times, Nenagh Guardian, Tipperary Star, Midland Tribune, Anglo Celt, Northern Standard and Donegal Democrat.

The Office of the Minister receives 12 newspapers daily. The four Offices of the Ministers of State are provided with 32 newspapers daily, and six weekly. The cost from 1 Jan to 30 Nov 2007 was €55,000.

Question No. 247 answered with Question No. 245.

Consultancy Contracts.

248. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by her Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33556/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): During the period concerned, my Department primarily retained the services of public relations / communications and advertising consultancy firms to implement national health promotion campaigns. The related expenditure

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

set out in the table covers a variety of services ranging from the provision of advice, through the cost of purchasing advertising space, to organising events.

The table covers the period from 1997 to 2006 and information for 2007 is being collated by my Department and will be forwarded to the deputy as soon as possible.

Name of Media Consultant	Nature of the work done	Year of Contract	Expenditure Incurred
			€
Archer Communications	Media Advice to the Minister of State	1997	1,187.00
QMP Publicis	Advertising, media purchasing and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns (AIDS Awareness, Anti-Smoking, Breastfeeding, etc.)	1997	1,578.00
Drury Communications	PR for National Health and Lifestyle Survey — Phase 1	1998	25,600.00
Drury Ltd	Media Advice to the Minister and his Department	1998	213,092.00
Fleishman-Hilliard	Folic Acid Awareness Campaign	1998	9,000.00
Grayling Gilmore	Public relations and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns (Healthy Eating, Folic Acid, Breastfeeding, Smoking, Smoke-free at Work & Obesity) launch of reports (CLAN, SLAN, Nutrition Policy & Health Promotion Strategy Review), and conference organising	1998	38,500.00
QMP Publicis	Advertising, media purchasing and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns (AIDS Awareness, Anti-Smoking, Smoke Free at Work, Breastfeeding, etc.)	1998	47,788.00
Grayling Gilmore	Public relations and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns and conference organising	1999	43,000.00
QMP Publicis	Advertising, media purchasing and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns	1999	69,734.00
Carr Communications	Alcohol Awareness Campaign	2000	26,100.00
Dillon Consultants	Unintended pregnancy and STI prevention campaign — December 2000-December 2001	2000	165,000.00
Grayling Gilmore	Public relations and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns and conference organising	2000	38,000.00
Public Communication Centre	Provision of public relations services for the National Heart Health Campaign	2000	70,000.00
QMP Publicis	Advertising, media purchasing and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns	2000	214,673.00
Walsh Public Relations	Launch and publicity for the National Children's Strategy	2000	16,110.00
Carr Communications	Alcohol Awareness Campaign	2001	156,700.00
Carr Communications	Promotion of the National Health Strategy	2001	100,724.00
Convenience Advertising	Advertising: Sexual Health Campaign	2001	110,700.00
Dillon Consultants	PR services in relation to the 'Think Twice Campaign'	2001	63,486.00
Grayling Gilmore	Public relations and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns and conference organising	2001	43,500.00

Name of Media Consultant	Nature of the work done	Year of Contract	Expenditure Incurred
			€
QMP Publicis	Advertising, media purchasing and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns	2001	193,039.00
Walsh Public Relations	PR and event management work in relation to Dáil na nÓg 2001	2001	19,401.00
Carr Communications	Public launch and communication of Forum on Fluoridation Report	2002	16,973.00
Carr Communications	Communications Consultancy in respect of BCG vaccine	2002	5,445.00
Carr Communications	Alcohol Awareness Campaign	2002	156,600.00
Carr Communications	PR and event management in relation to Dáil na nÓg 2002	2002	23,255.00
Carr Communications	Communications support in relation to the organisation of the first annual National Health Consultative Forum in 2002.	2002	24,405.00
Convenience Advertising	Advertising: Sexual Health Campaign	2002	163,800.00
Grayling Gilmore	Public relations and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns and conference organising	2002	13,000.00
Ogilvy	National Drugs Awareness Campaign	2002	101,200.00
QMP Publicis	Advertising, media purchasing and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns	2002	327,726.00
Wilson Hartnell	National Drugs Awareness Campaign	2002	212,960.00
Brindley Advertising	Publication of two reports — “Speaking Your Mind” & “What We Heard”	2003	4,516.00
Carr Communications	The Evaluation of ‘Cancer Services in Ireland’ A National Strategy 1996 — (media advice & launch of report)	2003	12,810.00
Carr Communications	The Development of Radiation Oncology Services in Ireland — media advice & launch of report	2003	12,810.00
Carr Communications	Alcohol Awareness Campaign	2003	130,600.00
Carr Communications	Consultancy services to provide information to the Public on the SARS alert	2003	23,667.00
Convenience Advertising	Advertising: Sexual Health Campaign	2003	193,200.00
Gibney Communications	Public Relations in relation to the National Task Force on Medical Staffing	2003	39,840.00
Grayling Gilmore	Public relations and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns and conference organising.	2003	260,000.00
QMP Publicis	Advertising, media purchasing and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns	2003	530,291.00
Carr Communications	Expert Group on Mental Health Policy — cost of the public consultation process and the publication of two reports on that process — “Speaking Your Mind”	2004	144,408.00
Convenience Advertising	Advertising: Sexual Health Campaign	2004	165,300.00
Grayling Gilmore	Public relations and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns and conference organising.	2004	520,000.00
Murray Consultants	Public Relations in relation to the National Task Force on Medical Staffing	2004	75,456.00

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

Name of Media Consultant	Nature of the work done	Year of Contract	Expenditure Incurred
			€
QMP Publicis	Advertising, media purchasing and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns	2004	366,841.00
Slattery PR	Public Relations for the UN Day for Older People Conference	2004	15,589.00
Carr Communications	Media Advice (Launch of the Report of the Commission on Assisted Human Reproduction)	2005	5,515.00
Grayling Gilmore	Public relations and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns and conference organising	2005	113,000.00
Hunter Red Cell	National Adoption Contact Preference Register — Radio advertising campaign	2005	120,000.00
QMP Publicis	Advertising, media purchasing and project management work in relation to National Health Promotion Public Awareness Campaigns (AIDS Awareness, Anti-Smoking, Smoke Free at Work, Breastfeeding, etc.)	2005	389,629.00
Carr Communications	To develop and implement a communications strategy for the announcement of a new initiative on Long Term Care for Older People	2006	40,000.00

Departmental Staff.

249. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of press advisers employed by her Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33571/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The table details the number of press advisers employed by my Department and the cost of such advice for each year of service from 1997 to date in 2007.

Year	Number of Press Advisors	Period of Employment	Salary
			€
1997	Nil		
1998	Nil		
1999	Nil		
2000	Nil		
2001	Nil		
2002	1	19/08/2002-31/12/2002	50,197
2003	1	01/01/2003-31/12/2003	72,609
2004	1	01/01/2004-07/10/2004	64,847
2005	1	24/01/2005-31/12/2005	104,080
2006	1	01/01/2006-31/12/2006	109,361
2007	1	01/01/2007-to date	115,377

Departmental Expenditure.

250. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of credit cards held by her Department; the cost of same

for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33586/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Cards are issued to me as Minister and to two nominated officers, namely the Registrar of the Adoption Board and the Accountant. In previous years a number of other cards were held by nominated officers in my Department and offices under the remit of my Department such as the Secretary General, the National Children's Office, the Ombudsman for Children, the Hepatitis C & HIV Compensation Tribunal, the Commission on Assisted Human Reproduction and the Chairman of the Post Mortem Enquiry. The cost of these cards, which includes the annual membership fee and the Government Levy and the amounts purchased are set out in the table. No interest was paid during the period.

Year	Government Levy/ Annual Fees	Purchases
	€000	€000
2000	0.3	9
2001	0.4	55
2002	0.5	22
2003	0.7	12
2004	1.0	29
2005	1.0	27
2006	0.3	10
2007	0.8	17

251. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost to her Department of photographers used by all Ministers in her Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33601/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The table sets out the cost of photography services provided to my Department, for ministerial and other official purposes, in the period concerned:

Year	€
1997	3,767.40
1998	3,725.65
1999	4,021.22
2000	16,168.98
2001	10,126.25
2002	18,534.70
2003	13,947.45
2004	27,846.57
2005	11,495.23
2006	8,113.82
2007 (to date)	7,938.09

252. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost of make-up for her for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33616/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): On the basis of records supplied to me by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the following were the costs for media presentation for me as Minister in the periods indicated below.

	€
July 2000 to November 2000	2,320.00
Dec 2000 to July 2001	5,335.61
August 2001 to April 2003	12,375.00
May 2003 to July 2003	3,380.00
Sept 2003 to Nov 2003	2,990.00
Dec 2003 to March 2004	2895.00
April 2004	900.00
Total	30,195.61

The records in the Department of Health and Children, based on invoices presented, show expenses for media presentation in 2006 as €1500. It is not possible based on records and invoices presented to supply the Deputy with costs in relation to make-up specifically.

253. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost of her Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33631/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department's official spend on entertainment, including State Receptions and other Official Functions is set out below:

Year	Cost
	€
1997	182,050
1998	191,826
1999	191,256
2000	214,308
2001	229,642
2002	343,973
2003	426,914
2004	361,039
2005	470,527
2006	438,857
2007	337,678

Government Information Services.

254. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to her Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a Departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to her every day or how often it is furnished. [33646/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Government Information Service provides my Department with summary news updates, covering all major news items, throughout the day. My Department's Press Office internally circulates the summaries of the 8.00 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. news programmes and Morning Ireland headlines, by email to senior managers. My Special Advisor in the media area discusses health related items in the news updates with me, as and when he deems this necessary.

Official Engagements.

255. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a press adviser travels with her on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by her in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with her. [33661/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My press adviser accompanies me on most official engagements.

Departmental Transport.

256. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in her Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33676/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The information requested is being collated in my Department and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

257. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost of her using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to Ministers of State and staff for the same period. [33691/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The information requested is being collated in my Department and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Communications.

258. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her Department carries news summaries on its internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33721/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department's intranet carries news feeds and press cuttings which are available to all staff. The information is accessed using standard browsing technology. The data in relation to news feeds is automatically gathered using standard technology such as RSS feeds (really simple syndication) and these are updated several times during the day. The intranet is maintained by the Internal Systems Unit. In relation to the availability of press cuttings on the intranet, these are accessed on a daily basis via web links from a third party supplier Media World, at the cost of €4,100 per month.

Departmental Expenditure.

259. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of mobile phones used by her and supplied by her Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33736/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I have the use of one mobile telephone which has been supplied to me by my Department. Since taking up Office as Minister for Health and Children the following costs have been incurred:

Year	Cost
	€
2004	648
2005	5,749
2006	5,845
2007	4,773

260. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children if any of the advisers or staff appointed by her directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by her Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33751/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Advisers and other staff appointed by me are supplied with mobile telephones and other items of equipment necessary for the performance of their duties. This equipment remains the property of my Department. The costs in respect of these items since I became Minister for Health and Children, are set out below:-

Year	Mobile Phone Annual Cost	Purchase Cost of IT Equipment
	€	€
2004	1,401	4,458
2005	11,691	2,516
2006	13,333	214
2007	9,503	Nil

Departmental Reports.

261. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the value for money review of the allocation and utilisation of funds for acute hospitals will be completed; the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33769/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I take it that the Deputy is referring to the Value for Money and Policy Review Assessment of the Allocation and Utilisation of Funding in Acute Hospitals. Hospital Network 2 (Southern Area Group) is being used as the model for this exercise which will, however, have wider national relevance.

The consultants were asked to provide a systemic analysis of the allocation and utilisation of funding for expenditure in the Southern Hospitals Group in 2006 under the Government's Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative. The overall objective of the review is to:

- assess the VFM achieved from money allocated and utilised in the Southern Hospitals Group and
- to inform the scope for alternative approaches.

The Report is not yet complete so it is not possible to estimate the value of any savings that might accrue to the Exchequer as a result of the exercise.

262. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the value for money review of the equal opportunities child care programme will be completed; the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33770/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Brendan Smith): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Value for Money Review of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP) was completed in June 2007 and the Report on the Review was submitted to and approved by the Government on 11 July 2007.

The Government's Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative is part of a framework to secure improved value for money from public expenditure. Its objectives are to analyse Exchequer spending in a systematic manner and to provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between programmes. The EOCP is a major EU co-funded investment programme with a total allocation of €535 million during 2000-2007. With the coming to an end of the EOCP in 2007, the Government introduced the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP) in January 2006 to ensure a smooth transition for childcare services and to continue to support the development of the sector. This Exchequer only funded programme has an allocation of €575 million during 2006-2010.

The Value for Money Review of the EOCP was intended to inform the implementation of the NCIP, in particular the new Community Childcare Subvention Scheme 2008-2010 which will replace the EOCP staffing support grant. It is not the intention to reduce the commitment to funding for childcare services as a result of the Value for Money Review but, rather, to ensure that the NCIP is efficiently and effectively implemented to secure the best outcomes from public funding. The recommendations of the Value for Money Review are being implemented by the Childcare

Directorate of the Office of the Minister for Children. Some of the key recommendations of the Value for Money Review addressed the question of a new NCIP support scheme for community childcare services. These recommendations are provided for in the new Community Childcare Subvention Scheme which was submitted to the Government with the Value for Money Review in July of this year and which was also approved.

I understand that the total allocation to this Scheme is €153 million over the next 3 years. As the total expenditure under the EOCP staffing support grant scheme in 2007 is expected to amount to €37.25 million, I am pleased to say that this represents a very significant increase in the annual funding allocation to support community childcare services.

263. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the value for money review of the efficiency and effectiveness of long stay residential care for adults will be completed; the anticipated savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33771/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Value for Money (VFM) Review of Long Stay Residential Care for Adults within the Mental Health Services is due to be completed by the end of December, 2008. The Review Steering Group is chaired by a representative of the HSE and the Steering Group membership is comprised of senior officials from the HSE, the Department of Finance, the Department of Health and Children and an Independent Quality Assessor. The review is being carried out as part of the programme of Value for Money and Policy Reviews which was approved by the Government in June, 2006, for the period 2006-2008. The Review is one of three VFM Policy Reviews in relation to topics under the aegis of the Department of Health and Children.

The objectives of the Value for Money and Policy Review initiative are to analyse Exchequer spending in a systematic manner and to provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between programmes. As the Review is still in progress, it is not possible to assess the outcome or to anticipate recommendations until the Review is completed.

Child Care Services.

264. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Health and Children the child care providers in County Kildare that have received capital funding and financial support for running costs since 2004 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33772/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Brendan Smith): As the

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

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. The table provides details of

funding allocated under the Childcare Programmes to childcare providers in Kildare from January 2004 to date. As will be seen €5.86 million was allocated under the capital strand of the EOCP and the NCIP. An additional €1.1 million was allocated towards staffing costs for Community Based/Not for Profit Groups.

Name of Provider/Group	Townland	Grant Type	Total approved
			€
The Crèche, National University of Ireland	Maynooth	Capital — Community/Not-for-Profit	1,000,000
Allenwood Community Development Association Ltd	Naas	Capital — Community/Not-for-Profit	130,000
The Cottage Crèche	Maynooth	Capital Private Providers >20	8,972
Longtown Crèche Ltd	Sallins	Capital Private Providers >20	10,195
Curragh Finn Crèche	Curragh Finn	Capital Private Providers >20	23,166
The Purple Penguin Crèche	Celbridge	Capital Private Providers >20	50,790
Ryevale Montessori & Day-Care	Leixlip	Capital Private Providers >20	5,557
Chuckles	Rathangan	Capital Private Providers >20	21,704
Tí na nÓg	Naas	Capital — Self-employed	9,248
Breda McGuirk	Monasterevin	Capital — Self-employed	50,790
Butterstream Preschool	Clane	Capital — Self-employed	50,790
Small Talk	Leixlip	Capital — Self-employed	10,317
Small Beginnings	Clane	Capital — Self-employed	9,655
Kildare Youth Services — Naas Child and Family Project	Naas	NCIP — CB Capital	1,000,000
Sugradh Community Out of School Playcare Service	Celbridge	NCIP — CB Capital	1,000,000
Athy Travellers Support Group Ltd	Athy	NCIP — CB Capital	174,456
Celbridge Community Centre	Celbridge	NCIP — CB Capital	34,530
Little Folk Pre School Playgroup	Nurney	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Busy Fingers Crèche Ltd	Newbridge	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Lots of Tots	Athy	NCIP — Private Capital	43,526
Sharon O'Neill	Castledermot	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Ardreigh Childcare Centre	Athy	NCIP — Private Capital	52,500
Little Toppers	Straffan	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Happy Faces Early Learning Centre	Athy	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Ryevale Montessori & Day-Care	Leixlip	NCIP — Private Capital	45,000
Treehouse Childcare (Kildare)	Celbridge	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Happy Steps Childcare	Kilcock	NCIP — Private Capital	72,266
Blossoms Pre-school	Naas	NCIP — Private Capital	44,250
Bright Beginnings	Dunmurray Road	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Early Days Crèche & Daycare Centre	Clane	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Wise Owl Montessori	Maynooth	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Tots Crèche & Daycare Nursery	Newbridge	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
First Steps	Naas	NCIP — Private Capital	16,210
Primrose Hill Playgroup	Clane	NCIP — Private Capital	14,080
Tir na nÓg	Newbridge	NCIP — Private Capital	33,750
Happy Days Montessori & Afterschool	Celbridge	NCIP — Private Capital	39,750
Naas Childcare Ltd T/A Tir na nÓg	Naas	NCIP — Private Capital	60,000
Buzy Bees Playschool	Sallins	NCIP — Private Capital	49,257
The Purple Penguin Crèche	Celbridge	NCIP — Private Capital	98,100
Respond (Support) Ltd — Flinters Estate Community Group	Athy	NCIP — Private Capital	106,801
Bernie Moore	Newbridge	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000

Name of Provider/Group	Townland	Grant Type	Total approved
Giggles Crèche	Newbridge	NCIP — Private Capital	59,025
Clever Cats Childcare Centre	Carbury	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Acorn Montessori & Crèche	Sallins	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Farm Lee Childcare	Celbridge	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Colaiste Lorcaín	Castledermot	NCIP — Private Capital	7,387
Greenlane Montessori & Afterschool	Leixlip	NCIP — Private Capital	100,000
Tir na nÓg Nursery & Montessori Centre	Athy	NCIP — Private Capital	20,720
Bright Eyes	Clane	NCIP — Private Capital	7,350
		Capital Total	5,860,142
Allenwood Community Development Association Ltd	Naas	Staffing — Community/Not-for-Profit	200,000
Flinters Estate Community Group	Athy	Staffing — Community/Not-for-Profit	50,700
Newbridge Family Resource Centre	Newbridge	Staffing — Continuation Funding	164,750
Athy Community Development	Athy	Staffing — Continuation Funding	30,667
Athy Travellers Group	Athy	Staffing — Continuation Funding 05	29,624
Sugradh Community Out-of-School Playcare Service	Celbridge	Staffing — Continuation Funding 07	80,500
Athy Community Development	Athy	Staffing — Continuation Funding 07	144,700
Newbridge Family Resource Centre	Newbridge	Staffing — Continuation Funding 07	281,800
Athy Travellers Group	Athy	Staffing — Continuation Funding 07	119,300
		Staffing Total	1,102,041

Nursing Homes Repayments Scheme.

265. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for Health and Children the proposals she has to extend the nursing home refund scheme to patients who are in private nursing homes in contracted beds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33818/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Health (Repayment Scheme) Act 2006 provides a clear legal framework to repay recoverable health charges for publicly funded long term residential care. All those fully eligible persons who were wrongly charged and are alive will have their charges repaid in full. The estates of all those fully eligible persons who were wrongly charged for publicly funded long term residential care and died since 9 December 1998 will have the charges repaid in full. The scheme does not allow for repayments to the estates of those who died prior to that date.

Recoverable health charges are charges which were imposed on persons with full eligibility under the Health (Charges for In-patient Services) Regulations 1976 as amended in 1987 or charges for in-patient services only, raised under the Institutional Assistance Regulations 1954 as amended in 1965. It is not my intention to extend the parameters of the health repayment scheme.

Question No. 266 answered with Question No. 244.

Health Services.

267. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the existence of a project (details supplied) in County Cork; if so, if her attention has further been drawn to the fact that no core funding was made available to the project by the Health Service Executive in 2007; if she will increase the core funding made available to this group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33822/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher): The Deputy's question relates to the funding, management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Nursing Homes Repayments Scheme.

268. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of persons whose claims have been settled under the nursing home repayments scheme; the proportion of claims settled; the number and proportion in each Health Service Executive area; when she anticipates that all claims will be settled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33827/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The HSE has informed my Department that since the commencement of the scheme over 32,000 claims have been received and to date 5,007 payments totalling over €99.03m have issued. 8,015 offers of repayment, totalling over €155.5m, have been made. The scheme is administered by the Health Service Executive in conjunction with the appointed scheme administrator KPMG/McCann Fitzgerald. Therefore the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the specific issue 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.

269. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children the full range of services available at the Health Service Executive health centre in Cromcastle, Coolock, Dublin 5. [33828/07]

270. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children the full range of services available at the Health Service Executive health centre in Darndale, Dublin 5. [33829/07]

271. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children the full range of services available at the Health Service Executive health centre in Kilbarrack, Dublin 13. [33830/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 269 to 271, inclusive, together.

The Primary Care Strategy aims to increase health service capacity through the development of services in the community to give people direct access to integrated multidisciplinary teams of general practitioners, nurses, home helps, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and others. It has been estimated that up to 95% of people's health and social services needs can be properly met within a primary care setting and the establishment of new Primary Care Teams can contribute greatly to enhancing community based health services.

The provision of the appropriate infrastructure to facilitate the delivery of primary care services is being considered by the HSE, having regard to a number of factors. These include the type and configuration of the services involved, the mixed public/private nature of our health system, the suitability of existing infrastructure and the capital requirements of the health services generally over the coming years. As the Health Service Executive has the operational and funding responsibility for Primary Care services, it is the appropriate body to consider the particular matters raised by the Deputy. My Department

has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have these matters investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Staff.

272. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views, in view of the important revelations by various medical professionals (details supplied) on withdrawing the so-called gagging clause in the proposed consultants contract in order that future failings in the health service are brought to the attention of the appropriate authorities and to her attention, if that is deemed necessary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33831/07]

275. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the status of the consultants contract; the progress that has been made on finalising the negotiations on a revised contract; the issues that remain unresolved; when the revised contract will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33841/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 272 and 275 together.

Talks on a new contract commenced on 24th November 2005 under the independent chairmanship of Mr Mark Connaughton SC. Bi-lateral talks took place over the summer and full plenary talks resumed on 4th September 2007. The Chairman presented his final report on the consultant discussions to the parties on 4th October 2007. On 9 October I wrote to the Irish Hospital Consultants Association and the Irish Medical Organisation conveying acceptance of the chairman's final report and noting the medical organisations support for the report subject to reservations. Discussions recommenced between the parties on 17 October and are ongoing with a view to implementing the independent chairman's recommendations and to resolving outstanding issues.

I am unclear as to the 'gagging clause' to which the Deputy refers. It is proposed that the new contract will contain a confidentiality clause to safeguard information concerning the medical or personal affairs of patients and/or staff. However, it is also proposed to include a clause concerning the right of consultants to advocate on behalf of patients/clients or persons awaiting access to service. I am anxious that the talks are concluded as soon as possible so that the HSE can proceed with arrangements for the recruitment of the extra consultants needed for the public health service.

Medical Cards.

273. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of full medical cards available on a county basis; if

she is satisfied that the system is working; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33832/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Medical cards are made available to persons and their dependants who would otherwise experience undue hardship in meeting the cost of General Practitioner (GP) services. In 2005 the GP visit card was introduced as a graduated benefit so that people on moderate and lower incomes, particularly parents of young children, who do not qualify for a medical card would not be deterred on cost grounds from visiting their GP.

Since the beginning of 2005 substantial changes have been made to the way in which people's eligibility for a medical card is assessed and these apply equally to the assessment process for a GP visit card. The income guidelines have been increased by a cumulative 29% and in addition allowance is now made for reasonable expenses incurred in respect of mortgage/rent, childcare and travel to work costs. In June 2006 I agreed a further adjustment to the assessment guidelines for GP visit cards and these are now 50% higher than those in respect of medical cards.

Between January 2005 (1,145,083) and November 2007 (1,270,873) an additional 125,790 people have medical cards. As at 1st November 2007, 74,671 persons held a GP visit card. Thus since January 2005, an additional 200,461 people have free access to GP services.

The Programme for Government commits to the following: Indexing the income thresholds for medical cards to increases in the average industrial wage; Doubling of the income limit eligibility of parents of children under 6 years of age, and trebling them for parents of children under 18 years of age with an intellectual disability; Allowing people with disabilities to work without losing key essential medical card cover after 3 years; Implementation of an annual publicity campaign and making applications easier so as to increase uptake amongst those who are eligible for Medical Cards and GP Visit Cards.

At present, my Department is carrying out a data collection exercise and a review of the eligibility criteria for medical cards and this work is expected to be completed by autumn next year. I am committed to making further progress in this area as soon as that review is completed. Detailed statistical data in relation to the number of medical cards issued on a county basis is held by the Health Service Executive. Therefore, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to provide the details requested directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

274. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will be

called for an appointment; the reason for the delay in same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33839/07]

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 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 this case investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Question No. 275 answered with Question No. 272.

Infectious Diseases.

276. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of infection control committees and teams that have been put in place in each hospital to date as recommended in the Health Service Executive infection control action plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33842/07]

278. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a clinical nurse specialist has been identified in each ward and area with responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the infection control committees as recommended in the Health Service Executive infection control action plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33844/07]

279. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she is satisfied with the complement of infection control staff employed by the Health Service Executive; the number of infection control staff recruited to date in 2007; the number of infection control staff vacancies that remain to be filled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33845/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 276, 278 and 279 together.

Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the HSE under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall Vote. Subject to overall parameters set by Government, the Health Service Executive has the responsibility for determining the composition of its staffing complement. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular issues raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

277. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the progress achieved in meeting her target to reduce health care associated infections by 20%, to reduce MRSA infections by 30% and to reduce antibiotic consumption by 20%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33843/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I can assure the Deputy that tackling Health Care Associated Infections (HCAIs), including MRSA continues to be a priority for the government and for the Health Service Executive (HSE). The HSE launched a National Infection Control Action Plan in March 2007. An Infection Control Steering Group, chaired by Dr. Pat Doorley, National Director (Population Health) is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the plan. Over the next three to five years, the HSE aims to reduce HCAIs by 20%, MRSA infections by 30% and antibiotic consumption by 20%. Achievement of these targets will benefit all patients who are at risk. These targets will be achieved through the development of national and local level action plans to reduce the potential for spread of infections between persons in health care settings, and, in addition, will focus on reducing antibiotic use in Ireland. The Steering Group is supported by eight Local Implementation Teams which will ensure that all local facilities are focused on achieving the national targets.

A new National Surveillance System has recently been established by the HSE to collect data and provide information on a quarterly basis on four key areas, to monitor HCAIs in our health care system: Staphylococcus bacteraemia; Antibiotic consumption; Alcohol gel use; MRSA surveillance in Intensive Care Units. The data for 2006 is currently being finalised and a report will be released by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre in the near future. Data for 2007 will be available in early 2008.

On that basis, it is not possible to indicate the rates of progress towards achievement against the targets on reductions in HCAIs or antibiotic consumption until sufficient data is available. While accepting that not all HCAIs are preventable, I am satisfied that significant steps are being taken to reduce the rates of infections and to treat them promptly when they occur.

Questions Nos. 278 and 279 answered with Question No. 276.

Hospitals Building Programme.

280. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the status of her co-location initiative; the number of contracts that

remain at tender stage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33846/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Board of the Health Service Executive approved preferred bidders for the following six co-located hospital sites at its July meeting: Waterford Regional Hospital; Cork University Hospital; Limerick Regional Hospital; Sligo General Hospital; Beaumont Hospital; St. James's Hospital. Since then the hospitals and the preferred bidders have been working towards finalising the Project Agreements for these sites. It is expected that the Project Agreements for the sites will be concluded in the near future. Connolly Hospital and Tallaght Hospital, which are also participating in the co-location initiative, are at an earlier stage of the procurement process. A tender in relation to the former is under consideration. It is expected that the invitation to tender (ITT) for Tallaght Hospital will issue in the near future.

Health Service Staff.

281. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the length of time she expects the health service employment recruitment ban to continue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33847/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The current pause on the recruitment of additional staff is a temporary measure initiated as part of the Health Service Executive financial break-even plan. There is no recruitment ban in place in the HSE. Of course, in any instance where a critical or essential vacancy arises it may be filled through redeployment of existing staff by the Line Manager or re-assignment of responsibilities based on an assessment of the priority of need.

Notwithstanding this, the Health Service Executive recognises that there are some circumstances where the appointment of staff may be necessary in front-line services. Accordingly, a process has been put in place to evaluate, monitor and approve requests for derogation from the general recruitment pause. A small group has been established including a representative of the National Hospitals Office, PCCC and other Directorates of the HSE and this group meets weekly to consider such applications. Of the applications for derogation received to date, 520.8 WTEs (wholtime equivalents) have been approved where posts have been identified as critical to service delivery.

I have been advised by the Health Service Executive that the recruitment pause will continue for December 2007 and the current arrangement will be reviewed prior to the end of the year. It is intended that a robust employment control framework will continue to be applied to services in 2008.

Health Insurance.

282. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on whether it is wise and fair that the smallest insurer in the market (details supplied) should be the only health insurer forced to make money payments under the risk equalisation scheme in March 2008; the way she sees this system as encouraging choice and competition in the market; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33848/07]

283. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on the current stay in payments on the risk equalisation scheme; the way a company (details supplied) is being forced to make the payment due to its failure to litigate against the Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33849/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 282 and 283 together.

Under the provisions of the risk equalisation scheme the company referred to in the Deputy's questions would, when the Health Insurance Authority next considers the matter, be subject only to 50% of the payments that would normally fall due in its case given the manner in which the provisions of the risk equalisation scheme apply to it. In addition, having regard to facilitating competition in the market, the current risk equalisation scheme falls a long way short of full equalisation and only partially equalises risk differentials between the insurers. With regard to the other likely contributors to the risk equalisation scheme, the question of a stay is before the High Court on 18th December.

Health Service Investigations.

284. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the investigations into diagnosis in Portlaoise Hospital will include other cancers as well as cancer of the breast; if concerns have been raised in relation to broader diagnostic issues in the hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33985/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The review of mammograms at the Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise is complete. A report on the review will be published after any individual identified in it has been offered the opportunity to comment, as is the normal legal requirement. A clinical review of ultrasounds at Portlaoise was completed last week. I have asked for a report from the Board of the HSE on the management of all events following the decision to suspend breast radiology services at Portlaoise. I expect that this will be completed early in the New Year. The HSE has also informed me that it is still considering how best to deal with the situation regarding the con-

sultant radiologist who has been placed on administrative leave.

Hospital Staff.

285. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will authorise the appointment of a paediatric phlebotomist for the Mid-West Regional Hospital to replace the service which was withdrawn when the pilot programme ended; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33986/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Almost 130,000 people work full-time or part-time in our public health services. In recent years, the Government's ongoing high level of investment in health has achieved and maintained significant increases in the numbers of doctors, nurses and other health care professionals employed in the public health services. The Government has also invested heavily in the education and training of such personnel in order to secure a good supply of graduates to provide for the health care needs of the population into the future.

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.

Health Services.

286. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if core funding will be provided for a society (details supplied) to enable it to continue its works. [33991/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): 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. Therefore, the Executive 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 Homes Repayment Scheme.

287. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will re-examine the

[Deputy P. J. Sheehan.]

case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12 who has been seeking refund of nursing home charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34012/07]

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.

288. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of claims to date submitted to the Health Service Executive under the scheme for the repayment of all wrongfully charged long-stay maintenance charges in public long-stay facilities and for public contracted beds; the number of persons paid; the amount of payments paid to date; and the number of claims outstanding. [34039/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has responsibility for administering the health repayment scheme in conjunction with the appointed scheme administrator KPMG/McCann Fitzgerald. The HSE has informed my Department that since the commencement of the scheme over 32,000 claims have been received and to date 5,007 payments totalling over €99.03m have issued. 8,015 offers of repayment, totalling over €155.5m, have been made.

Health Services.

289. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of additional home help hours funded by her Department in 2007; the cost of this programme; the number of home help hours in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34041/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): 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. Therefore, the Executive 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.

290. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of additional home care packages funded by her Department

in 2007; the cost of this programme; the number of home care packages in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34042/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): 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. Therefore, the Executive 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.

291. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of additional residential care beds funded by her Department in 2007; the cost of this programme; the number of residential care beds in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34043/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): 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. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular matter raised by the Deputy. The Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Child Care Services.

292. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of additional child care places under the NCIP and the previous equal opportunities child care programme funded by her Department in 2007; the cost of this programme; the number of child care places under this programme in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34044/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Brendan Smith): The €535 million Equal Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000-06, which was co-funded by the European Union, was succeeded in 2006 by the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) 2006-10 which has a fund of €575m and is entirely Exchequer funded. Both Programmes consist of grant schemes for capital investment, staffing support and quality improvement. While applications for EOCP grants are now closed, funding continues to be drawn down and child-care places are still being created.

From 1 January 2007, the total value of grants approved under the EOCP is €4,685,612, resulting in 2,947 new childcare places. This

brings the total number of childcare places created since the beginning of the EOCIP to 37,306. From 1 January 2007, the total value of grants approved under NCIP is €111,669,633. There is a time-lag between the point where grants are approved and the creation of physical places. While 266 new childcare places have been created in 2007 under the NCIP, the projected number of new childcare places once the approved NCIP funding is drawn down is 27,463 childcare places. The total number of NCIP new childcare places created to date is 1,472.

Services for People with Disabilities.

293. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of additional residential and respite care places in respect of physical and sensory disability funded by her Department in 2007; the cost of this programme; the number of residential and respite care places in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34045/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Jimmy Devins): As part of the Multi Annual Investment Programme under the Disability Strategy, the Government provided the Health Service Executive an additional €75m in 2007. This funding included monies to provide additional residential places and additional hours of personal assistance for people with a physical and sensory disability. The Government is also honouring its promise in relation to the Multi-Annual Investment Programme for people with disabilities, with a further €50 million investment in 2008 to provide additional residential, respite and day places. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Health Service Executive to arrange to have the details requested by the Deputy provided directly to him as a matter of urgency

Mental Health Services.

294. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of additional beds for under 16s in the child and adolescent mental health programme funded by her Department in 2007; the cost of this programme; the number of beds for under 16s in this programme in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34046/07]

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.

Health Services.

295. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of additional primary care teams funded by her Department in 2007; the cost of this programme; the number of primary care teams in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34047/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Primary Care Strategy aims to increase health service capacity through the development of services in the community to give people direct access to integrated multi-disciplinary teams of physiotherapists, general practitioners, nurses, home helps, occupational therapists and others. It has been estimated that up to 95% of people's health and social services needs can be properly met within a primary care setting and the establishment of Primary Care Teams can contribute greatly to enhancing community based health services.

In 2007 an additional €20m was provided in the Vote of the Health Service Executive to enable the full-year costs of the 87 primary care teams funded in 2006 to be met and to enable a further 100 teams to be established during 2007. These developments will involve, altogether, the appointment of some 600 additional front-line health care professionals. The Government has committed under the Towards 2016 agreement to the establishment of 300 Primary Care Teams by 2008; 400 by 2009 and 500 by 2011. A review of these targets will be undertaken in 2008.

As the Health Service Executive has the operational and funding responsibility for Primary Care Services it 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 this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme.

296. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children when she expects to receive the final report of the vaccine damage compensation group; the funding provided in budget 2008 to implement the recommendations of the group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34052/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Group is continuing with its consideration of this matter, and is consulting with a number of representative bodies and individuals, and I look forward to receiving their final recommendations shortly.

Infectious Diseases.

297. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children the plans she has to establish a compensation fund for the victims of hospital acquired infection; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34054/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I share the public concern in relation to Healthcare Associated Infections (HCAIs). Tackling HCAIs, including MRSA, is a priority for the Government and for the Health Service Executive (HSE). The State Claims Agency is dealing with a number of claims against the State which involve an element relating to MRSA. However, the matter of liability in such cases has yet to be established. I have no plans to establish a compensation fund.

Official Engagements.

298. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children if meetings have taken place between herself or her Ministers of State and representatives of the drinks industry, including members of employers' groups working on behalf of the drinks industry; the number of such meetings and the issues discussed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34055/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher): Since this Government came into office no formal meetings have taken place between myself and any representatives of the drinks industry. I can also state that no such meetings took place in that time with the Minister for Health and Children or any of the other Ministers of State at the Department of Health and Children. For the Deputy's information I can inform him that Minister Harney, who was Minister for Health and Children in the previous Government, last met formally with representatives of the drinks industry on 23rd November, 2006. At that meeting I understand that a range of issues were discussed around the issue of alcohol policy and alcohol misuse in Ireland.

Health Service Staff.

299. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the HSE does not collate complaints of bullying and harassment of HSE staff but does so in relation to service users; the way the matter of harassment and bullying of staff is dealt with in the HSE if there is no collation of information and as such no register of such complaints, actions taken, results of actions; and the need for human resources to have a paper trail that would have a historical and useful value to address such very important issues as bullying and harassment of staff within the HSE;

and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34064/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive has the responsibility to manage and deliver, or arrange to have delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services in a safe and secure setting. This includes responsibility for dealing with any complaints an employee may have concerning his or her working environment. The Executive is therefore 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 to the Deputy.

Health Services.

300. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of funding allocated to the HSE to provide home care packages for the Kildare/west Wicklow areas for the year 2007; if this funding has been totally allocated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34065/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): 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. Therefore, the Executive 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.

National Treatment Purchase Fund.

301. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the comparison and difference in cost values of the National Treatment Purchase Fund in relation to costs, time scale of hospital visits, waiting times for consultations, surgery and so on as compared to normal HSE procedures in relation to such costs, time scales and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34066/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): It is not possible to directly compare the cost of treatment arranged by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and the cost of similar procedures carried out in hospitals funded by Health Service Executive (HSE) because of differences in the determinants that go to make up costs in the two systems. For example, in public hospitals the cost of medical education is a major factor but this is not significant in private hospitals. In addition, the NTPF costs include pre and post-operative consultations

whereas this is not so with the HSE costing system. The NTPF advises my Department that, in general, the time that its patients stay in hospital for surgery mirror those within the HSE for patients who require similar procedures

Health Services.

302. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason her reply to Parliamentary Question No. 452 of 26 September, 2007 was confined to Longford-Westmeath when the question was in relation to the training of home helps within the HSE; if the stated area is the only area where home helps are receiving training; if so, the reason for same; if not, the record within the rest of the HSE in relation to the training of home helps; if the type of training as stated in the original reply is available in such areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34067/07]

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. Therefore, the Executive was the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to issue a reply directly to the Deputy.

The HSE inform me that a letter was sent to the Deputy, dated 16 November 2007, in which it said that the information being sought in relation to the exact numbers of Home Support staff trained and the cost to the HSE, was not routinely available so may take some time to collect. Following on from that letter, I am told that the HSE requested this information from each of the relevant sectors across the country. It would appear that the reply supplied by Longford/Westmeath sector was sent directly to the Deputy, as well as to the HSE. The Executive are continuing to compile the composite reply on this matter, including information in relation to Longford/Westmeath, which will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is completed.

Hospital Waiting Lists.

303. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will receive a date for their operation or if they are entitled to seek such an operation under the National Treatment Purchase Fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34072/07]

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. Patients waiting more than three months on a surgical waiting list may qualify for treatment under the National Treatment Purchase Fund. It is open to the person in question or anyone acting on their behalf to contact the Fund directly in relation to their case.

Mental Health Services.

304. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will make a statement on the status of the new psychiatric unit in Letterkenny; if planning permission has been applied for; when the decision is due; if the funding is available; and when she expects the new unit to open. [34080/07]

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. This includes the acquisition and development of property under its remit. 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.

Departmental Transport.

305. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for her transport and that of her staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34096/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The information requested is being collated in my Department and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medical Services Regulation.

306. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children her proposals for regulation and consumer protection in the area of cosmetic surgery and cosmetic procedures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34107/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Under the Medical Practitioners

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

Act 1978, the Medical Council is charged with responsibility for the registration of medical practitioners and the regulation of their activities. Persons who avail of the services of doctors performing plastic surgery should endeavour to seek the services of reputable providers. When invasive procedures are being arranged, persons would be strongly advised to check that the services are provided by a medical practitioner who is appropriately registered with the Medical Council. In addition, before agreeing to undergo any procedure, persons should ascertain the level of follow-up medical support which will be available to them after the surgery has been completed.

Where a concern arises about the professional activity of a registered medical practitioner, the Medical Council has the power to investigate the circumstances of the complaint, and, if a prima facie case exists, to conduct an inquiry. Where a finding of professional misconduct or unfitness to practise is made against a doctor, the Council has the authority to suspend, limit or revoke the registration of that individual.

The Medical Practitioners Act 2007 provides for a clear compulsory requirement for registration for all medical practitioners, changes to the Fitness to Practise process and the introduction of a mandatory scheme for the maintenance of professional competence. These and other new provisions of the Act will afford greater protection to the public.

Health Services.

307. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the number of detoxification beds for recovering drug addicts has been affected by recent Health Service Executive cutbacks; if so, the way they have been affected; if she will increase the number of detoxification beds in view of the increase in the number of people becoming addicted to drugs and needing to detox; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34119/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

308. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Health and Children the length of time it currently takes to access a detoxification bed after referral from a general practitioner or consultant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34120/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Service Staff.

309. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the chief executive of the Health Service Executive has decided that the administrative roll out of PPARS will be suspended; the payroll and personnel system that will be used in the HSE; if senior management of the HSE has been part of the operational design of the new system; the factors taken into account in the choice of the new payroll and personnel system for the HSE; the number of people currently employed by the HSE; the number of categories working in the service; and if these categories have standard conditions of employment. [34133/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The management and delivery of health and personal social services, including related payroll and personnel issues, are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act, 2004. 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.

310. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason young children cannot avail of the free child development service in places like Ballinasloe, Tuam and Loughrea in County Galway; if there is a waiting list; if all children in the State are entitled to such a service free of charge; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34171/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Staff.

311. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of non-Civil Service staff employed by her Department; the specific roles of these staff; the cost of these staff to the Exchequer; the number of these staff engaged in carrying out her work as a constituency Deputy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34193/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The following non-civil service staff are either employed directly by or seconded to my Department:

Grade	Number Employed/Seconded
Chief Therapist Advisor	1
Therapist Advisor	2
Nurse/Midwife Advisor	1
Nursing Advisor	1
Special Advisors	6
Personal Assistants	6
Personal Secretaries	5
Civilian Drivers	6
Legal Research Advisor	1

The total annual salary cost of the above posts is €1.78m. The following non-civil servants are also seconded to my Department and recoupment arrangements are subject to discussion with the relevant agencies at present.

Grade	Number Employed/Seconded
Director of Social Work	1
Disability Advisor	1
Acting Chief Environmental Health	1
Youth Project Officer	1
Palliative Care Advisor	1
Dental Advisor	1
Nursing Advisor	1
Social Worker	1

Of the above posts, only one person (Personal Assistant) is involved in Constituency work on my behalf.

Hospitals Building Programme.

312. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost of co-located private hospitals to the Exchequer with a breakdown of the cost for each of these hospitals; the amount of tax relief involved with these hospitals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34194/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): There will be no direct capital cost to the State arising from the co-location initiative. There will be a loss of private health insurance income to the hospitals from private health insurers. This is estimated at €79 million in respect of the six sites where the co-location initiative is most advanced, as follows — Waterford Regional Hospital €11m, Cork University Hospital €18m, Sligo General €8m, Limerick Regional €17m, St James €14m, Beaumont €11m. I consider that this is a small price to pay in order to free up 1,000 beds for public patients where the running cost of over €300 million is already being met by the State. The loss of income will be mitigated, in part, through income from the lease of the land and a potential share of profits from the co-located facility.

It is anticipated that the private developers will avail of the scheme of capital allowances under the Finance Acts. The level of tax relief depends on the financing arrangements for each hospital and it is not possible, at this stage, to provide a breakdown of potential capital allowances by hospital site. However, it should be noted that not all costs are eligible for tax relief under the scheme. The Government's consideration of the initiative assumed a capital cost of €1 million per bed. It is anticipated that for each €1 million in allowed capital expenditure, most relief will be claimed at the 41% income tax rate plus any allowable PRSI-related relief, spread over 7 years, and not taking account of tax buoyancy effects. This is still less than the capital cost to the State of building and commissioning an additional 1,000 new beds for public patients.

Health Services.

313. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason children in a school (details supplied) in Dublin 20 can not access a speech and language therapist; the measures she will take to rectify this situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34195/07]

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.

314. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will assist a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3. [34205/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Operational responsibility for the

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

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.

315. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the level of speech, language and occupational therapy a child (details supplied) in County Cork with a learning disability is receiving at present from the Health service Executive; and if further intervention services can be provided in 2008. [34208/07]

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.

Departmental Communications.

316. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of staff in her Department that are provided with a blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34225/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): In my Department 53 staff have access to a Blackberry device.

317. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of databases used by her Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within her Department. [34240/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department uses in excess of 150 application databases in support of the day to day work of the organisation. These databases support the routine administration and workflow within my Department such as human resources, finance, payroll, representations, briefing materials, parliamentary affairs, statistical analysis etc. The majority of the databases are operated solely within my Department. One of the most significant databases is the Civil Registration System used by the General Register Office. This database is operated as a managed service by an external service provider.

In the carrying out of their official duties staff in my Department also access a wide range of information from a variety of databases that are externally owned and operated. With the advent of the Internet as a means of accessing data it is not feasible to accurately quantify the number or operational details of the databases regularly used.

318. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for her Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if she will present the information in tabular readable form. [34255/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Information in relation to my Department is set out in the table.

IT Projects	Budget			Time		
	Target	Over	Under	On Time	After Original Deadline	Ahead of Original Deadline
19	18	1	0	11	5	3

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

319. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the steps she has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by Ministerial travel in her Department; and if none to date, the plans she will put in place on the matter. [34270/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): On foot of a commitment in the Programme for Government on carbon offsetting

official air travel, my colleague Mr. John Gormley, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, is currently developing a scheme for use by all Government Departments and bodies under their aegis. It is anticipated that these details will be announced shortly.

Data Protection.

320. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the

public held on her departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34285/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): All database information held in my Department is handled in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003. The Department has policies in relation to the acceptable use of ICT facilities. Access control policies determine access rights to sensitive personal data. Data under the General Register Office (GRO) is governed by the Civil Registration Act 2004 and the security procedures in place are in accordance with best practice.

The policy in relation to usage of ICT facilities exists to ensure that ICT systems are protected from a range of threats. My Department deploys a number of ICT security measures including industry-standard firewalls, authentication devices and security software to ensure that all data residing on Departmental networks are secure. From time to time testing of the infrastructure by independent experts takes place. I am satisfied that all reasonable preventative measures are in place to guard against attack from hackers. My Department is aware of the ongoing challenges in relation to protecting its data and is constantly reviewing its procedures.

Management Information Framework System.

321. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34307/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Management Information Framework (MIF) was introduced to ensure that Government Departments and Offices, through the availability of a full accrual based accounting system and performance measurement data, have the opportunity to consider fully the planning of investment on the basis of a value added concept.

The vast majority of the Health Vote, amounting to some €15bn gross for 2007, relates to direct service provision, which is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE). As a consequence, responsibility for expenditure and performance measurement in the wider health delivery system is a matter for the HSE. The Deputy will be aware that the HSE and the wider health delivery system have always operated on the basis of full accrual accounting principles which underpinned a broad management information framework, including a National Service Planning process, output statement, monthly reporting on key performance targets and budget outcomes, and value for money assessments.

As with all other Government Departments, the Health & Children (including the Office of

the Minister for Children (OMC)) Vote is accounted for on a cash basis. It is worth noting, however, that the amount spent directly within the Department (the Administrative Budget) is in the region of €52m or 0.35% of the total Health Vote in 2007. In that context, the Department's MIF project was based on upgrading its existing Financial Management System (FMS) to a dual accounting system (both Vote and accrual capabilities), thereby meeting the MIF strategic objective in a cost effective manner. The financial system upgrade was installed in line with the Government Decision deadline of 31 December, 2004. The roll out of the full MIF, to include the transfer of the OMC and activities of additional Ministers of State, is scheduled for completion in early 2008.

Whilst the upgraded financial system continues to operate in Vote mode, the benefits in terms of more efficient and speedy access to financial and management information/analysis can be seen as a major advantage within the Department. It is difficult to represent the operational and management benefits in financial terms.

322. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in her Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34322/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Management Information Framework (MIF) was introduced to ensure that Government Departments and Offices, through the availability of a full accrual based accounting system and performance measurement data, have the opportunity to consider fully the planning of investment on the basis of a value added concept.

The vast majority of the Health Vote, amounting to some €15bn gross for 2007, relates to direct service provision, which is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE). As a consequence, responsibility for expenditure and performance measurement in the wider health delivery system is a matter for the HSE. The Deputy will be aware that the HSE and the wider health delivery system have always operated on the basis of full accrual accounting principles which underpinned a broad management information framework, including a National Service Planning process, output statement, monthly reporting on key performance targets and budget outcomes, and value for money assessments.

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[Deputy Mary Harney.]

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Services for People with Disabilities.

323. **Deputy Beverley Flynn** asked the Minister for Health and Children her proposals to improve funding and resources and to provide additional social workers to address the needs of the 450 people on the blind register in County Mayo. [34328/07]

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 services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Pharmacy Regulations.

324. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she is available to preside over discussions between the Health Service Executive and the Irish Pharmaceutical Union with a view to reaching agreement on outstanding or contentious issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34366/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As the Health Service Executive (HSE) has operational responsibility, under the Health Act 2004, for the management and delivery of health and personal social services, the issue of revised reimbursement prices for community pharmacy under the GMS and community drugs schemes, following the announcement by the HSE on 17 September 2007 of new wholesaler arrangements, is being managed by a HSE-led team which includes representation from my Department.

The revised pricing arrangements were arrived at following a detailed consultation process accompanied by independent economic analysis. 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.

As the Deputy is aware, in order to address concerns expressed by the Irish Pharmaceutical Union (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.

Cancer Screening Programme.

325. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she has received correspondence from a group (details supplied) in Dublin 8; her plans to respond favourably to same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34367/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I received correspondence from the Group referred to by the Deputy on 22 November last. The correspondence related to the National Quality Assurance Standards for Symptomatic Breast Disease Services which I approved last June under the Health Act 2007. I am very grateful for the significant support provided by Europa Donna Ireland in terms of the implementation of the Standards and the designation by the Health Service Executive of eight specialist centres for symptomatic breast disease. My Department has issued a response to Europa Donna Ireland in this regard.

Adoption Services.

326. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she or her Department will implement policy to reduce waiting times for intercountry adoptions; her plans to address this issue in early date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34368/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Brendan Smith): The HSE has statutory responsibility for the implementation of policy with regard to assessments for intercountry adoption. As the Deputy may be aware, requests for assessment for intercountry adoption are continuously increasing. The recent study on intercountry adoption, undertaken by the Children's Research Centre in Trinity College, revealed that Ireland has one of the highest rates for foreign adoption in Europe. In addition, as a result of the increased number of children coming from abroad, a new and increasing demand for post-adoption reports from sending countries has been created. Both assessments and post-placement reports are being undertaken by HSE social work staff.

The HSE has been assessing the provision of services in the context of moving from the health board system to a single executive. It has acknowledged that there is a divergence in the provision of services and is committed to addressing those differences. In a number of areas, the HSE has improved waiting times by contracting assessments out to non-statutory agencies with appropriate expertise.

The HSE has also appointed an outside consultant to undertake a review of the intercountry adoption service. This review is examining staffing, business processes, resources, strengths and options within the service. The HSE has indicated that it will contact the Department shortly with proposals to improve this service based on the outcome of the report. I would like to assure the Deputy of my attention to this issue and reiterate the importance of a rigorous and effective assessment system.

Health Services.

327. **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. 158 of 6 November 2007. [34379/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher): The Deputy's question relates to the funding, management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

PQ No (27030/07) 158 was referred to the HSE on 01/11/2007. My Department has requested an update on the status of the reply.

Health Service Staff.

328. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason home helps in the Kildare west Wicklow area have to wait until 2008 for the payment of their travel allowance payments and arrears; if the matter will be addressed by the use of the Health Service Executive computer system analysing and processing the claims to ensure payment before Christmas 2007; the reason there is a different mechanism of payroll process for the eastern community works area than other areas of the HSE and that all payments within the Health Service not determined by the HSE computer payment system; when the process will be changed to ensure that the travel allowances are paid on time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34380/07]

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, including the payment of travel allowances to eligible personnel, has been provided as part of its overall vote. The Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular issues raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have these matters investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services.

329. **Deputy James McDaid** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position of the proposed refurbishment of the acute psychiatric unit at Letterkenny General Hospital; when work is scheduled to start on the refurbishment of the unit; and the amount of funding that has been allocated towards the funding. [34410/07]

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. This includes the acquisition and development of property under its remit. 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.

Departmental Properties.

330. **Deputy James McDaid** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the Health Service Executive carried out an audit of the lands attached to the psychiatric hospitals throughout the country as she has requested; the position regarding the audit carried out regarding St. Conal's Psychiatric Hospital in Letterkenny, County Donegal; if any land attached to St. Conal's Psychiatric Hospital in Letterkenny has been sold or disposed of in any way; if so, the person who authorised the sale or disposal of lands; if any land attached to the hospital has been sold, the proceeds of the sale received by Donegal mental health services; the proceeds channelled into community mental health services as she intended; if lands attached to St. Conal's are to be sold in the future will Donegal mental health services receive the proceeds of the sale; and if the money will be used to fund the transition of services from hospital based to community based in Donegal as she intended. [34411/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Jimmy Devins): The Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy "*A Vision for Change*", which provides the basis for the future development of mental health services, envisions an active, flexible and community-based mental health service, with a greatly reduced need for hospital admissions. It is recommended that in the future, mental health services should be delivered by a range of specialised multi-disciplinary community mental health teams, based in community mental health centres. To bring this about, the Report further recommends that steps be taken to bring about the closure of all psychiatric hospitals, and that the resources released by these closures, should be re-invested in the mental health service to fund the new mental health service infrastructure requirement.

Responsibility for the implementation of "*A Vision for Change*" including the recommendations relating to the acquisition and disposal of psychiatric hospital buildings and lands, is a matter for the HSE. 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.

Departmental Staff.

331. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a chief dental officer will be appointed in her Department; and when her Department will advertise to have that position filled. [34416/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): At the launch of the National

Oral Health Policy on the 18th October last, I announced that my Department would be filling a senior clinical dental position. In addition, I indicated that I was open to considering, in conjunction with stakeholders, the structure, role and responsibilities of this position. My Department has sought and received the views of stakeholders on this post. My Department is currently examining the submissions we have received.

Health Services.

332. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be called for an appointment to a clinic. [34417/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Health Service Executive has the operational and funding responsibility for Primary Care services, including arrangements relating to those clinics referred to by the Deputy. As such it 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 this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Reports.

333. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the person who carried out the review of recruitment procedures for locum consultants as announced in Dáil Éireann on 13 June 2000; the date the review was completed; the recommendations made by the review; if the recommendations have been implemented; if she will make a copy of the review available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34563/07]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Recruitment procedures for the appointment of locum consultants were the subject of review between the Department and the health service bodies during the period 2000 and 2002. In June 2000 the then Minister for Health and Children, Mr Micheál Martin, T.D. announced the establishment of a Working Group to consider recruitment procedures for locum consultants arising from the case of a locum Consultant Pathologist at Tralee, Sligo and Letterkenny General Hospitals.

The work of this group appears to have been superseded arising from the case of the employment of a UK based Consultant Psychiatrist to a locum psychiatrist position with the former South Eastern Health Board (SEHB), between April and November 2000, while he was suspended by the General Medical Council (GMC) in the United Kingdom and was consequently the subject of legal proceedings by the Medical Council in Ireland. In 2001 at the request of the then

Minister for Health and Children, Mr Micheál Martin, T.D., Ms Maureen Lynott carried out a review of the circumstances surrounding this case and to consider how procedures and/or regulations may need to be improved.

Ms Lynott's report was the subject of follow-up action with relevant health agencies which included consideration of her report by an inter agency health care forum. All matters relating to the recruitment, assessment of qualifications and experience, competence, termination of employment etc. of locums are the responsibility of the employing authority.

Departmental Records.

334. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Transport if his Department has conducted a recent review of the accuracy of the national vehicle and driver file; if he is satisfied with the accuracy of the database; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33317/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The National Vehicle and Driver File (NVDF) consists of a modern IT infrastructure. I am satisfied that the data currency and accuracy levels of the file are fully satisfactory and fit for purpose in relation to supporting driving licence and motor tax services and for the provision of vehicle and driver related data to facilitate the business activities of a number of approved bodies/agencies including the Garda Síochána.

Road Network.

335. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Transport when the value for money review of strategic non-national roads be will completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33473/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The value for money review of the strategic non-national roads programme is scheduled to be completed in May 2008. As the review is currently ongoing it would be premature at this stage to anticipate its outcome.

Road Safety.

336. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to proactively test drivers for the presence of illegal drugs in a similar manner to the successful random alcohol testing campaign which is the norm and which is an effective tool in curtailing the use and abuse of alcohol while driving [34384/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Road Traffic Acts provides that a member of the Garda Síochána may, where he or she is of the opinion that a person in charge of

a mechanically propelled vehicle in a public place is under the influence of a drug or drugs to such an extent as to be incapable of having proper control of that vehicle, require that person to go to a Garda station and further require that person submit to a blood test or to provide a urine sample.

The Medical Bureau of Road Safety analyses blood and urine specimens received under the Road Traffic Acts for the presence of a drug or drugs. Enforcement of the law on drug driving is a matter for An Garda Síochána. When a member of the Garda suspects that a motorist is driving under the influence of any intoxicant the Garda may arrest the suspect under Section 49 of the Road Traffic Act 1961.

The Department of Transport will keep under review the development of technology internationally for roadside testing for drugs. At present there is no reliable equipment available for that purpose. When suitable technology becomes available, any measures applied to the roadside testing of drivers for alcohol will also be applied in relation to drugs.

Rail Network.

337. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Transport the position regarding the western rail corridor; the breakdown of the stages; when he expects the section from Claremorris to start; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33224/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The phased re-opening of the Western Rail Corridor is being progressed by Iarnród Éireann in line with the timelines set out in Transport 21 which provides, subject to compliance with statutory requirements and requirements relating to approval of capital projects, for the Ennis to Athenry section to be completed in 2008, the Athenry to Tuam section in 2011, the Tuam to Claremorris section in 2014 and the Claremorris to Collooney section to be preserved under the Clár Programme.

I understand from Iarnród Éireann that work is underway on Phase One and Iarnród Éireann expects to have approximately 7 miles of new track laid by year-end. The Government has approved funding for the development of phase 2 of the Corridor between Athenry and Tuam, subject to completion by Iarnród Éireann of a fuller appraisal of this section. As I have advised above, under Transport 21 the Tuam to Claremorris section is due for completion in 2014. I would not expect to receive an initial business proposal for this section from Iarnród Éireann until late 2010/2011. Iarnród Éireann, with the assistance of funding under the Clár programme, is undertaking work to preserve the rail alignment on the Claremorris to Collooney section.

Energy Resources.

338. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Transport the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33286/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): It is assumed that the Deputy's reference to energy consumption in the context specified relates to electricity usage. The Electricity Supply Board is the supplier of electricity to my Department's offices. On the basis of the proportion that renewable energy resources contribute to the total electricity generated by the ESB, it is estimated that renewable resources account for approximately five per cent of my Department's electricity consumption. Insofar as the agencies within the remit of my Department are concerned, I am arranging for them to correspond directly with the Deputy in the matter. Finally, I wish to draw the Deputy's attention to the Government's White Paper on renewable energy which signals a major expansion of the contribution which renewable resources will make to Ireland's total energy requirements over the next few years.

State Airports.

339. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Transport if he discussed the extension of the US customs and border facility at Shannon Airport at his recent meeting with the US Secretary of Homeland Security; if progress has been made on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33300/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I recently met with Secretary Chertoff of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security when we discussed the possible extension of the pre-inspection facilities for U.S. bound passengers at Dublin and Shannon Airports to full pre-clearance. I hope to receive the detailed U.S. proposals in the matter in the near future. The operation of these facilities would be subject to a new Inter-Governmental agreement to be concluded between Ireland and the U.S and the advice I have received is that this would require new legislation.

Departmental Expenditure.

340. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Transport the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33345/07]

341. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Transport the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33360/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 340 and 341 together.

The cost of mobile telephones for my Department in 2006 and 2007, which are all paid directly to the service provider by this Department, with a breakdown of data and roaming charges is set out in the table.

Year	Total	Data Charges	Roaming Charges
	€	€	€
2006	153,628	23,386	26,800
2007	166,397	30,990	21,862

342. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Transport the amount of mobile telephone bills paid on the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33375/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The cost of the mobile telephone assigned to the Minister for Transport in 2006 and 2007 with a breakdown of data and roaming charges is set out in the table.

Year	Total	Data Charges	Roaming Charges
	€	€	€
2006	4,027.14	Nil	1,416.68
2007 (to date)	4,131.74	538.81	849.99

Road Network.

343. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the problems being experienced by local authorities regarding the implementation of a directive from the Health and Safety Authority which states that local councils can no longer deal with areas of concern on main roads throughout the State, and that any requests for remedial work must be processed through the office of the national road design; and his views on whether there is a huge backlog in national road design

offices, resulting in delays of several months before requests can even be processed and whether there are not enough staff to cater with this new demand, resulting in longer delays for many jobs that local authorities would have previously undertaken without undue hesitancy. [33493/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): As Minister for Transport I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme element of Transport 21. The implementation of individual national road projects including their design, is a matter for the National Roads Authority under the Roads Act, 1993 in conjunction with the relevant local authorities concerned.

Departmental Staff.

344. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the number, rank and pay of

Number	Rank	Pay
2	Clerical Officers	€23,221-€37,652 p.a.
1	Press Officer — Higher Executive Officer	€44,314-€56,250 p.a. Allowance: €11,956 p.a.
1	Press Adviser — Principal Officer equivalent	Current Scale — €82,016-€95,363 p.a.

The Press Office is responsible for the development, management and dissemination of information to the media. A Press cutting service is provided by a small team in the Corporate Services section of my Department. This press cutting service is accessible to all staff of the Department. The role of this team is to circulate any articles in the daily newspapers relevant to the remit of the Department.

Departmental Expenditure.

345. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the number and name of news-

Daily Papers	Quantity	Sunday Papers	Quantity
Irish Independent	12	Sunday Independent	2
Irish Times	29	Sunday Business Post	2
Irish Examiner	6	Sunday Tribune	2
Financial Times	4	Irish Mail on Sunday	2
UK Times	2	Sunday World	2
Daily Mail	4	Sunday Times	2
Irish Star	5	Sunday Express	1
Irish Mirror	2	News of the World	1
Irish Sun	2	Sunday Mirror	1
Evening Herald	6	Star Sunday	1
Foinse	1		
Meath Chronicle	2		
Clare Champion	1		
Total	76	Total	16

all civil servants in his Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33515/07]

346. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33545/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 344 and 346 together.

There are 4 civil servants in my Department engaged in media monitoring. The table provides information as requested.

papers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33530/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The information sought by the Deputy about newspapers purchased by my Department is set out in the table. Three newspapers are provided for me: Irish Times, Irish Independent and the Irish Examiner. My Department does not have a Minister of State. The yearly cost of newspapers supplied to my Department is €7,800 approx.

Question No. 346 answered with Question No. 344.

Consultancy Contracts.

347. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since

Consultant	Year	Cost	Nature of Work
		€	
Laurie Carr Associates	2002	1,440	Media Relations
	2004	1,840	
Tony O'Brien Communications	2004	5,920	Media Relations

Departmental Staff.

348. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33575/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): There is one Press Adviser currently employed in my Department. The table provides the information requested by the Deputy. As the Department of Transport has only been in existence since 2002 the information is provided from that year.

Year	Costs per annum
2002	€65,778–€81,126
2003	€68,409–€84,371
2004	€74,466–€91,841
2005	€71,990–€92,813
2006	€76,162–€94,205
2007	€66,000

Departmental Expenditure.

349. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33590/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department holds twelve credit cards. For each year until February of this year there was a yearly standing charge of 19.05 euro. This increased to 25 euro in February. There is a

1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33560/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The number, cost & name of any media consultants employed by the Department of Transport; the cost of such advice for each year since 2002 to date is as follows.

yearly Government charge of €40 per card. The cards are held by the following people.

Mr. Dan Commane
 Mr. Pdraig McGoldrick
 Mr. Pat Mangan
 Mr. Martin Diskin
 Ms Olive Stephens
 Mr. Michael O'Mealoid
 Mr. Conor O'Leary
 Mr. Les Kennedy
 Mr. Fintan Towey
 Mr. Jurgen Whyte
 Mr. Fintan O'Brien
 Ms Doreen Keaney

All the cards are used to cover incidental expenditure on behalf of the division where the individuals work except in the case of the card held in Finance Division which is used to cover hotel and conference bookings on behalf of Department wide staff.

The total amount spent by my Department in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and to date in 2007 for credit cards is as follows:

Year	Amount
	€
2002	8,067.05
2003	98,205.51
2004	119,676.69
2005	82,393.84
2006	95,913.73
2007	96,577.04

The above amounts include all charges and interest. The interest charges included in the above for each year are as follows:

Year	Amount
	€
2002	104.41
2003	1,315.63
2004	84.22
2005	669.47
2006	0
2007	0

350. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33605/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The cost to my Department of photographers used by all Ministers on a yearly basis since the Department of Transport was established in 2002 is set out in the table.

Year	€
Total 2002	3,276.54
Total 2003	12,151.86
Total 2004	21,456.68
Total 2005	16,246.70
Total 2006	8,973.94
Total 2007	9,102.72
TOTAL	71,208.44

351. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33620/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Nil.

352. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33635/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The amount spent on entertainment and catering in my Department since 2002 to date in 2007 is as follows:

Year	Amount
	€
2002	165,097.24
2003	109,264.09

Year	Amount
	€
2004	159,494.72
2005	97,806.70
2006	132,413.13
2007	136,220.64

This amount covers such items as catering costs in relation to staff meetings and training, as well as entertainment and catering costs relating to staff and visitors on official business.

Departmental Communications.

353. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33650/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Government Information Service email a daily summary of national stories (not specific to my Department) to the Press Office for information. This information would generally not be passed on to me as a matter of course.

Official Engagements.

354. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33665/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): A Press Advisor travels with me on official visits where there may be a press/media presence.

Departmental Transport.

355. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33680/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The costs associated with my Ministerial car, including the driver are borne by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The cost of providing similar services (including salaries and expenses of civilian drivers) to junior Ministers in my Department since June 2002 when the Department of Transport was formed has been as follows:

[Deputy Noel Dempsey.]

Year	€
2002	33,267
2003	87,842
2004	117,158
2005	101,723
2006	124,673
2007	59,112

356. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the cost of him using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to junior Ministers and staff for the same period. [33695/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I refer to my previous reply to question no. 97 of 15 November 2007 in relation to transport costs for myself and Ministers of State in my Department since I came into office. A breakdown of public transport costs for my predecessors in the Department of Transport is not readily available. The compilation of this information would require an excessive amount of staff time and resources.

Departmental Communications.

357. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport if his Department carries news summaries on their internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33725/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department makes relevant press cuttings available on its intranet. These are available to all staff and are accessed using a standard internet browser. The service is provided by one officer who works on it part time and is assisted by two others on a part time rota basis. The table sets out the costs of the service.

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
€82,640	€52,754	€60,670	€61,227	€63,644	€67,340

Departmental Expenditure.

358. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33740/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The number of mobile phones used by me or by my predecessors is outlined in the table.

Minister	Number of mobile phones used by Minister and supplied by the Department
Minister Brennan	1
Minister Cullen	2 and 1 blackberry
Minister Dempsey	4 and 1 blackberry

A breakdown of expenditure is not readily available from the Department's records.

359. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33755/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Advisors and staff appointed directly by me or by my predecessors who have mobile phones and other equipment are outlined in the table.

Minister	Staff
Minister Noel Dempsey	Olive Stephens Tanya Harrington James Fegan Una Grehan Margaret Conway
Minister Martin Cullen	Colin Hunt Sean Dower Dan Pender Pat Daly Inez O'Neill
Minister Seamus Brennan	Frank Lahiffe Tom Rowley Mary Browne Bobby Holland

A breakdown of individual items of expenditure is not readily available from the Department's records.

Rail Services.

360. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Transport the number of commuters, per year for the years 2005 and 2006 and an estimate for 2007, who use the Maynooth line at Maynooth, Leixlip Louisa Bridge and Confey rail stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33775/07]

361. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Transport the number of commuters, per year for the years 2005 and 2006 and an estimate for 2007, who use the Kildare line at Sallins and Hazel-

hatch in Celbridge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33776/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 360 and 361 together.

My Department has asked Iarnród Éireann to compile the information sought and to forward it to the Deputy directly.

Road Network.

362. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Transport the implications the recent amendment to the Roads Bill 2007 has with regard to funding of local authority non-national roads budgets; and if he will confirm that this funding for these roads is to be cut for 2008. [33779/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I assume the Deputy is referring to the Local Government (Roads Functions) Act 2007, which was enacted on 26 November 2007. That Act facilitates the transfer of certain functions from the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to the Minister for Transport. In relation to non-national roads, the Act amends the Local Government Act 1998 to allow the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to make payments from the Local Government Fund to the Minister for Transport to facilitate the payment of grants for such roads. In 2008, the payment from the Fund in respect of non-national roads will be €564.9 million compared to a provision of €520 million in 2007.

Port Development.

363. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport his views on whether the decision of An Bord Pleanála to allow Dublin Port to apply for land reclamation to facilitate 600,000 TEU capacity per annum as a strategic infrastructure will pre-empt the commitment to assess alternative locations such as Cork, Bremore and Greenore to provide this additional capacity needed by 2014; his role to date in this application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33780/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The National Development Plan proposes a comprehensive study of the role of Dublin Port, taking account of locational considerations, in the context of overall ports policy on the island of Ireland, wider transport policy, urban development policy, the National Spatial Strategy and national economic policy. Preparations for this study will be initiated in the near future. An Bord Pleanála recently decided that the proposed project to expand Dublin port qualifies as strategic infrastructure. This is the first part of the pre-application stage under the Strategic Infrastructure Act, 2005. Planning appli-

cations are operational matters for the company and I have played no role in this regard.

Road Network.

364. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Transport the progress to date and the planned improvements to upgrade the R402 in Kildare between Carbury and Johnstownbrige in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33788/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): In 2007, a grant of €2.5 million was allocated to Kildare County Council for the R402 Enfield — Edenderry Improvement Scheme. Progress with the project is a matter for Kildare County Council.

365. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Transport if all the roads allocations to Kildare County Council for 2007 for the non-national roads previously funded from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government have been spent or will be spent during 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33789/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): In 2007, grants totalling €23,685,337 were allocated to Kildare County Council for the improvement and maintenance of non-national roads. Claims and payments in respect of the 2007 non-national roads grants have not yet been finalised.

Departmental Reports.

366. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport when the value for money review of the CIÉ subvention scheme was completed; the value of the saving to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33809/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Expenditure Review on CIÉ subvention was published at the end of November after examination by my Department. The purpose of the review was to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the subvention paid to CIÉ over the period 2001-2005. The report also contains a number of measures to be taken up with the CIE companies to strengthen the management of public expenditure and deliver better value for money for the future and this is now being done.

367. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport when the value for money review of the capital spend by the Dublin Transport Office will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the

[Deputy Charles Flanagan.]

implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33810/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Preparation of the report of the review is at an advanced stage. I will make public its findings when it has been completed.

368. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport when the value for money review of the rail safety scheme will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33811/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department is currently engaged in a procurement process for the engagement of consultants to conduct a review of the Railway Safety Programme 2004-2008. The target date for the completion of the review is before the end of the current programme — end 2008. I cannot say at this point what will be the outcome of the review.

Marine Rescue Services.

369. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Transport if a report was carried out by senior coast guard executives in relation to the proposed new coast guard station; if so, the reason this report is not available under the Freedom of Information Act 1997; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33881/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Deputy will be aware that I have recently confirmed that new equipment should be procured to operate two fully manned marine rescue centres. I have also confirmed that locating one on the east coast and one on the west coast is the preferred option and that the east coast centre should be co-located with the HQ.

In relation to the west coast I consider that the site should provide a technically robust location and also be situated where all the staff at the centre can live within close proximity to enable them to be called on in an emergency. The Centres should be within a reasonable distance of each other to facilitate resilience and mutual support in the event of the loss of one centre, facilitate staff training and development and reduce associated costs. I have not yet decided where that location should be. The work to determine the best west coast site is in progress.

For the information of the Deputy I will provide him with a copy of a submission to me of the 5th October 2007 which provided the background to these decisions. If the Deputy would like a copy of the Deloitte and Touche Study, he should contact my office and a copy will be forwarded to him.

Public Transport.

370. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport if a decision has been made on the granting of a licence to Dublin Bus for the operation of the proposed new number 141 bus route from Swords to Dublin city centre via Santry, Whitehall and Drumcondra; if all private operators that are granted a bus licence are subject to the disability access requirements of the Equal Status Act 2000; if his Department in conjunction with An Garda Síochána is currently investigating the operation of private bus services without a licence in any parts of the country; the mechanisms in place in his Department to monitor and regulate the operation of bus services particularly in the greater Dublin area; if he plans to reform the bus licensing laws; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33978/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I refer to my reply to the Deputy's Parliamentary Question number 269 on 31st October, 2007 when I advised that my Department was currently considering the Dublin Bus proposal for a new Route 141 for bus passenger services between Swords and Rathmines via Drumcondra, taking into account the newly licensed commercial service operating between Swords and the City Centre via the Dublin Port Tunnel. That is still the current position.

Annual Passenger Licences issued in accordance with the Road Transport Act, 1932 are not subject to meeting the disability access requirements of the Equal Status Act, 2000. However, the approach being taken to the provision of wheelchair accessible buses and coaches in Ireland is outlined in "Transport Access for All", my Department's Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act 2005, a copy of which is in the Oireachtas Library.

It has long been recognised that the Road Transport Act 1932, as amended, is in need of significant reform so that the legislative provisions better reflect the realities of modern transport services, including the needs of people requiring disability access. The reform programme for the public transport market that I am pursuing will address these needs. In the meantime, my Department will continue to promote improvements in the administration of the bus licensing service based on the principles of due process and fair procedures.

The operation of a passenger road service without a licence issued by my Department is a criminal offence and the enforcement of such activity is a matter in the first instance for the Garda Síochána. In this regard, where my Department becomes aware of the operation of an unauthorised service the matter is passed to the Garda for their investigation.

Parking Regulations.

371. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to change the disabled

parking scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34074/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Provisions for the designation of parking bays on public roads that are reserved for use by persons who hold a disabled persons' parking permit and the granting of such permits are set out in the Road Traffic (Signs) Regulations 1997 (S.I. 181/97) and the Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations, 1997 (S.I. 182/97). A review of all aspects of this disabled persons' parking scheme is ongoing in my Department with a view to ensuring that the designated parking bays are reserved for use by persons for whom those bays are a necessity.

Departmental Transport.

372. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34100/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The information the Deputy requires is being compiled and will be forwarded as soon as possible.

Departmental Meetings.

373. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the number of management board meetings within his Department held since 2000 to date in 2007; the number of these meetings that were informal; the persons who attended the informal management board meeting held on 13 June 2007; the notice given of this meeting; the agenda discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34102/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Department was established in 2002 and records show that 168 formal management board meetings have been held since then. It is not possible to say precisely how many informal management board meetings have taken place in the same period, as many of these meetings were of a very short duration for consultation or coordination purposes only and, being informal, required no formal record to be prepared.

The informal meeting on 13 June 2007 was attended by the Secretary General, Assistant Secretaries Mangan, Murphy, Cullen and Mullen and Principal Officer, M. Nic Lochlainn. This informal meeting on 13 June 2007 was convened at short notice to facilitate the completion of the written brief for the new Minister and to consider any outstanding operational matters pertinent to the change of Minister.

Rail Network.

374. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport if the rail line from Glasnevin Junction, Dublin running along the Royal Canal south of Croke Park is in active use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34200/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): This is a day to day operational matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have no role in the matter. However, I understand from Iarnród Éireann that the line south of Croke Park is used for services.

Rail Network.

375. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport if he will ensure that the Oireachtas Library is furnished with a copy of the feasibility study which was undertaken by Irish Rail on the proposed interconnector and the option of increasing services via the Phoenix Park tunnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34201/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Consistent with my statement in the Dáil on 14th November, 2007, I propose to publish full information on feasibility studies and business cases for major projects and the factors taken into account in making decisions on them in due course. This will be done when there is no danger that it will have a negative impact on the State's ability to get best value for money through the public procurement process. The basis for the Government decision will be transparent but it will be handled in such a way as to avoid compromising the State's commercial interest and by extension the interests of all taxpayers. Accordingly, it would be premature to release studies on the Interconnector at this stage.

Light Rail Project.

376. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport if he will ensure that the extension of the Luas service to west Dublin is accompanied by the provision of park and ride facilities to maximise the incentive for people to utilise public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34202/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): It is proposed that the Luas to Citywest will have a park and ride facility adjacent to the stop at Cheeverstown. It is intended that this park and ride facility will accommodate some 300 cars.

Departmental Communications.

377. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Transport the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34229/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Mobile email equipment has been supplied to 47 staff in my Department.

378. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Transport the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34244/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department has 28 production databases, three of which are hosted by external organisations.

379. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Transport the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34259/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The information requested by the Deputy is in the tables which list all projects with a budget of €50,000 or greater which were completed by or for my Department since 2004.

2004

Description	Expenditure	Percentage of budget target	Within Completion Deadline
	€	%	
Intranet Site Development	36,296.40	52	Yes
Electronic Travel and Subsistence System	132,672.96	95	Yes
Integration of Voice and Data	51,609.25	99	Yes

2005

Description	Expenditure	Percentage of budget target	Within Completion Deadline
	€	%	
Driver Testing Call Centre	52,620.00	134.40	Yes
Upgrade of Driver Testing system	185,053.00	111.00	Yes
Road Haulage Tachonet system	2,392,767	100.65	Yes

2006

Description	Expenditure	Percentage of budget target	Within Completion Deadline
	€	%	
IT Helpdesk Tracking System	42,000	70	Yes
Outsourcing of Driving Tests	40,000	80	Yes
Integration of Marine Directorate	295,000	109	Yes
Data Backup Replacement	124,000	88	Yes
Windows 2003 System Rollout	193,978	73	No — delayed by six months due to pressure of work

2007

Description	Expenditure	Percentage of budget target	Within Completion Deadline
	€	%	
Mobile Working	124,571.00	83	Yes
Automated Audit and Risk Assessment System	59,290	99	Yes

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

380. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Mini-

ster for Transport the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by Ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to

date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34274/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): In the National Climate Change Strategy, the Government has decided that it will voluntarily introduce a carbon offsetting scheme for all air travel on Government business, including flights by Ministers and by civil servants. Practical arrangements will be put in place by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to enable each Department to compute annually the emissions associated with its air travel and to make a contribution to an appropriate fund to secure verified emission reductions of an equivalent amount.

Data Protection.

381. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Transport if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his Departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34289/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I am informed that all electronic data held by my Department is protected using industry best practices. I am further informed that data security measures are regularly reviewed in the light of changing circumstances and that any appropriate measures identified are implemented.

Transport 21.

382. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport if he will report on Government policy towards County Mayo and the western region; and when he will sanction the delivery of vital infrastructural projects such as key road, rail and air; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34291/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): A number of major infrastructural projects are in train in Mayo and the West. Transport 21, the Government's 10-year financial framework for investment in transport infrastructure, provides for a number of important projects in County Mayo. The N5 connects Dublin to Westport and Castlebar. Major sections of this route have been upgraded. The Charlestown Bypass was opened in November of this year and work continues on improvements on the Castlebar-Westport section of the route. The Atlantic Road Corridor runs from Letterkenny to Waterford via Sligo, Tuam, Ennis, Limerick, Mallow and Cork. Construction work will commence on parts of this route in 2008, three years ahead of schedule, thanks to acceleration in the funding provision for this project. Grants for improve-

ment and maintenance of regional and local roads are allocated annually to all local authorities.

Under Transport 21, the Tuam to Claremorris section of the Western Rail Corridor is to reopen in 2014, linking Mayo to Galway, Limerick and Cork by rail. Iarnród Éireann will take delivery of 183 high-specification Intercity railcars in 2007 and 2008. These will serve the national Intercity network, including Dublin to Mayo. As a result frequency on this line will increase from three services each way to five services each way daily. Bus services to the west of Ireland will benefit from investment, under Transport 21 with the purchase of 235 new buses by Bus Éireann. In addition, my Department provides funding to the local authorities in the regional cities for bus priority measures. In this regard, €4.89 million was made available in 2007 to Galway City and County Councils for bus priority measures in the city and its environs. My Department is in discussion with the local authorities in Galway about arrangements for an examination of the feasibility of introducing light rail transit or bus rapid transit in the context of the Galway Transportation and Planning Study.

Ireland West Airport at Knock has been allocated €27 million of funding, which will be used mainly for enhancing safety and security and investing in infrastructural improvements. In addition the Government approved grant aid of €27 million for the airport under the Regional Airports Capital Investment Grant Scheme, including almost €10 million for safety and security projects and €17 million for developmental projects. As indicated in the Ports Policy Statement, it is proposed that the regional harbours still operating under the Harbours Act 1946, will be transferred to local authority or port company control. My Department is working with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in this regard and has assisted in the process of preparing the relevant harbours for transfer with funding from a budget currently in the region of €4 million per annum. This funding has been allocated towards essential works to protect the fabric of the harbours concerned. In County Mayo, it is expected that the River Moy and Westport Harbours will transfer to local authority control in the near future.

Management Information Framework System.

383. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Transport the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34311/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The implementation of the management information framework system has assisted

[Deputy Noel Dempsey.]

in improving the financial control environment, improving analysis and generally enhancing the effectiveness of financial management services. The system has also assisted in improving cost saving analysis within the Department. However, there is no readily available financial estimate of the value derived to the Exchequer as a consequence of the implementation of the system.

384. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Transport if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34326/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Department's management information framework system, AGRESSO Financials, went live in September 2002 and has been fully rolled out to support the operational and reporting needs of the Department. The main focus in relation to performance indicators has been the reform of the estimates process and in particular tracking progress in relation to the indicators published in the Annual Output Statement. A system to automatically link this information with financial information from Agresso is in place to support regular monitoring and reporting of targets throughout the year. The Department has a fully defined costing framework in place, with the ability to capture both direct and indirect costs and, in particular, to support the full costing of activities and objectives at business and statement of strategy levels. In the context of management reports, the new financial management system has led to much improved reporting functionality in the context of timely and accurate reports with, in particular, on-line access to Divisional Managers to a suite of personalised flexible reports.

Driving Licences.

385. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport if prior to his recent decision in respect of provisional licence holders, he sought or received information from any source regarding the degree to which holders of provisional licences were involved in fatal or non-fatal accidents in each of the past five years; the number of such provisional licence holders in each year; the number of full licence holders in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34369/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The answer to the first part of the question is "No". As regards the second and third parts of the question, information of this kind can

be obtained directly from the Road Safety Authority.

Taxi Regulations.

386. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Transport when the taxi regulator will provide funding for the provision of taxi ranks throughout the country; if his Department will provide extra funding through a grant scheme to underpin such funding; the amount of funding available to the regulator; if this funding is to be determined on a *pro rata* basis in relation to the areas and the number of taxis in each area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34382/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Decisions regarding the location and operation of taxi ranks on public roads are matters for consideration by the relevant local authority. Under section 84 of the Road Traffic Act 1961, as substituted by section 15 of the Road Traffic Act 2002 and amended by section 42(10) of the Taxi Regulation Act 2003, a local authority is empowered to make bye-laws in respect of any specified area in its functional area appointing the places at which taxis may stand for hire. The making of such bye-laws is a reserved function of a local authority.

The provision of funding for taxi ranks is primarily a matter for local authorities. My Department does not provide specific grants to local authorities for the provision of taxi ranks on non-national roads. However, it is open to local authorities to use discretionary improvement or block grants allocated to them for various eligible works on regional and local roads, including traffic management schemes and the provision of road traffic signs, including regulatory road markings for taxi ranks. Decisions regarding the works to be funded from discretionary grants are matters for local authorities.

The Commission for Taxi Regulation is an independent statutory body whose main source of funding is licence fees in respect of small public service vehicles. The Commission for Taxi Regulation does not receive any funding directly from the Exchequer. Decisions regarding the use of licence fee revenue are primarily a matter for the Commission in the discharge of its functions under the Taxi Regulation Act 2003.

Public Transport.

387. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Transport the number of buses currently in service in the Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann fleets that run on alternative fuels; the percentage of the total fuel used that is alternative fuel in each case of a bus that uses alternative fuel; and the number of buses currently in service in the Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann fleets that use hybrid engines. [34383/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I have asked CIE to move to using a 5% biodiesel blend in current CIE vehicles and to plan for a 30% blend in new vehicles. My Department is working with CIE to establish how these targets can be achieved in the shortest time-frame possible. Both Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus have been undertaking trials on the use of biofuels. Bus Éireann is piloting the use of biodiesel produced from recovered vegetable oil in part of its Cork City tours fleet. Dublin Bus uses bio-diesel made from such oil on a trial basis in five open-top tour buses, which have been operating without any technical difficulties. Part of the Transport 21 investment programme will also bring more fuel efficiency to the public transport fleet.

All 239 buses currently on order, or about to be ordered, will have Euro IV engines which are more fuel efficient. In addition, Dublin Bus will be leasing a prototype hybrid electric double-decker bus in 2008 on a trial basis. It is estimated that this vehicle can achieve 34% less fuel consumption than a standard bus. Dublin Bus will consider the further acquisition of hybrid electric vehicles as part of future fleet replacement. I have also announced the preparation of a Sustainable Travel and Transport Action Plan, which will set out a broad suite of policies and measures to help the transport sector progress along a more sustainable trajectory and make a further contribution to reducing emissions to 2020.

Air Services.

388. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Transport the measures he will take to counteract the discontinuance of flights (details supplied) in and out of Gatwick Airport from Knock Airport which provided an important link to the Gatwick area of London as currently there is no other direct link to Gatwick. [34402/07]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Measures relating to the establishment and development of air services to and from Ireland West Airport Knock are a commercial matter for the airport authority, in which I have no function. The six regional airports, including Knock, play an important role within the national transport network by providing air transport access for their respective catchment areas, thereby boosting the potential for attracting inward investment and tourism business. Financial assistance provided by the Exchequer has contributed to the growth in passenger numbers at these airports in recent years.

Knock Airport is pursuing a developmental strategy aimed at winning increased traffic levels. Under Transport 21, the airport has been earmarked for €27.1 million in capital expenditure grants, consisting of €9.9 million for safety and

security projects and €17 million for developmental projects up to the end of 2010. I am satisfied that this capital expenditure grant allocation will further enhance the airport's ability to attract new air services on a commercial basis.

Human Rights Issues.

389. **Deputy Charlie O'Connor** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the action he is taking in response to worldwide concerns regarding human rights abuses in Zimbabwe; his contacts in the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33220/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am deeply concerned about the situation in Zimbabwe. The Government of Zimbabwe's disastrous economic policies have led to severe hardship for ordinary people, and those who seek democratic change face enormous obstacles. Politically motivated violence is reported to have increased throughout 2007. Many opposition activists and supporters, including those from the Movement for Democratic Change, have been arrested and some have been severely beaten in police custody.

International efforts must focus on pushing for a level playing field for the March 2008 elections to allow the people of Zimbabwe to decide who they think can best lead their country out of its current economic and political crisis. Ireland and the EU strongly believe that African leadership is the key to encouraging progress towards economic and political stability. We support the talks between the government and opposition in Zimbabwe which are being mediated by President Mbeki under a Southern African Development Community mandate. It is expected that the talks will conclude soon.

Implementation of any agreement will be crucial, and will need to be carefully monitored. When EU Foreign Ministers discussed the situation in Zimbabwe in October, they agreed that the EU may need to follow up the Southern African Development Community initiative once it is complete. At the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 19 November, it was agreed that President Mugabe would hear a tough and clear message on the EU's abhorrence of his policies at the EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon, and such a message was delivered last weekend.

There have been no political level visits between Ireland and Zimbabwe in recent years. The Secretary General of my Department raised Ireland's concerns about the failed political and economic policies of President Mugabe's Government with Zimbabwean officials in Harare in June 2007, and also had talks with members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. The Irish Ambassador to South Africa,

[Deputy Dermot Ahern.]

who is also accredited to Zimbabwe, has regularly expressed to Zimbabwean interlocutors the Government's deep concern about the situation there. He most recently met Zimbabwean officials during a visit to Harare in September 2007. He also has regular contact with South African officials on this issue.

Our Embassy in Pretoria monitors allegations of human rights abuses in Zimbabwe and raises issues of concern in relation to human rights and governance with the Zimbabwean Government at all levels and at every available opportunity. In their capacities as local EU Presidency representatives, the Irish Ambassadors in both Lesotho and Zambia have raised concerns about Zimbabwe with their host countries. I am very conscious of the suffering of the Zimbabwean people under this brutal regime, and the Government is determined to continue our support to them. Irish Aid funding for the people of Zimbabwe has amounted to more than €17 million over the past two years. Our contribution is channelled through UN agencies, local and international NGOs, and Irish missionaries, and has a direct and positive effect on the lives of thousands of people. Ireland is ready to respond appropriately to any positive change in Zimbabwe.

Middle East Peace Process.

390. **Deputy Charlie O'Connor** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will report on contacts in the Middle East in respect of the ongoing quest for peace; the recent contacts in the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33221/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Ireland is a long-standing and active proponent of a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the central element of a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East. The Government has argued consistently within the EU and internationally that the restoration of a credible peace process is an urgent necessity if further conflict in the region is to be avoided. I have therefore warmly welcomed the agreement reached between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas in Annapolis last month to launch final status negotiations with the objective of concluding a peace treaty before the end of 2008. I believe that, with political will on all sides, there is a genuine opportunity for the realisation of a two-State solution, and for movement towards a regional settlement. This opportunity must not be lost.

At the meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council which I attended in Brussels yesterday, we agreed that the EU will work directly with the parties and through the international Quartet to support the negotiating

process. It is in the interests of all parties that it results in the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, which unites the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza, living in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. The EU will also work closely with the Arab States in the promotion of a comprehensive settlement in the region, building on the historic Arab Peace Initiative, which was reaffirmed at the Arab Summit in Riyadh earlier this year.

The Donors' Conference, which will take place in Paris on 17 December, will be an important opportunity for the international community to underline in practical terms its commitment to the building of the institutions of a future Palestinian State. The EU will play a central role, as the strongest supporter internationally of the Palestinian people. The overall level of assistance from the Union and its Member States has risen significantly in recent years, and will amount to over €800 million this year. Ireland's bilateral assistance has also increased, from €4.5 million in 2005 to well over €7 million in 2007. At the Paris Conference, we will announce a significant multi-annual pledge of further assistance for Palestine, in line with our record in providing assistance to the Palestinian people and the strength of our commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian State.

Emigrant Support Services.

391. **Deputy Charlie O'Connor** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the position regarding his Department's Irish abroad initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33222/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The establishment of the Irish Abroad Unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs in 2004 has greatly enhanced our capacity to develop and implement policies aimed at building relations with, and providing practical and financial assistance to, Irish communities overseas, across a wide range of important issues. Reaching out to and strengthening links with our communities abroad, and with those of Irish ancestry, is a cornerstone of Government policy. The funding of community groups working with emigrants is an essential and positive element in strengthening our outreach to the wider "Irish Family" worldwide. The very substantial level of funding now available to assist with the provision of services and support to vulnerable Irish men and women helps also to promote and sustain valuable community structures into the future.

The strong commitment of the Government to support our community abroad is reflected in the unprecedented level of funding secured for emigrant services. This year, €15.165 million was allocated to assist our communities abroad, an

increase of 26% on 2006. While the needs of the vulnerable members of our community in Britain remain a particular area of concern, I am pleased that increased funding has enabled us to support a much wider range of initiatives, including capital projects, than was possible in the past. A particular area of focus relates to initiatives that support homeless Irish people. In this regard, the Simon Community estimates that the number of homeless Irish in central London has fallen from over 600 in 1999 to under 100 last year, and credits Irish Government funding with having played a key role in this. I find this very gratifying and encouraging.

As well as our continuing support for frontline welfare services in Britain and the United States, I am pleased that the additional funding available in recent years has made it possible for me to broaden the range of projects and extend the geographic reach of our activity. In the past year, for example, I have been happy to approve funding for Irish community organisations in other countries, including South Africa and Zimbabwe. This wider Government support represents an acknowledgement and appreciation of the role of generations of Irish, past and present, across the globe.

As we near the end of 2007, the plight of our undocumented citizens in the US continues to be of the utmost concern to the Government. The Government has been steadfast in its support for the undocumented. The Taoiseach and I have used every possible opportunity to advocate on their behalf and will continue actively to do so in the period ahead. Officials in the Irish Abroad Unit and at our Embassies and Consulates help to keep our people abroad in touch with Ireland. They also maintain close and interactive contact with frontline organisations that support our communities. This helps to ensure that the Irish voluntary sector around the world has an effective channel of communication with the Government and that everything possible gets done to advance the interests and well-being of our citizens overseas.

Energy Resources.

392. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33281/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): To date in 2007, 87% of this Department's energy budget has been spent on electricity. According to Eirgrid's latest figures, at least 9.3% of the electricity supplied comes from renewable sources, mainly wind and hydroelectric. The remaining 13% of the Department's

energy budget is attributable to oil and gas, which are non-renewable sources.

Departmental Expenditure.

393. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33340/07]

394. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33355/07]

395. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the Departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33370/07]

410. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33735/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 393, 394, 395 and 410 together.

The figures set out in the table include all costs for all mobile phones assigned to personnel at Headquarters in my Department.

	2006	2007 to 31 October
	€	€
Total (excluding VAT)	165,667	120,369
Data charges	14,112	8,580
Roaming charges	37,893	35,280

For operational reasons, I have two mobile telephones. There is also a telephone in my official car. The table sets out the costs, excluding VAT, of mobile telephones supplied to me since my

[Deputy Dermot Ahern.]

appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs in September 2004.

	Sept-Dec 2004	2005	2006	2007 to 31 October
Cost (inclusive of monthly account fees)	€ 1,989	€ 9,251	€ 9,079	€ 5,585

The records retrievable by the Department, in the time available, do not provide a basis upon which the data and roaming charges for 2004 to 2006 for individual accounts can be calculated. However, I can advise the Deputy that the charges to date in 2007 for roaming and data relating to my accounts are €2,193.99, and €798.86 respectively.

Departmental Staff.

396. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33510/07]

398. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33540/07]

400. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33570/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 396, 398 and 400 together.

There is one press officer and three other officials in the press office of the Department, together with a Press Advisor, whom I personally appointed in 2004. The Press Advisor is at the level of Counsellor/Principal Officer, with a salary scale of €82,016 to €101,446. No Press Advisors were employed at the Department between 1997 and 2004. The press officer is at the level of First Secretary/Assistant Principal with a salary scale of €66,302 to €82,679. Two of the officials are at the level of Third Secretary, with a salary scale of €33,439 to €59,213 and one is at the level of Clerical Officer, with a salary scale of €23,221 to €37,652.

The work of the officials involved covers the broad range of duties in relation to press work, including liaison with the media, both foreign and domestic. Media monitoring is part of these duties and a summary of the main news items in Ireland is forwarded electronically each day to overseas missions and to all staff at Headquarters. The direct cost of this monitoring service, which is provided by the Irish Times, amounts to €49,164 annually. The Press Office also prepares a daily summary of news items specifically relating to the work of my Department. This information is disseminated to Ministerial Offices and senior management in the Department.

Departmental Expenditure.

397. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33525/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have provided, for the benefit of the Deputy, a tabular statement setting out details of the newspapers purchased by my Department on a daily and weekly basis. In order to achieve value for money, my Department has an agreement with certain suppliers to allow it to vary the number of newspapers provided on a weekly basis to provide for changes in staff requirements and to avoid partially unused yearly subscriptions. As such, the table details the newspaper requirement for the week beginning 3rd December 2007.

Daily Newspapers

Title	Total
Irish National	
Irish Times	91
Irish Independent	43
Irish Examiner	20
British National	
British Independent	11
Daily Telegraph	9
Financial Times (provided free with on-line service)	100
Guardian	22
London Times	8
Foreign [International]	
Wall Street Journal	5
International Herald Tribune	29
Foreign Language	
La Repubblica	1
Dagens Nyheter	1
Istneswtija	1
Die Welt	2

Title	Total		Total
El Pais	5	<i>Tabloid</i>	
Frankfurter Allgemeine	2	Irish Mail on Sunday	3
Les Echos	1	Sunday World	1
Le Figaro	2	News of the World	1
Le Monde	13	Sunday Mirror	1
Vedomosti	1	Sunday People	1
Northern Ireland		Sunday Express	1
Irish News	14	Star on Sunday	1
Belfast Telegraph	9	<i>Regional Newspapers</i>	
Newsletter	2	Andersonstown News	2
<i>Tabloid</i>		Anglo Celt	1
Daily Express	1	Argus	3
Irish Daily Mail	2	Derry Journal	3
Evening Herald	10	Donegal Democrat	1
Irish Mirror	5	Drogheda Independent	3
Star	7	Dundalk Democrat	3
Sun	6	Leitrim Observer	1
		Limerick Leader	1
		North Belfast News	3
		<i>Specialist Newspapers</i>	
		An Phoblacht	4
		Church of Ireland Gazette	1
		Die Zeit	2
		European Voice	1
		Foinse	2
		Farmers Journal	1
		Finanz Wirtschaft	1
		Guardian Weekly	3
		Irish Catholic	1
		Irish Echo	4
		Irish Post	2
		Irish Voice	4
		Irish World	1
		Metro Eireann	5
		New York Review of Books	7
		Politiken Weekly	1
		Times Literary Supplement	6
Weekly Newspapers			
	Total		
<i>Saturday Newspapers</i>			
Irish National			
Irish Times	2		
Irish Independent	2		
Irish Examiner	2		
British National			
Guardian	1		
British Independent	1		
London Times	1		
Financial Times	1		
Daily Telegraph	1		
Northern Ireland			
Belfast Telegraph	2		
<i>Tabloid</i>			
Irish Sun	1		
Star	1		
Daily Mirror	1		
Daily Express	1		
Irish Daily Mail	1		
Evening Herald	1		
<i>Sunday Newspapers</i>			
Irish National			
Sunday Business Post	12		
Sunday Tribune	8		
Sunday Independent	6		
British National			
Sunday Times	5		
Independent on Sunday	4		
Observer on Sunday	3		
Sunday Telegraph	3		

As a rule four newspapers per day, seven days a week are provided to me as well as three weekly regional papers, once a week. The office of Minister of State for European Affairs, Dick Roche T.D. receives five daily newspapers, Monday to Friday. The Minister of State for Overseas Assistance, Michael Kitt T.D. personally receives three daily newspapers, Monday to Friday. Other personnel in the Ministers Offices receive papers from the above list. The estimated annual cost of the current newspaper order for my Department, as detailed above, is €143,000. The cost of the newspapers provided to the Ministerial offices is estimated to be €16,600 per annum.

Question No. 398 answered with Question No. 396.

Consultancy Contracts.

399. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33555/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Department of Foreign Affairs is responsible for two Votes- Vote 28 (Foreign Affairs) and Vote 29 (International Co-operation). The information requested by the

Deputy is set out in the following tables covering both Votes for the period from 31 December 1997 to date. I am very conscious of the need to achieve value for money on consultancy expenditure. The Department engages media consultants only where there is a very specific need for this expertise and it cannot be provided from the Department's own resources. Under Vote 28 the consultancies in question arose in very specific circumstances where the Department was required to carry out information and awareness-raising campaigns relating to EU matters. The media consultancy undertaken under Vote 29 plays an important role in promoting public awareness and understanding of the work of the expanding Irish Aid programme.

VOTE 28

Year	Name of Consultant	Nature of Work Done	Cost
			€
1998	Drury Communications	Provision of information to the electorate in relation to the referendum on the Amsterdam Treaty (engaged under the terms of the Referendum Act 1998)	2,606,003
2002	Drury Communications	To advise on a comprehensive communications strategy aimed at improving the transmission of information about the EU to the Irish public	62,999

VOTE 29

Year	Name of Consultant	Nature of Work Done	Cost
			€
2005	Ms Brid McGrath	Assistant Communications Officer: To assist in the distribution of information to the public on the work of the Irish Aid Programme.	11,776
2006	Ms Brid McGrath	Assistant Communications Officer: To assist in the distribution of information to the public on the work of the Irish Aid Programme.	41,024
2006	Drury Communications	Planning and design of a public information and communications strategy for Irish Aid	49,131
2007	Ms Brid McGrath	Assistant Communications Officer: To assist in the distribution of information to the public on the work of the Irish Aid Programme.	24,640
2007	Bannon & Bannon	To deal with media matters relating to the Hunger Task Force and to promote its work.	2,262
2007	Mr Danny Rowan	Temporary Communications Specialist: To assist in the distribution of information to the public on the Irish Aid Programme.	36,493
2007	Ms Daire Higgins	Provision of public relations and outreach consultancy services for the Irish Aid Centre	19,800

Question No. 400 answered with Question No. 396.

Departmental Expenditure.

401. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumu-

lative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33585/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): One official credit card is assigned to me through the Department. The total charges incurred on this credit card are €29 in 2004 and €287 in 2005. No charges were incurred on the card for 2006 and 2007. In my Department, official credit cards are held by senior officials

who need credit cards for official purposes and a small number of officials who may need to make sanctioned purchases requiring a credit card, for example subscription to on-line journals. The

table details the number of cards held in each of the years 2000-2007 and the costs incurred in each year:

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number of credit cards: 9	Number of credit cards: 12	Number of credit cards: 10	Number of credit cards: 10	Number of credit cards: 14	Number of credit cards: 15	Number of credit cards: 13	Number of credit cards: 12
Total purchases €34,997	Total purchases €131,186	Total purchases €38,046	Total purchases €124,927	Total purchases €42,081	Total purchases €19,981	Total purchases €34,802	Total purchases €28,439 (To date)
Annual Charges €127	Annual Charges €190	Annual Charges €196	Annual Charges €464	Annual Charges €502	Annual Charges €594	Annual Charges €639	Annual Charges €780

I draw the Deputy's attention to the amounts incurred in 2001 and 2003. In 2001, a credit card was set up and used solely for the purpose of covering delegation costs incurred in the course of the Taoiseach's visit to Brazil; an amount of €66,320 was incurred. In 2003, a credit card was set up and used solely for the purpose of covering delegation costs incurred in the course of the President's visit to Australia; an amount of €98,733 was incurred. No interest has been incurred on any of these credit cards.

402. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33600/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The cost of photography in my Department in each year since 1997 is as set out in the tables. Table A covers the total cost of all official photography charged to my Department. Table B relates to photography costs that are directly connected to Ministers in my Department. Since 2004 the costs for all photography connected with State events involving visiting foreign dignitaries have been charged to my Department. This includes all incoming State, official and working visits, as well as international events organised by my Department. As will be seen, there was a significant additional spend in 2004, directly as a result of our EU Presidency commitments, and 2006 saw a higher than average number of inward State and official visits. The figures in table B relate in the main to photographs of Ministers meeting senior figures such as visiting Foreign Ministers and other foreign dignitaries, both at home and abroad.

Table A

Year	€
1997	4,237.70
1998	3,633.34
1999	5,433.23
2000	7,425.90

Year	€
2001	11,517.24
2002	18,509.35
2003	9,503.71
2004	44,342.54
2005	29,306.70
2006	84,263.13
2007	53,955.45
Total	272,127.63

Table B

Year	€
1997	4,237.70
1998	3,633.34
1999	5,433.23
2000	7,425.90
2001	11,517.24
2002	18,509.35
2003	9,503.71
2004	23,256.17
2005	10,399.35
2006	20,015.92
2007	16,461.87
Total	130,393.78

All Departments are obliged to put contracts to tender, by EU rules, if its value is estimated to be over €25,000. The contract for photography was first put out to tender in 2003 and this process was repeated in 2005.

403. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33615/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Since my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs in September 2004, no costs have been incurred in relation to make up services.

404. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33630/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have presented below, in tabular form, costs incurred by my Department on official entertainment for the past ten years. The purpose of this entertainment is to promote bilateral relations with other States in the context of visits by Heads of State, Heads of Government, Foreign Ministers and other high-level visitors, and also through visits abroad by the President, Taoiseach and Ministers. As will be seen, there was a significant additional spend in 2004 as a result of our EU Presidency commitments.

Year	Expenditure
	€
1997	470,460
1998	457,729
1999	534,754
2000	634,556
2001	983,620
2002	669,407
2003	781,672
2004	3,040,744
2005	888,078
2006	868,615
2007 (to date)	675,939

The Department's 75 Missions, as part of their ongoing work to promote Irish interests, also have access to a representational allowance.

Government Information Services.

405. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33645/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): My Department does not receive a daily summary of stories specifically relevant to its work from Government Information Services. Government Information Services do however provide a short summary form of the main stories in the major media outlets. This is provided in electronic form to Ministers, senior members of the Department and the staff of the press office. These summaries are issued in the morning, and after the main lunchtime, evening and nightly news bulletins.

Official Engagements.

406. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33660/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): A member of the press office normally travels with me as part of my official delegation. There have been no occasions in the past year on official visits where a member of the press office has either not been present or has not been in contact with me.

Departmental Transport.

407. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33675/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): There is no official car provided to the Ministers of State at my Department. They can claim mileage expenses for official travel and these are detailed in the table that follows this reply. My Department also pays the salaries of four civilian drivers, two for each Minister of State, at an individual annual salary cost of €33,148. Details of the cost of air travel incurred when the Ministers of State are travelling abroad on official business are also provided in the table. The figures in the table cover the period from 2002 to date. It has not been possible, in the time available, to retrieve the detailed information for the period prior to 2002.

Minister of State Expenses — from June 2002-September 2007

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	€	€	€	€	€	€
<i>Minister of State, Conor Lenihan T.D.</i>						
Mileage				21,677	16,846	8,177
Airfares			8,521	50,182	26,041	2,410

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	€	€	€	€	€	€
<i>Minister of State, Tom Kitt T.D.</i>						
Mileage	9,605	11,445	25,159			
Airfares	30,227	66,946	56,941			
<i>Minister of State, Michael Kitt T.D.</i>						
Mileage						13,322
Airfares						7,903
<i>Minister of State, Noel Treacy T.D.</i>						
Mileage			10,146	21,277	43,173	27,958
Airfares			2,926	33,375	15,221	7,393
<i>Minister of State, Dick Roche T.D.</i>						
Mileage*						7,914
Airfares	6,393	23,089	8,905			4,728

* Mileage expenses incurred by MOS Roche from 2002 to 2004 were a charge on the Department of the Taoiseach.

408. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the cost of him using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to junior Ministers and staff for the same period. [33690/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have outlined below the costs incurred on public transport since 1997 by the private offices of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of State at this Department.

Year	Minister's Office	Ministers of State's Offices
1997	€99	no charge incurred
1998	no charge incurred	no charge incurred
1999	€116	no charge incurred
2000	€43	no charge incurred
2001	no charge incurred	no charge incurred
2002	no charge incurred	no charge incurred
2003	no charge incurred	no charge incurred
2004	€539	€214
2005	no charge incurred	€491
2006	€69	€103
2007	€21	no charge incurred

Departmental Communications.

409. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his Department carries news summaries on their internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33720/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): There are a number of different news summaries and services used by my Department. Every weekday, a compilation of morning press highlights is emailed to staff. Press Highlights from the weekend are uploaded to the internal web on Monday mornings. This is, of course, a particularly important service for our 75 Missions overseas. This service is provided by the Irish Times New Media Division, with an annual cost of €49,164.

A summary of News Headlines is also emailed to all staff at 8 a.m., 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. These are compiled by the Communications Unit at the Department of An Taoiseach and are provided at no cost to the Department. These daily news summaries are also placed on the Department's Intranet to which all staff with a computer have access. Also, on the Intranet, there are a number of news feeds provided by: RTE News; International Herald Tribune-Europe; MSNBC-US News; BBC News-Europe World Edition; Reuters; AP and International Herald Tribune-Asia Pacific. These news feeds are refreshed every 15 minutes and are provided free of charge.

My Department's library also provides more detailed, customised news and information updates to staff on request, to assist in the performance of their duties. This information is circulated to officers by e-mail. These specialised news services include material from: BBC Global newlines; Lexis Nexis; Intelligence Research publications; FT-online; and Reuters Wealth Manager.

Question No. 410 answered with Question No. 393.

Departmental Expenditure.

411. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile

[Deputy Fergus O'Dowd.]

phones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33750/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): My Department provides advisors and staff appointed by me with mobile phones and other appropriate communications equipment necessary to enable them perform their duties. The table sets out the costs of such equipment and services since I took office in September 2004.

2004 (from September)	2005	2006	2007
€1,142	€14,571	€7,404	€5,163.48

Departmental Reports.

412. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when the value for money review of the support for Irish emigrant groups was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33764/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Value for Money and Policy Review of the Support for Irish Emigrants Groups Programme, which was undertaken by Goodbody Economic Consultants, was completed in July, 2007. Copies of the Report were lodged with the Houses of the Oireachtas on 1 August 2007 and with the Value for Money and Policy Review Secretariat of the Department of Finance at the same time.

The Review was undertaken against the background of the rapid expansion in the Emigrant Groups Support Programme, in terms of financial allocations, the number of organisations funded and the geographic spread. At €15.165 million, the funding in 2007 represents an increase of 26% on last year, and a fifteen-fold increase over the past ten years. The purpose of the Review was to examine the objectives of the Programme, the economic effectiveness and efficiency with which services are being delivered, and the quality and quantity of the outputs and benefits delivered to our communities abroad. While savings to the Exchequer did not constitute a part of the terms of reference of the Review, the recommendations in it should help to ensure that taxpayers' funds will have an even greater impact in the future.

In its conclusions, the Review stated that the Programme "has made impressive progress towards its objectives of connecting vulnerable Irish emigrants to the statutory and voluntary services that they need and developing and strengthening the Irish voluntary sector and Irish

communities abroad. The Programme has also made its first steps towards addressing other aspects of Irish heritage". The Review also found that the monitoring and evaluation processes for the Programme have been relatively informal to date but sufficient to ensure that it has operated well. In this regard, and in line with the growth of the programme, it recommended that a more formalised system of monitoring and evaluation be put in place. Overall, the Review painted a very positive picture of the Department's work in this area, making the point that the approach adopted has been extremely effective and efficient.

413. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when the value for money review of the evaluation of Development Cooperation Ireland's emergency humanitarian assistance for a selected disaster was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33765/07]

414. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when the value for money review of the automated passport project will be completed; the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33766/07]

415. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when the value for money review of the development aid to Mozambique will be completed; the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33767/07]

416. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs when the value for money review of the HIV budget line will be completed; the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33768/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Michael P. Kitt): I propose to take Questions Nos. 413 to 416, inclusive, together.

The Value for Money Review of Irish Aid's (formerly Development Cooperation Ireland's) emergency humanitarian response to a selected disaster focused on the 2004 Asian Tsunami. The report on this VfM Review, which was an independent assessment of the appropriateness, efficiency, effectiveness and connectedness of Irish Aid's response to the tsunami disaster, was published and laid before the Oireachtas this year.

The Government committed a total of €20 million to the affected countries. The Value for Money Review concluded that Irish Aid's overall response was appropriate and strategic, and that the programme of support was managed in an efficient and effective way, with no wastage of funds. The Review also made some useful recommendations, including that, in supporting future emergencies, consideration should be given to selecting a smaller number of partner agencies with specific expertise to ensure that Irish Aid's support does not become too fragmented.

In its management responses to the recommendations, which are included in the report, Irish Aid noted that it has embarked on a process of enhanced dialogue with NGO, UN and Red Cross partner agencies for the purposes of developing better and more supportive partnerships, which will contribute to more appropriate and strategic funding relationships for future emergency responses. This approach with partner agencies is in line with Irish Aid's commitments under the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative.

The Value for Money Review of Development Aid to Mozambique is expected to be published and laid before the Oireachtas by the end of December. The Review of the HIV budget line will commence in the New Year, with the end of 2008 as the target date for completion. In agreement with the Department of Finance, the Review of the Automated Passport Project has been re-named the Review of the Passport Service, and will be completed in early 2008.

Human Rights Issues.

417. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the reports emanating from, and a recent BBC documentary on, a State run children's social care home in Mogilino, Bulgaria; if, in view of the fact of Bulgaria's recent membership of the EU, he is concerned by reports of abuse and neglect; and if action on these matters is proposed at EU level, in order to ensure a uniform high level of child care across the EU. [33784/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I share deep concerns regarding the welfare of vulnerable children in institutional care in Bulgaria, such as those who featured in a recent BBC documentary. The need for action to address this disturbing legacy of past policies and attitudes was highlighted during Bulgaria's negotiations for accession to the EU. While some progress was made before accession, the Bulgarian authorities recognise that more needs to be done. The EU continues to support this reform process and some €5 million of EU funding will next year be directed towards the development of alterna-

tive care arrangements for people resident in such institutions.

Providing an alternative to large-scale institutional care is a process that requires careful planning and adequate funding. There is a general recognition amongst those dealing with this situation on the ground that the solution must be well thought out, be applicable generally throughout the system, and have the interests of the children as the driving force behind it.

With regard to the Mogilino institution which featured in the documentary, I am advised that the Bulgarian authorities are working closely with a group of Non Governmental Organisations and UNICEF in the implementation of an agreed action plan. As a result, medical evaluations of the children have been carried out and a number of them have received hospital treatment. The children are also being assessed to determine the full extent of their problems with a view to producing detailed plans for their futures. The local authorities have authorised additional funding and supplies to immediately improve the welfare of those living there. A new Director has been appointed to the institution and the rest of the staff are receiving training by a group of specialists in this field. Ultimately, it is planned to close the orphanage and to provide specialist care through the creation of smaller group homes.

In light of the BBC documentary, I have asked our Ambassador to Bulgaria to convey my concerns regarding the welfare of these vulnerable people to the appropriate authorities in Bulgaria. The Ambassador and other officials in the Embassy will also inform the Bulgarian authorities of the strong public interest in Ireland in seeing a dramatic improvement in the standards of care given to people in institutional care in Bulgaria.

Ireland's engagement and concerns are also expressed in other ways. In recent years, the Department of Foreign Affairs has supported NGOs active in Bulgaria on the protection of children at risk and the rehabilitation of people with intellectual disabilities. Organisations supported include the Bulgarian Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities. The Irish Embassy in Sofia maintains close contact with organisations working to improve the living conditions of the children and young adults resident in institutions. A number of Irish citizens and organisations are also involved and the Embassy supports them in their work whenever possible. I can assure the Deputy that we will continue to urge the early implementation of the reforms needed to protect the interests of this particularly vulnerable section of society.

International Agreements.

418. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will use his influence in Europe to ensure that there are no mandatory negotiations on services, intellectual property,

[Deputy Paul Gogarty.]

investment or other trade related issues as part of any economic partnership agreement negotiation from 1 January 2008. [33815/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Michael P. Kitt): The negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the European Union and the African Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP) have reached a critical stage. The mandate for the negotiations of Economic Partnership Agreements comes from the legally-binding Cotonou Agreement, the central objective of which is “reducing and eventually eradicating poverty, consistent with the objectives of sustainable development and the gradual integration of the African Caribbean Pacific countries into the world economy”. In line with Article 37.1 of the Cotonou Agreement, negotiations began in September 2002 between the European Commission and the ACP countries and the agreements are required to come into force by 1 January 2008 in order to be compatible with World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules. For the purposes of the EPA negotiations, the ACP states are organised into six regional groupings.

The rationale behind the EPAs is that they would be comprehensive instruments which would include trade in services, investment and other trade related areas, as well as trade in goods. However the negotiations have revealed a number of difficulties between the two sides. These include resistance on the part of a number of ACP countries to the inclusion of non-goods items; differences of interests within particular regional groupings; and fears about the impact of opening ACP markets to EU exports.

The current aim is that, where agreement on a full EPA is not possible by the end of the year, a form of “stepping stone” agreement should be signed, based on market access arrangements for goods only. The European Commission envisages that such stepping stone agreements will lead to full EPAs. The Government have consistently maintained that the outcome of the negotiations should result in agreements that are supportive of ACP countries’ development needs and their poverty reduction efforts. In this regard the Taoiseach made the point at the recent EU Africa summit in Lisbon that the EU approach should be “one of goodwill, flexibility, understanding”. Ireland considers that it is vitally important that whatever arrangements are put in place do not disadvantage the developing countries. That will continue to be the core of our approach, and our position in this regard was reiterated at yesterday’s General Affairs and External Relations Council.

Foreign Conflicts.

419. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the position in relation to

Kosovo following the failure to reach agreement by the 10 December 2007 deadline; and the view of the Government on the declaration of independence expected to emerge. [34077/07]

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.

Ireland, together with our EU partners, has consistently expressed strong support for the work of the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, on the issue of Kosovo’s final status. 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. However, 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. The Troika process has now concluded without agreement and the International Contact Group reported to the UN Secretary General on 10 December. Ireland strongly supported the Troika initiative and we regret that the talks have failed.

The matter now returns to the UN and will be discussed further by the UN Security Council on 19 December. I do not believe that it would be helpful for me to speculate at this stage with regard to specific future developments on this sensitive issue. We recognise that difficult choices may need to be made in the near future which deal with the reality of the situation on the ground and which are necessary to safeguard the future security and stability of Kosovo and the Balkan region as a whole. During my recent visit to the Balkans, I met with the political leadership in both Belgrade and Pristina and urged both sides to refrain from any activities or statements which might jeopardise the security situation in the region at this time. I am pleased to note that such a commitment has been given to the Troika by the parties and is reflected in their final report.

At EU level, the latest developments were discussed yesterday by Foreign Ministers and will be considered further at the forthcoming European Council. Ireland, with its partners in the European Union and the international community, is committed to continuing to play its full part in the efforts to resolve this important European issue. While we will face a more complex and uncertain political and legal environment in the absence of agreement, 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 support the future economic development of Kosovo.

Departmental Transport.

420. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34095/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have outlined in tabular form the transport hire costs incurred by my Department since my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs in September 2004. These charges all relate to the hire of cars on official visits abroad. There have been no transport hire charges incurred by my office for travel in Ireland.

Transport Hire	Sept-Dec 2004	2005	2006	2007 (to date)
Minister's Office	€12,263	€65,776	€69,803	€18,609

Departmental Communications.

421. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Mini-

Project name	On/Ahead of deadline	On/under budget
Global Communications Upgrade for Embassies	Completed on time	On budget
Outsourced Helpdesk	Completed on time	On budget
Upgrade of ICT infrastructure at HQ, London, and Permanent Representation, Brussels	Completed on time	On budget
Upgrade of ICT infrastructure for Embassies	Completed on time	On budget
Biometrics on Passports	Completed ahead of time	Under budget

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

424. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34269/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I fully support the commitment in the

ster for Foreign Affairs the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a Blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34224/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Seven staff in my Department have been provided with Blackberry or Blackberry-style devices. This includes five members of staff in the ICT Unit who are currently testing these devices as part of a feasibility trial.

422. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34239/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): There are 95 databases currently used by my Department across a range of systems. All but one database is operated solely by staff in the Department. The ICT Helpdesk database is jointly operated by Departmental staff and on-site external contractors who provide ICT support services.

423. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34254/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Five information technology projects have been undertaken by my Department since 2004. One was completed ahead of time and under budget, while the remaining four projects were completed on time and on budget.

current Programme for Government to “require carbon offsetting of all official air travel in support of urban forests”. I understand that my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, will shortly announce details of a scheme for use by all Government Departments and bodies under their aegis which will address this commitment. Once the details are announced, the new scheme will be appropriately implemented by my Department.

Data Protection.

425. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34284/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): All Departmental databases and systems that store or maintain information relating to members of the public are inaccessible from the Internet and, therefore, from hackers. My Department implements a range of security measures, including multi-layered firewalls, to secure its internal ICT network from the Internet. This ICT security infrastructure is reviewed on a regular basis. I am satisfied that the measures in place provide adequate safeguards to protect all information relating to members of the public held by my Department.

Management Information Framework System.

426. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34306/07]

427. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34321/07]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 426 and 427 together.

The benefits of the Management Information Framework (MIF) are measured in terms of improved efficiency, greater financial controls, enhanced accountability and the promotion of a value for money approach to all financial transactions. It is not possible to attribute a specific financial saving to the introduction of the MIF. However, it has resulted in increased efficiency and the availability of clearer financial information, in real time, to decision-makers, meaning that better decisions can be made on the use of resources.

To date the Management Information Framework has resulted in:

- The introduction of a modern, cost effective Financial Management and Reporting System;
- Enhanced financial reporting capabilities of the Department;

- The roll-out of on-line access to the financial management systems at HQ and over 60 Missions abroad;
- The introduction of electronic payments at HQ; and
- The deployment of performance indicators.

Budgetary responsibility has been delegated to budget holders and the resulting costing and reporting framework provides the basis for all financial management of the funds allocated to the Department. Senior management reviews financial performance on an ongoing basis.

The Management Information Framework project is near completion. The last remaining part is the upgrade of our travel and subsistence system which I expect will be completed in 2008. This year, for the first time, my Department submitted an Annual Output Statement, dealing with the year 2006. The Output Statement makes use of the Performance Indicators included in my Department's current Statement of Strategy. The comprehensive financial information included in that Output Statement is too detailed for inclusion here but the Deputy will wish to be aware that it is available on my Department's website, www.dfa.ie. A new Statement of Strategy is currently close to completion and will set out new Performance Indicators for the period 2008 to 2010.

Energy Resources.

428. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33278/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The percentage of energy consumed in my Department that comes from renewable sources is nil. The buildings occupied by my Department are managed and maintained by the Office of Public Works (OPW) on behalf of the Department. All matters pertaining to the heating and lighting of the Department's buildings and whether renewable energy sources are used, are decided upon by the OPW in consultation with the Department. My Department would be open to any proposals from the OPW to reduce the Department's dependency on oil and gas usage, by using renewable energy sources where practicable. The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the agencies of my Department is not an area in which I have a function.

Economic Competitiveness.

429. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment his views on the recommendation made by the National

Competitiveness Council in its latest annual report for co-ordinated preparation of responses to Competition Authority reviews from Government on competition matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33308/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The National Competitiveness Council's suggestion in relation to coordinated preparation of responses to Competition Authority reviews will be given consideration in the context of the current review of the operation and implementation of the Competition Act 2002.

Community Employment Schemes.

430. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of people on community employment schemes on 31 October 2007; the maximum duration of these schemes; the budget allocated to FÁS to operate these schemes; the proportion of same paid in salaries to the participants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33310/07]

431. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if a State body other than FÁS is authorised to operate community employment schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33311/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 430 and 431 together.

FÁS, as the state's Training and Employment Authority, is charged with sole responsibility for the overall management and delivery of the Community Employment Programme nationally. I am advised by FÁS that at end October 2007, there were 22,271 employed under the Community Employment Programme. The 2007 budget for Community Employment is €356m of which approximately €322m or 90% is funding that is provided to cover salary and associated costs (PRSI, Child/Adult Dependent etc.).

Community Employment (CE) as an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons (including those with a disability) with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a fixed term basis. The programme is structured to help unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to a work routine and to assist them to enhance/develop both their technical and personal skills.

The maximum duration that individuals can remain on CE is dependent on the participant's eligibility status. This eligibility criteria are generally based on age and length of time in receipt of various social welfare payments. Typically, par-

ticipants can avail of periods of between 1 and 6 years.

In November 2004, to cater for older workers in particular, I revised the 3-year CE capping to allow those of 55 years of age and over to avail of a 6-year period on CE (based on participation since 3rd April 2000). Subsequently, the participation limit for persons eligible for CE based on a Social Welfare disability-linked payment (including those under 55) was increased by a further 1 year. These measures were introduced in recognition of the fact that older participants and participants with a disability may find it more difficult to progress into the open labour market.

FÁS is continuing to develop the content of the CE programme. The new approach involves the introduction of an "Individual Learner Planning Process" which is focusing on meeting the learning needs of participants. The Individual Learner Plan is providing for the planning, organising and recording of the work experience, training and development that each participant receives while working on CE. It also includes further training and development for supervisors, a new application process and quality assurance procedures.

Under this Individualised Approach FÁS has proposed four new FETAC Awards relevant to both CE and JI learners, including:

- Certificate in Personal and Social Employment Skills Level 3
- Certificate in Vocational Employment Skills Level 3
- Certificate of Applied Employment Skills Level 4
- Certificate in Specific Employment Skills Level 5

These new awards will facilitate all the planned learning completed on CE or JI by each participant being rolled up into the achievement of a FETAC award. This will provide added value to the learner and will support their progression onto further training or employment.

The provision of places is managed through a standardised application process between regional FÁS offices and local Sponsor/Community Organisations. FÁS makes every effort to ensure that differing levels of demand between neighbouring schemes are equalised. I should say that this Government will continue to support into the future the positive role of CE in meeting the needs of long-term unemployed persons while at the same time providing essential services to communities.

Departmental Agencies.

432. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the proportion of the FÁS budget that is spent on upskilling, apprenticeships and community employment schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33316/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The proportion of the total FÁS Programme Budget (which excludes administration and overheads) to be spent on Upskilling, Apprenticeship and Community Employment in 2007 is as follows:

Measure	Proportion
Upskilling	5% (People in Employment excluding Apprenticeships)
Upskilling	26% (People for Employment)
Apprenticeship	15%
Community Employment	42%

Departmental Expenditure.

433. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33337/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The cost of mobile telephone bills paid directly by my Department in 2006 and to date in 2007, together with the percentage for data charges and for roaming charges, is as follows:

Year	Cost	Percentage for Data Charges	Percentage for Roaming Charges
	€	%	%
2006	224,054.06	18	11
2007 to date	151,595.40	45*	13

*The significant increase in the percentage for data charges in 2007 arises because of the roll-out of remote access for staff via their mobile phones, Blackberries and laptops, and in particular because of the significant increase in the number of Labour Inspectors this year.

434. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33352/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): Staff of the Department using their own private mobile phones for official purposes are reimbursed by the Department. The amount involved for 2006 was €1,142.16 and to date in 2007 the amount

involved is €742.29. It is not possible to provide a breakdown or percentage of the costs which relate to data charges or to roaming charges.

435. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33367/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The cost of my mobile telephone bills paid by the Department, in relation to mobile phones assigned to me, in 2006 and to date in 2007, together with the percentage for data charges and for roaming charges, is as follows:

Year	Cost	Percentage for Data Charges	Percentage for Roaming Charges
	€	%	%
2006	3,682.97	not available*	not available*
2007 to date	3,002.00	not available*	not available*

*My Department sought this information from the service provider concerned. However, I understand that for data protection reasons the service provider has declined to provide this information.

Departmental Reports.

436. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when the value for money review of science and technology spending was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33489/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): My Department scheduled an Expenditure Review of Science & Technology Spending in 2004. The Expenditure Review was based on data and findings from three independent evaluations of individual Science and Technology Programmes, in the period 2002 to 2004, commissioned by the Department and managed by Forfás. The Expenditure Review focussed on the principal Research Technological Development and Innovation in Industry measures under the National Development Plan 2000-2006. The schemes covered by the Expenditure Review were:

- The R & D Capability Grants Scheme;
- The Research Technology & Innovation Competitive Grants Scheme;

- The Enterprise Ireland Collaboration Programme.

The purpose of the Expenditure Review was to provide a systematic analysis of what was actually achieved by expenditure under these schemes and to provide a basis on which informed decisions could be made on priorities in this area, and thus to ensure that the benefits arising from expenditure in this area is maximised.

The Expenditure Review made a strong case for the continuation of State support in the areas of Science and Technological development. The review made significant and comprehensive recommendations on the overall usefulness of the agency supports for research and innovation in the business sector relative to national objectives with a focus on whether they constituted value for money and efficient use of public funds. These recommendations sought to enhance the quality and quantity of research supported by the enterprise agencies.

The Review was completed in 2005. Many of its recommendations were taken into account when drafting the Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation (2006 — 2013). This Strategy provides the opportunity to ensure that maximum economic and social benefits are derived from the Government's commitment of €8.2 billion to this area under the National Development Plan. The Strategy gives breadth and depth to a vision for a knowledge economy and society in Ireland backed by a wide cross section of investments by various departments and agencies, with clear targets and clear outcomes to be achieved. The Strategy is currently in the process of being implemented.

437. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when the value for money review of Science Foundation Ireland will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33490/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Value for Money review of Science Foundation Ireland programmes is nearing completion, and I expect it will be finalised in early 2008. The purpose of the review is to examine SFI's major funding programmes and make targeted comments and recommendations, where appropriate, on the overall effectiveness of the agency supports in building a world-class research system in Ireland, with a focus on whether the programmes as operated constitute value for money and efficient use of public funds. It is anticipated that the implementation of the review when completed will assist in securing value for money and maximising the economic impact from the SFI investments.

438. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when the value for money review of the FÁS competency development programme will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33491/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): An official of the Department, who is currently undertaking the IPA Masters in Policy Analysis, has been charged with conducting the Value for Money Review of the FÁS Competency Development Programme. Work has commenced on the Review and a Steering Committee comprising of representatives of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Department of Finance, Forfás and FÁS has been established to oversee the Value for Money Review.

The Steering Committee has approved the timetable for the completion of the various stages of the Review, with the final report due to be submitted by May 2008. It is too early to state the possible implications, including potential future savings to the Exchequer, the completed Value for Money Review will have. Upon completion the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and FÁS will consider the Review's recommendations.

Departmental Staff.

439. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33507/07]

441. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33537/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 439 and 441 together.

I have appointed one Press Officer who advises me on media matter generally. The remainder of the Staff of the Department's Press Office are civil servants and I have no function whatsoever in their appointment or assignment to that office. The details sought by the Deputy are in the table. The principal officer named below includes the

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

press office as one of a number of Departmental functions in his portfolio.

The functions of the Press Office are to communicate with the media about the public affairs of the Department. This office issues speeches and press releases as well as organising press conferences and photo-calls. As far as media monitoring is concerned this involves a press cutting service which is made available electronically to all staff of my Department. The cost of the press cuttings service is €3,850 per month.

Name	Rank	Salary Scale
Jerry O'Connor	Press Advisor	€82,016–€101,446
John P Kelly	Principal Officer	€82,016–€101,446
Roisin McCann	Higher Executive Officer	€44,314–€56,250
Eric Giguere	Executive Officer	€29,093–€46,167
Jason Kiernan	Clerical Officer	€22,058–€35,773
Philomena Guerin	Clerical Officer	€22,058–€35,773

Departmental Expenditure.

440. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33522/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): My Department purchases on a daily basis (Monday to Friday inclusive) copies of the Irish Times, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, Financial Times, Star, Sun, Mirror, Daily Mail, Guardian, Evening Herald, Evening Echo and Le Monde for distribution to officials of the Department. My Department also purchases 1/2 copies of the Saturday editions of the Irish Times, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, Financial Times, Star, Sun, Mirror, Daily Mail, and Evening Herald. The number of daily newspapers purchased by the Department (including the Saturday editions) amounts to 601 per week or approximately 120 per day.

My Department also purchases the following weekly newspapers — Sunday Independent, Sunday Tribune, Sunday World, Sunday Business Post, Sunday Times, Mail on Sunday and News of the World; the number of Sunday newspapers purchased by the Department amounts to 7 per week. The Department provides my Office (on Monday to Friday inclusive) with 2 copies of the Irish Times, 2 copies of the Irish Independent and 1 copy each of the Irish Examiner, Financial Times, Evening Herald and Daily Mail.

The Department provides the Office of Minister of State Ahern (on Monday to Friday inclusive) with a copy of the following daily newspapers: Irish Times, Irish Independent and Irish Examiner. Minister of State Ahern is also provided with a copy of the Saturday Examiner. The Department provides the Office of Minister of State Kelleher (on Monday to Friday inclusive) with a copy of the following daily newspapers: Irish Times, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, Star and Evening Herald.

The Department provides the Office of Minister of State McGuinness (on Monday to Friday inclusive) with a copy of the following daily newspapers: Irish Times, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner and Financial Times. The annual cost of providing newspapers for officials and Ministers of the Department is approximately €51,600.

Question No. 441 answered with Question No. 439.

Consultancy Contracts.

442. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33552/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The media consultants employed by my Department are set out on the tabular statement. I have no function whatsoever in their appointment or assignment to particular agencies or projects. This does not include any information from the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement from whom information could not be obtained in the time available.

Media Consultants 1997-2007

Year	Name of Media Consultant	Purpose of Consultant	Cost
1997	None		
1998	None		
1999	Caden Communications	Media and communications advisor to ODCA	£10,073.25
2000	Caden Communications	Media and communications advisor to ODCA	£12,584
2000	QMP D'Arcy	Advertising campaign for introduction of National Minimum Wage	£21,698
2001	Caden Communications	Media and communications advisor to ODCA	€39,603
2001	QMP D'Arcy	Advertising increase in National Minimum Wage	£15,608

Year	Name of Media Consultant	Purpose of Consultant	Cost
2002	QMP D'Arcy	Advertising increase in National Minimum Wage	€13,944
2002	Caden Communications	Media and communications advisor to ODCA	€38,192
2003	Caden Communications	Media and communications advisor to ODCA	€44,033
2003	Carr Communications	Effective Communication with Company Registration Office (CRO) clients	€29,108
2003	Mr. John Armstrong	Consultant to the Department's Press Office for the duration of Ireland's Presidency of the EU	€9,528.92
2004	Mr. John Armstrong	Consultant to the Department's Press Office for the duration of Ireland's Presidency of the EU	€41,545.44
2004	Quinn McDonnell Pattison	Advertising increase in National Minimum Wage	€29,040
2004	Caden Communications	Media and communications advisor to ODCA	€55,539
2004	Carr Communications	Effective Communication with Company Registration Office (CRO) clients	€64,493
2005	QMP Publicis	Advertising increase in National Minimum Wage	€33,387.53
2005	Caden Communications	Media and communications advisor to ODCA	€47,371.50
2005	Q4 Public Relations	Media and communications advisor in respect of Interim NCA From October to December 2005	€27,225
2005	Carr Communications	Effective Communication with Company Registration Office (CRO) clients	€38,722
2006	Brindley	Advertising increase in National Minimum Wage	€23,635
2006	Q4 Public Relations	Media and communications advisor in respect of Interim NCA	€108,900
2006	Carr Communications	Effective Communication with Company Registration Office (CRO) clients	€33,123
2007	The Media Group	To devise, implement & manage a national promotion & advertising campaign across a range of media for the ICT Audits Programme for Small Business in Ireland	€135,000 inclusive of VAT
2007	Leo Burnett	Advertising increase in National Minimum Wage	€50,163
2007	Q4 Public Relations	Media and communications advisor in respect of Interim NCA1 January to 30 April 2007	€36,300
	Carr Communications	Effective Communication with Company Registration Office (CRO) clients	€45,624
2007	Keating and Associates Corporate Communications Consultants	Public Relations and Media Consultants Advice regarding and development of content for the NERA website	€46,734.43

Departmental Staff.

443. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33567/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): At any one time during the period concerned there has been one Press Officer/Advisor in my Department. Four separate individuals have filled the post during that time including the present incumbent. The Press Advisor is paid at the salary scale of Principal Officer which ranged from €46,222.00 — €55,943.39 in 1997 to €82,016 — €101,446 in 2007.

Departmental Expenditure.

444. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for

whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33582/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): My Department has arrangements in place with two credit card companies to issue charge cards to officials who travel on official business on a regular basis. This facility is available to staff as an alternative to using their personal credit cards for official business purposes. The charge cards are generally used to cover costs such as hotel accommodation and train fares. At present, 57 staff of my Department hold charge cards under this arrangement, although some staff continue to use their personal credit cards for business related transactions.

Staff who are issued with charge cards under the arrangement outlined above hold individual accounts with the issuing credit card company. They are responsible for clearing the amounts incurred on their accounts, including any interest charged. Therefore, my Department does not directly incur costs in relation to purchases or interest on credit or charge cards. Staff are

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

entitled to reclaim travel, subsistence and other official expenses from my Department in accordance with civil service regulations. Expenses of this nature are paid directly to the officers concerned who may use the refunds to settle their credit card accounts.

My Department pays Government Stamp Duty on credit cards used for official transactions. The total cost of Stamp Duty paid on credit cards from 2000 to the present in 2007 is set out on the table. The amounts on the table include some costs associated with the processing of Stamp Duty payments.

Year	Amount
	€
2000	€1,923.65
2001	€2,418.85
2002	€2,166.00
2003	€3,815.00
2004	€4,761.74
2005	€6,697.74
2006	€4,700.00
2007 to date	€3,896.82

445. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33597/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): It is estimated that the cost of photography for all the Ministers in my Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 was as follows:

Year	Total
2007	5,989.18
2006	2,830.35
2005	6,212.38
2004	4,807.03
2003	4,836.55
2002	9,226.51
2001	13,393.90
2000	8,618.63
1999	13,538.71
1998	36,737.25
1997	21,207.47

446. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997

to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33612/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): I have had no make-up costs since my appointment as Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

447. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33627/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): I assume that the Deputy is seeking details of the amount spent by my Department on official entertainment for each of the years in question. Official entertainment includes the hosting of official lunches, dinners and receptions and is governed by Department of Finance guidelines.

The amount spent by my Department on official entertainment for each year from 1997 to the present is set out on the table. Expenditure for 2004 includes a sum of €268,357.49 in respect of functions associated with Ireland's Presidency of the EU.

Year	Amount
1997	IR£43,275.01
1998	IR£40,811.73
1999	IR£45,007.41
2000	IR£45,680.63
2001	IR£72,212.03
2002	€75,765.79
2003	€47,953.76
2004	€307,938.78
2005	€46,262.07
2006	€51,912.70
2007	€43,596.45

Departmental Communications.

448. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33642/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Government Information Service supplies my Department and my Press Office with news headlines each day in electronic format and this information is forwarded to me as necessary.

Official Engagements.

449. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33657/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): As a general rule I am accompanied by my press officer on official visits. On occasions when not so accompanied, I am in contact with him.

Departmental Transport.

450. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33672/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): I am assuming the Deputy is referring to the cost of providing transport which is supplied directly by my Department and is not referring to the cost of public or commercial transport such as air travel and taxis. The position is that my Department does not supply official cars or other forms of transport to Ministers of State or their staff. Ministers of State use their private cars and receive mileage allowances based on recorded usage. My Department also pays the salaries of drivers who are engaged by the Ministers of State for the duration of their term of office.

Staff in Ministers of State's Offices are entitled to claim mileage allowances in respect of travel undertaken in their private vehicles in accordance with normal civil service travel guidelines.

451. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the cost of him using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to Ministers of State and staff for the same period. [33687/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): I assume that the Deputy's question refers to bus and rail travel. However, in the time available to me, it has not been possible to compile the information sought by the Deputy. I have asked my officials to review the Department's records as quickly as possible and as soon as the information becomes available I will communicate it to the Deputy.

Departmental Communications.

452. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if his Department carries news summaries on its

internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33717/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): My Department does not carry news summaries on its internal web.

Departmental Expenditure.

453. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33732/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): Since my appointment as Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in September 2004, the Department has supplied me with 1 mobile phone, 1 Blackberry phone and 1 in-car phone. The annual cost of those phones since my appointment in September 2004 is as follows:

Year	€
2004	511.31
2005	4,938.56
2006	3,682.97
2007 to date	3,002.00

454. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33747/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The advisers appointed by me directly have each been provided with a mobile phone, and one of them with a blackberry also, by the Department. The annual cost to the Department of providing those mobile phones, since my appointment as Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in September 2004, was as follows:

Year	€
2004	1,516.34
2005	12,321.62
2006	17,721.96
2007 to date	12,770.01

Departmental Transport.

455. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34092/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): Having regard to the component parts of the Deputy's question I assume that the information sought relates to the hire of private modes of transport and does not include the cost of taxis or scheduled air travel. In the time available, my officials have identified the cost of private car hire charged to my Office from 2001 to date. Details are not readily available prior to 2001. The costs so identified are set out in the table.

These costs relate to the use of cars on official trips abroad. Cars are typically used in these circumstances to transport Ministers and accompanying officials to and from airports, hotels and official engagements. The hire of cars for official visits abroad is organised by the Department of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, I am not aware of the precise arrangements relating to car hire, including tendering procedures, which may have applied. My officials are continuing to review whether any other modes of private transport were hired for my office. I will write to the Deputy shortly, outlining the results of this review.

Year	Cost of Car Hire
	€
2001	25,388.91
2002	26,596.30
2003	6,074.59
2004	17,190.07
2005	17,190.75
2006	8,195.13
2007 to date	3,761.47

Grant Payments.

456. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the amount of grant aid and assistance made available to a company (details supplied) in County Galway since it began operating in 2002; the conditions that applied to such grants; and if the company fulfilled the conditions attached to such grants. [34114/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): I am informed by IDA Ireland that the amount of grant aid paid to the company in question since 2002 is €7,391,590.

I understand that the grants were subject to standard conditions which have been fulfilled by the company to date. I should point out that these are day to day operational matters for IDA Ireland and I do not have any role in the day to day operational matters of the agency.

Decentralisation Programme.

457. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if the NSAI is moving to Arklow as intended; the number of staff who have applied to move to Arklow; and when the NSAI move will take place. [34130/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): Under the Government's decentralisation programme the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is due to relocate to Arklow, Co. Wicklow. Ten staff within the NSAI have formally indicated a willingness to decentralise to Arklow. The current NSAI implementation plan anticipates a target date of April 2009 as the completion date for its decentralisation programme; however, this is highly dependent on the resolution of matters at central level concerning the transfer of staff within the public service and other staffing related issues. The accommodation requirements for the NSAI in Arklow are being addressed by the OPW but to date there has been no progress in identifying and securing suitable office accommodation in the Arklow area.

Work Permits.

458. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the position in relation to an application by a person (details supplied) in County Cork for a work permit. [34207/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Employment Permits Section of my Department has informed me that an application was received on behalf of the named individual. I am pleased to advise that a work permit has now issued in this case.

Departmental Communications.

459. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34221/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): There are 89 staff in my Department who are provided with a BlackBerry device. A further 88 laptops have been assigned to staff which provide them with

remote access to Departmental systems, including e-mail.

460. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34236/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): There are over 200 electronic databases in use throughout my Department. They support a variety of functions which range from small and uncomplicated databases (e.g. internal telephone directory) to large and complex corporate data repositories that support high volume processing (e.g. Patents Office Administration System).

About ten electronic databases contain personal client information such as PPS numbers, date-of-birth, names addresses, etc. With the exception of one database which is operated on our behalf by the Centre for Management and Organisation Development (CMOD) within the Department of Finance, none of these databases are wholly or even partly operated by external organisations or individuals. Instead, all are hosted and operated solely within the secure confines of this Department. In terms of security, it is the Department's policy that such databases continue to be managed internally unless an externally managed service can match or even surpass the Department's security controls.

In common with many organisations, my Department's IT Unit uses highly reputable 3rd party contractors to provide specialist, technical support services. From time to time it is necessary to provide access to these 3rd party contractors in order for them to carry out technical repairs or modifications to databases, but such access is given in a controlled manner and in line with agreed procedures and restrictions.

461. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34251/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): Under the Department of Finance's circular 16/97, my Department is obliged to report to the IT Vote Control Section of the Department of Finance on all significant ICT Projects it undertakes. This reporting requirement includes the provision of information regarding the projected cost, time-scale and identifiable benefits to be achieved as a result of the implementation of any such project. Also, to ensure proper governance, control and prioritisation, where the anticipated budget for any ICT project exceeds €25,000, a formal Project Proposal must be put before my own Department's ICT Steering Group for approval. According to my Department's records, the details of such projects undertaken in my Department since 1st January 2004, are set out in the table below.

Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment ICT Projects

Project Name / Description	Start Date	Estimated Cost	Estimated End Date	Actual Cost	Actual End Date	Comments
Patents Office Redesign of Website	Feb 2006	€ * 99,000	Dec 2007	€ * 99,000	Dec 2007	* There were a number of elements to this project — all of which were contracted for individually on a single figure cost basis. The final cost is in line with all work contracted for.
Patents Office. NET	June 06	184,701	Dec 06	* 184,701	Est Q2 2008	* This is a single price contract and as such the final cost will be the original estimated cost. This project is currently undergoing User Acceptance Testing and is expected to go live in Q2 2008. The delay is a result of additional development work, which was carried out by the developers at no cost to the Department, in order to enhance the quality of the system.
Patents Office Online Journal	May 06	42,649	July 06	42,649	Oct 06	The delay was due to additional time required by the external developers to develop the system.
Introduction of Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) in new decentralised office in Carlow.	11/05/07	149,847	02/07/07	149,847	30/07/07	Construction delays resulted in a revised project completion date
Peoplesoft	May 2003	330,000	May 2004	380,289	May 04	Original Peoplesoft was implemented on the Department's own infrastructure. It is now centrally hosted by CMOD and DETE pays an annual licensing and support fee. Includes online claims facility.
Redundancy Payments System	2003	1,000,000	Q1 2005	910,879	May 05	
E-Mail Archiving System	March 2004	81,520	June 2004	81,523	June 2004	
Correspondence Tracking System	May 2005	30,000	Dec 2005	19,245	Est Mar 2008	Application to be deployed through the Department's re-designed Intranet

Project Name / Description	Start Date	Estimated Cost	Estimated End Date	Actual Cost	Actual End Date	Comments
WEB Services — Import Licensing Application (transferring licence information to Brussels)	Dec 2006	€ 17,134	June 2007	€ 23,917	Sept 2007	Project scope changed by Brussels
Intranet Application	July 2007	238,000	Mar 2008	Est.240,776	Est Mar 2008	Actual time taken was a result of lack of resources in-house (to perform testing, etc.). Costs rose as the developer took on additional tasks arising from lack of in-house resources.
Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement — Website Redesign	March 2005	25,000	July 2005	44,700	January 2007	
Companies Registration Office — Electronic companies annual return	1/4/2005	200,000	30/3/2006	190,926	1/7/2006	Contract extended due to additional development needed for partial decentralisation
Companies Registration Office — Registration Services System Version 6	1/4/2004	1,100,000	30/3/2007	1,132,956	ongoing	
Companies Registration Office — Online services	1/4/2004	1,295,000	30/3/2007	1,431,448	ongoing	Contract extended due to additional development needed for partial decentralisation
Labour Relation Commission — Case Management System	March 2004	410,000	Nov 2004	263,000	Nov 2004	Less development work required.
Labour Relation Commission — Website Development	July 2005	32,600	Dec 2005	32,600	Dec 2005	
Employment Appeals Website Development Phase I	Nov 2005	48,000	March 2006	48,000	April 2006	
Employment Appeals Website Development Phase II	Mar 2006	40,000	Sept 2006	46,750	Dec 2007	Additional functionality developed
Upgrade to Wide Area Network	Nov 2006	243,000	Nov 2009	243,000	N/A	Fixed price contract based on an agreed number of days consulting and associated deliverables.
ICT Security review	Dec 2006	122,000	N/A	122,000	Sept 2007	

All costs are inclusive of V.A.T.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

462. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34266/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The impact of carbon dioxide emissions caused by flights involving Ministers of the Department is not accounted for at present by my Department. However, the Department will take whatever steps are necessary to introduce a carbon offsetting scheme for official air travel when such a scheme has been developed and announced by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Data Protection.

463. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34281/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): My Department currently employs a suite of technologies aimed at ensuring that its IT systems and electronic data are protected against external attacks. Furthermore, my Department takes the view that ensuring high levels of information security is a task that requires ongoing and careful vigilance. To this end, my Department has recently completed a comprehensive information security review. The recommendations of this review were agreed by the Management Board and are currently being implemented as a departmental priority.

Furthermore, my Department is appointing an Information Security Officer who will focus on ensuring that best practice information security processes and technologies continue to be adopted. An external information security consultant will shortly be appointed and will provide ongoing expert advice and guidance both to the Information Security Officer and more broadly to my Department to ensure that risks to confidential or sensitive data are identified and managed appropriately.

My Department is taking an integrated approach to ensuring its data remains secure. While this takes into account the risks associated with malicious attacks such as hacks, it also incorporates broader steps to ensure that its IT systems and data are secured in a manner that minimises all risks. This involves raising awareness of data protection and information security throughout the Department and its Offices, the adoption of additional technologies which secure and protect data, and improving work practices and processes in order to take full account of the requirements of securing information and data.

Industrial Development.

464. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the steps he is taking to support enterprise development in County Mayo and the western region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34292/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): In response to this question, I am using the Nuts 111 definition of the Western region i.e. Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. State support for enterprise and job creation is channelled through the industrial development agencies. While I may give general policy directives to the agencies under the Industrial Development Acts, I am precluded from giving directives regarding individual undertakings or from giving preference to one area over others.

I have been assured by the agencies under the remit of my Department that they are actively endeavouring to attract new investment, to encourage the start-up of new businesses, to grow existing businesses and to develop the labour market in County Mayo and the Western Region. A high quality urban environment with a critical mass in population, skills and world-class access infrastructure, are critical to prospective investors when they are deciding where to locate. At the end of 2006, there were over 6,000 Enterprise Agency supported full time jobs in county Mayo. During 2006 the County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) in the Western Region have paid out over €1.28m in grant assistance to 114 clients, which in turn has enabled the creation of 228 jobs in the area.

IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland are working closely with local authorities, utility providers and others to maximise the attractiveness of Mayo and the Western region in terms of meeting the needs of potential investors. In addition, FÁS is contributing in a number of ways to enterprise development, including providing a free recruitment service to employers and facilitating and grant aiding the training of those who are in employment with the Competency Development Programme. To enhance the attractiveness of the County for new and expansion projects IDA Ireland is investing significantly in the provision of planned and focused property solutions in the Western Region and specifically in Mayo. IDA is developing world class Business and Technology Parks in both Westport and Castlebar. The medical technologies and pharmaceutical/ food sectors are the largest sectors in Mayo, representing 42% and 34%, respectively of IDA supported employment in the county.

Enterprise Ireland is focused on the creation of new jobs through supporting entrepreneurs setting up new High Potential Start-Up Companies, the retention and creation of new jobs in existing companies and in enhancing the innovation capability of Ireland at a national and regional level

through support of research in companies and third level institutions. The overall aim of Enterprise Ireland's strategy is to transform Irish companies into market focused and innovation driven businesses; and to increase their exports, sales and employment. Enterprise Ireland has approved support for Community owned/led Enterprise Centres in 23 locations in the Western Region, which is helping to provide much needed workspace for new businesses.

Job Creation.

465. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the IDA plans for job creation in Castlebar, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34293/07]

466. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the IDA plans for job creation in Ballina, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34294/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 465 and 466 together.

IDA Ireland is the agency with statutory responsibility for the attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI) to Ireland and its regions. The marketing of individual areas for new or expansion FDI investments and jobs is a day-to-day operational matter for the Agency. While I may give general policy directives to the Agency, I am precluded under the Industrial Development Acts from giving directives regarding individual undertakings or from giving preference to one area over others.

A central goal for IDA Ireland is the achievement of Balanced Regional Development. The National Spatial Strategy provides a framework for the achievement of this goal through the prioritisation of development and investment in gateway towns and hub locations. On this basis, IDA Ireland seeks to attract foreign direct investment into the gateway and hubs, as well as a small number of additional locations, throughout the West. In relation to Mayo, the Agency is actively promoting the linked hubs of Ballina and Castlebar and Westport for additional overseas investment and jobs. IDA Ireland's sectoral emphasis is on attracting new knowledge intensive projects in the Medical Technologies, Life Sciences, Information Communications Technology and International Services sectors.

IDA Ireland continues to work closely with its existing base of overseas companies in County Mayo to encourage them to grow and expand. In addition the Agency is investing significantly in the provision of planned and focused property solutions, tailored to specific key sectoral targets, to attract inward investments to the county.

At present, there are over 3,000 people employed in IDA supported companies in

County Mayo. The recent announcement that Baxter International Inc., a world leading health care company, is to invest more than €75 million over a six year period as part of a strategic programme to introduce new technologies and higher value products to its manufacturing plants in Castlebar and Swinford, is a most welcome development.

I am satisfied that the strategies and policies being pursued by the Industrial Development Agency, together with the roll out of the National Development Plan 2007-2013, will continue to bear fruit in terms of investment and job creation for the people of Mayo.

Management Information Framework System.

467. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34303/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Management Information Framework (MIF) system was introduced as part of the modernisation process in the public service. The key aim of the MIF is to provide improved financial and non-financial management information to enable better decision making and use of resources by Government Departments. The MIF system has demonstrated its effectiveness in my Department, for example, through the provision of monthly expenditure reports to senior managers, in the retrieval of information for Parliamentary Questions and in the preparation of my Department's Annual Output Statement.

Because the MIF was primarily designed to produce improvements of a qualitative nature, my Department does not maintain an estimate of savings directly attributable to the system's use. However, the quality and timeliness of information which the MIF provides serves as a means of highlighting trends in expenditure and alerts senior managers to corrections which may need to be made in areas of expenditure for which they have responsibility. In this context, I am satisfied that the MIF system has proven to be a worthwhile investment in terms of supporting the monitoring and analysis of public expenditure and in capturing the outcomes of this expenditure through performance indicators.

468. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34318/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Management Information Framework (MIF) system was introduced as part of the modernisation process in the public service. The key aim of the MIF is to provide improved financial and non-financial information to managers to enable better decision making and use of resources by Government Departments.

The MIF system has been rolled-out in my Department, although refinements will continue to be made to maximise the potential of the system. A suite of performance indicators has been drawn-up as part of the MIF reporting system. These indicators feed into the Department's Strategy Statement, Annual Report and Annual Output Statement, all of which are laid before the Oireachtas. Progress on the achievement of targets set out in the indicators will also feature in reports to my Department's Management Board on a regular basis.

The financial management system introduced by my Department in 2004 as part of the MIF project incorporates a costing framework that captures expenditure by subhead, Business Unit and expenditure heading. It includes an extensive suite of accounting and financial management reports. Access to the main financial management reports on the system is directly available to Business Units throughout my Department. Data from the system is also used to compile more detailed monthly expenditure reports for my Department's Management Board, to extract information for replies to Parliamentary Questions and to prepare my Department's Annual Output Statement.

Work Permits.

469. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when work permits will issue on behalf of persons (details supplied) in view of the need to employ persons with such experience and having tried unsuccessfully to recruit same here and the need for the company to continue business at its highest level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34363/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that it is not in receipt of current applications for the above named. If applications are submitted, they will be treated on their merits and on a case-by-case basis.

Industrial Development.

470. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the position regarding investment in research and development which is central to improving management and industry for the continuous growth in industry exports and to improve the quality of

business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34405/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The current National Development Plan provides for a step-change increase in the investment in technology, innovation and scientific research. It involves a commitment of €8.2 billion which is planned for the period 2007 to 2013 and aimed at building the skills needed for a modern knowledge-based economy and strengthening Ireland's research base.

For 2008, under the Vote of my Department an amount of over €326 million has been provided for the furtherance of these objectives. The Research and Technology Vote allocation for 2008 will build on an investment of almost €290m in 2007, and represents a €37 million (or 13%) increase on 2007.

This level of investment will allow Ireland to continue to build its research base and improve competitiveness through the development of innovative products and at the same time build the knowledge base that will establish our economy as an attractive place in which to do business in the future. The level of investment involved sends a clear signal to business that this Government is supporting their efforts to develop new products, stay competitive and win new markets and thus make a contribution to providing a sustainable long-term basis for future growth in employment and incomes.

The funding of €326m for Science and Technology announced in the 2008 Budget will be used to fund basic research, to increase in-company research and development, to promote the commercialisation of research and to strengthen the collaboration between industry and the education sector. The aim of building a robust research system will be achieved by building effective collaborative between industry and third level research, helping SMEs to innovate, to stay competitive and by supporting the efforts to bring the outputs of Ireland's growing research base to the marketplace. Three State Agencies — the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland — are responsible for delivering the science and technology strategy to the business and research communities and their 2008 Budgets will reflect the Government's commitment to this area.

In its strategy document "Transforming Irish Industry", launched in October 2007 Enterprise Ireland set its priorities for the period 2008-2012 and among the five key priorities is "driving innovation". In delivering on its Strategy, it is continuing its work with industry, to foster R&D activity both through financial support and advisory assistance. The focus of Enterprise Ireland efforts is to enhance the level of applied research taking place on industrially relevant topics, grow links between enterprise and academia to foster mutually productive relationships and boost the commercialisation of existing and new research. A

portion of this support — provided through the Innovation Management Programme — will impact directly on improving management within its client companies.

A number of new initiatives are being prepared or are already underway to encourage an R&D culture in Irish businesses. In particular over the next few months EI and IDA will launch R&D offerings to companies. These new schemes bring together, under a single heading within each agency, financial supports for company-led research projects, providing an integrated and unified approach capable of meeting company needs flexibly and efficiently.

Another new programme that will be delivered by both agencies is the Competence Centre programme. Competence Centres will be collaborative entities established and led by industry in Ireland and resourced by highly qualified researchers associated with research institutions that are empowered to undertake market focussed strategic R&D for the benefit of industry. A Competence Centre is established when a group of companies come together to define their common research interest and can demonstrate the strategic impact of a Competence Centre on their business area. My Department foresees significant expenditure on new Competence Centres, estimated to be in the range of €1m to €2m annually per centre. EI have identified a number of candidate proposals from industry, and will be making a call to third level institutes early in 2008.

A new programme introduced earlier this year was the Innovation Vouchers programme. This initiative provides €5,000 vouchers to firms which may be used to purchase specialist innovation support from a number of research providers, principally third level institutes. It is an encouragement to small and medium sized enterprises to address a current problem which needs to be confronted, and it provides a gradual introduction to the field of research for companies that may be new to this area.

Encouraging results are being achieved by both Enterprise Ireland and the IDA as a result of the R&D programmes in place to date. For example, expenditure in excess of €2m on R&D activity by Enterprise Ireland assisted companies rose from a base of 21 companies in 2003 to 42 companies in 2007. In addition, Enterprise Ireland client companies spending €100,000 or more on R&D rose from 462 in 2003, to 617 in 2007. Separately, 54 Research and Development projects were supported by the IDA in 2006, the figure for 2007 is projected at about 50 and a similar figure is expected in 2008. Also under Enterprise Ireland's Commercialisation Fund, 140 projects were approved in 2005, rising to 155 in 2006, and a similar number will be funded this year to support and develop programmes with commercial potential.

Work Permits.

471. **Deputy Mary O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the outcome of the application for a two year green card for a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [34439/07]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Employment Permit Section of my Department has received an application on behalf of the named individual and a decision on this application will be made within the next week.

Sport and Recreational Development.

472. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the available grants for people who are interested in building leisure facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33836/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): Under the sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, funding is allocated to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. Through the sports capital programme this Government has invested considerable sums in important sporting infrastructure in every county of Ireland. Since 1998 a total of €568m has been allocated in sports capital funding to 6,716 sports projects across the country. Additionally over €107m in capital funding has been provided towards the redevelopment of Croke Park. In 2007 alone €85m was allocated towards 935 separate projects.

The date of the next round of the Programme has 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.

Energy Resources.

473. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33274/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): There are currently three buildings occupied by my Department, two of which are located in Dublin at Kildare Street and South Frederick Street. As my Department is not the main tenant in either of the Dublin buildings I am not in a position to say what percentage of energy supplied is from renewable sources.

The third building occupied by my Department is at Fossa in County Kerry, which accommodates an advance party of 70 staff transferred during the last 18 months in the context of decentralis-

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

ation of my Department to Killarney. My Department is currently in the process of switching over to Airtricity for this building. This will provide wind-generated electricity to this building. The energy supplies to the agencies under the aegis of my Department are a day-to-day matter for the agencies themselves.

Departmental Expenditure.

474. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33332/07]

475. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33347/07]

476. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33362/07]

498. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33727/07]

499. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33742/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 474 to 476, inclusive, 498 and 499 together.

The amount of €28,760 was paid directly by my Department in respect of mobile telephone bills for the Department and the National Archives, in 2006. My Department does not retain information which allows it to identify the cost of data charges and roaming charges separately. The amount of €31,420 was paid directly by my Department in respect of mobile telephone bills

for my Department and the National Archives to date in 2007. In 2006 and to date in 2007, there have been no payments made in the form of expenses in respect of mobile telephone bills.

The amount of €208 has been paid in respect of two mobile telephones assigned to me by my Department since my appointment as Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism in June 2007. There are 4 members of staff appointed directly by me in the Department all of whom have been assigned mobile telephones and various IT related equipment and the cost to date of these services since my appointment as Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism in June 2007 is €4,600.

Departmental Reports.

477. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when the value for money review on the swimming pools programme was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33391/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): The Value for Money and Policy Review Report of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme is being finalised at present. The Report is examining, among other things, how the programme has worked to date, what has been achieved and what changes, if any, are required to ensure its effective and efficient delivery.

Following consideration of the recommendations, it is my intention to publish the Report and to launch a new round of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme. Until such time as the recommendations are assessed and implemented, it is not possible to indicate what savings, if any, might arise in the administration of the programme. There is a provision of €184m in the National Development Plan, 2007-2013 in respect of the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme.

478. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when the value for money review on the Irish Sports Council was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33392/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): It is expected that the Value for Money Review on the Irish Sports Council will be completed shortly. The purpose of value for money reviews is to ascertain if value for money is being achieved, having regard to the aims and objectives of the organisation or scheme under review. At this time it is not possible to estimate, what savings, if any may be generated following the review.

479. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when the value for money review on the Irish Film Board was com-

pleted; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33393/07]

480. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when the value for money review on the arts and cultural capital enhancement scheme was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33394/07]

481. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when the value for money review of the Arts Council will be completed; the anticipated savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33395/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 479 to 481, inclusive, together.

It is expected that the Value for Money Reviews on the Film Board, the Arts and Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme (ACCESS) and the Arts Council will be completed in 2008. The purpose of the reviews is to ascertain if value for money is being achieved, having regard to the aims and objectives of the organization or scheme under review. At this stage it would be premature to comment on the outcome of the reviews until they have been completed.

482. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when the value for money review of the horse and greyhound fund will be completed; the anticipated savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33396/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): The value for money review of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund is expected to commence in 2008. At this stage no precise date has yet been set for the completion of the review. The purpose of value for money reviews is to ascertain if value for money is being achieved, having regard to the aims and objectives of the organisation or scheme under review. At this time it is not possible to comment on the outcome of the review.

Departmental Estimates.

483. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the budgets of the bodies, boards, authorities, committees, commissions, agencies and quangos under his remit between the years of 1997 and 2007 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33500/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): The budgetary information sought by the Deputy in respect of the Agencies operating under the aegis of my Department is set out in my Department's Estimates, which are published annually as part of the Estimates Volumes. The Estimate Volumes are available on the Department of Finance website www.finance.gov.ie. Subhead D3 of the Department's Vote aggregates the Estimates provision for the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Chester Beatty Library, National Concert Hall and Crawford Gallery. These agencies will be notified before Christmas of their individual allocations for 2008.

Departmental Staff.

484. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33502/07]

486. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33532/07]

488. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33562/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 484, 486 and 488 together.

There is currently one Press Adviser at Principal Officer Higher level appointed by me in June 2007 and a Higher Executive Officer who acts as Press Officer in my Department. They are both paid at the civil service rates appropriate for those levels. There are also two executive officers, one on a worksharing basis, employed in my Department's Press Office. Prior to June 2007, my Department engaged PR consultants on a contract basis which terminated in October 2007.

The work of the Press Office includes, inter alia, the promotion of my Department's policies and achievements, handling queries from the media on matters within my remit and acting, as required, as spokesperson for me and my Department. It also involves preparing and editing speeches and press releases and dealing with requests for interviews, articles, messages etc for a range of publications.

All staff in my Department's Press Office receive daily press cuttings, taken from national

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

daily and Sunday newspapers, in electronic format, provided by Media World Limited. The press cuttings, which are monitored by the Press Officer, are circulated to me, to my Special Advisor, to my Private Secretary and to members of the Management Advisory Committee. The daily press cuttings may also be accessed on-line, on the Media World website, by staff who have been provided with a username and password by my Department's Press Office.

My Department's Press Office also intermittently receives press cuttings from regional publications, also provided in electronic format by Media World Ltd. These may be forwarded, at the discretion of the Press Officer, to senior or middle management if an article is judged to be of interest to their area of responsibility. The

Press Officer also receives broadcast monitoring email notifications from Media World Ltd of television and radio broadcasts relevant to arts, sport or tourism.

My Department is invoiced monthly by Media World Ltd for these services. The cost for daily press cuttings is €1,452.00 (inc. VAT) per month. The cost for regional press cuttings is €1.60 + 21% VAT per cutting. The cost for broadcast monitoring is €78.65 (inc VAT) per month. In addition my Department requires a licence from Newspaper Licensing Ireland Limited in order to circulate or copy this information. The cost for this licence, covering Irish and British newspapers, is €575.03 from April 2007 to April 2008.

The total cost of the engagement of PR consultants for the Department from June 2002 to October 2007 was €354,137 as set out in the Tabular Statement.

		Year	€
Fleishman Hilliard Bowe	PR Consultants for Department	2002	€18,731
Murray Consultants	PR Consultants for Department	2003-2006	€223,611
O'Herlihy Communications	PR Consultants for Department	2006	€56,595
O'Herlihy Communications	PR Consultants for Department	2007 Contract terminated (Oct 07)	€55,200
Total			354,137

Departmental Expenditure.

485. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33517/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tables.

Daily Newspapers

Newspaper	Daily Quantity	Annual Cost (Approx)
Irish Times	45	19,213
Irish Independent	19	8,163
Financial Times	2	1,000
Racing Post	2	1,325
Evening Herald	1	332
Star	1	393
Daily Mirror	1	302
Daily Mail	1	175
Irish Examiner	9	3,913
London Times	1	238
London Independent	1	275
TOTAL	83	35,329

Weekly Newspapers

Newspaper	Weekly Quantity	Annual Cost (Approx)
Irish Field	1	161
Saturday Sun	1	52
Daily Mail Saturday	1	52
Greyhound Weekly	1	104
Foinse	1	78
Sunday Independent	1	125
Sunday Tribune	1	130
Sunday World	1	114
Sunday Business Post	1	114
Sunday Times	1	130
Sunday Mirror	1	62
Sunday Mail	1	104
Star on Sunday	1	94
News of the World	1	68
TOTAL	14	1,390

There are three daily newspapers and one weekly newspaper provided to me from the list above at a total annual cost of approximately €1,620. There is no Minister of State assigned to my Department.

Question No. 486 answered with Question No. 484.

Consultancy Contracts.

487. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number, cost

and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33547/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): The information sought by the Deputy in relation to my Department since its establishment in June, 2002 is set out in the table.

Press/PR Company	Project/Responsibility	Year	Fees
			€
Mahon O'Neill	Media relations to support launch of "Counties in Time" CD by the National Archives	2003	6,331
Mahon O'Neill	PR work in relation to the launch of the online exhibition entitled "Views of Four Presidencies" by the National Archives	2004	7,792
Mahon O'Neill	National Media campaign across print and broadcast media in relation to 1901/1911 Census Project by the National Archives	2005	6,331
Menyma Public Relations	PR for relaunch of Afterdark Programme and for two specific Afterdark events, National Museum of Ireland	2003	4,276
Brenda O'Hanlon	National Library PR	2002	13,303
Brenda O'Hanlon	National Library PR	2003	23,312
Brenda O'Hanlon	National Library PR	2004	24,046
Brenda O'Hanlon	National Library PR	2005	8,140
Kate Bowe PR Ltd	PR services ReJoyce	2004	4,800
Kate Bowe PR Ltd	Irish Festival in China provision of PR Management Services	2003-2004	72,834
Sheenagh Gillen	Relations Management Services for Irish China Festival	2004	7,000
Audrey Behan	Press Assistant Services	2004	3,200
Gerry Lundberg	Beckett Centenary Festival	2006	31,492
Siobhán Colgan	EU Presidency Cultural Programme PR Management Services	2003-2004	32,778
Fleishman Hilliard Bowe	PR services ReJoyce	2004	127,141
Fleishman Hilliard Bowe	PR Consultants for Department	2002	18,731
Murray Consultants	PR Consultants for Department	2003-2006	223,611
O'Herlihy Communications	PR Consultants for Department	2006	56,595
O'Herlihy Communications	PR Consultants for Department	2007 Contract terminated (Oct 07)	55,200
Total			726,913

The above information includes details of public relations consultants employed by the National Museum of Ireland and the National Library of Ireland up to May 2005. These bodies were part of my Department until they were established on a statutory basis in May 2005.

Question No. 488 answered with Question No. 484.

Departmental Expenditure.

489. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33577/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): It is my Department's policy to have in place an official credit card account under which credit cards are issued to the Minister(s), Private Secretary to the Minister and certain senior officials. As of now, eight cards have been issued. However, I do not use an official credit card. One of the cards issued under the account is for Departmental use in the case of exceptional purchases or bookings where a credit card is required by the supplier and can only be used with the prior approval of the Finance Officer.

The total costs incurred on these credit cards between June and December 2006 was €7,965.29, while expenditure to date in 2007 is €28,579.34. No interest charges have been incurred on the Department's credit card account.

Prior to June 2006, the arrangements in place for the provision of credit/charge cards to Ministers and Departmental officials was on the basis

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

of individual cardholders being personally liable for all charges incurred. Where expenditure was incurred for official purposes, such costs could be reclaimed by the cardholder in accordance with Department of Finance rules on travel, subsistence, entertainment etc. As charges incurred on all such cards were the specific responsibility of the cardholder and not the Department, records are not available on the overall usage of these cards prior to June 2006.

490. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33592/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): The cost incurred by my Department to date in 2007 for services provided by photographers is €11,069.56. In previous years it was standard practice for photographers to be sourced indirectly by my Department's PR consultants. It has not been possible to isolate the costs attributable to photography services within the consultancy fees in the time available.

491. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33607/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): No cost has been incurred in respect of make-up for me at any time.

492. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33622/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): The expenditure incurred by my Department, including the National Archives, on official entertainment since its establishment in June 2002 is set out below.

Year	€
2002	29,940
2003	63,428
2004	89,310
2005	50,576
2006	55,842
2007 to date	49,367

The National Museum and National Library were part of my Department until May 2005 when they were established as separate entities but the

expenditure by those bodies in that period is not available in my Department. The figure for 2006 reflects the fact that during that year, Ireland held the Presidency of the European Union.

Government Information Services.

493. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33637/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): My Department does not receive a daily summary of stories from Government Information Services in either written, verbal or electronic format. Staff in my Department's Press Office are on an email circulation list and receive press releases issued by other state organisations, including Government Information Services, at the same time as they are issued to the media.

Official Engagements.

494. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33652/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): My press advisor accompanies me to official Departmental events where there is a media interest. He has been present at all official visits since my appointment as Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism.

Departmental Travel.

495. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33667/07]

496. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the cost of him using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to junior Ministers and staff for the same period. [33682/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 495 and 496 together.

Since my appointment as Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism in June 2007 I have incurred

no costs in respect of public transport usage. No Minister of State has been appointed to my Department.

Departmental Communications.

497. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his Department carries news summaries on their internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33712/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): My Department does not carry news summaries on its internal web.

Questions No. 498 and 499 answered with Question No. 474.

Sports Capital Programme.

500. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when he will seek applications for the 2008 sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34051/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): The sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, allocates funding to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. The date of the next round of the Programme has 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.

Departmental Transport.

501. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34087/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to transport hire since the establishment of the Department in June, 2002 is set out below and is in respect of car hire for the Minister and accompanying staff while abroad and in the absence of a State car. There was no car hire for staff of my Department over the period in question. All arrangements in respect of car hire abroad are made by the Department of Foreign Affairs on behalf of my Department and the costs of such car hire are recouped by my

Department to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Year	
2002	Nil

2003

Location	Cost
	€
San Francisco	1,248
Brussels	187
Manchester	905
London	991
Edinburgh	2,596
London	1,239
Paris	1,077
Total 2003	8,243

2004

Location	Cost
	€
London	521
London	488
Singapore	926
London	454
London	822
Brussels	300
London	1,442
Singapore	58
London	1,143
Brussels	611
Lisbon	1,160
Total 2004	7,925

2005

Location	Cost
	€
London	957
Budapest	432
Brussels	363
London	1277
Copenhagen	3,096
London	388
London	1,383
London	544
New York	2,913
London	2,406

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

Location	Cost
	€
London	6,758
Los Angeles	7,920
London	551
London	392
London	397
Total 2005	29,777

2006

Location	Cost
	€
Paris	2,304
London	1,447
London	472
Athens	2,900
London	7,592
Cardiff	846
London	407
London	1,208
London	2,971
London	204
Berlin	2,436
Cannes	9,616
Newfoundland	1,031
Paris	3,396
Total 2006	36,830

2007 to date

Location	Cost
	€
United Kingdom	6,994
London	1,849
Total 2007	10,115

Sports Capital Programme.

502. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the reason for the anomaly where a sports club that has qualified for a sports grant under the lottery funds for sports facilities but is unable to make the financial commitment to the lease without being able to draw down the lottery grant assistance; and the action being taken to address this anomaly. [34128/07]

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 com-

munity organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. Under the terms and conditions of the programme, an applicant (other than those solely seeking sports equipment) must provide evidence of freehold ownership of the property or evidence that they hold a lease of twenty-two years or more with at least fifteen years left to run. These are minimum requirements of the programme. These conditions are in place to ensure that the grantee is in a position to commit to the facility remaining in sporting use for at least fifteen years.

In addition, grantees in receipt of funding over a specified level must enter into a Deed of Covenant and Charge in order to protect the Minister's interest and ensure that the property remains in sporting use. This places a charge on the grantee's property and in this regard, my Department is advised by the Chief State Solicitor's Office (CSSO) that a lease of twenty-one years is required in law to create a legal estate capable of supporting a charge.

The Department, acting on the advice of the CSSO, requires a twenty-two year lease because where a lease is required to be registered in the Property Registration Authority, and a solicitor fails to register the lease in time and part of the twenty-one year term then expires, the Property Registration Authority will not register the lease, and the charge that is required cannot be secured. It is to ensure, therefore, that the lease may be registered within the timeframe required, so that the charge can be secured, that my Department has requested a lease of not less than twenty-two years. In this regard, it provides a safeguard for organisations that apply for capital funding under the Sports Capital Programme. It should be noted that these requirements are not applicable if the application is for a sports equipment grant only.

Departmental Communications.

503. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34216/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): A total of 28 staff in my Department have been provided with mobile email devices. In addition, the National Archives, which is also part of my Department, has provided such devices to 13 members of its staff.

504. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34231/07]

507. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34276/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 504 and 507 together.

A total of 23 databases are currently in operational use in my Department. Of these, 18 databases are operated entirely by my Department and two are operated entirely outside of the Department by the Oireachtas. The three remaining databases are hosted by other civil service organisations, that is to say they are essentially owned by those organisations but my Department can access them in order to perform services and to provide information which is particular to my Department alone. In addition, the National Archives, an institution which is also part of my Department, presently has twelve database systems in use in its office which are all fully operated and managed within the National Archives IT network.

I am satisfied that the best possible preventive and security measures are in place to restrict external access to the information in all of the databases as outlined. These measures include software facilities such as 'firewall' protection systems and login and password security, both to access the network and then to access the databases available on the network. There is also comprehensive protection against computer viruses and so-called 'spam' emailing. Access to the databases and to any personal data therein is limited only to those staff authorised to carry out duties in relation to such data.

505. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34246/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): My Department's IT services assist the other divisions in the Department in meeting their objectives and providing the best possible service to the public. To that end, while no major information technology-only projects have been undertaken in that period, the IT Unit has had a significant role in the various projects undertaken by the Department which have had a far wider context than IT. During the period in question those projects include decentralisation and new financial and human resource management systems.

The National Archives, an institution which is also part of my Department, currently has one major information technology project in progress. This project, which was launched in December 2005, involves the digitisation and making available online (in searchable format) of the 1901 and 1911 Census of Ireland forms and information. The project, which is being carried out in partnership with the Library and Archives Canada (LAC) is due for completion by end June 2009. The first phase of the project, data for Dublin in 1911, was launched on 3rd December 2007. The overall cost, including application development, hardware, hosting and contextual/historical research is estimated at €4,600,000.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

506. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34261/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): On foot of the commitment in the Programme for Government on carbon offsetting official air travel, my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr. Gormley, is developing a scheme for use by all Government Departments and bodies under their aegis.

The proposed scheme, details of which will be announced shortly, will apply retrospectively to air travel since this Government came into office. I intend to co-operate fully with the scheme when it comes into effect.

Question No. 507 answered with Question No. 504.

Management Information Framework System.

508. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34299/07]

509. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34313/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 508 and 509 together.

My Department introduced a new financial management system in support of the Manage-

[Deputy Séamus Brennan.]

ment Information Framework System in March, 2005, procured through the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform Financial Shared Services facility in Killarney, Co. Kerry. It is now an integral part of the Finance function of my Department and provides comprehensive financial information to senior management on the key activities of my Department. The system provides financial information on a series of performance indicators that have been developed as part of the Statement of Strategy, which is revised every 3 years, and for the preparation of the Annual Output Statement which forms part of the Estimates process and which was introduced for the first time in 2007 in the context of the examination by the Dail Select Committee of my Department's Vote.

It is not possible to estimate how much money has been saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the system. However, its introduction has resulted in a significant improvement in the timeliness and quality of financial information available and a saving of time and effort in producing important financial reports such as the Annual Appropriation Account.

Sports Capital Programme.

510. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his attention has been drawn to the fact that serious delays have occurred in the payment of national lottery grants under the sports capital programme due to delays in the general processing of the legal formalities and in particular in drafting, agreeing and completing the priorities agreements as between him and the relevant financial institutions; and if he will take steps to expedite the process. [34415/07]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Séamus Brennan): Under the sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, funding is allocated to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. Since 1998 the Government has allocated a total of €568m in sports capital funding to 6,716 sports projects across the country. Additionally over €107m in capital funding has been provided towards the redevelopment of Croke Park. In 2007 alone €85m was allocated towards 935 separate projects.

The Deputy will appreciate that the scale of these investments warrants protection of the State's interests. Under the terms and conditions of the programme, an applicant (other than those solely seeking sports equipment) must provide evidence of freehold ownership of the property or evidence that they hold a lease of twenty-two years or more with at least fifteen years left to run. These are minimum requirements of the programme. These conditions are in place to

ensure that the grantee is in a position to commit to the facility remaining in sporting use for at least fifteen years. Priority agreements are used to ensure that, where the club or organisation has debts to lending institutions, the Minister's investment and any other debts are listed in order of rank or priority.

In relation to expediting this process, I understand that the Chief State Solicitor's Office issues a pack to all solicitors acting on behalf of grantees. This pack includes a sample priority agreement. When the documents are returned they are checked by the Chief State Solicitor's Office and if in order the deeds can be sent to the Department for sealing. A proportionate amount of time is required for legal documents to be checked by the Chief State Solicitor's Office. If the documents are not in order the solicitors will be notified. There can be a number of delays in putting these agreements in place such as delays in the submission of fully completed paper work or difficulties in agreeing the order of priority of the club's debts.

My officials have a very good working relationship with the Chief State Solicitor's Office and together we are constantly trying to make improvements to the operation of the programme to make it more user friendly, while always conscious of the need to protect what are significant Government investments. If there are particular projects of which the Deputy is aware where a serious delay is occurring I would be happy to have the matter investigated and a response provided to the Deputy.

Pensions Provisions.

511. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if, in view of the fact that one in five pensioners are at risk of poverty, under the programme for Government undertaking to increase the basic State pension to at least €300 by 2012, he will ensure that this provision is front loaded and not drip fed at the rate of €20 per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33242/07]

514. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs his plans to reduce the discrepancy between the shortfall between the additional cost for older persons, over 70 living alone which result in a weekly shortfall of €47 to €90 as compared to a €9 to €62 shortfall in the same period for couples of a similar age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33245/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 511 and 514 together.

The Programme for Government features a number of commitments in relation to social welfare pensions, including a commitment to increase the basic State pension to €300 per week by 2012. Progress towards this target was

announced in last week's Budget, where the State Pension (Contributory) was increased by €14 per week, bringing it up to €223.30 per week. An increase of €12 per week was granted on the State Pension (Non-Contributory), bringing it up to €212 per week.

Over the last number of Budgets, pension increases have been well ahead of inflation ensuring that not only is the real value of pensions maintained but that they are significantly improved in real terms. This is clearly evident in the recently published EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) which showed that the position for older people improved significantly from 2005 to 2006, with the 'at risk of poverty' rate falling from 20.1% to 13.6%. Furthermore, the number of people aged 65 and over at risk of poverty was significantly lower than for the general population, where 17% are considered to be at risk of poverty.

While various studies use different measures of calculating income needs the policy in relation to support for pensioners has been, for many years, to give priority to increasing the rates of pension payable to all pensioners rather than targeting individual groups such as those that are living alone. The most recent SILC figures show that this approach has resulted in a very significant reduction in the poverty risk for older people in general. This approach was continued in Budget 2008 and the position will be kept under review.

512. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs his commitment under the programme for Government to increasing the qualified adult allowance rates to the level of the full State pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33243/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to complete the process begun in Budget 2007 to raise the qualified adult increase for the spouses and partners (age 66 or over) of contributory pensioners to the level of the State Pension (Non-Contributory). Spouses and partners of non-contributory pensioners may receive a pension in their own right at age 66. In Budget 2008, I was pleased to provide an increase of up to €27 per week in the qualified adult rate where the qualified adult is aged 66 or over. This brings the maximum rate to €200 per week which represents 94% of the target in the Programme for Government. It is my intention to complete the process of aligning the rates in question within three years.

Social Insurance.

513. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if social insurance credits will be provided to those who have had breaks in their working lives, particularly those who have been absent from the workforce due

to caring responsibilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33244/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The social welfare pension rights of those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties are protected by the Home-maker's scheme which was introduced in 1994. The scheme allows up to 20 years spent caring for children or incapacitated adults to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes. However, the scheme will not of itself qualify a person for a pension. The standard qualifying conditions, which require a person to enter insurance 10 years before pension age, pay a minimum of 260 contributions at the correct rate and achieve a yearly average of at least 10 contributions on their record from the time they enter insurance until they reach pension age, must also be satisfied. The minimum paid contributions required will increase to 520 in 2012. These conditions are designed to ensure that those qualifying for pensions have had an adequate and sustained commitment to the social insurance system as well as to uphold the contributory principle that underpins the qualifying conditions for all social insurance payments.

While there are no plans to alter these arrangements in the immediate term, the operation of this scheme is subject to review in the context of the Green Paper on Pensions, with particular regard being paid to the operative date of the scheme and the use of credits for pension purposes rather than the current system of disregards. A consultation process on the Green Paper is now underway and will remain open until mid 2008. The Government will respond to the views expressed during the consultation process by publishing a framework for future pensions policy. I expect that this will be available towards the end of next year.

It should also be noted that people of working age who are no longer liable for PRSI contributions may opt to protect their pension entitlements by applying to become a voluntary contributor. In order to be admitted to the voluntary contributions scheme, a person must have a minimum of 260 weeks of PRSI paid in either employment or self-employment and apply within 12 months of being insurable. The requirement to have 260 paid contributions to gain access to the scheme is essential in that it ensures that the requisite number of paid contributions required is in place to establish a contributory pension entitlement.

Question No. 514 answered with Question No. 511.

Social Welfare Code.

515. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he will increase

[Deputy James Bannon.]

the aged 80 allowance by €6 to €16 per week; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33246/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): There are about 115,000 people currently in receipt of the allowance, at an annual cost of some €60 million per annum. Increasing the allowance to €16 per week would involve an additional cost of the order of €36 million per annum. The policy in relation to pension rates in the recent budget was to use available resources to improve the position of all pensioners to the fullest extent possible rather than focussing on the position of individual groups, such as those who are over 80 years of age. Accordingly, the over 80 allowance was not increased on this occasion.

516. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if it was standard practice for the health boards to inspect houses prior to occupation by people in receipt of rent supplement; if so, if this practice was in place in 2002; and if not, the practice there was to determine if a house was suitable to be inhabited by people approved or in receipt of rent supplement. [34078/07]

517. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if the house formerly occupied by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal was inspected by the North Western Health Board prior to them being approved rent supplement and moving in 2002. [34079/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to answer questions Nos. 516 and 517 together.

In order to qualify for a rent supplement a person must satisfy a means test. The Executive must satisfy itself also that the applicant has a genuine accommodation need for which he or she cannot provide, that a bona fide tenancy arrangement exists between the applicant and the landlord and that the property being rented is suitable to his or her needs.

The Health Service Executive has confirmed that while it did not inspect the premises in this case, it was provided with documentary evidence by the applicant and landlord which indicated that the house was suited to meet the accommodation needs of the person concerned. The Executive may consider that a property is not suited to the applicants needs if the accommodation does not comply with Housing Regulations. However, enforcement of housing regulations is a matter for Local Authorities and not the responsibility of the Community Welfare Service. Community Welfare Officers are not qualified to undertake this work.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

518. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33284/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The Electricity Supply Board (ESB) and Energia supply the electricity requirements for my Department and agencies. Some 27 offices of my Department, including all head-quarter offices, are supplied by Energia with the remaining 108 offices, together with agencies of my Department, being supplied by the Electricity Supply Board.

It is not possible to identify explicitly the generation sources for this electricity. I am advised, however, that for the year ended 2006, ESB owned or contracted in 296 MW of renewable generation capacity which represented 29% of all renewable electricity generation in the State at that time. Likewise Energia has renewable generation capacity. It would be reasonable to conclude that some of this electricity generated from renewable sources was provided to my Department.

Departmental Reports.

519. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the response by his Department to the recommendations made to his Department by the Competition Authority in its October 2007 report on competition in the dental profession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33321/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The final report on the investigation by the Competition Authority into the dental profession, published in October 2007, made the following recommendations which affect this Department:

1. The Health Service Executive and the Department of Social and Family Affairs should allow clinical dental technicians who are on the Register of Clinical Dental Technicians to be directly reimbursed under the Dental Treatment Services Scheme and the Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme, for the sale of dentures and for denture repairs.
2. The Health Service Executive and the Department of Social and Family Affairs should allow advanced dental hygienists who are on the Register of Advanced Dental Hygienists to be directly reimbursed under the Dental Treatment Services Scheme and the Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme for eligible dental treatments they provide.

Both recommendations can only be brought into force if other recommendations for the Dental Council and the Department of Health & Children are accepted and brought into force i.e. changes in the Dentists Act 1985 to allow for the registration of dental technicians and dental hygienists.

I am informed by the Minister for Health and Children that she is aware of the need to improve the competitive position of dental services in Ireland and in this regard she has welcomed the recent report and recommendations from the Competition Authority. In addition, the Minister for Health and Children recently announced the development of a new National Oral Health Policy and one of the central parts of this policy will be that of regulatory reform. The report by the Competition Authority will provide a solid foundation for the discussions on regulatory reform in the context of the National Oral Health Policy.

Departmental Expenditure.

520. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33343/07]

521. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33358/07]

522. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33373/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 520, 521, 522, together.

The Department supplies some 1,200 members of staff with mobile phones to assist in the performance of their official duties. The costs of official calls and phone rental on these devices are borne by the department. Arrangements are in place for staff to reimburse costs associated

with personal calls on Departmental phones. There are no arrangements in place to pay expenses to staff in respect of business calls made on personally owned phones.

The total amount paid in respect of mobile phone charges in 2006 was €393,860 of which 13% applied to data and 7% to roaming. For the year 2007, so far €381,118 has been paid of which 16% represents data charges and 6% represents roaming.

On my appointment as Minister of Social & Family Affairs in June this year, I was assigned a mobile phone by the Department. The amount paid in respect of this phone to date (21 November 2007) is €1306.16, of which 22% % represents data and 78% represents voice. Roaming charges are not available.

Departmental Staff.

523. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and Ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33513/07]

524. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33528/07]

525. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33543/07]

526. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33558/07]

527. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33573/07]

529. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the cost to his

[Deputy Fergus O'Dowd.]

Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33603/07]

532. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33648/07]

533. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a press advisor travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33663/07]

536. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if his Department carries news summaries on its internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33723/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos: 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 529, 532, 533, and 536 together.

There are four civil servants in my Department's Press Office. The Press Officer is a Higher Executive Officer on a pay scale of €44,314 to €56,250. There are two Deputy Press Officers at Executive Officer grade. One of these is on a pay scale of €29,093 to €46,167 and the other is on a pay scale of €30,628 to €48,594 (Class A rate of PRSI contribution applies as this person commenced employment after 6 April 1995). The fourth member of staff on a pay scale of €22,058 to €35,773. The role of the Press Office staff is to provide an effective channel of communication between myself, my Department and the media.

There is one Press Adviser in my Department on a Principal Officer scale of €82,016 to €95,363. The duties carried out by the Press Adviser, who has been appointed on a contract basis for my term of office, are as set out in Section 11 of the Public Service Management Act, 1997, that is, to assist the Minister by providing advice, on a wide range of issues, by monitoring, facilitating and securing the achievement of Government objectives that relate to my Department and by performing such other functions as may be directed by me. It is normal practice for the Press Adviser to accompany me on all official engagements.

Prior to July 2002 there were no Press Advisers employed in my Department. The Press Adviser appointed in July 2002 was on a Principal Officer scale of €59,384 to €69,051 together with a private pension contribution of 11% of salary. In September 2004, a new Press Adviser was appointed to my Department was on a Principal Officer Higher scale of €75,955 to €88,040. In February 2006, a personal salary rate of €101,037 was sanctioned in respect of the Press Adviser. The person in question was also entitled to a private pension contribution of 11% of salary. These scales and rates attracted increases as provided for under the various national wage agreements.

My Department has engaged the services of a media monitoring company since 2005. This company provides an electronic media monitoring service covering publications of relevance to my Department, including the Irish national daily and Sunday newspapers. The press clippings from this service, which have cost €21,280.00 to date in 2007, are available to all departmental staff and are updated daily by the media monitoring company engaged by my Department.

In addition, the Press Adviser and Press Office staff receive a summary of news headlines from the Government Information Services, from Monday to Friday each week. These are received via email and text message and where relevant, I am made aware of issues that may impact on my Department.

Information in relation to the Department's use of Media Consultants is being compiled and will be made available to the Deputy as soon as it is available. The names of the daily newspapers purchased by my Department are listed in the table below. The cost to date in 2007 is €15,558.20.

Name of Newspaper	Number purchased by Department weekly	Number supplied to Minister's Office Weekly (included in overall number)
Irish Times	27	5
Irish Independent	27	5
Irish Examiner	32	5
The Star	17	5
The Irish Mirror	6	
The Irish Daily Mail	12	
The Irish Sun	6	
USA Today	3	3
Financial Times	5	
Waterford News & Star	2	1
Dungarvan Leader	1	
Munster Express	1	
Southern Star	1	
Evening Echo	5	

Name of Newspaper	Number purchased by Department weekly	Number supplied to Minister's Office Weekly (included in overall number)
Sunday Independent	2	
Sunday Tribune	2	
Sunday Business Post	2	
Sunday World	2	
Irish Mail on Sunday	2	
Sunday Times	2	
News of The World	2	

Expenditure on photography by Ministers for Social and Family Affairs during the period 1997 to date in 2007 is listed below:

Year	Amount of Expenditure
1997	IR£11,898.96
1998	IR£4,752.20
1999	IR£5,003.62
2000	€9,764.36
2001	€13,950.97
2002	€9,250.65
2003	€16,177.92
2004	€16,203.47
2005	€16,517.26
2006	€11,236.32
2007 to date	€13,194.05

Departmental Expenditure.

528. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33588/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): There are currently five credit/charge cards held by officials of my Department and two held by agencies under the aegis of the Department. The cards are issued on the strict condition that they will be used solely for official purposes and the named card holder is the only person authorized to use the card. Such official usage includes purchase of equipment, air-fares, training courses, fees and official entertainment. Details of the yearly payments, costs of card including annual charges, government levy and interest paid to date are outlined below.

Year	Total Payments	Cost of Card (e.g. Annual Charge/ Government Levy)	Interest Paid
	€	€	€
2000	39,984	146	0
2001	48,550	102	0
2002	28,372	82	0
2003	18,971	65	0
2004	15,548	133	0
2005	16,136	385	0
2006	25,253	350	0
2007	11,241	605	0.45

Question No. 529 answered with Question No. 523.

530. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33618/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): According to Departmental records make up expenses were not incurred for the period requested.

531. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33633/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): My Department has spent €41,847 on official entertainment in the 11 months to the end of November 2007, the latest date for which figures are available. Expenditure in the previous ten years is detailed below.

Year	€
1997	33,121
1998	35,032
1999	41,499
2000	54,744
2001	34,813
2002	76,935
2003	49,976
2004	35,438
2005	27,586
2006	34,135

Questions Nos. 532 and 533 answered with Question No. 523.

Departmental Transport.

534. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33678/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The cost to my Department for 1997 for transport costs incurred by the then Minister was € 13,189. During the period July 1997 to date no Minister of State was formally assigned to my Department. However, Minister of State, Máire Hocht, who is Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, has special responsibility for older people, areas of which fall within the remit of my Department. There are no costs attached to her office from my Department.

535. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the cost of his using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to Ministers of State and staff for the same period. [33693/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): Details of public transport expenditure are not recorded separately but are included in the overall Travel and Subsistence subhead. There is a significant level of travel expenditure in my Department's budget, arising from the dispersed nature of my Department's services and, inter alia, the fact that a considerable level of investigative work must be carried out in the course of delivering the Department's services. I have outlined in the table details of the total travel expenditure which would include bus/train fares, car mileage and other miscellaneous domestic travel costs.

	Travel Costs
	€
1997	1,706,085
1998	1,831,200
1999	1,837,984
2000	2,026,548
2001	2,100,323
2002	2,252,727
2003	1,867,230
2004	2,123,624
2005	2,101,747
2006	2,129,568
2007 (to current date)	2,135,802

Question No. 536 answered with Question No. 523.

Departmental Expenditure.

537. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33738/07]

538. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33753/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 537 and 538 together.

The details requested by the Deputy are not immediately available but are being collated. I will provide this information in writing to the deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Pension Provisions.

539. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the improvements since 2005 in the contributory and non-contributory pensions; the number of pensioners in County Kildare who benefit per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33773/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): Meeting the needs of older people is a priority for this Government. Since 2005, and including the increases announced in the recent Budget, cumulative increases in the state pension (contributory) and the state pension (non contributory) amounted to €56 and €58 per week respectively. During this period the Government reached its commitment for a minimum target of €200 per week for pensions and has set a new target of €300 per week to be achieved by 2012. The allowance paid to pensioners who are over 80 years of age was also increased to €10 per week in 2006.

In 2007 the Government made a commitment to increase the qualified adult allowance for spouses and partners of contributory pensioners, who are aged 66 years and over, to the level of the state pension (non-contributory) over a period of three years. In Budget 2007 an increase of €23.70 per week in the qualified adult payment was given and this was followed by an increase of €27 per week in Budget 2008. These increases bring the weekly rate for the qualified adult payment to €200 per week, which is 94% of the target rate.

From 2002 pensioners could opt to have the qualified adult allowances paid separately to spouses and partners. From September 2007 payment of the qualified adult allowance is automatically paid separately to the spouse or partner,

although there is provision for the couple to opt for a joint payment.

In budget 2006 a standard non-contributory pension payment was introduced for those over 66 years. The basic income disregard for the purposes of the means test for non-contributory pensions was increased to €20 per week and the incentives for pensioners on means tested payments, who may wish to continue in employment, were introduced with €100 per week of earnings disregarded. These allowances were increased in 2007 with the basic means disregard rising to €30 per week and the employment earnings disregard to €200 per week. The amount of capital disregarded for means test purposes is €20,000 for a single person doubled in the case of couples.

The number of people in receipt of State Pensions in Kildare in each of the years in questions is as follows:

Scheme	2005	2006	2007
State Pension Contributory	2,859	3,343	6,129
State Pension Transition	2,490	2,476	223*
State Pension Non Con	1,527	1,768	1,806
Total	6,876	7,587	8,158

It should be noted the recipients of State Pension Transition are now transferred to State Pension Contributory when they reach 66 years of age.

Social Welfare Code.

540. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the improvements since 2004 and proposed improvements in the conditions for carers both in terms of allowances and benefits; the number of carers in County Kildare who have benefited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33774/07]

545. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when the value for money review of social welfare payments to carers was completed; the value of the saving to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33794/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 540 and 545 together.

Supporting and recognising carers in our society is, and has been, a priority of the Government since 1997. Over that period, weekly payment rates to carers have been greatly increased, qualifying conditions for carer's allowance have been significantly eased, coverage of the scheme has been extended and new schemes such as carer's benefit and the respite care grant have been introduced and extended.

My Department conducted an internal review of payments to carers during the period 2004 to

2006. The review was designed to build on the review of the carer's allowance which was published in 1998 and to develop proposals for improvements in the schemes. The review examined all aspects of carer's allowance, carer's benefit and the respite care grant and made a broad range of proposals covering issues such as the definition of full time care and attention, qualifying conditions for the respite care grant and the operation of the means test for carer's allowance. In recent Budgets many of the review's recommendations especially in the area of introducing more flexibility into current arrangements have been implemented.

In June 2005 the respite care grant was extended to all carers providing full-time care and attention to a person in need of such care regardless of their means or social insurance contributions. Since then the grant has also been paid in respect of each care recipient. The rate of the respite care grant has been increased significantly. In Budget 2008 I provided for an increase of €200 in the level of the grant so that from June 2008 the grant will be €1,700 per year in respect of each care recipient.

In 2005 the carer's allowance scheme was extended to accommodate care-sharing situations. Under these arrangements it is possible for week-on week-off care-sharing arrangements to be facilitated. This means that where two carers are providing care to the same person on alternate weeks the carer's allowance and the annual respite care grant can be split between them. Budget 2006 increased the number of hours for which a carer can engage in employment, self employment, education or training outside the home and still be considered to be providing full time care and attention from 10 to 15 hours per week. This improvement came into effect in June 2006 and applies to carer's allowance, carer's benefit and the respite care grant. Budget 2006 also provided for the duration of carer's benefit to be increased from 15 to 24 months. A corresponding increase in the duration of carer's leave came into effect from 24 March 2006.

Budget 2007 provided for significant structural reforms to introduce new arrangements whereby people in receipt of a social welfare payment, other than carer's allowance or benefit, who are providing with full-time care and attention, are able to retain their main welfare payment and receive another payment. Depending on their means, the maximum of this payment will be equivalent to a half rate carer's allowance. Similarly, people currently in receipt of a carer's allowance, who may have an underlying eligibility for another social welfare payment, can transfer to that other payment and continue to receive up to a half rate carer's allowance.

These new arrangements, which came into force in September 2007, apply to almost all weekly social welfare payments including state pension contributory and non-contributory; wid-

[Deputy Martin Cullen.]

owner's contributory/non-contributory pension and to people in receipt of qualified adult allowances. The new arrangements do not apply to recipients of jobseeker's allowance or benefit given the nature of these payments. This is in line with the arrangements which already applied to receipt of the respite care grant.

The current rate of carer's allowance and carer's benefit is €200 per week for those aged under 66. The rate of carer's allowance for those aged over 66 is €218 per week. As a result of improvements provided for in Budget 2008 all of these rates will increase by €14 per week from January 2008.

From April 2007 the weekly carer's allowance income disregard increased by €30 to €320 for a single carer and by €60 to €640 for a couple. This surpasses the Towards 2016 commitment to ensure that those on average industrial earnings can qualify for the payment. Budget 2008 provided for the disregard to be increased further to €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple from April 2008.

The number of people in County Kildare in receipt of either carer's allowance or carer's benefit has increased by 60 per cent since 2004, from 633 people at the end of 2004 to 1,014 people at present. I will keep supports for carers available from my Department under review in order to continue to improve the schemes and ensure commitments on income support are delivered.

Social Welfare Benefits.

541. **Deputy Michael Noonan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if child benefit will be awarded to a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33790/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): Under EU regulations 1408/71, an employed person who is working in a Member State is entitled to the family benefits provided by that State even though their family may be residing in another Member State. When both parents are employed in two different States, the country of residence of the children pays the family benefits.

The person concerned is currently employed in Ireland and confirmation of her employment in Ireland from the 15th March 2007 has been received. Her ex-partner is employed and residing in Slovakia but is not maintaining the family, as a result Ireland is the competent country to pay Family Benefits. Child Benefit has been awarded from the 1st April 2007. All arrears due from April to date will be lodged to her bank account on Tuesday the 1st January 2008. Correspondence has issued to the person concerned requesting further information relating to her employment status prior to March 2007. When a

reply is received, her entitlement to further arrears will be established and she will be advised accordingly.

Departmental Reports.

542. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when the value for money review of the supplementary welfare allowance phase two was completed; the value of the saving to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33791/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The review of the supplementary welfare allowance scheme was carried out as part of the Government's Expenditure Review Initiative series of Programme Evaluation reviews. Given the extensive and complex nature of the scheme, the review was undertaken in two phases. A report was published at the end of the first phase in December 2004. That report gave a broad appraisal of the scheme and identified issues for particular consideration in the second phase which commenced in February 2005. This second and final phase of the review, which was published in November 2006, is an in-depth examination which considered the issues raised in phase I of the report, examined the validity of the objectives of the scheme and the efficiency and effectiveness of the scheme. The report of phase II of the review also provided a series of recommendations in relation to the future of the supplementary welfare allowance scheme.

Overall the review concluded that the scheme has, over the years, met its objective of guaranteeing that every person in the State has a minimum level of income sufficient to meet their basic day to day needs. However, the review also points out that the scheme has gone beyond its original "safety net" role and now plays a more extensive role than was originally intended. In overall terms the main recommendations arising include:

- The creation of a unified system of income support delivered at Social Welfare Local Offices and complemented by a range of activation supports;
- Vigorous support of the Rental Assistance Scheme to address housing needs of people in long-term rent supplementation
- A continued role for the Community Welfare Service in delivering a flexible and immediate response to those most in need.

A number of measures have been introduced to progress implementation of the recommendations of the review. For example, Budget 2007 provided for improvements in the qualifying conditions for rent supplement which will support the transfer to the rental accommodation scheme of

rent supplement tenants who wish to take up full-time employment.

The review also identified a number of issues relating to the incentives under the rent supplement scheme for those wishing to take up an employment opportunity. These issues were addressed in Budget 2007. Since June of this year where a person has additional income in excess of the standard weekly rate of supplementary welfare allowance, the first €75 of such additional income together with 25% of any additional income above €75 is disregarded for means assessment purposes. This ensures that those returning to work or participating in training schemes are better off as a result of taking up such an opportunity.

The review also recommended an easing of the means test for supplementary welfare allowance in the assessment of capital. Budget 2007 provided for an improved capital assessment which presents a less severe approach to the assessment of capital for SWA purposes. The process currently underway to transfer certain functions from the HSE to my Department presents fundamental reform and developmental opportunities for a fully integrated and enhanced income support system, as recommended in the report. This includes a restructuring and integration of income and wider support services within one entity, namely my Department, while facilitating the HSE in concentrating on its core health and personal social services functions. The report provides a working template to support the transfer programme.

In conclusion, the focus of the review was on maximising the achievement of the objectives that have been identified as appropriate to the supplementary welfare scheme in an effective and efficient manner. Over time, the implementation of the recommendations of the review, will result in improvements in the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the scheme.

543. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when the value for money review of the unemployment benefit and assistance for atypical workers was completed; the value of the saving to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33792/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The review of the jobseeker schemes which was undertaken under the expenditure review process, focused on the application of the schemes conditions to workers who are not employed on a full-time basis. The review was completed in November 2006. The review contained a range of recommendations, some of which may result in savings to the Exchequer or to the Social Insurance Fund while others could lead to additional costs to the Fund. The con-

clusions and recommendations are under consideration within my Department.

544. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when the value for money review of one-parent family payments was completed; the value of the saving to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33793/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The review of the one-parent family payment was one of two strands of work undertaken with regard to lone parents and their families under the auspices of the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, the other being an analysis of obstacles to employment for lone parents. Both of these reports are contained within the 'Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents' published in March 2006. The focus of the review of the one-parent family payment was to examine; the effectiveness of income support arrangements with regard to the needs of lone parents and their children; the desire to avoid long term dependency on social welfare income support and the continued appropriateness of the scheme.

One of the main findings of the review was that while the Exchequer is spending significant resources in direct supports for lone parents, €1.48 billion in 2006, it is achieving poor outcomes in terms of tackling poverty and social exclusion. That is why the Government discussion paper put forward proposals for the expanded availability and range of education and training opportunities; the extension of the National Employment Action Plan; focused provision of childcare; improved information services and the introduction of a new social assistance payment for all low income families, including lone parents with young children.

The development of any new scheme to support low income parents can only be introduced when the necessary co-ordinated supports and services are put in place on the ground by other Departments and Agencies. For this reason, the non-income recommendations contained in the discussion paper are currently being tested in two areas: Coolock and Kilkenny. These tests will identify and address any practical and administrative issues that may arise in advance of a scheme being introduced. The tests are scheduled to run until the end of the year, after which a report will be made to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. The tests will allow for operational and logistical co-ordination between the relevant Departments and Agencies to be considered and will facilitate the development of the policy and operational details of the new scheme and accompanying supports.

Question No. 545 answered with Question No. 540.

546. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when the value for money review of the disability allowance scheme will be completed; the anticipated value of the saving to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33795/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): Disability allowance was one of the payments which formed part of the Expenditure Review of Illness and Disability Payment Schemes that was carried out by my Department in 2003 and subsequently published in 2004.

The review examined and reported on the trend and level of expenditure and found that disability allowance is well targeted in addressing income maintenance requirements of customers and combating social exclusion. The review also highlighted a number of areas where further work can be usefully targeted. The first of these is the reason for the rise in the number of recipients of Disability Allowance since 1996, when my Department initiated the disability allowance scheme to replace the previously existing Disabled Persons Maintenance Allowance scheme.

The second area to be further examined is access for people in receipt of disability allowance to employment and training. This is obviously an area of increased importance to the Department, reflected in the focus on 'people of working age' in the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion, the latest social partnership agreement Towards 2016 and the Department's Disability Sectoral Plan. The Sectoral Plan is of particular importance in that regard because it builds on the Department's key policy objectives and aims to deliver support to people with disabilities that will reduce their risk of dependence.

It is now proposed to further examine these two particular issues. I am anxious to ensure that this examination is relevant to the needs of people with disabilities and my Department is at present finalising terms of reference for the review. The review will begin early in 2008 and will take between six and nine months to complete.

Central to this work will be the forthcoming publication by the Central Statistics Office of findings from the National Survey on Disability in Ireland carried out in 2006. This survey will allow the Department, for the first time, to 'match' the incidence of disability in Ireland against the numbers in receipt of disability allowance. It will give valuable information on the profile of recipients, including previous and current employment history, which will allow for more informed policy options to be taken. Publication of this survey by the Central Statistics Office is

expected early in 2008 and the availability of this data will affect the timing of the completion of the disability allowance review.

547. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when the value for money review of information services provided to customers will be completed; the anticipated value of the saving to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33796/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): My department is carrying out a Value for Money Review of its information services together with the relevant agencies under the aegis of the Department that are engaged in information provision, i.e. Citizens Information Board and Reach. The review will cover the period 2005-2007 and will examine direct and indirect expenditure incurred in the provision of information on welfare schemes. Work on the review has commenced and is expected that it will be completed by the end of 2008. Any recommendations arising from the review will be assessed at that time.

Social Welfare Benefits.

548. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath did not receive supplementary welfare allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33797/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The supplementary welfare allowance scheme (SWA) is administered on my behalf by the Community Welfare division of the Health Service Executive (HSE). The person concerned applied for SWA on 18th September 2007. The HSE has advised that payment was awarded from that date and remained in payment until 29 October 2007. Retrospective payments are not made under the terms of the SWA scheme. SWA payments may only be made from the date a claim is made.

An application for Illness Benefit was registered on 20th September 2007 for the person concerned. However, this claim was refused as the qualifying criteria were not satisfied. The person concerned was informed of this decision with an explanation of the reasons why his claim was not allowed. The procedures he should follow in order to have his claim re-examined were also set out. If an applicant for SWA is not satisfied with the decision made in their case, they may lodge an appeal to the Appeals Office of the Health Service Executive.

Departmental Transport.

549. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34098/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): My staff require the use of taxis

for travelling to various meetings when public transport is not suitable. This service is provided by the taxi firm, selected following a tender process, with whom my Department has an account. The table shows the relevant expenditure from January 1997 to November 2007.

Information in relation to transport costs incurred in the course of Ministerial trips abroad on official business is currently being compiled within my Department and will be made available to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Taxi Expenditure

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 to date
€2,443	€4,430	€3,399	€4,189	€4,047	€5,950	€5,603	€5,868	€7,923	€7,362	€4,787

Social Welfare Benefits.

550. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare has only been sanctioned for a reduced supplementary welfare allowance payment in view of the circumstances of the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34137/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): Under the terms of the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, which is administered on my behalf by the community welfare division of the Health Service Executive, an exceptional needs payment (ENP) may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which the applicant is unable to meet out of his/her own resources. There is no automatic entitlement to this payment. Each application is determined by the Executive based on the particular circumstances of the case. Eligible people would normally be in receipt of a social welfare or health service executive payment.

The Executive has advised that the accommodation needs of the person concerned are now being met under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) which is administered by local housing authorities under the aegis of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The person concerned has been paid an exceptional needs payment on eight occasions in 2007. Her most recent application was made on 29th November 2007. She was granted a payment by the CWO on the basis of the circumstances of the case she made at the time. It is open to the person concerned to approach the Executive should she wish to make an application for further ENP support.

Pension Provisions.

551. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the progress that has

been made by his Department following the recommendations by the Irish Human Rights Commission in relation to special pension for the self employed introduced in 1999; if the committee of experts has completed its review of the matter in the context of its annual report on compliance with the European code of social security recently submitted by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34183/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The case reported on by the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) involves a couple who were over 56 years of age in 1988 when compulsory social insurance for the self-employed was introduced and who could not, therefore, satisfy one of the basic requirements for pension as they did not commence paying insurance 10 years before pension age.

In addition, the couple could not satisfy the qualifying conditions for the special half-rate pension which was introduced in 1999 for self-employed people as they had not paid the 260 contributions required. While one of the couple could have qualified had they paid the necessary contributions, because of advanced age the other person would not have been able to contribute the necessary level of contributions before reaching pension age. A refund of part of the social insurance contributions was available to such people.

The IHRC recommended that a reduced benefit should be paid to people who, because of advanced age, could not satisfy the conditions for the special pension introduced in 1999. The recommendations of the IHRC are based on its assessment of the situation under the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Code of Social Security. In relation to the European Code of Social Security, the IHRC places particular emphasis on provisions in relation to the position of people, who by reason

[Deputy Martin Cullen.]

of age when provisions are introduced, cannot satisfy contribution or employment conditions.

The Department makes annual reports on compliance with this Code to the Council of Europe, summarising changes to the social welfare system. These reports are then referred to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Committee of Experts for their examination. The Department's 1999 report included details of the self-employed provisions which are now the subject of the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) investigation. At that time, the ILO Committee confirmed that Ireland met its obligations.

Accordingly, as an initial step in its review of the IHRC report, my Department has asked the ILO Committee of Experts for its views on the way in which the IHRC has interpreted the relevant articles. While the Department has received an informal opinion which is at variance with the conclusions of the IHRC, it has asked the Committee of Experts for a formal review of the situation in the context of our annual report on compliance with the European Code of Social Security which my Department submitted in August this year. The annual report has drawn specific attention to the IHRC report and the manner in which it interprets our obligations under Article 29.5 of the Code. The views of the supervising committees were sought on the conclusions of the IHRC report and the Department is awaiting a response from the Council of Europe. My Department will re-examine its position in relation to the IHRC report when the views of the supervising committees have been received.

Departmental Communications.

552. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34227/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): My Department is currently testing the use of mobile e-mail equipment and has provided Blackberry or similar PDA type devices to 15 staff in a test environment. Further significant development of the underlying Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure is required before general secure deployment of such devices. This work has commenced and will continue over the coming year. When completed mobile communication devices will be deployed to staff whose role require the use of such technology.

553. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly

operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34242/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The Department administers some fifty separate Social Welfare schemes and makes payments to one million people each week. The nature and volume of its business means that it has responsibility for a significant amount of personal and other data and it is heavily dependent on secure Information Communications Technology (ICT) facilities to provide its services.

The ICT portfolio within the Department includes systems that:

- produce payments across multiple schemes
- support customer-centric processing including PRSI consolidation
- provide administrative capability across the Department
- support e-Govt and inter-departmental processing/data exchange and
- support line managers on a countrywide basis.

Each of these systems is typically built to use multiple databases and include additional capabilities such as audit, archive etc. In addition, a large number of database copies, for each of the aforementioned categories of systems, are used to support testing efforts — unit, system, user acceptance, performance testing. There are more than 1,000 databases held on the Department's ICT infrastructure, supporting all of the capabilities listed above. Almost all of these databases are operated wholly within the Department by the Department's own staff. A very small number of systems and their supporting databases are operated externally to support the Department's HRMS system and to support the Public Services Broker.

554. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34257/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The information requested is currently being compiled within the Department and will be made available to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

555. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Mini-

ster for Social and Family Affairs the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34272/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): My Department has not established records of carbon dioxide emissions from Ministerial transport provided to me for official purposes. However, on foot of the commitment in the Programme for Government on carbon offsetting official air travel, the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government is developing a scheme for use by all Government Departments and bodies under their aegis. My Department will fully partake in the scheme.

Data Protection.

556. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34287/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): The Department administers some fifty separate schemes and makes payments to one million people each week. The nature and volume of its business means that it has responsibility for a significant amount of personal and other data and it is heavily dependent on secure Information Communications Technology (ICT) facilities to provide its services. The Department is fully aware of its obligation to safeguard the security of this data and employs a wide range of measures to protect the confidentiality, availability and integrity of information.

Access to data by departmental staff and agents is strictly controlled and granted in accordance with departmental policies and procedures. Technological safeguards include the use of firewalls, Virtual Private Network technology, password protection and personal accounts.

All electronic data is stored securely in the Department and is replicated in a similarly secure environment for back-up purposes at a back-up site. Both sites have rigorous control procedures and site perimeter protection. Secure network arrangements including the use of data encryption and dedicated link lines are in place to cover the transmission of data to a small number of designated agencies (e.g. An Post, Bank of Ireland). The Department keeps its security and access arrangements under review in light of developments in security technology and approaches. It will continue to improve levels of protection for personal and other data.

Management Information Framework System.

557. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister

for Social and Family Affairs the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34309/07]

558. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34324/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 557 and 558 together.

My Department's Management Information Framework incorporates a financial module, which is updated on a regular basis, as well as an extensive business activity module. The financial module provides up to date information based on a cost centre and nominal coding structure that reflects the full range of business needs. The system currently provides some 7 million combinations of coding.

The business activity module comprises a system of passive monthly reports as well as an interactive computer based business intelligence system. The latter development has been rolled out to my Department's regional offices. Following the Minister of Finance's announcement of a number of reforms to the budget and estimates process the work undertaken to develop a costing framework became the foundation for the Annual Output Statement (AOS) which is submitted to the Select Committee on Social and Family Affairs.

My Department's business planning process is closely linked to the Statement of Strategy and management reports on business activities include performance indicators that reflect the key business objectives of my Department. While it is not possible to quantify in monetary terms the savings accruing to the Exchequer arising from the Management Information Framework, the system has enabled the development of a comprehensive financial management system, the introduction of both passive and interactive management reporting and the production of the Annual Output Statement.

Social Welfare Code.

559. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he will examine the means test applicable to non-contributory social welfare payments which shows a much higher rate of return on shares, investments and bank deposits than is the case in reality; when the present means test was introduced; the basis for the calculation at that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34407/07]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Martin Cullen): In assessing means for social assistance purposes account is taken of any cash income the person may have, together with the value of capital and property (except the home). Capital may include the following:

- Stocks and shares of every description, which are assessed according to their current market value.
- Savings certificates, bonds, national instalment savings, which are assessed according to their current market value.
- Money invested in a bank, building society etc.

For the purposes of social assistance schemes, an initial amount of capital has is disregarded for means test purposes. For example, in the case of the State Pension Non-Contributory (formerly the Old Age Pension), this amount was increased from £200 to £2,000 in 1997 and then was substantially increased to £10,000 in October 2000. It was then further increased to €20,000 in June 2005.

The balance of any capital owned is assessed as follows:

- The next €10,000 is assessed with a weekly value of €1 per €1,000
- The next €10,000 is assessed with a weekly value of €2 per €1,000
- The remainder is assessed with a weekly value of €4 per €1,000

The new capital assessment arrangements introduced in 2005, combined with other means disregard improvements introduced in 2006 and 2007 for the State Pension Non-Contributory, mean that a single non-contributory pensioner, with no other means, can have capital of up to €40,000 and still qualify for a pension at the maximum rate. This figure is doubled in the case of a pensioner couple.

These current assessment arrangements were not designed to reflect current or past yields from deposit income, shares or other investments. It should be noted that the current assessment arrangements also apply in relation to the weekly value of other property such a property which is being let or is capable of being let.

The current system continues with the policy of ensuring that those with relatively modest amounts of capital receive the greater share of available support, while the small proportion of people with large amounts of capital should avail of it to contribute, at least partially, towards meeting their needs. There are no plans, at present, to change the current arrangements.

National Drugs Strategy.

560. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he has made progress and the steps he

has taken in relation to the recommendation contained in a report (details supplied) that a local focus for intervention should be immediately established for Limerick city due to the findings in that report that the problems of drug abuse in Limerick city are particularly acute; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33217/07]

561. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he is aware that the drugs situation particularly misuse of heroin is worsening in Limerick city; the reason the local focus for intervention has not to date been established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33218/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 560 and 561 together.

The degree to which the misuse of drugs, including heroin, is worsening in Limerick City is difficult to gauge. I am aware that the number of new entrants seeking treatment for opiate use in the mid-western region has increased from 16 who presented in 2001 to 24 presenting in 2005. This type of secondary indicator, while obviously giving cause for concern, can, however, difficult to interpret. The Health Research Board, which is responsible for the National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS), has indicated that overall changes in numbers presenting for treatment can be due to a number of factors, such as an increase in the number of treatment places, an increase in reporting to the NDTRS, as well as an increase in drug use.

Our most comprehensive data on the prevalence of drug usage comes from the Drug Prevalence Survey 2002/2003. A second Prevalence Study covering the 2006/2007 period has recently been carried out by the National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD). The first report on national prevalence figures and trends is expected in January next and the findings of this study will give an up-to-date picture of overall problem drug use in Ireland.

With regard to heroin, the Deputy should note that the NACD is currently undertaking a study that will give us our most up to date picture with respect to opiate use and its changing patterns of use across the country. This study will update the data from a similar piece of research carried out in 2001. The NACD expect the latest report to be completed by the middle of 2008 and I believe that it will provide useful information about the changing pattern of heroin use in Ireland.

With regard to the need for a local focus to tackle the drug problem in Limerick City, I believe that the time and complexities involved in setting up a local structure are considerable and, consequently, I would support the establishment of a sub-group of the existing Mid West Regional Drugs Task Force with a particular focus on the

city. This, in my opinion, would be a more efficient — and quicker — option in terms of getting a number of drugs projects up and running in Limerick City in the short-term. My Department will be progressing this approach in the coming weeks. Finally, the Deputy should note that my Department has received additional funding of €14.3m for 2008. This represents an increase of over 28% on the 2007 allocation and will provide a major funding boost for drugs initiatives next year.

Aquaculture Development.

562. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress Údarás na Gaeltachta has made, in view of the fact that the Cawley report has recommended that Údarás na Gaeltachta be the lead agency with Bord Iascaigh Mhara in developing aquaculture, since the publication of the strategy report and the recommendations within; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33270/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): In the first instance, I wish to inform the Deputy that responsibility for matters contained in the Report of the Seafood Industry Strategy Review Group (The Cawley Report) rests with my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Údarás na Gaeltachta has, however, since its inception, taken a lead role in the promotion and development of aquaculture, seafood processing and other marine related projects in the Gaeltacht. In addition to the acknowledgement of Údarás' strategic role in the Cawley Report, it is worth noting that the Marine Institute, in its own report on the development of the marine resource sector, *Sea Change — A Marine, Knowledge, Research and Innovation Strategy for Ireland*, recognises the role of Údarás as a partner for the implementation of many of the recommendations in that report. I understand also that a key implementation role for Údarás in the Gaeltacht is envisaged in the National Strategic Plan for Fisheries 2007-2013, which was formally submitted to the European Commission in November 2007 by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Against this background, Údarás continues to promote the aquaculture and fish processing sectors through the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance Operational Programme (FIFG) and other funding, and I understand that a number of projects have been approved for funding since the publication of the Cawley Report.

Energy Resources.

563. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Depart-

ment has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33275/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Neither my Department nor any agency under the remit of the Department is aware of the percentage, if any, of energy consumed coming from renewable sources.

Departmental Programmes.

564. **Deputy Edward O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make an application for CLÁR funding available to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [33305/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Under the CLÁR Programme, top-up funding is provided to sports clubs, located in CLÁR areas, who are successful under the Sports Capital Grants Scheme run by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism (D/AST) and recommended for CLÁR support by that Department. The sports club referred to by the Deputy may qualify for funding under the CLÁR Programme, therefore, if they qualify for a grant from D/AST.

The Deputy should also note that the club may be eligible to apply for funding under the ESB Three Phase Measure which is also operated by CLÁR should they wish to install floodlights at their grounds. An application for this scheme may be made directly to the CLÁR section of my Department which is located in Teeling St., Tubbercurry, Co Sligo.

Departmental Expenditure.

565. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33334/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The estimated sum of €148,000 inclusive of VAT and rental was paid by my Department in 2006 and to date in 2007 in respect of mobile phone charges. A breakdown of roaming and data charges is given below.

	Roaming	Data
	€	€
2006	7,349	10,267
2007 to date	4,390	15,048

566. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33349/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): No mobile telephone bills are paid by my Department in the form of expenses.

567. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33364/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Mobile phone charges in respect of mobile phones assigned to me, by the Department, amounted to €3,124 in 2006 and €2,720 in 2007 to date. The information requested in relation to a breakdown of roaming and data charges is available from November 2006 to date only. In the period since then, data charges amounted to €25.98 and roaming charges amounted to € 356.43.

Departmental Reports.

568. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the value for money review on the Scéimeanna Feabhsúcháin sa Gaeltacht was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementations of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33401/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The review referred to by the Deputy was published in 2006. Implementation of the recommendations is ongoing, as appropriate. Actions taken to date include:

- the retention of the Strategic Roads Scheme and its inclusion in the NDP 2007-2013;
- emphasising to local authorities the importance of standardised signage; and
- the establishment of a standing co-ordinating committee between my Department and Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Arising from implementation of the recommendations, I am confident that there will be ongoing positive outcomes in terms of efficiencies and standards of service. Several of the recommendations affirmed the ongoing benefits of the schemes for the Gaeltacht and proposed that priority be given to the stronger Irish-speaking areas. Progress on these and other recommendations, as appropriate, will be a matter for consideration in the context of the recently published Linguistic Study on the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht and the Government's proposed 20 year strategy for the Irish language.

569. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the value for money review on capital expenditure on the offshore islands, 2000 to 2004 was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementations of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33402/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The VFM review of capital expenditure on the Islands for the period 1998-04, which was undertaken as part of my Department's VFM/Expenditure Review Programme, is currently nearing completion. It is hoped to have the review published and laid before the relevant Oireachtas Committee by end-2007.

570. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the value for money review on the Ciste na Gaeilge was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33403/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The report in question has been subject to external quality assessment and is nearing completion. I expect that the report will be finalised early in the New Year.

571. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the value for money review on the drugs initiative was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33404/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Expenditure Review of the Local Drugs Task Forces (LDTFs) was completed late 2006 and published on my Department's website in January 2007. The Review found that:

- the LDTF Programme has been effective and highly relevant to the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy;
- extensive measures have been implemented to address the drug problem at a local level; and
- there are indications of high cost benefit ratios of projects such as those delivered through the LDTF programme.

A number of areas were identified in the Review and substantial progress has been made in addressing those issues. These include the development of (i) clearer reporting relationships and monitoring systems between projects, funders and the LDTFs and (ii) stronger evaluation processes in relation to future mainstreaming of projects to statutory agencies. In particular, the Deputy should note that a more rigorous financial feedback system has been developed. In addition, indicators — to gauge the performance and activity of projects — have also been incorporated into the National Drugs Strategy Team's reporting mechanism for the Task Forces.

I am confident that the implementation of these measures has contributed to the overall robustness of the procedures and processes currently in place within the National Drugs Strategy.

572. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the value for money review on local development social inclusion programmes will be completed; the anticipated savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33405/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I expect that the final draft of the report on the value for money review on the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme will be completed by end of the January 2008 at the latest. Pending receipt of the final report from the consultants engaged to undertake the review, I am not in a position to say what impact the implementation of its recommendations will have.

573. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the value for money review on the area based rural development initiative and Leader programme will be completed; the anticipated savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33406/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): As the Deputy is aware, the EU co-financed 2000-2006 Area

Based Rural Development Initiative/LEADER + programmes will be concluding shortly. These programmes were already subject to ex-ante and mid-term reviews and will be the subject of ex-post evaluation following the completion of expenditure in 2008. Accordingly, the proposed value for money review of these programmes was replaced with a review of the CLÁR and RAPID leveraged funding programmes operated by my Department.

Departmental Staff.

574. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33504/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): None of the staff of my Department are engaged in providing a media monitoring service. It goes without saying, of course, that many of my Department's staff endeavour to keep themselves informed of media coverage related to their duties and functions. In this regard the Press and Information Office of my Department has a contract with a private company for the provision of a press cuttings service to my Department. This is available to all staff.

Departmental Expenditure.

575. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33519/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The following publications are purchased by my Department either daily or weekly: The Irish Times × 10, Irish Independent × 7, Irish Examiner × 3, Evening Herald × 2, Irish News × 1, Foinse × 3, Lá × 3, The Star × 2, The Sun × 2, Irish Mirror × 2, Irish Daily Mail × 1, Metro Eireann × 1, Farmer's Journal × 4, Phoenix × 1, Village × 1, Connacht Tribune × 1, Mayo News × 1, Western People × 1, Business & Finance and Management × 1. The total cost to date this year (January to November) is €14,809.94.

The following papers are provided to my office: The Irish Times, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, Irish News, Lá and the Farmer's Journal. The Minister of State is provided with the follow-

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

ing papers: The Irish Times, Irish Independent and the Irish Examiner.

Departmental Staff.

576. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33534/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): There is one Press Officer in the Department who is an Administrative Officer and her current salary point is €46,264. The Press Officer provides an information service to the public and the media on behalf of the Department. There is one Media Advisor in my Department at Assistant Principal Officer level and her salary point is €70,062. The Media Advisor advises the Minister on media matters.

Consultancy Contracts.

577. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in

Title	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	€	€	€	€	€	€
Media Advisor	32,806	77,967	94,501	100,492	108,391	*€129,315

*Includes once off severance and redundancy payment of €44,850.

Departmental Expenditure.

579. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33579/07]

585. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33669/07]

586. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cost of him using public transport for every

2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33549/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): My Department has made available on its website details regarding consultancies (excepting those of minor value, i.e., less than €5,000, excluding VAT) relating to the period since its establishment in June 2002 up to the end of September 2007. The relevant link, which will take the Deputy directly to these details, including the information sought by him, in relation to expenditure by my Department is: www.pobail.ie/en/CorporateSupportServices/Finance/Consultancies. For the Deputy's convenience, I have arranged for a copy of the material in question to be sent directly to him at his Oireachtas e-mail address.

Departmental Staff.

578. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33564/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): My Department was established in June 2002. A Media Advisor was appointed on 24 June that year and served until 14 June 2007. A new Media Advisor was appointed on 10 July 2007. The annual cost in terms of salary and related costs in respect of the post from June 2002 to end-2007 is as follows:

year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to junior Ministers and staff for the same period. [33684/07]

600. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34301/07]

601. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34315/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 579, 585, 586, 600 and 601 together.

These questions deal with various aspects of my Department's administration and management of resources. My Department, which was established in June 2002, has provision for administrative expenses in 2008 of the order of €20.6 million — a 2% increase on the 2007 Estimate. There are two credit cards held in my Department — one each held by the Private Secretary to the Minister and the Private Secretary to the Minister of State. The relevant costs are shown in Table 1. The credit card is one of a number of systems of payment used by my Department, including electronic transfer and cheques. All credit card payments are subject to the same checks and verification as other payment systems. The credit card is used only where it is considered the most secure, efficient and appropriate payment method.

It may be noted that to avoid unnecessary reimbursements and to minimise paperwork, the credit card held by the Minister's Private Secretary is now used where the payment has to be made on the provision of the service. I am open to suggestions as to more effective ways of making such payments that would maintain the integrity of the system and cut down further on unnecessary bureaucracy.

Records indicate that payments made in respect of his official car for the Minister of State (including costs associated with the salary and expenses of the civilian drivers) from June 2007 to end-November 2007 amounted to €32,145. No costs of this nature were payable by my Department in the period from June 2002 to June 2007. Costs relating to public transport usage by Ministers of State are, however, included in Table 2. Records in my Department indicate that the amounts paid for public transport (comprising trains, buses, flights and ferries) are as shown in Table 2.

With regard to the Management Information Framework, the system has been fully rolled out in my Department and is an integral part of the finance function. It provides management information on expenditure and costs. It forms the basis of regular finance-related reports to the Management Advisory Committee and is also used in the preparation of the annual Appropriation Account and other external reports; the maintenance of the assets register; the execution of payments; and preparation of responses to many ad hoc queries and requests for reports.

The Management Information Framework requires higher levels of both financial and information & communications technology skills within the Department, as well as external assistance, when required, to support and develop it. However, it has also provided a significant saving of time and a streamlining of effort and it produces more information than would otherwise be available. There is no quantification of any

specific saving to the Exchequer in 2007 but the system was introduced to provide overall systemic improvements rather than achieve a particular level of savings.

Finally, can I say that I welcome the interest shown in the management of resources by my Department. I believe that the information provided in this reply demonstrates a practical and consistent approach to good management of public funds. I feel, however, that the optimal opportunity for further consideration of management expenses and related matters is in the context of the estimates debate for the Vote for my Department. I am more than willing, as I have done in 2007, to further debate such issues in the context of the consideration of my Department's 2008 Estimate.

Table 1 — Credit Card costs June 2007-November 2007

Year	Purchases	Charges/ Fees	Interest
	€	€	€
2002	1,461	19	17
2003	4,091	118	62
2004	5,245	158	127
2005	1,115	158	9
2006	6,918	78	120
2007 (to end-Nov)	2,699	80	9

Table 2 — Cost of Public Transport June 2002-November 2007

Year	Minister	Minister of State	Staff
	€	€	€
2002	Nil	Nil	12,562
2003	21,088	5,576	73,702
2004	11,518	11,757	88,856
2005	17,660	Nil	52,549
2006	13,595	9,712	67,513
2007 (to end-Nov)	16,211	3,947	61,356

580. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33594/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): As the Deputy is aware, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs was established in June 2002. Photographer costs since that time are as follows:

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

Year	Cost
	€
2002	1,283.82
2003	5,117.53
2004	4995.24
2005	10,710.57
2006	6,208.85
2007	13,637.44

581. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33609/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Nil.

582. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33624/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): It is not practical, within the time available to provide the information sought. I am arranging for the material to be compiled as a priority and provided directly to the Deputy.

Government Information Services.

583. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33639/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): My Department does not receive a daily summary of relevant stories from Government Information Services.

Official Engagements.

584. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33654/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): A Press

Advisor travels with me on a limited number of official visits of public interest. Yes, there were many official engagements during which a press advisor was not present.

Questions Nos. 585 and 586 answered with Question No. 579.

Departmental Communications.

587. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if his Department carries news summaries on their internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33714/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs employs a media monitoring company to provide a clippings service covering articles relevant to myself, the Minister of State and the Department in the national and regional print media. The media monitoring company maintains an archive of news clippings on their website, which is accessible to all Departmental staff through a link on the Department's intranet site. Additionally, certain staff in bodies associated with the department, have access to this archive by arrangement.

The pricing arrangements are as follows. Up to 100 articles per week costs €169. Up to 200 articles per week costs €302 and up to 300 articles per week costs €417. Additional articles above the prescribed thresholds cost €1.69. This is usually updated twice a day for daily papers and a few times during the week to cover regional press etc.

588. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of mobile telephones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33729/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Three mobile phones are assigned to me by the Department. The information requested is available only from January 2004. The costs incurred for each year since then are shown in tabular form below.

Year	€
2004	4,045
2005	3,529
2006	3,124
2007 to date	2,720

589. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile telephones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33744/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Since 2002, three blackberrys, two laptops, five PCs and 3 printers were issued by my Department to staff appointed by me. The estimated cost of supplying this equipment was €9,504. Subsequently, one blackberry, one PC and 2 printers were returned for use by the Department. The estimated cost of this equipment would have been €1,665.

Information in relation to monthly rental and call costs is available from January 2004 only. The costs incurred for each year since then are shown in tabular form.

Year	€
2004	3,193
2005	2,464
2006	1,560
2007 to date	1,152

Voluntary Sector Funding.

590. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will provide core funding to a society (details supplied) under the scheme to support national organisations in the community and voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33990/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Funding Scheme to Support the Role of National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector was advertised on 11 May, 2007 and the closing date for receipt of applications was 22 June, 2007. The organisation referred to by the Deputy made no application for funding under this Scheme.

Departmental Transport.

591. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34089/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): It is not practical within the time available to provide the information sought. I am arranging for the material to be compiled as a priority and provided directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Programmes.

592. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if a town land (details supplied) in County Kilkenny is included in the CLAR programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34139/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The townland referred to by the Deputy is not within the designated CLAR area for County Kilkenny. The Deputy should note that details of all CLAR EDs for County Kilkenny are available on my Department's website at www.pobail.ie.

Departmental Communications.

593. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a Blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34218/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Currently 17 Blackberry devices have been issued in the Department.

594. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34233/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): There are 35 electronic databases in use in the Department ranging from simple contact databases supporting low level processing to more high-level databases supporting high volume processing. Some 29 of these databases are operated solely within my Department, while the remaining ones are operated wholly or partly operated by external organisation or individuals.

595. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34248/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has initiated four information technology projects since 2004. As outlined in the table, two of these projects are ongoing and I would not be in a position to comment at this stage as to whether they will be completed on schedule and on budget. The remaining two projects were completed as outlined in the table.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

Consultancy Description	Consultant	Start Date	End Date	Deadline	Budget
Development of the Department's Intranet	Parallel Intranet Ltd	01-Sep-05	01-Dec-05	over	On
Pilot on-line ferry ticketing project	Directional Data Systems	01-Dec-04	01-Aug-05	On	On
Development of applications database for CLÁR	Study Focus	01-Apr-07	Ongoing		
Development of Information system to support administration of the Rural Development Programme for Ireland 2007-2013.		01-Jun-07	Ongoing		

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

596. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34263/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): On foot of the commitment in the Programme for Government on carbon offsetting official air travel, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is developing a scheme for use by all Government Departments and bodies under their aegis. As soon as the scheme is in place I intend to operate it in respect of Ministerial travel in my Department.

Data Protection.

597. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34278/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Access to information relating to members of the public held on departmental databases is controlled by internal authentication procedures and further protected from external attack by physical firewall devices in accordance with good industry practice.

Ferry Services.

598. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason his Department does not pay cargo subsidies for the transporting of cargo to and from Sherkin Island, Heir Island and Long Island; and his views on whether this is an inconsistency in view of the cargo subsidies payable in respect of other islands. [34295/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): My Department currently subsidises the provision of a cargo service to the three Aran Islands, as well as a combined cargo and passenger service to Cléire. In addition, subsidies are paid in respect of roll on/roll off ferry services to Bere Island and Árainn Mhór, which also serve the cargo transport requirements of those two islands.

One of the primary objectives of my Department over the past number of years has been to improve the standard and frequency of transport services to the islands. To date, this has been achieved on a phased basis, with the improvement of existing services and the provision of new passenger services being afforded priority. The next phase envisages the provision of subsidised cargo services on a prioritised basis and, in this context, tenders for the provision of three new cargo services to Inishbofin, Clare Island/Inishturk and Toraigh are currently being evaluated by my officials. In deciding to prioritise the provision of services to these four islands, regard was had to criteria such as distance from the mainland, population and the adequacy of existing non-subsidised services.

Having regard to these criteria, it is considered that a case for subsidised cargo services to the three islands referred to by the Deputy could not be justified at this time.

599. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the agreed cargo price list for the subsidised cargo service to Oileán Chleire; and his views on whether this represents value for money. [34296/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The maximum charges for carriage of cargo on the subsidised ferry service for Cléire is set out in the Tables. The prices included in this list compare favourably with cargo prices used on other ferry services subsidised by my Department and it is considered that they represent good value for money.

Tables: Maximum Tariff for Carriage of Cargo to Cléire, Co Cork

Vehicles, Agriculture

MAXIMUM CHARGES FOR CARRIAGE OF GOODS TO CLÉIRE

The following are maximum charges exclusive of V.A.T @ 21% and may be subject to reductions as appropriate depending on quantity.

Description of Merchandise	Single	Return
	€	€
Car, vanette	33.50	67.00
Jeep or Pick up	47.50	95.00
Hiace type van or people carriers	63.50	127.00
Vans or minibuses (up to 12 seater)	95.00	190.00
Large Vans or minibuses	127.00	254.00
Tractors	47.50	95.00
Motor bikes / scooters	10.00	20.00
Small car trailer	17.50	35.00
Cattle & horse boxes	23.50	47.00
Agriculture trailers (10ft x 6ft)	29.50	59.00
Boat trailers (18ft +)	25.50	51.00
Traps & carts	20.00	40.00
Caravan	98.50	197.00
Mobile homes	158.50	317.00
Bicycles	2.50	5.00

Farming & Animals

MAXIMUM CHARGES FOR CARRIAGE OF GOODS TO CLÉIRE

The following are maximum charges exclusive of V.A.T @ 21% and may be subject to reductions as appropriate depending on quantity.

Description of Merchandise	price per item
	€
Cattle over 1yr	12.50
Cattle under 1yr	6.50
Calves	2.50
Sheep	2.50
Pigs	2.50
Horses	16.00
Ponies under 14 hh	11.00
Foals	6.50
Donkeys	6.50
Chickens, ducks, etc (in boxes)	2.50
Square bales hay	0.25
Round bales hay	3.00

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

Farming & household

MAXIMUM CHARGES FOR CARRIAGE OF GOODS TO CLÉIRE

The following are maximum charges exclusive of V.A.T @ 21% and may be subject to reductions as appropriate depending on quantity.

Description of Merchandise	price per item	Per tonne
	€	€
Fertiliser, lime, moss peat	0.50	10.00
Coal, briquettes, turf	1.50	10.00
Jerry Cans	1.50	
Oil	3 cent per litre when pumped off boat	
Diesel	3 cent per litre when pumped off boat	
Feedstuff, nuts, meal	0.50	10.00
Wheelbarrows	2.50	
Gates charged per foot(e.g. 10ft = 6.50)	0.65 p/ft	
Ladders	5.00	
Lawn mower — push	6.50	
Lawn mower / quad ride on	10.00	
Fireplace	22.00	
Headstone & kerbing	20.00	
Garden shed	28.50	
Buckets of paint charged per gallon	0.65 per gallon	
Wheelie bins	7.50	
Skips	31.00 single	62.00 return
Bathroom suite	31.00	
Bathroom/kitchen tiles	1.25	22.00 per pallet
Concrete blocks (per thousand)	107.00	
Cement/Lime skim coat	1.50	10.00
Slates (per thousand)	29.00	
Tiles	2.50	22.00
Timber	1.50	22.00
Plywood	1.25	22.00
Plasterboard/hardboard	1.25	22.00
Flooring	1.25	22.00
Iron hardware	1.25	22.00
Reinforcing Iron bars	1.25	20.00
Reinforcing mesh 8×4 sheets	5.00 (per sheet)	
Copper pipes	1.25	
Sewer Pipes	1.25	
Waste pipe	1.25	
Rolls of lead	5.00	
Rolls of felt	3.00	
Wall insulation/Aero board	1.25	
Rolls of fibreglass	1.25	
Rolls of polythene	2.50	
<i>Doors</i>		
Flush	2.50	
Panel	3.00	
Glass panel	5.00	
Fire doors	7.50	
Solid exterior door	5.00	
Glass exterior door	6.00	

 MAXIMUM CHARGES FOR CARRIAGE OF GOODS TO CLÉIRE

The following are maximum charges exclusive of V.A.T @ 21% and may be subject to reductions as appropriate depending on quantity.

Description of Merchandise	price per item	Per tonne
	€	€
Shower door	7.50	
Bath	15.00	
Sink & pedestal	5.00	
Toilet	5.00	
Cookers, household appliances etc	6.50	
Stanley/solid fuel range	31.50	
Rolls of carpet and vinyl	9.50	
Double beds	6.00	
Double base/mattress	3.00	
Single bed	4.00	
Single bed/mattress	2.50	
Bunk bed set	10.00	
Single headboards	2.00	
Double headboards	3.00	
Continental headboards	4.00	
Bedside locker	2.00	
3ft combination wardrobe	15.00	
Wardrobe double	9.00	
Small chest of drawers	4.00	
Large chest of drawers	6.00	
Coffee table	4.00	
Table	7.00	
Kitchen chair	1.25	
Three piece suite	22.00	
Three seater couch	14.00	
Arm chair	6.00	
Two seater couch	10.00	
Bookcase	5.00	
Dressing table	12.00	
Large kitchen cabinets	20.00	
Groceries, hardware etc	2.50 (per box)	
Fruit, vegetables & eggs	1.25	
Meat (up to 14lbs) fish	2.00	
Cases of ice cream	0.50	
Cases of beers, minerals	0.50	
Cases of wine	1.00	
Cases of spirits	2.50	
Cases of cigarettes	2.50	
Boxes of bread, cakes	1.00	
Bags of carrageen, seaweed	1.25	
Bags of potatoes	1.25	
<i>T beams</i>		
Up to 10ft	7.00	
Up to 15ft	10.00	
Up to 25ft	12.00	
Up to 30ft	15.00	
industrial size oil tank	90.00	
domestic oil tank	10.00	

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

MAXIMUM CHARGES FOR CARRIAGE OF GOODS TO CLÉIRE

The following are maximum charges exclusive of V.A.T @ 21% and may be subject to reductions as appropriate depending on quantity.

Description of Merchandise	price per item	Per tonne
	€	€
plastic attic tank	4.00	
copper cylinder	6.00	
radiators (small) 3/4ft	2.50	
Radiators (large) 7ft	4.50	
<i>televisions</i>		
32" widescreen	10.00	
other sizes	7.00	
<i>Windows</i>		
8x5	10.00	
7x5	9.50	
6x5	9.00	
5x5	8.00	
5x4	7.50	
4x4	7.00	
3x4	5.50	
2x4	5.00	
3x2	4.00	
Hollow core slabs	25 per tonne	
Refuse trucks	1,000 (return) 800 (each return for two trucks)	
JCB	1,000 return	
Laden low loader	500 return	
Small stones	18 per tonne	
Topsoil	18 per tonne	
Turf (trailer)	75	
Fitted kitchens	150 flat rate	
Kitchen worktop	15	
Tracking machines — 6 tonne	400	
12 tonne	700	
20 tonne	1,000	
Barrels of tar	20	
Seed potatoes	20 per tonne	
Office furniture	Based on combination wardrobe — €15	
Teleporter	800 return	
Cement mixers — Large	30	
Small	15	
Lintels	50c per /ft	
Stairs	50 flat rate	
Bales of cardboard	10 per pallet	
Generator — Large	50	
Small	10	
Dumpers	400 one way	
Oil tanks (2,400 ltrs)	75	
Video/DVD	10	

Questions Nos. 600 and 601 answered with Question No. 579.

Departmental Expenditure.

602. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the breakdown of the funding provided by his Department to the islands within the remit of the local authority of Donegal County Council of a capital funding of €35,167.25 and a current expenditure of €287,947.05 for the year 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34393/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The details sought by the Deputy in regard to the capital expenditure payments of €35,167.25 to date in 2007 are as follows:

	€
Playground on Oileán Thoraí	35,000.00
Waste management on Oileán Thoraí	167.25

The details in regard to the current expenditure of €287,947.05 to date in 2007 relate to subsidised ferry services to Toraigh and Árainn Mhór, as follows:

	€
Turasmara Teo (Oileán Thoraí)	130,460.34
Maoin na Farraige Teo (Árainn Mhór)	157,486.71

Departmental Expenditure.

603. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will provide a breakdown of the funding provided by his Department to the islands within the remit of the local authority of Mayo County Council;

Table 1: Capital funding paid by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in 2007 to date in relation to islands in Co Galway

	€
<i>Inis Mór</i>	
Improvements and maintenance at the old Cill Rónáin pier	144,888.00
Upgrade of county council roads and spaces for traffic to pass	20,000.00
Upgrade of non-county council roads	20,000.00
Village renewal at Cill Ronáin	9,574.00
Kerosene/diesel distribution service	53,056.70
Improvements to marine facilities at Cill Ronáin	9,272.70
New surface on road from vocational school to pier/airport	814.00
Improvements to non-county council roads	34,027.00
Improvements to the cemetery at Cill Rónáin	501.00

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34420/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The details sought by the Deputy in regard to capital expenditure payments in 2007 to date are as follows:

	€
Inis Bigil cablecar	47,250.60
Pier improvement works on Inishturk and Clare Island	26,549.44

In addition, a sum of €318,853.41 in current expenditure has been paid to date in 2007 in respect of subsidised ferry services to Clare Island, Inishturk and Inis Bigil as follows:

	€
O'Malley Ferries (Clare)	60,958.37
Clare Island & Clew Bay Cruises (Inishturk)	242,000.04
Erris Local Development (Inis Bigil)	15,895.00

604. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will provide a breakdown of the funding provided by his Department to the islands within the remit of the local authority of Galway County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34421/07]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Capital funding of €11,327,124 was paid by my Department in 2007 to date in relation to islands in Co Galway. The relevant details are set out in Table 1. In addition, a sum of €2,649,687 in current expenditure has been paid by my Department in 2007 to date in respect of the provision of subsidised transport services to na hOileáin Árann and Inishboffin. The relevant details are set out in Table 2.

[Deputy Jack Wall.]

	€
<i>Inis Meáin</i>	
Improvements to Caladh Mór pier	5,118,126.47
Upgrade of roads	49,418.00
<i>Inis Oírr</i>	
Upgrade of non-county council roads	1,713.00
Environmental impact statement and licence	112,009.70
Improvements to the main roads	49,684.00
Playground	38,206.40
<i>Inis Bó Finne</i>	
Improvements to the road at Cluain Mór	344.00
Purchase of land for Clifden airstrip	474,112.84
New surface on county council road	14,965.00
Strengthen road at Day's Hotel	12,631.00
Improvements to building on Cleggan pier	784.00
Widening of the Pound Road	14,040.00
Inishboffin Community Centre	61,090.23
New surface on county council road from East to West Quarter	919.00
Inishboffin Airstrip	1,206,836.18
Consultancy — Inishboffin Airstrip	20,328.00
Ecological study at Inishboffin Airstrip	1,028.50
Wall at An Cladach ó Dheas	23,942.00
Ambulance and essential equipment	48,308.00
Costal protection at Chladach ó Dheas, necessary improvements to old pier and building of new slipway	3,752,667.01
<i>General</i>	
Temporary engineer to supervise works to piers at Cill Ronáin, Caladh Mór, Inis Oírr and Inishboffin, in addition to Inishboffin Airstrip	20,723.37
Ro-Ro study	13,113.80

Table 2: Current funding paid by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in 2007 to date in relation to transport services to islands in Co Galway

	€
Island Ferries Teo	592,400.08
Lasta Mara Teo	841,000.00
Inishboffin Island Discovery Ltd	203,600.84
Aer Arann	833,154.00
Údarás na Gaeltachta	179,532.37

Departmental Reports.

605. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the value for money review on the aquaculture programme was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33398/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Value for Money and Policy Review of the aquaculture supports

programme was finalised in May 2007. The review covered the period 2000 to 2005 of the NDP 2000-2006. The Review found that in general the current support schemes in aquaculture remain valid and the Aquaculture Development Measure and Exchequer funded schemes under the management of an Bord Iascaigh Mhara and Údarás na Gaeilge represent an integrated and cohesive set of measures designed to support the development of aquaculture from small-scale operations and trials to new technologies through to larger, more efficient, competitive and sustainable operations. The

review found that the Marine RTDI programme and aquaculture monitoring activities under the management of the Marine Institute are also compatible with the Department's high level strategy and remain valid.

The Review found that the future success of Irish aquaculture, in common with the development need identified for the Seafood Industry as a whole, lie in a move away from the production of low value added commodity type products to higher value products, sustained by the differentiation of Irish aquaculture products from the international competition as a premium quality offering.

Having regard to the aquaculture sub-measure of the Seafood Development Measure of the NDP 2007-2013 the report considers that in relation to aquaculture the high-level goal of this Measure should be to support competitiveness via the application of technological innovation to further develop environmentally sustainable techniques, including organic farming, and achieve successful diversification into new species, while ensuring the highest international quality standards are met.

These conclusions find parallels with those in the Report of the Seafood Strategy Review Group — Steering A New Course. The Review identifies the new NDP 2007-2013 as providing an opportunity to refocus and re-align schemes and monitoring activities and an ideal opportunity to develop SMART objectives that would greatly facilitate future evaluations.

Specifically, the Review proposes 16 recommendations to be applied in the context of supports during the course of the new NDP for the period 2007-2013. These recommendations are being pursued and implemented, where they are judged appropriate. As it is so early in the context of supports being generated under the European Fisheries Fund and the NDP 2007-2013, it is too early at this stage to give an accurate estimation of Exchequer savings. This picture will only be emerging over the course of the coming years.

606. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the value for money review of the BIM marine support programme will be completed; the anticipated value of the saving to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33812/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): A Value for Money review on the Fisheries Support Programme has been selected by this Department as part of the 2006-2008 round of reviews for completion by December 2008. Currently consideration is being given to the formation of a representative steering committee. It is the intention to have this committee commence its work in early January.

Question No. 607 withdrawn.

Grant Payments.

608. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister

for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason it is necessary for farmers to have all their payments paid directly into their bank accounts in view of the fact that many farmers do not want to avail of this option and some farmers particularly in isolated rural areas do not currently have a bank account; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33250/07]

609. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of farmers who currently receive payments from her Department; and the number of same who have already opted to receive their payments paid directly into their bank accounts. [33251/07]

610. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the action she will take to allay the concerns of farmers who do not want to provide her Department with details of their personal bank accounts due to privacy or security concerns; the way this information is monitored and if access to this information is limited to the accounts section of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33252/07]

611. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the options available to farmers who do not wish to receive their payments from her Department by direct credit to their bank account but wish to continue receiving their payments by way of a cheque in the post; if farmers have freedom of choice in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33253/07]

612. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the EU requirements which dictate that all scheme payments to farmers must issue to a bank account; and if there is an opt-out clause available for farmers here who do not wish to avail of this facility. [33254/07]

614. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the way the requirement for farmers to have all their payments paid directly into the bank accounts and her Department's administration of this fit in with the Data Protection Act 1988; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33268/07]

630. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason it is necessary for farmers to be paid under all schemes by direct credit to their bank accounts in view of the fact that many farmers are quite concerned about this proposal and some farmers do not have or want to have bank accounts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33494/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 608 to 612; 614 and 630 together.

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

In 2006, a total of 139,338 farmers received payments under the various schemes administered by my Department. Over 66,000 farmers have supplied the necessary details to receive their payments through directly into their bank account and are already paid through the electronic funds transfer facility.

My Department is obliged to adhere to the requirements and controls set out by the EU Commission in administering EU funded schemes. The new requirement to pay all scheme payments directly into bank accounts is being implemented in accordance with EU Council Regulation 1290/2005 which lays down the rules on the financing and management of the Common Agricultural Policy for the years 2007 to 2013. The detailed implementing rules for that Regulation, as set out in EU Commission Regulation 885/2006, requires that all EU paying agencies, including my Department, adopt procedures to ensure that payments are made only to bank accounts. Payment by cheque (payable order) may continue to be made for the EU financial years 2007 and 2008. However, as and from the EU 2009 financial year commencing on 16th in October 2008, payments by cheque will no longer be permitted.

My Department will be in contact with farmers to facilitate the smooth transfer to electronic funds transfers. All bank account details supplied are handled to the highest levels of security and confidentiality and the switchover to electronic payments is being administered in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

613. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork has not received their single farm payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33260/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted a late application for the 2006 Consolidation measure in January, 2007. This case has now been processed. The person named also submitted an application on 25 April 2007 to transfer entitlements to a Milk Production Partnership of which he is a member. It was not possible to process this application until the 2006 Consolidation application was fully processed. This application has now been fully processed and payment will issue shortly.

Question No. 614 answered with Question No. 608.

Energy Resources.

615. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the percentage of energy consumed in her Department and in all agencies for which her Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33273/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available. However, I wish to inform the Deputy that, earlier this year the heating of my Department's office in Johnstown Castle in Wexford was switched over to a Woodchip boiler. Following a survey carried out by the Office of Public Works it has been decided to install biofuel heating systems in the following Offices of my Department; Ballina AES Office, Cavan Regional Office, Castlebar Office, Ennis Local Office, Enniscorthy Local Office, Longford Local Office, Mullingar Local Office and Nenagh Local Office. It is envisaged that the Office of Public Works will have these heating systems installed early next year.

Building Management Systems have been installed in recent years at all of my Department's Offices (including Agriculture House) with a floor area greater than 1,000 sq meters. These systems are set up to avail of off peak/low rate electricity where possible. They also control use of electricity, gas and oil in all such Offices and centrally control temperature in these Offices.

High efficiency fluorescent lighting is in place in all DAFF Offices. This lighting is considered by the OPW to be five times more energy efficient than conventional lighting. In more recently built and refurbished Department Offices, lighting control systems have been installed which automatically switch off lighting in Office areas that are unoccupied.

During 2007, the Department has continued its desktop computer upgrade programme, which involves the replacement of older models of computer with more environmentally friendly models resulting in reduced demand for electrical power. With regard to agencies under the aegis of my Department, the energy consumed is an operational matter for the bodies themselves.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme.

616. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the issue with the computerised mapping system in her Department will be resolved to enable REP scheme four applications to be accepted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33297/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): There is no difficulty with the computerized mapping system (e-REPS) which is hosted by Teagasc on my Department's behalf and is available to all planners. The re-engineering of e-REPS to accommodate the new options and supplementary measures introduced in REPS 4 has been fully available since 8 November 2007. Since 1 September 2007 it has been possible to prepare applications manually, in advance of the re-engineering of e-REPS, and applications prepared in this way have been accepted in my Department's local offices since that date and are being processed.

EU Directives.

617. **Deputy Edward O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the European Commission has adopted proposals that aim to streamline and extend the rules pertaining to the registration of regional trade marks; if her attention has further been drawn to the fact that Mitchelstown cheese may not be manufactured in Mitchelstown and Galtee bacon named after the local Galtee mountains is not of Irish origin and that this could be in breach of the EU regulations; and if she will take action in this regard as the situation is being abused. [33304/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): As neither of the products listed by the Deputy is registered as a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) or Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) under Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 on the Protection of Geographical Indications and Designations of Origin for Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs which is implemented in Ireland under Regulations entitled European Communities (Protection Of Geographical Indications and Designations of Origin For Agricultural Products And Foodstuffs) Regulations (S.I. No 704 of 2007), I have no statutory role in the matter.

I understand however that both names have been registered as trademarks under trademark law, which comes under the jurisdiction of my cabinet colleague, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Mr Micheál Martin. I am bringing the matters raised to his attention.

Departmental Expenditure.

618. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by her Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33331/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information requested by the Deputy is as follows.

2006

Network	Total Charges	Data Charges	Roaming Charges
Vodafone	263,712.00	63,486.08	27,081.62
O2	451,848.30	1,026.02	36,066.56
Total	715,560.30	64,512.10	63,148.18

2007

Network	Total Charges	Data Charges	Roaming Charges
Vodafone	257,618.13	58,594.05	25,431.33
O2	488,260.00	1,681.60	30,380.82
Total	745,878.13	60,275.65	55,812.15

619. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by her Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33346/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information requested by the Deputy is as follows.

2006

	Total Charges	Data Charges	Roaming Charges
Mobile Phone Expenses	7,362.14	N/a	N/a
Total	7,362.14	N/a	N/a

2007

	Total Charges	Data Charges	Roaming Charges
Mobile Phone Expenses	3,149.48	N/a	N/a
Total	3,149.48	N/a	N/a

A detailed breakdown of data and roaming charges in respect of expenses paid to staff is not readily available.

620. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to her by her Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33361/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information requested by the deputy is as follows.

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

2006

Network	Total Charges	Data Charges	Roaming Charges
Vodafone	0.00	0.00	0.00
O2	6,308.15	0.00	2,865.58
Total	6,308.15	0.00	2,865.58

2007

Network	Total Charges	Data Charges	Roaming Charges
Vodafone	1,813.52	378.94	1,110.90
O2	2,115.06	0.00	1,103.68
Total	3,928.58	378.94	2,214.58

Departmental Reports.

621. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the value for money review on installation aid was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33379/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The value for money review on the Installation Aid Scheme will be completed by my Department during the course of 2008.

622. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the value for money review on the farm waste management programme was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33380/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The value for money review on the Farm Waste Management Scheme was completed by my Department in 2007 and is available on my Department's website. Many of its recommendations were taken into account in the introduction of the revised Farm Waste Management Scheme in 2006 which provided increased grants to farmers in order to assist them meet the additional requirements of the Nitrates Directive.

623. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the value for money review on dairy hygiene was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33382/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The value for money review of the Dairy Hygiene Scheme is currently at the external examiner stage and should be completed during the course of 2008.

624. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the value for money review of the food research and development grants was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33383/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department carries out Value for Money and Policy Reviews on major spending programmes in line with the strategic management initiative in order to: assess the objectives, efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes and to identify mechanisms to improve the delivery of specific programmes; and identify indicators which will improve monitoring of the performance of the programmes and of the success in meeting their objectives.

A review of the Food Institutional Research Measure, my Department's public good food research measure, has been carried out and the independent evaluation of the draft report, which is required under the expenditure review process, was recently completed. It is expected that the report will be signed off and published in the new year. Consideration will then be given to implementation of any recommendations in the report. It is not appropriate at this stage to comment on potential savings that may result from the review.

625. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the value for money review of the bovine TB scheme will be completed; the anticipated saving to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33384/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The value for money review of the Bovine TB Eradication Scheme is scheduled for completion by the end of the year. After its completion, consideration will be given to implementation of any recommendations that may be contained in the report. Consequently, it is not possible at this stage to quantify the extent of any savings that may result from the review.

626. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the value for money review of the meat hygiene temporary inspectors scheme will be completed; the anticipated saving to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33385/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993, the Strategic Management Initiative and the Public

Service Management Act 1997 emphasised the need for increased efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public resources and set the background for the Expenditure Review process. Under this initiative, my Department carries out Value for Money and Policy Reviews on major spending programmes on a periodic basis. Their aim is to: assess the objectives, efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes and to identify mechanisms to improve the delivery of specific programmes; and identify indicators which will improve monitoring of the performance of the programmes and of the success in meeting their objectives.

Under the Temporary Veterinary Inspector (Meat Hygiene) Programme, private veterinary practitioners are engaged on a contract for service basis to conduct official controls in DAFF approved slaughtering establishments. A review of this Programme commenced in early 2007 and is nearing conclusion. It would be inappropriate in advance of completion of the review to speculate on the outcome.

627. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the value for money review of the cattle movement monitoring systems animal identification scheme will be completed; the anticipated saving to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33386/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The value for money review of the cattle movement and monitoring system is scheduled for completion by the end of next year. After its completion, consideration will be given to implementation of any recommendations that may be contained in the report. Consequently, it is not possible at this stage to quantify the extent of any savings that may result from the review.

628. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the value for money review of the fallen animals scheme will be completed; the anticipated saving to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33387/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Value for Money Review on the Fallen Animals Scheme is scheduled to be carried out next year.

Grant Payments.

629. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will ensure that forestry premium payments are made to a person (details supplied) in County Sligo as soon as possible; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33454/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The delay in paying

forestry premiums, to the applicant in question, was due to multiple claims being received by my Department for the same area of ground. Revised maps have been submitted and I understand the premiums will be paid before Christmas.

Question No. 630 answered with Question No. 608.

Departmental Staff.

631. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in her Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by her or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33501/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): A monitor of news headlines relating to my Department contained in the main Irish daily and provincial newspapers as well as the main agricultural press is prepared by the staff of the Press Office. The monitors are made available to all senior management of the Department. In addition, access to the full content of such items is made available to all staff in the Department through the library site on the Department's intranet (Ezone). It is not possible to provide costs for this service as the work is carried out as part of the standard duties of the staff involved.

Departmental Expenditure.

632. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number and name of newspapers purchased by her Department daily and weekly; the number provided to herself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33516/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The daily and weekly newspapers purchased by my Department are: Irish Times; Irish Independent; Irish Examiner; Irish News; The Star; Evening Herald; Guardian; Sunday Independent; Sunday Tribune; Sunday Business Post; Irish Mail on Sunday; Financial Times; Sunday Times; Anglo Celt; Argus; Avondhu; Carlow People; Carrighdoun; Clare Champion; Clonmel Nationalist; Connaught Telegraph; Connaught Tribune; Corkman; Donegal Democrat ; Donegal Peoples Press; Donegal Post; Drogheda Independent ; Dundalk Democrat; Dungarvan Leader; Dungarvan Observer; Derry People/ Donegal News; Echo (Enniscorthy); Enniscorthy Guardian; Finn Valley Voice; Gorey Guardian; Guardian (Nenagh); Imokilly People; Kerry's Eye; Kerryman; Kildare

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

Nationalist; Kilkenny Voice; Kingdom; Leinster Express; Leinster Leader; Leitrim Observer; Limerick Leader; Longford Leader; Longford News; Mayo News; Meath Chronicle; Midland Tribune; Munster Express; Nationalist (Laois); Nationalist (Carlow); New Ross Standard; Northern Standard; Offaly Express; Offaly Independent; Roscommon Champion; Roscommon Herald; Sligo Champion; Sligo Weekender; Southern Star; Tipperary Star; Tuam Herald; Tullamore Tribune; Waterford News and Star; Western People; Westmeath Examiner; Westmeath Independent; and Wicklow People.

Eleven daily newspaper titles and two weeklies are provided to myself and to my 3 Ministers of State. The total cost of newspapers purchased by my Department in 2007 is €39,766.

Departmental Staff.

633. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of press officers and press advisers in her Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible to; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33531/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The work of the Press Office which has responsibility for press and media matters is carried out by a unit of the Corporate Affairs Division in my Department. The equivalent of 4.5 staff work full-time on media communications duties in this unit, all of whom are civil servants. This includes one civil servant at Assistant Principal Officer level who works as the Department's Press and Information Officer. His annual salary is €73,784 and the post carries an annual allowance of €8464.

Consultancy Contracts.

634. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by her Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33546/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Department has not employed any media consultants since 1997. One media consultancy, McMahon Sheedy Communications, was employed from January to June 1997 at a cost of £19,057.50.

Departmental Staff.

635. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of press advisers employed by her

Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33561/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): There have been only two Press Advisors employed in my Department, at different times, since 1997. The salaries of these advisors amounted to €82,066 and €83,815 per annum. There is currently no Press Advisor employed in my Department.

Departmental Expenditure.

636. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of credit cards held by her Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33576/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): There are currently 50 credit cards held by staff in my Department in connection their official duties. Credit cards are issued to certain officers at the grade of Executive Officer and upwards to pay for official expenses. It is not possible to provide details of the costs requested in the timeframe allowed. This information will be provided in writing directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

637. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the cost to her Department of photographers used by all Ministers in her Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33591/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The amount spent by my Department on photographers over a ten-year period from 1997 to 2007 is not readily available for all the years in question. I will arrange to supply the Deputy with the figures shortly.

638. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the cost of make-up for her for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33606/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): No cost to the Department arises.

639. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the cost of her Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33621/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The amount spent by my Department on official entertainment expenses over a ten-year period from 1997 to 2007 is not readily available for all the years in question.

I have to hand the total amounts spent in the years 2005, 2006 and 2007 to-date which are as follows:

- 2005: €61,575 which represents 0.00005% of my Department's total budget.
- 2006: €56,380 which represents 0.00004% of my Department's total budget.
- 2007: €40,134 which represents 0.000027% of my Department's total budget.

I will arrange to supply the Deputy with the figures for the previous years shortly.

Government Information Services.

640. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if her Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to her Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to her every day or how often it is furnished. [33636/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Press Office of my Department receives news headline summaries from the Government Information Service on an hourly basis during the course of the day. A daily newspaper headline listing is also prepared by the GIS. The summaries are circulated in electronic format and are circulated via email on an ongoing basis. The Press Officer advises the Minister's office and senior Department officials of

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
€210,375	€257,437	€311,339	€318,645	€306,813	€337,418

Note: expenditure in the period 2002 — 2006 is in respect of 2 Ministers of State; there are currently 3 Ministers of State assigned to the Department.

643. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the cost of her using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to junior Ministers and staff for the same period. [33681/07]

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	€	€	€	€	€	€
Minister & staff	21,138.33	31,643.60	25,972.77	43,878.17	7,709.60	36,651.05
Minister of State & staff	33,834.67	29,490.16	36,013.86	20,380.23	21,802.84	16,206.57

matters which are pertinent to the Minister's brief or the Department's area of activity.

Official Engagements.

641. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if a press adviser travels with her on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by her in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with her. [33651/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department does not currently employ a press advisor. The Press Officer, who is an official of the Department, would accompany the Minister on official duties where appropriate to undertake press and media duties. The Press Officer and press office staff maintain daily contact with the Minister's office.

Departmental Transport.

642. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in her Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33666/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The cost of providing transport to the Ministers of State in my Department and their staff for the period 2002 to date in 2007 is set out in the table. It was not possible to provide the information for the period 1997 to 2001 in the timeframe given and I will forward further details in writing directly to the Deputy as soon as possible. The figures supplied include pay for drivers and travel and subsistence costs incurred by Ministers of State and staff personally appointed by them. This expenditure was paid in accordance with the relevant official guidelines and regulations.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Public transport costs for the years 2002 to 2007 are set out in the table. My Department is unable to access the information required by the Deputy for previous years in the time available.

Departmental Communications.

644. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if her Department carries news summaries on its internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33711/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Access to the content of news items relating to my Department is available to all staff in the Department through the library site on the Department's intranet (Ezone). The information is updated daily by staff in the library. The library subscribes to the newspapers as part of its normal information service and there are no additional costs in making the headlines available.

Departmental Expenditure.

645. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of mobile phones used by her and supplied by her Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33726/07]

646. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if any of the advisers or staff appointed by her directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by her Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33741/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to answer Questions Nos. 645 and 646 together.

The information requested is not readily available but will be collated and referred directly to the Deputy.

Grant Payments.

647. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in view of the fact that a person (details supplied) in County Mayo has submitted the further information which was requested by her Department, they will be awarded their DAS. [34011/07]

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

potentially not meeting this minimum stocking density requirement, the applicant is invited to submit evidence of satisfactory stocking i.e. Flock Register, Horse Passports. Alternatively the applicant may submit details of a REPS plan or a Commonage Framework Plan, which provides for a lower stocking level.

The applicant in this case was written to and invited to submit appropriate evidence of the number of sheep maintained on the farm and a copy of the REPS Plan. My Department received a flock register relating to the holding. However, the applicant did not submit a full REPS plan, which provides for a lower stocking level on the holding. The applicant has been contacted directly by an official from my Department and requested to submit the relevant documentation. On receipt of this documentation, the application will be processed with a view to issuing the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme payment at an early date, provided that the applicant is eligible for payment.

Industrial Relations.

648. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of disputes that are on the records of her Department that involve staff members of her Department or agencies as set up by her Department; the number of disputes that have been transferred from her Department to an agency set up by her Department; when such an agency was set up; if such transfer of responsibility in relation to disputes has been sanctioned by the Attorney General; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34073/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): There are currently no industrial disputes in my Department. With regard to the Agencies under the aegis of my Department, disputes are a matter for the bodies themselves.

Departmental Transport.

649. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for her transport and that of her staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34086/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The cost of providing transport hire for my predecessor and I, Ministers of State assigned to my Department and my staff for the period 2003 to date in 2007 is set out in the table below. It is not possible to provide the information for the period 1997 to 2002 in the timeframe given and further details will be for-

warded in writing directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The transport hire costs were incurred almost exclusively in connection with attendance at the monthly meetings of the EU Council of Agricultural and Fisheries Ministers, other international negotiations, including the World Trade Organisation and other official ministerial visits abroad.

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	€	€	€	€	€
Minister	36,966.80	18,167.23	15,819.18	21,663.74	19,924.24
Ministers of State	9,753.90	2,305.44	14,339.72	6,040.09	8,559.26
Totals	46,720.70	20,472.67	30,158.90	27,703.83	28,483.50

Grant Payments.

650. **Deputy Beverley Flynn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if a decision has been made on an application under the farm-yard improvement scheme for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [34111/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): No decision has yet been made by my Department in the case referred to. Applications received under the Farm Improvement Scheme prior to its suspension on 31 October 2007 will be processed by my Department up to the level of funding provided for the Scheme in the 2006 partnership agreement, Towards 2016.

Agriculture Policy.

651. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if there are plans to introduce a structure of share farming or leasing schemes which provide tax incentives to encourage more trained young people into farming; if she proposes an increase in research and development resources into the agri-food sector; and if she proposes to provide additional resources to Teagasc Training and Advisory Services. [34127/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): At present there are a number of generous schemes and reliefs aimed at encouraging land mobility and reducing the cost of transfers to young trained farmers. These include:

- A rental income tax exemption of up to €20,000 for farmers over 40 years who lease out land for a period of 10 years or more.
- A rental income tax exemption of up to €15,000 for farmers over 40 years who lease out land for a period of 7 years or more.
- A rental income tax exemption of up to €12,000 for farmers over 40 years who lease out land for a period of 5 to 7 years.

Foreign transport hire is arranged by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the cost is recouped by my Department. Transport hire within Ireland, which is confined almost exclusively to the cost of transport hire for official visits by Ministerial delegations, is minimal so tenders are not normally sought.

- Capital Gains Tax — Retirement Relief for farmers aged over 55 years.
- A 90% Agricultural Relief from Capital Acquisitions Tax.
- The provision of full Stamp Duty Relief for young trained farmers.
- Stamp Duty relief for land swaps for the purpose of farm consolidation.
- Farmers who are leasing out land can still, subject to certain conditions, qualify for Capital Gains Tax retirement relief.

In addition, increased support for land mobility is provided through a range of enhanced measures included in the Rural Development Plan 2007-2013. The Installation Grant Aid for young farmers is worth €15,000 and a maximum early retirement pension of €15,000 per annum is available for farmers who dispose of their land by gift, sale or lease.

To encourage research and innovation in the agri-food sector, which is an essential requirement for improving profitability and added value, more than €175m has been provided to fund research, training and advice in the 2008 budget. This comprises €42m in my Department's Research and Training Subhead, which includes €26m to fund research in the Food and Farm sectors through the FIRM and Stimulus Research Programmes. This represents an overall 12% increase in the 2007 provisions for those areas.

My Department will provide €133m to Teagasc for capital and non-capital purposes in 2008 to support its research, training and advisory services. This is a 3% increase in the provision for 2007. Teagasc has also been allowed to retain the proceeds of the sale of its lands in Athenry to fund a major programme in its research facilities. By any standards these are substantial resources and are a clear indication of the Government's continuing commitment to supporting Teagasc activities.

It is the responsibility of the Teagasc Authority to prioritise its activities and to allocate its funding accordingly. This it has done over the years

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

in accordance with the needs of clients, EU and Government policy. I am satisfied that in doing so it has provided a first class service to Irish farmers.

Grant Payments.

652. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the situation regarding a person (details supplied) in County Cork and their single payment entitlements arising from recent correspondence from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34174/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The person named successfully applied under the New Entrant measure of the Single Payment Scheme. Subsequently, the person named applied to be considered for an allocation of entitlements under Categories A, B and C of the 2005 National Reserve.

Category A caters for farmers who inherited land or received land free of charge or for a nominal sum from a farmer who had retired or died by 16 May, 2005 and who had leased out his/her holding to a third party during the reference period 2000 to 2002.

Category B caters for farmers who made an investment in production capacity in a farming sector for which a direct payment under Live-stock Premia and/or Arable Aid schemes would have been payable during the reference period 2000 — 2002. Investments can include purchase or long term lease of land, purchase of suckler and/or ewe quota or other investments.

Category C caters for farmers who sold their milk quota into the Milk Quota Restructuring Scheme and converted their enterprise to a farming sector for which a direct payment under Live-stock Premia and/or Arable Aid Schemes would have been payable during the reference period 2000 to 2002. The person named did not meet the eligibility criteria under Categories A and C but he was deemed successful under category B of the National Reserve and a formal letter to this effect issued on 24th November 2007.

The regulations governing the Single Payment Scheme stipulate that an applicant who is found to be eligible under more than one measure of the Scheme, may only receive an allocation of entitlements under whichever measure is most beneficial to him/her. The person named had already been deemed eligible under the New Entrant measure of the Single Payment Scheme. However his allocation under the National Reserve measure amounted to €2434.74, which was greater than the original allocation of €1894.66 under the New Entrant measure.

As the National Reserve measure is financially more beneficial, the New Entrant allocation is now rescinded in favour of the National Reserve.

The person named was informed of this by letter dated 22 November, 2007. The extra monies now due in respect of 2005, 2006 and 2007 will issue to the person named shortly.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme.

653. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the regions where her Department has requested reduced stocking densities on commonages; the reason for her Department's request in each case; the progress that has been made in respect of each area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34175/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): As a result of environmental damage on commonages due to overgrazing by sheep, Ireland was required by the European Commission to put in place comprehensive measures to deliver environmentally sustainable farming practices as a condition of making REPS payments to commonage farmers. Over 4,000 Commonage Framework Plans, covering approximately 430,000 hectares, were prepared by agricultural consultants on behalf of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and of my own Department. When each plan was being prepared, a field assessment was carried out and the level of destocking (if any) that was recommended was directly related to the environmental condition of the commonage. Destocking was recommended to varying degrees on commonages in every county. The European Commission continues to monitor progress with the exercise in the context of the Wild Birds Directive, and it has already been necessary for the National Parks and Wildlife Service to take additional steps in one area to deal with overgrazing problems. Other areas where recovery of vegetation has been unsatisfactory are also being monitored by the NPWS and I understand that it may be necessary to take similar steps in those areas.

Departmental Communications.

654. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of staff in her Department that are provided with a blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34215/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The number of staff in my Department provided with a Blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment is 94. 87 staff have been provided with Blackberry devices and 7 staff are piloting a 'push email' solution on mobile-phones.

655. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of databases used by her Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within her Department. [34230/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department has in place twenty one (21) databases to support its work. Twenty (20) databases are operated and hosted within the Department. One (1) database, which is shared with other Departments, is hosted by another public sector organization that provides hosting facilities.

656. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for her Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if she will present the information in tabular readable form. [34245/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department has invested significantly in IT over the past number of years and has successfully delivered many new IT systems to underpin its operations and to provide greater internal efficiencies, controls, and enhanced customer service. At any time there is a large programme of IT initiatives being progressed. The details requested by the Deputy in relation to the IT projects delivered since 2004, are being prepared and will be sent on to him directly.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

657. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the steps she has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in her Department; and if none to date, the plans she will put in place on the matter. [34260/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The setting of policy in relation to the offsetting of carbon dioxide emissions from Ministerial travel is a matter, in the first instance, for my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. I understand that he, on foot of the commitment in the Programme for Government on carbon offsetting official air travel, is developing a scheme for use by all Government Departments and bodies under their aegis and that he intends to announce details of the scheme shortly.

Data Protection.

658. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on her departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34275/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department has put in place a robust Information Technology infrastructure, at both the hardware and software levels, to ensure that all data (including personal data) is safe from hackers. A complex infrastructure consisting of firewalls, routers, and specialized software has been deployed to protect against intrusion by hackers, etc. As a further measure, the Department has put in place a contract for independent testing and verification, on an ongoing basis, of the security control measures that it has put in place. At the computer application level, the Department has a sophisticated data access control system (Single Sign On) that includes user profiles. This provides for tailored access to data, appropriate to the individual user's needs and prevents unauthorised access to data.

Management Information Framework.

659. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34298/07]

660. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in her Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34312/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to answer Questions Nos. 659 and 660 together.

The Management Information Framework has been fully operational in my Department. However, evaluation and improvement of the system is on-going and work is currently in hand to integrate into the system the fisheries related responsibilities which have been transferred to my Department. The main component of the Framework is the SAP R3 Accounts system which was introduced into the Department in 2001 and to which additional modules were added in 2003. The system was updated in 2006. When arrangements to include fisheries expenditure are complete, all funds disbursed by my Department will be accounted for on the system.

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

Apart from facilitating the efficient processing of payments and the production of the Appropriation Account and other statutory accounts, the system includes a management-reporting module which is available to management at all levels. Management reports, including information on administrative and programme expenditure, are examined at every meeting of the Department's Management Advisory Committee in order to monitor progress and manage programme delivery. My Department has a well developed system of business planning, which involves the production of Divisional plans with key performance indicators linked with the higher level goals in the Statement of Strategy for my Department.

It is not possible to identify what savings, if any, have accrued from the operation of the Management Information Framework. However, I believe that it has provided substantial operational improvements, including the automation of manual processes, and that it has improved significantly efficiency in the processing of payments. The Framework is also a useful management tool to senior management in providing accurate, up-to-date data in support of decision making and resource allocation.

Grant Payments.

661. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the means whereby a resolution can be achieved in the matter of recoupment of moneys in the case of the representatives of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34329/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The REPS agreement in question was between the Department and a third party, not the person named. Consequently the debt involved is not a matter for the representatives of the person named but for the third party concerned. I have asked my officials to communicate directly with the third party concerned to progress this matter.

Beef Imports.

662. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the status and progress towards the implementation of the 25 recommendations contained in the EU Food and Veterinary Office report published in March 2007; the prospect of her issuing, in the interest of the health concerns of the consumer here, a directive to ban the importation of Brazilian beef into Ireland until the measures signalled in the said report apply; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34392/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The report of the visit

in March of the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) to Brazil was published in October. The progress in the implementation of the recommendations of that report will be assessed by the FVO. In this context of a further FVO mission was undertaken in November. At my request the matter was discussed recently by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFAH).

In response to Ireland, UK, Italy and Denmark who also requested update on the FVO's latest Mission to Brazil in November and the actions the Commission proposed to take, the Commission said that the FVO report on the latest mission was being drafted but details were not available. The Commission did however indicate that all of the assurances previously given were not complied with and it was considering various options. I have remained in contact with Commissioner Kyprianou on this issue. The Commissioner has assured me that the Commission will not hesitate to the appropriate measures if a product imported from a third country or produced in the domestic market represents a risk for the health of EC consumers or livestock.

Registration of Title.

663. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a vesting order will be completed for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [34440/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The vesting order for the person named is completed and is currently being sealed and will be lodged with the Property Registration Authority within a week.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme.

664. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if a person in (details supplied) in County Mayo will be approved and granted the disadvantaged area scheme in view of the fact that the requested information has been submitted. [34441/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): An application under the 2007 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 1 May 2007. During processing of the application, it was necessary for an official of my Department to request additional information from the person named, which has now been supplied. Accordingly, full payment (€4,456.75) under the 2007 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme will issue to the person named in the coming days.

Harbours and Piers.

665. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food her plans to make funding available to further develop Bally-

cotton harbour in County Cork under the fishery harbour development programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34444/07]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The harbour at Ballycotton is owned by Cork County Council and responsibility for its development rests with the Local Authority in the first instance. My Department does, however, co-fund approved capital works under the Fishery Harbours and Coastal Infrastructure Programme, subject to the availability of Exchequer funding and overall national priorities. Funding of €900,000 was approved under the Programme in 2007. This represented 75% of the total 2007 estimated spend of €1.2 million submitted by Cork County Council.

I have recently invited applications for funding under the 2008 Fishery Harbours & Coastal Infrastructure Programme. Any application received from Cork County Council will be considered subject to the availability of exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

School Transport.

666. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Education and Science the policy regarding fuel subvention for school buses; if a review is being carried out on the use of biofuels for schools buses; her views on an incentive for the use of biofuels in school buses; the qualifications required to drive a school bus; and the way candidates are reviewed. [33777/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): I take it that the Deputy is referring in the first part of the Question to the current fuel duty rebate scheme which is a matter for the Minister for Finance and the Revenue Commissioners. I understand that in March of this year the European Commission published its decision to refuse all requests for the retention of the fuel duty rebate scheme.

My Department understands that officials from the Department of Transport are currently engaging with officials from the Department of Finance to explore the possibility of replacing the scheme, if appropriate, by alternative non-tax financial support mechanisms to achieve the same policy objectives, subject to EU State Aid requirements. My Department will liaise with both Departments regarding the outcome of these discussions.

In relation to the use of biofuels, my Department understands that the Minister for Transport, as part of his overall objective for sustainable urban transportation, has requested CIÉ to move to a 30% bio-diesel blend in all new buses as part of their fleet replacement policy. In line with the Programme for Government, CIÉ has also been asked to set out as quickly as possible an action

plan to convert the existing fleet to a 5% biofuel blend.

I also understand from the Minister for Transport that the Mineral Oil Tax Relief (MOTR) Scheme II, announced in November 2006 will also support a move to biofuels. This Scheme will place 163 million litres of biofuels on the market at a cost to the Exchequer of €200 million over the period 2006-2010.

In regard to the qualifications of bus drivers within the school transport scheme, Bus Éireann school bus drivers are required to undergo a pre-employment medical examination by a nominated doctor, and may be subject to on-going review. All Bus Éireann school bus drivers must hold a current Driving Licence, appropriate to the size of vehicle that they are required to drive.

In addition, drivers are required to satisfy a background vetting check conducted by the Garda Authorities. Bus Éireann school bus drivers must pass a Driving Assessment conducted by specially trained and qualified Bus Éireann Inspectors. Route training and vehicle familiarity training is provided, along with refresher courses and other training courses such as advanced driving techniques and a disability awareness programme.

Contractors school bus drivers are required to provide certification of medical fitness to drive a bus from their General Practitioner, and may be subject to on-going medical review by the Chief Medical Officer of CIE. It is a condition of the Contract Agreement that no person shall be allowed to drive a school bus if having been requested, they refuse to submit themselves for medical examination, or if they are certified unfit.

Both the Contractor and the drivers nominated by the Contractor to undertake school bus driving are also subject to Garda vetting. All nominated Contractors Drivers must hold a driving licence appropriate to the size of vehicle that they are required to drive to fulfil the Contract Agreement. Bus Éireann maintain a record of driving licences on file for all nominated Contractors school bus drivers.

Contractors, as bus operators in their own right, are primarily responsible for the training of their own drivers, but notwithstanding this are also obliged to ensure that their drivers attend training courses nominated by Bus Éireann.

Schools Building Projects.

667. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Science if an architectural team has been appointed for the building works at a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33226/07]

668. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Science the status of the school building project at a school (details supplied) in

[Deputy Martin Ferris.]

County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33227/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 667 and 668 together.

My Department have completed a technical visit of the school referred to by the Deputy with a view to determining the project brief. The future progression of the project will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme.

669. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding planned refurbishment work and a new building for a school (details supplied) in County Cork. [33257/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): An extension/refurbishment project proposed for the school referred to by the Deputy is at the early stages of architectural planning. The progression of the project will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme.

School Transport.

670. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science, further to Parliamentary Question No. 444 of 16 October 2007, if progress has been made in relation to the school transport inquiry for a child (details supplied) in County Cork. [33258/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): The Deputy will be aware from my reply to Parliamentary Question 444 that pupils who reside 3.2 kilometres or more from, and are attending, their nearest gaelscoil are eligible for free school transport. The position is that there is no provision in the School Transport Scheme for my Department to sanction either transport or grant-aid for pupils in circumstances outlined by the Deputy in the details supplied.

Grant Payments.

671. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will report on a query (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33263/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the deputy that following the receipt of additional information requested a grant has been sanctioned for the school in question. Arrangements are being put in place to have the grant paid into the school's bank account as soon as possible.

Energy Resources.

672. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Education and Science the percentage of energy consumed in her Department and in all agencies for which her Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33277/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department is involved in the collaborative purchase of electricity for use in Government Departments operated by the Government Supplies Agency, OPW, who administer the tendering process. The present contracts for the supply of electricity to my Department do not include electricity from renewable sources. My Department will evaluate the situation when the contract is re-tendered next year. The information in relation to the aegis bodies under my Department is being compiled and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy.

Schools Building Projects.

673. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the necessary funding will be made available for the commencement of works on the new buildings for a school (details supplied) now that a site has been nominated. [33290/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department is committed to purchasing a site for Gaelscoil Cluain Meala. For reasons of commercial sensitivities, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual sites.

Higher Education Grants.

674. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on her Department's refusal to grant a Gaeltacht third level scholarship to a student (details supplied) who otherwise qualified for the scholarship but because their selected course subjects included some university subjects which were not taught through Irish, they were informed that the scholarship was being withdrawn; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33294/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Every year the Department of Education & Science awards 50 Third Level Irish Scholarships to students, who have completed their Leaving Certificate through Irish and who have amongst other things, attended an all-Irish school and reached a certain minimum standard in the Leaving Certificate.

Twenty of these scholarships are offered to students who wish to pursue their third level studies entirely through the medium of Irish — An Scéim Scoláireachtaí Gaeilge Tríú Leibhéal Teoranta. Students applying for this particular scholar-

ship are required to submit a list of courses that they have chosen on their Central Applications Office application form. This list must include an approved course that is listed under the Teoranta Scheme.

As soon as possible after the Leaving Certificate results have issued, the Department begins to make preliminary offers to students who have chosen one or more of the approved courses on their CAO list. These offers do not constitute awards as such, as compliance with the conditions of the schemes must be checked to ensure that they meet the eligibility requirements. The full terms and conditions of the Teoranta Scholarship Scheme can be accessed on www.education.ie under Students & Trainees.

School Transport.

675. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will review, resource and fund extra transport services for a school (details supplied) in County Dublin which is under pressure taking pupils in from nearby Balbriggan and where parents and students are having severe difficulty getting to the school which is located in a rural location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33296/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): Under the terms of my Department's Primary School Transport Scheme, pupils who reside 3.2 kilometres or more from, and are attending, their nearest suitable national school as determined by my Department, are eligible for free school transport. There is no provision in the Scheme for my Department to sanction either transport or grant-aid for pupils in the circumstances outlined by the Deputy.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme.

676. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Education and Science the proposals she has to increase the meal allowance for VTOS learners by €4 to €20 per week and to at least double the travel allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33307/07]

724. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will increase substantially the meal and travel allowance paid to VTOS learners which is currently €4 per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34034/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 676 and 724 together.

The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) is a second — chance education initiative, which is funded by my Department, for

unemployed persons who are at least 21 years of age and in receipt of certain social welfare payments for at least six months. It is operated through the Vocational Education Committees. The aim of the Scheme is to give unemployed people education and training opportunities which will develop and prepare them to go into paid employment, or on to further education opportunities leading to paid employment.

A training allowance is paid by the VECs to students who previously drew unemployment benefit or assistance. The student ceases to receive an unemployment payment and, instead, receives a VTOS training allowance at a rate equivalent to the maximum rate of unemployment benefit, plus a payment for an adult or child dependant, if appropriate. VTOS students also retain their social welfare secondary benefits.

The allowances for VTOS students for meals and travel referred to in the question are equivalent to these paid to participants on FÁS training courses. VTOS students are entitled to a meal allowance of €0.80 per day. They may be entitled to a travel allowance if they reside more than 3 miles from a centre. This weekly allowance ranges from €4.60 for a distance of 3 to 5 miles to €32.60 for a distance of 40 to 50 miles from a centre. These allowances are increased in line with increases in FÁS rates. An increase in the FÁS rates will be necessary before VTOS rates can be increased.

Third Level Courses.

677. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views and the steps she plans to take to act upon the recommendation by the National Competitiveness Council in its 2007 annual report that the Government develop a proactive, consistent and supportive policy framework to attract more foreign students into the Irish higher education system as a means of generating foreign earnings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33326/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I have taken note of the Recommendations of the National Competitiveness Council in relation to the development of a policy framework for attracting foreign students to Ireland. In this area, my Department established an interdepartmental group some time ago with the remit of considering the most effective way of promoting Ireland as a centre of educational excellence for international students and for the promotion of Irish education abroad. The group's Report on the Internationalisation of Education Services was published following approval by Government.

The Recommendations of the Report include the establishment, on a statutory basis, of a new body to be called 'Education Ireland' whose main objective will be to promote Ireland as a centre of excellence for international education. Prep-

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

arrangements are well advanced to establish Education Ireland in the first instance as a company, with draft legislation also being prepared to establish Education Ireland on a statutory basis in the course of 2008.

Departmental Expenditure.

678. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by her Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33336/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department has a significant number of staff who provide services to schools around the country and are therefore not office based. This includes staff in the Inspectorate and psychologists in the National Educational Psychological Service.

In total, 530 official mobile phones are supplied to staff in my Department and are paid directly by my Department to the mobile phone operator. Each member of staff is provided with an itemised bill on a monthly basis and must refund to the Department the cost of any personal calls where the cumulative value is more than one euro during the billing month. The amount recouped so far in 2007 is €14,548.

The information in relation to the cost of mobile phones (before recouped money is deducted) is contained in the table.

Year	Total	Data	Roaming
	€	€	€
2006	326,397	58,813	16,013
Jan-Nov 2007	392,909	66,589	22,048

679. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by her Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33351/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department does not pay mobile telephone bills in the form of expenses. All staff mobile phone bills are paid directly to the mobile phone provider.

680. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to her by her Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33366/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department's mobile phone operator is unable to provide the information on data and roaming charges for 2006 as it is protected information under the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003. The total cost of charges for my mobile phone in 2006 was €3,137.82. The information in relation to 2007 is contained in the table.

Year	Total	Data	Roaming
2007	€3,313.96	€310.28	€1889.60

Schools Building Projects.

681. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she will sanction the development for a school (details supplied) in County Wicklow in view of the demands on the school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33455/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, all applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria. Progress on individual projects, such as the ones in question, will be considered in the context of the multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

Departmental Reports.

682. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review on the supply panel for primary teaching was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33456/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The review and evaluation of the Supply Teacher Scheme for Primary Schools concluded in June, 2003 that the scheme is generally contributing positively to primary education in the areas in which it operates, although levels of success vary.

The scheme was found to be relatively expensive in terms of cost per day of substitution,

although this finding has to be balanced with other educational and policy issues. In balancing these economic and policy issues, the Review concluded that effective provision of quality substitution in the future is likely to require a mixed market approach — i.e. the Supply Teacher Scheme, agency supply and casual substitution.

The Review recommended to continue the Scheme in the short term, with some recommended improvements in processes and management. In addition, it also recommended an investigation of the potential for agency supply and a further review of the scheme in 3-5 years time. The report is currently being considered by the education partners.

683. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review on youth encounter projects was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33457/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Brendan Smith): The report on the value for money review of Youth Encounter Project schools is due for finalisation in the near future and will then be submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas, in line with standard procedure. The impact of implementing the recommendations contained in the report, including possible savings, will be the subject of periodic review.

I should point out to the Deputy that, while the achievement of savings is an element of the review, in general the review focused on the efficiency and effectiveness with which the YEP schools are using the resources allocated to them by my Department to achieve their stated objectives.

684. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review on first and second level building programmes, topic 2 devolved initiatives, was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33458/07]

692. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review of grants to first and second level schools will be completed; the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33466/07]

693. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review of the summer works scheme

primary and post-primary buildings will be completed; the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33467/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 684, 692, and 693 together.

The Government's Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative is part of a framework introduced to secure improved value for money from public expenditure. The objectives of the Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative are to analyse Exchequer spending in a systematic manner and to provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between programmes. It is one of a range of modernisation initiatives aimed at moving public sector management away from the traditional focus on inputs to concentrate on the achievement of results.

Value for Money Reviews are undertaken under the aegis of steering committees which are representative of the Departments/Offices managing the programmes/areas being reviewed. For the more significant reviews the Department of Finance is generally represented on the steering committees.

In early 2000 my Department's Planning and Building Unit revised the manner in which the School Capital Programme was delivered and concluded that it was necessary to introduce a mechanism that would increase the deliverable infrastructures in a speedy, cost effective and qualitative manner to ensure improved educational facilities nationally. The Small Schools Initiative and the Permanent Accommodation Initiative were introduced on a pilot basis in the School Capital Programme 2003. Both of the initiatives were the subject of an expenditure review based on the 2003 programme. The review concluded that the initiatives' objectives were satisfactorily achieved. These included:

- the schools involved have better school facilities and/or additional school accommodation,
- the introduction of these initiatives ensured that the Department was in a position to address the higher priority banded projects through the traditional method of architectural design in the knowledge that 40 additional schools were progressing to construction within a timeframe of 12 months with no hands-on requirement from my officials, a higher output was achieved, as none of the schools in the SSI would have progressed to construction in 2003 if the initiatives were not put in place,

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

- a higher level of quality was obtained (permanent build) in relation to the projects progressed through the introduction of the PAI, as the previous method of progressing these applications was to provide temporary prefabricated accommodation,
- the majority of the building projects proceeded to site and construction within the 12 months timeframe as dictated in the guidelines of each initiative,
- the majority of the building works completed were of good quality and deemed to provide VFM,
- School Management Authorities (SMAs), on average, were happy with their own abilities to progress their own building projects. 81% of SMAs would recommend acceptance of the devolved initiatives again 100% were satisfied with the educational impact achieved, 97% were satisfied with the programme of delivery and 93% satisfied with the autonomy Role of SMA,
- Compliance with public procurement was achieved in relation to the tendering process for building Contractors.

The devolved Summer Works Scheme was introduced in 2004. The value for money review of the primary and post-primary summer works scheme is not due to be officially completed until late 2008 and consequently any outcomes will not be known for some considerable time.

685. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review on schools information communication technology programmes was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33459/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Value for Money Review of the ICT Support Services for Schools is currently being finalised.

686. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review on information communication technology undergraduate skills programmes was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33460/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Report to which the Deputy refers to is currently being finalised.

687. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review on teacher education and development programme was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33461/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The report to which the Deputy refers to is currently being finalised.

688. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review on the Youthreach and Traveller education was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33462/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The value for money review of the Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centre programmes is not yet finalised.

689. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review on insurance arrangements for schools was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33463/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Value for Money Policy review on Insurance Arrangements in primary and post-primary schools is currently under way.

690. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review of expenditure on the education of persons who do not have English or Irish as a first language will be completed; the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33464/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The value for money review of expenditure on the education of persons who do not have English or Irish as a first language has not commenced. It is intended to undertake this review in 2008.

691. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the value for money review of special needs assistants will be completed; the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this

report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33465/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Value for Money and Policy Review referred to by the Deputy is due to be completed by end of 2008. The Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative is part of a framework introduced to secure improved value for money from public expenditure. The objectives of the Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative are to analyse Exchequer spending in a systematic manner and to provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between programmes. It is one of a range of modernisation initiatives aimed at moving public sector management away from the traditional focus on inputs to concentrate on the achievement of results. It would be premature of me at this point to anticipate the conclusions that will emerge from the review.

Questions Nos. 692 and 693 answered with Question No. 684.

Registration of Title.

694. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason for the delay in the transfer of title for a former school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33468/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department has no objection to the release of its interest in the Lease dated 9th November 1909. However as there is more than one person claiming title to this property my Department cannot proceed with releasing its interest until the successor of the title has been established. The Chief State Solicitor's Office is currently endeavouring to establish title so that this matter can be satisfactorily concluded.

Schools Building Projects.

695. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason the construction of a school (details supplied) in County Donegal has yet to begin; if there is a problem, the reason the board of management have not been notified as such; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33469/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The tender report for the school is under examination in my Department at present. The School's Board of Management will be kept advised of developments when the examination is complete.

Departmental Staff.

696. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Mini-

ster for Education and Science the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in her Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by her or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33506/07]

698. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of press officers and press advisers in her Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible to; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33536/07]

700. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of press advisers employed by her Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33566/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 696, 698 and 700 together.

The Press Office in my Department is staffed by the following, all of whom are Civil Servants:

- 1 Press Officer/Assistant Principal Officer level
- 2 Higher Executive Officers
- 2 Executive Officers
- 1 Clerical Officer

The Press Officer is a full-time civil servant paid at Assistant Principal level. The Press Officer and other staff in the Press Office respond to media queries on behalf of the Minister, Minister of State and my Department generally. They also draft and issue press releases to the media about education initiatives.

There are two Higher Executive Officers and two Executive Officers assigned to the Press Office of my Department. Each of them works from 8am-8pm Monday to Friday on a four week rota basis. Part of the duties of the officer working the 8am shift each morning is to provide a brief one line summary of education related newspaper stories in the national daily papers. This summary is circulated via email to all Senior Management in the Department as well as the Minister, Minister of State and Special Advisor. There is no additional cost of this service as media monitoring is a function of all press offices.

My Department's Press Office is also included in the circulation of material from the Government Information Service Communications Unit on a daily basis. Over the period 1997-2007 a

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

Press Officer has been employed in my Department as follows:

- 1st January 1997 to 26th June 1997 — Paid at Assistant Principal Officer Level
- 2nd September 2002 to 29th September 2004 — Paid at Principal Officer Level
- 8th November 2004 to present — Paid at Assistant Principal Officer Level.

The amount paid in respect of salary for all of the officers in the Press Office is in accordance with the Department of Finance Salary Scales for the relevant grades.

Departmental Expenditure.

697. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number and name of newspapers purchased by her Department daily and weekly; the number provided to herself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33521/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The number and name of newspapers purchased daily and weekly by my Department is contained in the table. The cost of all newspapers to my Department in 2006 was €94,967.21.

My Office is provided with six daily and one weekly newspaper. The Minister of State's Office receive six daily newspapers. The cost of newspapers supplied to my Office in 2006 was €2,433.60. The cost of newspapers supplied to the Minister of State's Office in 2006 was €2,345.20.

Newspaper Name	Daily or Weekly	Amount
Irish Times	Daily	169
Independent	Daily	76
Examiner	Daily	21
Star	Daily	6
London Times	Daily	2
Daily Mail	Daily	1
Sun	Daily	1
Evening Herald	Daily	1
Foinse	Weekly	2
Saturday Times	Weekly	4
Saturday Independent	Weekly	5
Saturday Examiner	Weekly	3
Saturday Star	Weekly	3
Sunday Mail	Weekly	2
Sunday Independent	Weekly	2
Sunday Tribune	Weekly	2
Sunday Business Post	Weekly	2
Sunday World	Weekly	1
Sunday Times	Weekly	1

Newspaper Name	Daily or Weekly	Amount
Kerryman	Weekly	2
Bray People	Weekly	1
Corkman	Weekly	1
Tallaght Echo	Weekly	1
Wicklow People	Weekly	1
Leinster Leader	Weekly	1
Westmeath Examiner	Weekly	1
Westmeath Independent	Weekly	1
Longford Leader	Weekly	1
Offaly Independent	Weekly	1
Laois Nationalist	Weekly	1
Limerick Leader	Weekly	1
Clare Champion	Weekly	1
Tipperary Star	Weekly	1
Nenagh Guardian	Weekly	1
Imokilly People	Weekly	1
Southern Star	Weekly	1
Munster Express	Weekly	1
Waterford News	Weekly	1
Waterford Star	Weekly	1
Sligo Champion	Weekly	1
Leitrim Observer	Weekly	1
Donegal News	Weekly	1
Meath Chronicle	Weekly	1
Drogheda Independent	Weekly	1
Anglo Celt	Weekly	1
Dundalk Democrat	Weekly	1
Northern Standard	Weekly	1

Question No. 698 answered with Question No. 696.

Consultancy Contracts.

699. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by her Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33551/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information sought by the Deputy is being compiled in my Department and will be sent to him as soon as possible.

Question No. 700 answered with Question No. 696.

Departmental Expenditure.

701. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of credit cards held by her Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they

are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33581/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): There are three credit cards held by my Department. Details as requested in respect of these cards are given in the table.

Cost of Official Credit Cards used in the Department of Education for each year since 2000 to date in 2007

Holder	Year	Total Cost*	Interest
		€	€
<i>IT Manager</i>			
Purpose of use—			
Purchase of IT goods & services	2000	1,997.36	0.00
	2001	6,413.61	0.00
	2002	6,576.26	0.00
	2003	2,026.74	16.21
	2004	6,529.58	0.00
	2005	132.00	10
	2006	1,307.64	0.00
	2007	741.47	10.57
<i>Minister's Private Secretary</i>			
Purpose of use—			
Payment of official expenses incurred by the Minister	2000	940.47**	0.00
	2001	2,428.35**	0.00
	2002	5,432.50	0.00
	2003	2,641.45	0.00
	2004	805.39	19.35
	2005	1,392.27	0.00
	2006	5,698.06	0.00
	2007	326.35	0.00
<i>Minister of State's Private Secretary</i>			
Purpose of use—			
Payment of official expenses incurred by the Minister of State	2002 (1st Year)	19.33	0.28
	2003	3,175.03	7.14
	2004	458.9	5.95
	2005	1,321.74	0.00
	2006	3,150.06	0.00
	2007	4,691.00	0.00

*Total Cost includes Purchases, Interest as well as Government Duty and Annual Membership Fees.

**Interest charges if any not available.

702. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the cost to her Department of photographers used by all Ministers in her Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33596/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The following are the details relating to the costs of photographers used by all Ministers and Ministers of State in the Department of Education and Science, for each year, from 2000 to date. Details for the period 1997 to 1999 were not readily available, given the time constraints.

Year	€
2000	13,671.93
2001	23,373.37
2002	31,631.56
2003	25,065.16
2004	35,114.32
2005	17,565.99
2006	13,744.06
2007 (to date)	11,498.71

703. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the cost of make-

[Deputy Fergus O'Dowd.]

up for her for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33611/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): There was no cost to the Department incurred in relation to make-up.

704. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the cost of her Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33626/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information sought by the Deputy is being compiled in my Department and will be sent to him as soon as possible.

Government Information Services.

705. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to her Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to her every day or how often it is furnished. [33641/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Minister and the staff of the Press Office receive the general daily news summaries provided by Government Information Services in electronic format.

Official Engagements.

706. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a press adviser travels with her on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by her in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with her. [33656/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Department's Press Officer generally travels with me to official public engagements throughout the country where media are invited or are expected to attend. If the Press Officer is not in attendance, as can happen when I travel abroad for official business, I would remain in regular contact with officials in my office in Marlborough Street, including the Press Officer. It is not possible to itemise particular events during the past year which were not attended by the Press Officer.

Departmental Transport.

707. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the cost of provid-

ing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in her Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33671/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information sought will take some time to put together and accordingly I will arrange to have my Department reply directly to the Deputy as soon as possible .

708. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the cost of her using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to Ministers of State and staff for the same period. [33686/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Please find the following spreadsheet containing the cost of using public transport by the Minister of Education and Science, Junior Ministers and Staff for 2006 and to date in 2007. Information on the breakdown for previous years is not readily available.

	2006	2007
	€	€
Taxi	234.25	116.50
Trains Luas Dart	108.40	226.00
Bus	0.00	5.30
Total for Public Transport	342.65	347.80

Departmental Communications.

709. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department carries news summaries on their internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33716/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): All staff in the Department of Education and Science have access to education related news clippings through the intranet. Relevant newspaper stories are added to the intranet site on a daily basis. This service is provided by a commercial company, under contract to the Department. The cost of this service to the Department in 2006 was €45,383.63

Departmental Expenditure.

710. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of mobile phones used by her and supplied by her Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33731/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I was appointed Minister for Education and Science on 29/9/2004. I use one mobile phone supplied by my Department. The annual cost of same for each year since my appointment is contained in the table.

Year	Cost
	€
2004	291.92
2005	4,282.16
2006	3,137.82
Jan-Nov 2007	3,313.96

Departmental Expenditure.

711. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science if any of the advisers or staff appointed by her directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by her Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33746/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department has provided three mobile phones, two Blackberry devices and one fax machine to staff appointed directly by me.

The annual cost of same since my appointment on 29/9/2004 is given in the table.

Year	Cost
	€
2004	274.13
2005	8,211.07
2006	9,308.78
Jan-Nov 2007	8,140.15

Departmental Funding.

712. **Deputy Áine Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Science the schools in County Kildare that received funding, either for extensions or new schools for the years 2005, 2006 and allocated for 2007; the extra facilities that were provided with this funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33787/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information is not readily available in the format sought by the Deputy. However, I will arrange to have the information compiled and forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects.

713. **Deputy Shane McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Science the anticipated

completion date for the new national school in Laytown, County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33824/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department has already provided a 16-classroom facility to meet the immediate accommodation requirements in Laytown. The new 24-classroom school building will be provided by my Department under a design and build contract. The procurement process for this project is now nearing completion and it is expected that the contract will be awarded very soon. As part of the tender competition, the initial design and layout for the school has already been done and some pre-planning discussions have taken place with Meath County Council in order to help ensure that it meets their requirements.

Following the placing of the design and build contract, the first task for the successful contractor will be to submit the application for planning permission for the new school. Given the preparatory work already done it is expected that the application for planning permission can be done within a matter of weeks following the appointment. I want to assure the Deputy that my Department is committed to providing the new school in Laytown at the earliest possible stage.

State Examinations.

714. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will reconsider the decision to timetable chemistry after English paper two due to the extra pressure it will place on students studying this subject of considerable national priority; and if she will restore chemistry to its position later in the schedule when it is not accompanying a core universal subject. [33833/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The new Leaving Certificate examination schedule for 2008 has been agreed with a working group representing the Partners in Education, and is designed to reduce the demand on students especially during the first week of the examinations. It advances Chemistry, which is sat by some 7,000 students, and Geography, sat by some 25,000 students, to Thursday and Friday respectively of the first week, which, along with Home Economics which is sat by some 12,000 students, ensures that the majority of students get a break of at least one half day during this intensive phase.

The revised timetable ensures that the significant writing pressure that was experienced by all students on day one has now been reduced. Whereas unfortunately chemistry is only taken by 7,000 students it does require a different set of skills and thought processes and so was considered a balance to English.

There are no plans to change the timetable for 2008. However, each year, when drawing up the timetable for the following year, the State Examinations Commission invites the input of the Part-

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

ners in Education so that their experience can inform the formulation of the next year's schedule. I also plan to engage in a consultation with Leaving Cert students after their exams to get their views on the new mix of papers.

School Enrolments.

715. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Science the pupil capacity of a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and the number of students currently in attendance. [33840/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): A building project was recently completed at the school referred to by the Deputy to bring the capacity of the school to 1,200 pupils. Enrolment figures for 2007/08 are not yet available but I can confirm that the enrolment at the school in question for 2006/07 was 1,153 pupils.

Special Educational Needs.

716. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will ask the special educational needs organisers to meet with the parents and teacher of a pupil (details supplied) in County Kilkenny who is in need of increased resource teaching hours in view of the report of the senior speech and language therapist in the Health Service Executive and the recommendations of the school principal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33851/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I have made arrangements to have the family's request for a meeting with the SENO transmitted to the NCSE.

Psychological Service.

717. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of people currently waiting for assessments by the school psychological services in County Mayo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33852/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I can inform the Deputy that all primary and post primary schools have access to psychological assessments either directly through my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA) that is administered by NEPS and full details of which are available on my Department's website.

NEPS does not keep waiting lists for assessments of children but in common with other psychological services encourages a staged assessment process, whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational

planning and remedial intervention, in consultation with their assigned NEPS psychologist. Only if there is a failure to make reasonable progress in spite of the school's best efforts, will a child be referred for individual psychological assessment. This system allows the psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually.

The introduction of the General Allocation model for primary schools in 2005/06 means that children with high incidence special needs now longer have to wait for an individual assessment before they can get access to extra support. Children who manifest very special or urgent needs in school and who have not been previously assessed by a psychologist and are brought to the attention of a NEPS psychologist by the Principal teacher will usually be assessed by the psychologist within that school term. Normally, principals of schools prioritise those children in need of psychological assessment in consultation with the assigned psychologist.

Schools that do not currently have NEPS psychologists assigned to them may avail of the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA) under which the school can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly. The prioritisation of urgent cases for assessment is a matter for the school principal of the school in the first instance.

Third Level Courses.

718. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a course (details supplied) has not received formal recognition from the Irish Teaching Council; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33880/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Teaching Council has had responsibility for the accreditation and recognition of courses for teaching since its establishment on 28 March, 2006. My Department does not have any involvement in this process. I understand that the Council has not yet received an application from this institute in relation to the recognition of this degree for the purposes of teaching physical education.

Higher Education Grants.

719. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a VEC have refused to pay fees for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal who is completing their MA as the awarding body is claiming that after completing a postgraduate, a person must undertake a new course to obtain an MA; if she will clarify her Department's policy in relation to fee pay-

ment for MA courses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33882/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The decision on eligibility for third level grants is a matter for the relevant assessing authority — i.e. the local authority or VEC. These bodies do not refer individual applications to my Department except, in exceptional cases, where, for example, advice or instruction regarding a particular clause in the relevant scheme is required. If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a maintenance grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to the relevant local authority or VEC.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down, in writing, by the relevant local authority or VEC, and remains of the view that the body has not interpreted the schemes correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to my Department. Alternatively, as already indicated, the local authority or VEC may, itself, in exceptional circumstances, seek clarification on issues from my Department.

School Accommodation.

720. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Science the expenditure by her Department in the provision of or renting of portacabins at secondary level in County Mayo for 2005-06 and 2006-07. [33980/07]

721. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Science the expenditure by her Department in the provision of or renting of portacabins at primary level in County Mayo for 2005/06 and 2006/07. [33981/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Question Nos. 720 and 721 together.

The information sought by the Deputy is not readily available.

School Transport.

722. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of parents who sought transport for their children from the Gort catchment area to a school (details supplied) in County Galway, who can benefit from the decision of the Ombudsman to direct her Department to refund the costs incurred by these parents; the amount involved in each case; when she will refund these transports costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33984/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): My Department is currently reviewing records to

establish the number of children who might benefit from the Ombudsman's recommendation. This review will be completed as quickly as possible.

Grant Payments.

723. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science the applications processed by her Department; the average waiting time to process each application; the steps she is taking to speed up the processing time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33289/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The processing of applications for grants/assistance etc. can be a complex and time-consuming operation. The length of time between receipt of an application and a decision issuing to an applicant varies widely on the type of application, accuracy in completing the original application form and the processes that have to be carried out by my staff to assess the application. For instance, with applications for major capital funding consultations may have to be carried out with outside bodies e.g. Local Authorities, local schools, Patron Bodies, Trustees, etc. However, in all cases my Department endeavours to have the various processes required completed and a response issued to applicants as quickly as possible.

Question No. 724 answered with Question No. 676.

Schools Building Projects.

725. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the details of a particular circumstance applying at a national school (details supplied) in County Limerick; if she has examined the claims therein; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34048/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Approval of the Stage 3 (developed sketch scheme) was issued to the Board of Management of the school in a letter dated 14 November 2007. In addition, preparation of Stage 4/5 tender documents has commenced. It is not possible to say at this point when construction will start. However, my Department will be in contact with the school authorities regarding further progress as soon as the tender documents have been completed.

Question No. 726 answered with Question No. 58.

Decentralisation Programme.

727. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of special-

[Deputy Ruairí Quinn.]

ist staff due to decentralise to each identified decentralisation location for her Department and its agencies; the number who have decentralised to each location to date; the number of specialist staff within her Department who have indicated a wish to decentralise to each of the identified locations to date; the number of specialist staff from other Departments who have indicated a wish to decentralise to each location identified for her Department's decentralisation to date; the way it is intended to deal with any shortfall in specialist staff wishing to decentralise; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34059/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Two specialist posts in my Department are scheduled to relocate to Athlone. None of the specialist staff in my Department have indicated a wish to decentralise to Athlone and there are no suitably qualified staff in other departments who have expressed a wish to decentralise to Athlone to these posts.

Twenty six (26) specialist posts in my Department are scheduled to relocate to Mullingar. Nine (9) members of the specialist staff of my Department have indicated a wish to decentralise with these posts and one suitably qualified member of the staff of another organisation has indicated a wish to decentralise to Mullingar. It is envisaged that it should be possible to fill these posts through recruitment arising as the result of normal staff turnover throughout the period of the roll out of the programme of decentralisation.

728. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the status of the decentralisation programme in each agency under the aegis of her Department to date; the number of staff in each agency due to decentralise to each identified location; the number who have decentralised to each location to date; the number of staff within each agency who have indicated a wish to decentralise to each of the identified locations to date; the number of staff from other Departments or agencies who have indicated a wish to decentralise to each location identified for her Department's agencies decentralisation to date; the timeline for further decentralisation of agencies under the aegis of her Department. [34060/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The agencies under the aegis of my Department that will decentralise under the programme of decentralisation are the National Education Welfare Board (Portarlington), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Portarlington), the Higher Education Authority (Athlone), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (Edenderry), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (Edenderry) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (Edenderry). I am arranging for each of

these agencies to provide me an update on their current progress towards decentralisation to include the detail requested by the Deputy. I will provide this directly to the deputy as soon as it is available.

Departmental Transport.

729. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for her transport and that of her staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34091/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled by my Department and will be forwarded directly to him.

Decentralisation Programme.

730. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the status of the decentralisation programme for her Department to date; the number of staff due to decentralise to each identified location; the number who have decentralised to each location to date; the number of staff within her Department who have indicated a wish to decentralise to each of the identified locations to date; the number of staff from other Departments who have indicated a wish to decentralise to each location identified for her Department's decentralisation to date; the timeline for further decentralisation from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34101/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Under the Government's decentralisation programme announced in 2003, one hundred (100) posts from my Department's headquarters were scheduled to decentralise to Athlone. It has been possible to relocate 11 of these posts to Athlone in advance of the main move, which will happen when the new building in Athlone is ready for occupation. On the basis of the information provided by the Office of Public Works I understand the it should be possible to complete the relocation of all of these posts to Athlone by the late spring/early summer of next year.

Sixty (60) members of the staff of my Department have indicated a wish to decentralise to Athlone (this includes those members of staff in the posts that have already been relocated). Thirty seven (37) of the members of staff of other Departments have indicated a wish to decentralise to Athlone.

Under the Government's decentralisation programme, 300 posts from my Department's headquarters were scheduled to decentralise to

Mullingar. A site has been acquired for my Department's new headquarters in Mullingar and tenders have been received by the Office of Public Works, for the provision of this accommodation. The accommodation will be procured as a Public Private Partnership project, using the design, build, finance and maintain model. It is currently envisaged that the decentralisation to Mullingar will take place in 2010.

One hundred and forty one (141) members of staff of my Department have indicated a wish to decentralise to Mullingar. One hundred and three (103) of the members of staff of other Departments have indicated a wish to decentralise to Mullingar. It is anticipated that there any shortfall of volunteers to decentralise to Mullingar, will be made up between now and 2010.

Adult Education.

731. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason the National Adult Education Learning Council was disbanded in 2003 only a year after it was established without an explanation and the review of the council was never made public; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34104/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): The National Adult Learning Council was formed in March 2002 on an ad hoc basis with the intention that it would be established as a statutory body under Section 54 of the Education Act 1998. Following the formation of the ad hoc Council, concerns emerged that the functions envisaged for it were too wide-ranging and were not sufficiently focused. Additionally, a number of developments had occurred which would impact on the work of the Council.

A strategic review of the role and functions of the Council was undertaken to address these concerns. The outcome of the review has been under consideration in my Department. I expect to be in a position soon to make a decision on the best way forward. The decision will be based on how best to provide in the most cost-effective manner for the learning needs of young people who leave school early or who may not wish to progress directly into employment or higher education and of adults seeking second-chance education in the adult, further and vocational education sector. It will also be necessary in that context to take account of existing provision and structures.

Special Educational Needs.

732. **Deputy Beverley Flynn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the provision for education she has made with regard to a child (details supplied) in County Mayo. [34105/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): An appropriate school placement

is available for the child referred to by the Deputy. However I wish to advise the Deputy that, as the matters referred to are the subject of ongoing High Court proceedings against my Department, the Department of Health and Children and the Health Services Executive, it would be inappropriate for me to comment in any detail on the particulars of the situation.

State Examinations.

733. **Deputy Beverley Flynn** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she will allow senior trade examinations as there are many people who sat senior trade examinations in the past but need to complete a section of their senior trade subject in order to complete all compulsory sections; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34106/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Department of Education and Science announced in 1999 that it would end the operation of the Senior Trade Examinations in 2003, but the State Examinations Commission, established in 2003, actually continued the process for a further and last time in 2004. These examinations are no longer made available. However, an alternative arrangement was agreed in discussions between the Department, the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Institutes of Technology, the Dublin Institute of Technology and FÁS. Under this arrangement, persons interested in completing their qualification should contact Apprenticeship Services, FÁS, 27-33 Upper Baggot St, Dublin 4. FÁS will then make the appropriate arrangements with an Institute of Technology to facilitate access for eligible applicants to assessment leading to a Level 6 Advanced Certificate from the Further Education and Training Awards Council.

School Curriculum.

734. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will extend a comprehensive drug and alcohol awareness programme within the confines of the present SPHE programme to transition and senior cycle in all second level schools here; if this could be done on the model of the Teaching Advisory Council on Alcohol and Drug Education in England; the teaching resources or packs she will publish for teachers who teach drug and alcohol awareness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34122/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) forms a mandatory part of curriculum provision in primary schools and in junior cycle. The overall aim is to help develop students' confidence and self esteem, and promote the skills for living, for responsible decision making,

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

and for mental, physical and emotional health and well-being. The junior cycle syllabus for SPHE includes a specific module on Substance Abuse.

The implementation of these programmes in schools is supported by full-time support services at primary and second level which provide professional development for teachers and advice and support to schools. The second level support service is operated jointly with the Health Sector. A range of resources are available to support the programme. These include the Walk Tall Programme at primary level, On My Own Two Feet at post primary level, the Teacher Guidelines for SPHE developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, a Substance Misuse Prevention Information Booklet for schools and parents, Guidelines for Developing a School Substance Use Policy, and a policy template for this, and links and references to relevant websites.

The SPHE Support Service also provides support and assistance to schools in the development of their Substance Use policies, and offers a resource directory, which includes the materials of the Teaching Advisory Council on Alcohol and Drugs Education in England. Copies of these materials were made available to the network of Education Centres around the country by the support service.

A senior cycle programme in Social Personal and Health Education is being developed by the NCCA. A draft curriculum framework has been published, and consultations have been completed on it. I look forward to receiving the recommendations of the Council on the matter at an early date. Substance Use will be one of the five areas of study planned for the programme.

In addition to this, the Transition Year Programme, which is available to schools on an optional basis provides a flexible menu of options designed to further support pupils' personal and social development, to provide a bridge between junior and senior cycle and to offer a broad educational experience which can aid the maturing process. As part of this, there is scope for schools to offer alcohol and substance misuse programmes.

While education has a role to play in addressing the problem of alcohol misuse, behavioural change will not happen without the support and co-operation of parents, the drinks industry and society as a whole. Parents have a responsibility to help children and young people to adopt sensible and responsible attitudes and behaviours in relation to alcohol. The community as a whole needs to reflect on the general attitude to alcohol use.

Schools Building Projects.

735. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the provision of a new national school at Ballyea,

Darragh, Ennis, County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34126/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The tender report for the school in question is under examination in my Department at present. The School's Board of Management will be kept advised of developments when the examination is complete.

Capitation Grants.

736. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on the situation whereby local authorities are levying water charges at different rates throughout the country on schools which receive capitation payments from her Department at a uniform rate and where an element of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is imposing these charges on her Department's schools which have received no funding to provide for these charges; if the Government will provide for schools water charges directly from Exchequer funding in the context of the schools annual capitation grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34167/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Schools receive funding by way of per capita grants to meet their day-to-day running costs and enable them to pay for services such as light, heat, water and waste disposal. The value of the capitation grants have improved significantly over the past few years and are set to increase again by €15 per pupil in 2008.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Water Framework Directive requires that the 'polluter pays' principle be applied to the provision of water and waste services to all non-domestic users. However, I am concerned about the considerable variance in the rates being applied by different councils which have left some schools with huge bills.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Programme for Government contains a commitment to examine the provision of waste and water allowances to schools with charges becoming effective after these are exceeded. The implementation of this commitment is primarily a matter for my colleague — the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. However, my Department will of course input to and support the examination to be conducted by the Department of the Environment and I have already discussed the issue with the Minister.

In the meantime, we are anxious to enable schools to conserve water and keep their bills as low as possible. New school buildings are being designed with that goal in mind. Measures such as the use of low-pressure spray taps on wash hand basins, dual flushing units on toilets and push button type shower controls are generally used. While these will be of major benefit to the users

of new buildings, resources have also been made available that will assist those in existing facilities in considerably reducing their water bills.

The Minister for the Environment launched a 'Conserve Water in Schools' resource pack last month in association with Dublin City Council. The materials, which are available for download on the council's website, www.dublincity.ie, show children how they can get involved in conserving water and put a stop to water wastage. The campaign is also aimed at school management and lists the kind of things they can do to reduce water consumption in their schools. Steps are, therefore, being taken to help schools to reduce their water bills, to give them extra funding to meet unavoidable costs, and to examine — in the context of the Programme for Government — the introduction of a new system of water allowances.

Site Acquisitions.

737. **Deputy Deirdre Clune** asked the Minister for Education and Science if it is possible for her Department to acquire a site for educational purposes by compulsory purchase order; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34168/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Department does not have the authority to use compulsory purchase orders in relation to matters arising from site acquisitions. The Property Management Section of the Office of Public Works acts on behalf of the Department in relation to site acquisitions generally. In certain circumstances local authorities also acquire sites on behalf of my Department. The use of compulsory purchase procedures can be quite protracted and it would not necessarily mean the faster acquisition of sites. Neither would compulsory purchase orders mean the acquisition of sites at a price below market value. Where no alternative course of action exists, my Department may ask that CPOs be used.

My Department is working closely with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government to explore ways of streamlining and improving the process of acquiring school sites.

School Transport.

738. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on declaring the village of Clonberne, Ballinasloe, County Galway a common catchment area for buses taking children to schools (details supplied); if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there are all sorts of complications which mitigate against the children of many families who want to go to the school of their choice but because of an outdated system for determining catchment area boundaries cannot do so and that this area has had huge school bus problems in recent years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34170/07]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey):

Under the terms of my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme, a pupil is eligible for transport if s/he resides 4.8 kilometres or more from her/his local post primary education centre, that is, the centre serving the catchment area in which s/he lives. The scheme is not designed to facilitate parents who choose to send their children to a post-primary centre outside of the catchment area in which they reside. However, children who are fully eligible for transport to the post-primary centre in the catchment area in which they reside may apply for transport on a concessionary basis to a post-primary centre outside of their own catchment area — otherwise known as catchment boundary transport. These children can only be facilitated if spare seats are available on the bus after all other eligible children travelling to their 'own' post-primary centre have been catered for. Such children have to make their own way to the nearest pick up point within that catchment area.

Arts in Education.

739. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has received the Arts Council report on the arts in education; when she will make it available to the public; her views on its recommendations; when she will commence the process of its implementation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34181/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I have received the draft Arts Council Report on the Arts in Education and my Department is currently considering its recommendations in consultation with the Department of Arts Sport and Tourism. The publication of the Report is a matter for that Department. My Department invests heavily in arts education insofar as programmes in schools, and further and higher education are concerned. My Department will continue to work in collaboration with other agencies to progress this important area to the optimum extent.

Student Support Services.

740. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reasons for the diminution of the millennium fund, a source of funding for third level education for those from impoverished backgrounds; if replacement funds are earmarked to perform a similar task; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34184/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I wish to assure the Deputy that there has been no diminution in the level of sup-

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

port made available for the Millennium Partnership Fund.

School Enrolments.

741. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on the ongoing difficulties being experienced by those persons living here on student visas with regard to enrolling their children in primary schools in their locality; if her attention has been drawn to the inconsistency of this difficulty when set against the Equal Status Act 2000, Article 42.3.1 of the Constitution underlining the right of every child to a primary education and Article 2 of Protocol One of the European Convention on Human Rights; the action she will take to deal with and alleviate this inequity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34185/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Existing education policy is that students up to 18 years of age are admitted to primary and second level schools irrespective of their nationality or status. Indeed, under the Equal Status Act, schools may not discriminate in admission to schools except where this is necessary to maintain the religious values or ethos of the school. While the Act does provide for differential treatment in relation to fees for further and higher education for persons who are not nationals of an EU Member State, there is no such condition specified in regard to second level schools.

The admission of persons to the State from outside the EU is a matter for the immigration authorities. Children of refugees, those with humanitarian leave to remain in the State, and asylum seekers are entitled to access free first and second level education. However, the basic conditions for a student visa require that the student attend a full time programme of education and training, and be financially self supporting.

The Report on the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Internationalisation of Irish Education, published in 2004, set out a strategy with the objective of enhancing the attractiveness of Ireland as a quality venue for international students and increasing the numbers of students coming to Ireland to participate in further and higher education and training and in the language sector. It was envisaged that students from outside the EU/EEA and Switzerland, other than refugees and those with humanitarian leave to remain in the State, would participate on a fee paying basis.

In the course of the discussions leading to the Report, the position of minors attending school for second level education was discussed, and the existing immigration policy that student visas should be allowed only in respect of attendance at fee-paying schools was confirmed, on the basis

that to do otherwise would give rise to additional demands on the State.

Adult Education.

742. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a course in the adult education centre of a university (details supplied) in County Dublin was cancelled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34188/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The position is that the universities are run as autonomous institutions. They are also academically independent and my Department does not have any function in the day to day operational affairs of such colleges. Decisions on staffing arrangements and programme provision are made by the universities themselves. The universities receive a block grant from the Higher Education Authority and it is a matter for each institution to determine how it is allocated internally.

Psychological Service.

743. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason there are no national educational psychologists assigned to schools in an area (details supplied) in County Dublin; the steps she plans to take to rectify this issue as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34189/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Deputy will, I'm sure, be aware that all primary and post primary schools have access to psychological assessments either directly through the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA). Schools that do not currently have NEPS psychologists assigned to them may avail of the SCPA and have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved and paid for by NEPS. The prioritisation of urgent cases for assessment is a matter for the school principal in the first instance.

I can inform the Deputy that this Government is committed to expanding the number of NEPS psychologists, so that more schools can receive a direct service and as new recruits are assigned to each region and inducted, the number of schools afforded NEPS service will increase, including the area referred to by the Deputy in his question. To this end I can inform the Deputy that my Department has been working, in conjunction with the Public Appointments Commission to recruit new psychologists from an existing panel to the service. The number of NEPS psychologists has increased from a total of 128 in April to a current level of 136. In all 11 psychologists have been recruited in this period but due to the nor-

mal effect of resignations and retirement the net increase is 8. In addition my Department has recently contracted a further 3 psychologists with 2 due to take up duty before years end. A further psychologist will take up duty in early January 2008.

The panel concerned is now exhausted and the Public Appointments Service has recently announced the commencement of a competition from which a new panel will be drawn to continue the recruitment process. The deadline for receipt of applications in this regard has now passed and work is proceeding on the short-listing of candidates for interview. It is envisaged that the process will be completed and panels formed as quickly as possible allowing recruitment to recommence early in 2008. It is intended that both through completing the process for hiring the additional 31 psychologists approved for 2007 and by hiring another 11 in 2008, the number of NEPS psychologists will increase to 169 next year.

Question No. 744 answered with Question No. 108.

Site Acquisitions.

745. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a decision has been made regarding the funding for a new site for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 2 and two other all-Irish schools; if she will provide details of this funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34191/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that agreement has been reached to provide permanent accommodation for the school in question on a V.E.C. owned site. The site is currently being master planned to facilitate both this school and two other all-Irish schools. All of the school authorities will be kept informed of progress in this regard.

Higher Education Grants.

746. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science the provisions of the higher education grant scheme in relation to the assessment of means for applicants who are over 18 years of age but living at home with parents; and if basis of the means assessment changes if the same applicant has dependent children of their own. [34206/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department funds four maintenance grant schemes for third level and further education students which are administered by the Local Authorities and the Vocational Education Committees. Students who are entering approved courses at undergraduate or postgraduate level for the first time are eligible for maintenance

grants where they satisfy the relevant conditions as to age, residence, means and nationality.

Under the terms of the Department's maintenance grants schemes, and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Higher Education Grants) Act 1992, a mature student is defined as a candidate who is at least 23 years of age on the 1st January of the year of entry or re-entry to an approved course.

Under the terms of my Department's 2007 Third Level Student Maintenance Grant Schemes the position is that, students who are entering approved courses for the first time are eligible for grants where they satisfy the prescribed conditions with regard to age, residence, means, nationality and previous academic attainment. A mature student is defined for the purposes of the schemes as a candidate who is at least 23 years of age on the 1st January of the year of entry or re-entry to an approved course.

Mature students are categorised as either independent mature students or mature students dependent on parents or guardians. An independent mature student is defined as meaning a mature student who was not ordinarily resident at home with his/her parents or guardians from the October preceding their entry to an approved course. Independent mature students are assessed without reference to either their parents' or guardians' income or address.

When assessing the means of students other than independent mature students, the means test provision of the scheme specifies that the students' means and those of their parents or guardians must be below a prescribed limit. This provision requires that parental income be taken into account irrespective of the individual circumstances in any case where the student is not an independent mature student.

Generally speaking, candidates continue to be assessed under the terms and conditions of the Scheme appropriate to their year of entry. Accordingly, candidates who were not classified as Independent Mature Students at the time of entry, or re-entry, to an approved course may not generally be assessed as such for the duration of their course.

Departmental Communications.

747. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of staff in her Department that are provided with a blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34220/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Sixteen staff in my Department have been provided with blackberry devices.

748. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of databases used by her Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly

[Deputy Damien English.]

operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within her Department. [34235/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department has fifteen databases. One is wholly managed by an external organisation. The remainder are primarily managed within the Department with some assistance from external organisations.

749. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for her Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if she will present the information in tabular readable form. [34250/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of information technology projects (defined as significant new developments) is set out below.

- 2004: Nil
- 2005: Nil
- 2006: 1 project was over budget and delivered on the original deadline.

Additional requirements gave rise to the excess. 1 project was over budget and delivered after the original deadline. In this case, the scale of the task was greater than originally anticipated. In both cases, there was clear output in respect of the additional amounts incurred. 2007 1 project was within budget and delivered on the original deadline

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

750. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the steps she has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in her Department; and if none to date, the plans she will put in place on the matter. [34265/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The vehicles used for ministerial transportation are supplied by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Government policy in relation to carbon dioxide emissions from Ministerial cars is determined by that Department and therefore the question should be directed to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Data Protection.

751. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she is satisfied

that personal information relating to members of the public held on her departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34280/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Department uses industry standard firewalling mechanisms to protect its information from unauthorised access from sources outside the Department. The Department's own firewall is positioned behind a central Government firewall adding an extra layer of protection. The Department's firewall is regularly health checked to ensure compliance with industry best practice.

Schools Recognition.

752. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science the way a proposal to develop a new gael coláiste in a particular area should be submitted to her Department; and the way such an application would be assessed. [34297/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): A new post primary school/gaelcholáiste can be established in either of two ways — either under the Department's normal planning processes or by way of an application by a sponsor/Patron. With regard to the former, it is the function of School Planning Section to assess the educational infrastructural needs of an area at both primary and post primary level and to plan, in that context, for the establishment of new schools/ gaelcholaistí where this is deemed necessary.

The process of assessing the need for new or additional facilities entails consideration of all relevant factors, including enrolment and demographic trends, housing developments and the capacity of existing schools to meet the demand for places. Apart from this, it is open to a prospective sponsor to apply for the establishment of a new post primary school/gaelcholáiste. In this event, among the criteria used to assess an application are:

- That the needs of students likely to attend the school cannot reasonably be met by existing schools
- The Patron is registered with the Department
- The proposed enrolment is sufficient to ensue that the school will be viable in the long term
- The enrolment will be sufficient to ensure that the school can operate a broad and balanced curriculum
- The availability of suitable accommodation for the school

- That the Patron will comply with the rules and regulations governing post primary schools and all relevant Sections of the Education Act, 1998.

The Department is happy to support the establishment of new Gaelcholáistí where a need is demonstrated.

Management Information Framework System.

753. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34302/07]

754. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in her Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34317/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 753 and 754 together.

There is no current analysis available that quantifies the savings that have resulted from the implementation of the Management Information Framework (MIF) in the Department of Education and Science. In general the development of the MIF has contributed, in line with its objectives, to improved financial management, performance measurement and accountability. Overall financial service has been improved with greater efficiency in terms of processing financial transactions and accounts, higher levels of productivity, provision of better quality information to managers and improved customer service.

The work to date on implementing MIF has mainly focused on the installation, maintenance and development of a modern Financial Management System (FMS). The FMS replaced a mostly manual system and has substantially modernised the Financial Management of the Department. Further developments of the FMS were dependent on an upgrade of the system. This upgrade was completed recently and the planned developments will proceed from 2008 onwards.

In drafting a framework for the identification and development of performance indicators the focus has been on a number of categories of indicators that will be applicable across the various sectors of the education system. The categories identified include provision, participation, quality in learning outcomes, inclusion and customer satisfaction. Indicators, such as pupil/teacher ratios, retention rates or levels of funding are in general well developed and in use within the Department. The Department's Statement of

Strategy 2008-2010 will set out, at a system wide level, the intended key indices of performance for each of the main elements of the education system over the coming years.

The specification of the Department's FMS provided for a costing framework that classified expenditure on a similar basis to the Department's vote e.g. administrative expenditure and programme expenditure. Programme expenditure is further subdivided per sector: First Level Education, Second Level Education and Third Level Education. Programmes are charged with direct costs but significant work remains to be completed in distributing indirect costs.

There is a management reporting framework within the Department and while a number of reports are available on the system this module of the FMS has not been fully implemented. It is intended that progress will be made on the development of improved management reports on the FMS by identifying, defining and designing reports of significant value as resources allow and expertise develops.

Schools Building Projects.

755. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science her proposals to meet the site or classroom accommodation requirements in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; her proposed time-scale for the provision of such facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34330/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, all applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria. Progress on individual projects, such as the one in question, will be considered in the context of the multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

756. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans for the provision of permanent accommodation on site for the proposed new school at Kill, County Kildare; when she expects to finalise these matters and identify a possible date for the completion of the necessary works; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34331/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the appointment of a Design Team for the above project has been completed. A Planning and briefing meeting was recently held with the successful design team in order to allow this project commence architectural planning. This project will when completed accommodate a 32 classroom school along with ancillary facilities. My Department has requested the Design Team to prepare a Stage 1 Submission (site analysis and

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

sketch scheme). Further progression of the project can be considered when this is received.

757. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in regard to the provision of the new school at Ardclough, County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34332/07]

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. Progression of all projects will be considered in the context of my Department's Multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

758. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in regard to the meeting in full of the extra accommodation requirements at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34333/07]

762. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in relation to an application for major capital funding in the case of a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; when this application is expected to progress; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34337/07]

763. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in relation to an application for major capital funding in the case of a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; when this application is expected to progress; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34338/07]

764. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the status of an application for large scale capital funding by a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; when same is expected to progress; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34339/07]

766. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the status of an application for large scale capital funding by a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; when same is expected to progress; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34341/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 758, 762, 763, 764 and 766 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, all applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria. Progress on individual projects, such as the ones in question, will be considered in the context of the multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

759. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when works associated with the provision of extra facilities at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34334/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that construction recently commenced on this project and it is envisaged that it will take about 15 months to complete.

760. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the extent to which the facilities at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare are adequate to meet requirements; her plans to provide extra facilities there; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34335/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school to which he refers has applied to my Department for large scale capital funding to meet its long term needs. As the Deputy will be aware, all applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria. Progress on individual projects, such as the one in question, will be considered in the context of the multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme

761. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in relation to provision of extra facilities at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; if her Department has received a response regarding proceeding by the school to stage three; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34336/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning i.e. stage 4/5 (tender documentation). The final grant of planning permission is expected shortly. 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.

Questions Nos. 762 to 764, inclusive, answered with Question No. 758.

765. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a further response has been received from the board of management at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare following confirmation by her Department of advancement to stage three; her plans to progress this matter in the next six months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34340/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the tenders for the project to which the question refers were recently returned to the school. Their Design Team are examining the submissions and will submit a tender report to my Department as soon as it is complete.

Question No. 766 answered with Question No. 758.

School Accommodation.

767. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in regard to the provision of classroom facilities and accommodation at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34342/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The school referred to by the Deputy applied and was approved funding for four extra classrooms under the devolved Permanent Accommodation Scheme for 2007. The alternative to a school participating in a devolved scheme would be to apply for consideration for inclusion in the mainstream school building programme in line with the project's priority band rating. The Permanent Accommodation Scheme (PAS) was originally introduced in 2003 on a pilot basis and was extended to cover more schools in subsequent years.

I increased funding for the PAS in 2006 by an average of 20%. This increase follows-on from an increase of up to 25% in 2005. The feedback has in general been very positive, the number of schools participating has increased year on year and many schools are anxious to be included. In order to maintain this momentum I approved over 140 additional schools to participate in this scheme in 2007. The present position of the project in question is that the architectural planning of the project is progressing satisfactorily and the School Management would expect to go on site in the new year.

768. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science her intentions to respond to the request from the school authorities at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare in respect of the provision of permanent classroom accommodation; the precise deadline in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34343/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The School Board of Management as client on this project are currently in the process of re-appointing a Consultant Architect for this project. On receipt of the recommendation from the Board of Management, it will be examined by the Department and the Schools Board of Management will be kept informed of

developments on completion of this examination. 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.

769. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of school places available through the various primary and second level schools at Cellbrigde, County Kildare; her plans to enhance or meet these requirements in full in early date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34344/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available. However, I can confirm that in response to the need for additional primary school places in Celbridge, the Department recognised a new primary school which commenced operation this September. The school's initial intake was 79 pupils. The school is located in temporary accommodation, the refurbishment of which was funded by the Department to ensure that it was suitable for school use. Site identification and acquisition procedures are ongoing for a permanent home for the school. It is intended that the site will also facilitate the development of a post primary school. The Deputy will probably be aware that under the Area Development Plan for the N4/M4 corridor published by the Commission on School accommodation, provision of a new post primary school for Celbridge is recommended post 2011.

770. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the plans she has in mind to meet the accommodation requirements at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34345/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The school to which the Deputy refers to, currently is in the process of preparing a Stage 3 submission (Developed Sketch Scheme). Once a date for receipt of this submission is received, a review meeting will be arranged between the Board of Management along with its Design Team and the Department to evaluate the submission. A pre planning meeting was recently held with Kildare County Council in order to progress the process of being in a position to lodge a full planning application. On completion of this project it is anticipated that the school will contain 16 mainstream classrooms, General Purpose room and ancillary facilities.

771. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in regard to the provision of permanent site, accommodation and other facilities for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34346/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The school to which the Deputy refers to has recently had its Stage 3 submission (Developed Sketch Scheme) approved and a letter to this effect was forwarded to the Project Manager with a number of comments to be addressed in the next Stage. It is envisaged that the school will be accommodated in the new Pipers Hill Campus along with the Post Primary School, which is currently being developed. When complete the school will have 16 mainstream classrooms along with ancillary accommodation.

772. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she expects to be in a position to meet in full the projected accommodation and other requirements in respect of primary and second level schools at Kilcock, County Kildare; if it is intended that the necessary funding will be provided in 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34347/07]

773. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department have identified the precise school accommodation requirements for the future both primary and second level, at Leixlip, County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34348/07]

774. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the discussions she has had with all the relevant school authorities in primary and second level schools in Maynooth, County Kildare with the objective of identifying the precise school place and other facility requirements in the town having regard to current and projected population levels; when she expects these requirements to be met in full; the means by which they will be met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34349/07]

777. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she or her Department have had discussions with all of the school authorities, the local authority and the VEC with the object of determining the precise school accommodation requirements for both primary and second level for the town of Naas, County Kildare; her specific plans to address these issues having particular regard to population expansion in the area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34352/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 772 to 774, inclusive, and 777 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Commission on School Accommodation published an Area Development Plan for the N4/M4 corridor which includes Leixlip, Maynooth and Kilcock. The document which was published following an

extensive consultation process with all interested parties sets out the blueprint for capital investment in the areas concerned for the foreseeable future.

Progress on individual projects will be considered under the School Building and Modernisation Programme. In Naas, the Department has already made significant interventions including the provision of 2 new primary schools and the significant expansion of existing post primary schools. The Department is currently working to ensure that there will be sufficient primary places available in 2008 for all eligible pupils and plans are also progressing for a new 1,000 pupil post primary school and for a 16 classroom school for the Gaelscoil.

775. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the extent of the discussions she has had with the relevant primary and second level school authorities at Clane, County Kildare having particular regard to the need to identify the school accommodation and other requirements in view of the current and projected population increases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34350/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): An application for large scale capital funding has been received from one of the primary schools in Clane and the Department has contacted the other school in relation to its long term requirements. The Department has no application for capital funding at post primary level but it is keeping the situation under review. As the Deputy will be aware, all applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria. Progress on individual projects will be considered in the context of the multi-Annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

776. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the extent to which she has had discussions with all the primary and second level school authorities at Celbridge, County Kildare with a view to meeting accommodation and other facilities required arising from the population increase in the area; the timescale for the provision of such facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34351/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): In response to the need for additional primary school places in Celbridge, the Department recognised a new primary school which commenced operation this September. The schools initial intake was 79 pupils. The school is located in temporary accommodation, the refurbishment of which was funded by the Department to ensure that it was suitable for school use. Site identification and acquisition procedures are ongoing for a permanent home for the school. It is

intended that the site will also facilitate the development of a post primary school. The Deputy will probably be aware that under the Area Development Plan for the N4/M4 corridor published by the Commission on School accommodation, provision of a new post primary school for Celbridge is recommended post 2011.

Question No. 777 answered with Question No. 772.

Schools Building Projects.

778. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the funding provided by her Department towards the school building programme in each of the past three years to date in 2007; her expected expenditure under this heading in the 2007/2008 school year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34353/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The annual allocations under the School Building and Modernisation Programme are set out on a financial year basis rather than on the school year. The outturn for the years 2004 to 2006 was as follows:

2004 — €333m.

2005 — €501m.

2006 — €494m.

The outturn for 2007 will be in excess of €540m.

Special Educational Needs.

779. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the further projected requirements in respect of special needs teachers throughout the country; the full extent to which the shortfall has been identified and is expected to be addressed within a reasonable time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34354/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I wish to advise the Deputy that the level of resources being made available by my Department to support students with special educational needs nationally has grown significantly in recent years. At primary level, there are now over 6,000 teachers working directly with children with special educational needs, including those requiring learning support, compared with fewer than 1,500 in 1998. At post-primary level, over 2,450 whole-time equivalent teachers support special needs students compared with 200 in 1998. This includes 566 learning support teachers. Significant progress has been made in relation to increasing the number of SNAs in our schools who specifically cater for children with care needs. There are over 8,800 whole-time equivalent SNAs in primary and post-primary schools

supporting the care needs of these students compared with approximately 300 in 1998.

Additional teaching supports are allocated as necessary by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in line with my Department's policy to support children with special educational needs. As a result, there is no current shortfall in the number of teacher posts being allocated for children with special educational needs.

Going forward, the NCSE has produced an Implementation Report regarding the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN Act), which is currently receiving detailed consideration within my Department. As part of this process, my officials have met with the education partners to obtain their views on the report and its recommendations. Arising from this process and taking account of the Council's implementation report, a Working Group in my Department has been developing proposals for the implementation of the Act and this work will be completed shortly. In this context, I am satisfied that effective progress is being made to advance development of the necessary policy and supports to enable formal commencement of the remaining provisions of the Act.

780. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the school accommodation requirement in terms of school places, teaching or other facilities for children with autism or Aspergers syndrome; the full extent of the funding provided by her Department to address these issues in each of the past three years; her proposals for the future in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34355/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Deputy will be aware of my commitment to ensuring that all children, including students on the autistic spectrum, receive an education appropriate to their needs. As the Deputy is aware, the National Council for Special Education is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers, for the establishment of special classes for autism and for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support children with special needs. In excess of 275 autism-specific classes have now been approved around the country, with 75 sanctioned in the last year alone. The NCSE will continue to sanction additional classes for children with autism where the need arises.

As part of my commitment to catering for the accommodation needs of children with special needs, all applications for such accommodation are given priority by my Department's Planning and Building Unit. Where notice of new or additional accommodation needs does not allow sufficient time for the provision of a permanent

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

structure, my Department funds the provision of temporary accommodation. The information regarding the level of funding which my Department makes available for school accommodation for children on the autistic spectrum requested by the Deputy is not readily available.

School Accommodation.

781. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science her proposals to ensure sufficient advance planning and discussions with existing school authorities with a view to ensuring sufficient school accommodation for the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34356/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The process of assessing the need for new or additional educational facilities at primary or post-primary level in any given area entails consideration of all relevant factors, including enrolment and demographic trends, housing developments and the capacity of existing schools to meet the demand for places. Liaison with existing schools is also an important part of the process. In this way, every effort is made to ensure that there is adequate existing provision and that timely arrangements are made to extend capacity or provide new infrastructure where necessary.

In addition, Local Authorities are obliged by statute to refer draft local area development plans to the Department for observation and comment so that lands can be zoned for future education use. There are numerous sites reserved for education purposes, particularly in the rapidly developing areas, under this process so as to ensure that there will be sufficient land set aside and available for the future development of education infrastructure. Over and above the statutory consultation provisions in relation to local authority draft area development plans, my Department has in recent years worked to strengthen contacts with local authorities to enable informed decisions to be made in planning future educational provision.

My Department also makes extensive use of data from the Census of Population for a variety of purposes including long-term projections of enrolment at national and local level and when drafting its own area development plans and planning school provision for likely enrolment at local area level.

The Deputy may be aware that the Programme for Government includes a commitment to establish a Developing Areas Unit in my Department. This Unit has been established and forms part of my Department's planning and building division. The Unit will be solely dedicated to progressing school planning in rapidly developing areas building on improvements that have already been made in school planning in recent years. Staff in

the unit will liaise with local authorities etc., identify where new schools are needed and ensure that they are delivered in the fastest possible timeframe.

782. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children throughout the country accommodated in prefabricated or other temporary structures in all primary schools including scoileanna lán gaeilge; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34357/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information requested by the Deputy is not available in the Department. However, every effort is made to keep the expenditure on the rental of temporary accommodation, including prefabs low. It should be noted that less than 5% of the almost € 495 million that was invested in school buildings last year, went on the rental of temporary accommodation. Where accommodation is needed at very short notice, however, a temporary solution can be the only option. Such accommodation may also be used where the need is short-term, such as when a school requires a temporary building while it is awaiting the completion of construction of permanent facilities.

783. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the extent to which she expects to approve the provision of extra second level all-Irish colleges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34358/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): New or additional second level all Irish schools can be established in either of two ways — either under the Department's normal planning processes or by way of an application by a sponsor/Patron. With regard to the former, it is the function of School Planning Section to assess the educational infrastructural needs of an area at both primary and post primary level and to plan, in that context, for the establishment of new schools/ gaelcholáistí where this is deemed necessary.

The process of assessing the need for new or additional facilities entails consideration of all relevant factors, including enrolment and demographic trends, housing developments and the capacity of existing schools to meet the demand for places.

Apart from this, it is open to a prospective sponsor to apply for the establishment of a new post primary school/ gaelcholáiste. In this event, among the criteria used to assess an application are: that the needs of students likely to attend the school cannot reasonably be met by existing schools; the Patron is registered with the Department; the proposed enrolment is sufficient to ensure that the school will be viable in the long term; the enrolment will be sufficient to ensure

that the school can operate a broad and balanced curriculum; the availability of suitable accommodation for the school. and that the Patron will comply with the rules and regulations governing post primary schools and all relevant Sections of the Education Act, 1998.

The Department is happy to support the establishment of new Gaelcholáistí where a need is demonstrated.

784. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she expects to be in a position to provide permanent classroom accommodation for all children currently accommodated in pre-fabricated classroom structures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34359/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): During the period of the last National Development Plan 2000-2006, record levels of investment and the streamlining of delivery systems allowed a major acceleration of the school building programme with over €2.6 billion was invested in upgrading existing school infrastructure and providing new school accommodation at both first and second-level. This delivered over 7,800 building projects involving tens of thousands of extra permanent school places. This investment has helped to increase capacity and transform the standard of accommodation in many schools throughout the country.

The budget for 2007 is the first year of the roll out of the new NDP 2007-2013 which will involve an investment of over €4.5 billion in school buildings. This funding will enable the Department to continue to take a proactive approach to the provision of modern school accommodation particularly in developing areas. This year alone over €540 million will be spent on school building infrastructure with over 1,500 projects which will ultimately deliver over 700 classrooms to provide permanent accommodation for over 17,500 pupils, mainly in developing areas. The Department will target funding, as appropriate, in order to ensure that additional school accommodation is provided in developing areas within the earliest possible timeframes.

Innovations in the delivery of school buildings such as Generic Repeat Designs and the use of the Design and Build model have been introduced to ensure that new school buildings are delivered in the fastest time-frame possible. Much greater authority has also been devolved to local school management boards to manage and deliver smaller building projects, thereby freeing the Department to concentrate on the larger scale projects.

The focus within the Department is also to empower schools to resolve their accommodation needs, wherever possible, by way of permanent accommodation as evidenced by the introduction

of two new initiatives, the Permanent Accommodation Initiative and the Small School Initiative. The purpose of these initiatives was to allow primary schools to undertake a permanent solution to their classroom accommodation needs and, where possible, to obviate the need for temporary accommodation. Forward planning has been improved through greater cooperation with Local Authorities and the publication of 10-year Area Development Plans.

With regard to expenditure on the rental of temporary accommodation, including prefabs, every effort is made to keep this expenditure low. It should be noted that less than 5% of the almost €495 million that was invested in school buildings last year, went on the rental of temporary accommodation. Where accommodation is needed at very short notice, however, a temporary solution can be the only option. Such accommodation may also be used where the need is short-term, such as when a school requires a temporary building while it is awaiting the completion of construction of permanent facilities.

Psychological Service.

785. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she expects the availability of psychological services to be increased in line with the best practice internationally; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34361/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Deputy will, I'm sure, be aware that all primary and post primary schools have access to psychological assessments either directly through the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA). Schools that do not currently have NEPS psychologists assigned to them may avail of the SCPA and have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved and paid for by NEPS.

The Deputy will also be aware that since NEPS was established, we have trebled the number of psychologists in the service. Notwithstanding this and as I have previously announced my Department is committed to increasing psychological service staffing further, so that by 2009 there will be 200 NEPS psychologists.

To this end I can inform the Deputy that my Department has been working, in conjunction with the Public Appointments Commission to recruit new psychologists from an existing panel to the service. The number of NEPS psychologists has increased from a total of 128 in April to a current level of 136. In all 11 psychologists have been recruited in this period but due to the normal effect of resignations and retirement the net increase is 8. In addition my Department has recently contracted a further 3 psychologists with 2 due to take up duty before years end. A further

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

psychologist will take up duty in early January 2008.

The panel concerned is now exhausted and the Public Appointments Service has recently announced the commencement of a competition from which a new panel will be drawn to continue the recruitment process. The deadline for receipt of applications in this regard has now passed and work is proceeding on the short-listing of candidates for interview. It is envisaged that the process will be completed and panels formed as quickly as possible allowing recruitment to recommence early in 2008. It is intended that both through completing the process for hiring the additional 31 psychologists approved for 2007 and by hiring another 11 in 2008, the number of NEPS psychologists will increase to 169 next year.

My Department remains committed to the development of a strong and robust educational psychological service serving the needs of all primary and post-primary pupils.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

786. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when she expects to achieve the reductions in class sizes proposed in the course of the general election; the number of extra teachers employed since the beginning of the commencement of the 2007/2008 school year; when the desired pupil teacher ratio in the classroom is expected to be achieved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34362/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Approximately 1,100 extra primary and post-primary teachers have been put in place this school year. We are also planning for about 1,200 more for the 2008/09 year. As I have said on many occasions in the past, high quality teachers are by far the most important ingredient in our education system. The record increases in teacher numbers in recent years have been absolutely unprecedented. Significant improvements have been made in the pupil teacher ratio at primary and post-primary level in recent years. The ratio at primary level has dropped from 22.2:1 in the 1996/97 school year to 16.41:1 in the 2006/07 school year. The ratio at post-primary level has dropped from 16:1 in the 1996/97 school year to 13.13:1 in the 2006/07 school year.

In the primary sector alone, there are now in the region of 6,000 more teachers on my Department's payroll than there were in 2002. Extra teachers have been provided in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years specifically to reduce class sizes in our primary schools. The number of teachers working in the areas of language support and special needs has also increased significantly. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to provide a further 4,000 primary teachers by 2012. With the additional teachers

already put in place this year and those provided for in the Budget, we are ahead of target with about 2,000 extra primary teachers to be delivered within just two years.

Departmental Properties.

787. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans for the future use of the Old Monastery, Kilcock, County Kildare; the extent to which plans have been formulated or progressed for its conversion as a library for educational purposes or other civic use; the extent to which this forms part of the regeneration plans for the town square; the intended timescale for its future development or alternative use; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34371/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The building referred to by the Deputy is in the ownership of Kildare County Council. This property was in the ownership of my Department, but was transferred to Kildare County Council earlier this year. The transaction involved an exchange of lands between my Department and Kildare County Council to facilitate the construction of Gaelscoil Uí Riada.

As part of the transaction it was agreed that the Council would lease back to my Department a portion of this property for the continued operation of the Gaelscoil, pending construction of the new school. This lease expired in June 2007. My Department is currently in negotiations with Kildare County Council regarding further short term use of this property to facilitate primary accommodation provision for Kilcock for September 2008.

Schools Building Projects.

788. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science if, in view of the increased allocation in budget 2008 for the school building programme, she will take steps to ensure that the necessary funding is allocated to enable a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath to proceed to construction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34386/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The tender report for the school referred to by the Deputy is under examination in my Department at present. The School's Board of Management will be kept advised of developments when the examination is complete. Progression of all projects will be considered in the context of my Department's Multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

789. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science if, in view of the increased allocation in budget 2008 for the school building programme, she will take steps to ensure

that the necessary funding is allocated to enable a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath to proceed to construction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34387/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The tender report for the school referred to by the Deputy is under examination in my Department at present. The school's Board of Management will be kept advised of developments when the examination is complete. Progression of all projects will be considered in the context of my Department's Multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

790. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science if, in view of the increased allocation in budget 2008 for the school building programme, she will take steps to ensure that the necessary funding is made available to enable a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath to proceed to construction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34388/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The tender report for the school referred to by the Deputy is under examination in my Department at present. The school's Board of Management will be kept advised of developments when the examination is complete.

791. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science if, in view of the increased allocation in budget 2008 for the school building programme, she will take steps to ensure that the necessary funding is made available to enable a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath to proceed to construction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34389/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, all applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria. Progress on individual projects, such as the one in question, will be considered in the context of the multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

792. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science if in view of the increased capital expenditure available in budget 2008 for the school building programme, she will take steps to allocate the necessary funding to allow a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath to proceed to construct the accommodation required; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34390/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Progression of all projects to tender and construction, including the project in question, will be considered in the context of my Department's multi-annual School Building and

Modernisation Programme. I intend to announce in January the first tranche of projects that will be proceeding to construction with further announcements throughout the year as the school building programme is rolled out.

793. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science if in view of the increased capital expenditure available in budget 2008 for the school building programme, she will take steps to allocate the necessary funding to allow a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath to proceed to construction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34391/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, all applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria. Progress on individual projects, such as the one in question, will be considered in the context of the multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

794. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science if the tender documentation for a project (details supplied) in County Mayo has been completed; the estimated timing and funding for the stages to completion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34397/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The tender documentation for the project referred to by the Deputy is nearing completion. Progression of all projects to tender and construction, including this project, will be considered in the context of my Department's Multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. I intend to announce in January the first tranche of projects that will be proceeding to construction with further announcements throughout the year as the school building programme is rolled out.

Special Educational Needs.

795. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of legal cases her Department is involved in with parents of children with special needs who have initiated legal proceedings against the State; the estimated legal cost of these actions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34408/07]

796. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Science the legal costs and compensation paid per year over the past five years in legal proceedings involving children with special needs who have taken legal actions against the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34409/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 795 and 796 together.

There are 75 cases involving children with special educational needs currently ongoing in which my Department is a named party. The Deputy will be aware of my position on the issues of litigation in special educational needs and can be assured that neither I nor my Department take lightly any decision to defend cases concerning children with special educational needs. Cases are generally only litigated where no potential settlement is acceptable to both sides and the Government's authority to decide issues of policy is in question. The State has an obligation under the Constitution to provide for primary education. In the context of children with special educational needs, that education must be appropriate to their requirements. The State decides on an appropriate form of provision, having regard to the advice available to it from relevant experts in the National Educational Psychological Service, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the Inspectorate and independent experts. The Department is not complacent in dealing with these cases and attempts, wherever possible, to reduce the potential for litigation and the levels of legal costs where they arise.

I would like to emphasise that legal costs incurred by the State in defending those cases which are brought to court, are not met directly by my Department. In accordance with financial procedures in cases involving damages or compensation against the State, costs are generally charged to the Chief State Solicitor's Office Vote as sanctioned by the Attorney General. With reference to the costs incurred by my Department which are payment of legal costs of solicitors acting on behalf of children with special educational needs the costs for the last five years are as follows:

2003 — €3,766,276.53
 2004 — €5,160,555.16
 2005 — €1,211,529.68
 2006 — €620,880.43
 To date 2007 — €421,176.97

Ex-gratia payments made in the settlement of these cases were as follows:

2003 — €662,830.42
 2004 — €421,692.11
 2005 — €101,655.16
 2006 — €152,333.34
 To date — 2007 €53,882.00

Finally I wish to assure the Deputy that I am most anxious that all children receive an education appropriate to their needs and I will continue to prioritise the issue of special educational needs and, in co-operation with the National Council

for Special Education and the education partners ensure that children with special educational needs are adequately resourced to enable them to meet their potential.

School Planning.

797. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department's school planning and building unit has established a specific task force to address primary school capacity issues in certain areas around the country for September 2008; and if locations (details supplied) in County Cork have been included on a priority list. [34412/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government includes a commitment to establish a Developing Areas Unit in my Department dedicated solely to progressing school planning in rapidly developing areas. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that this Unit has been established. The unit will be solely dedicated to progressing school planning in rapidly developing areas building on improvements that have already been made in school planning in recent years. Staff in the unit will liaise with local authorities, identify where new schools are needed and ensure that they are delivered in the fastest possible timeframe.

As the Deputy will be aware applications for large scale capital funding are assessed against published prioritisation criteria and assigned a Band rating. Progress on individual projects is then considered in the context of the multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme consistent with the assigned Band rating.

Schools Recognition.

798. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a formal application for a new primary school (details supplied) in County Cork has been received by her Department from an intending patron organisation; and the status of the application. [34413/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Two patron bodies have submitted notifications of intention to apply for recognition of a primary school in the area referred to by the Deputy. The deadline for receipt of applications is 31 January, 2008. The New Schools Advisory Committee (NSAC), an independent advisory committee has been charged with the task of assessing these applications to open new primary schools and make recommendations therein. The consultation process is currently under way. Following which the NSAC will submit a report with recommendations on the applications.

School Staffing.

799. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Education and Science when a school (details supplied) will open; the supports that have been put in place for the children who should have been in attendance at this school since September 2007; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [34446/07]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Hanafin): As the Deputy may be aware, three teaching vacancies out of a total teaching complement of four teaching posts have arisen in the school in question for the 2007/2008 school year, namely the posts of principal and two teachers. Due to this exceptional number of vacancies, the school was unable to re-open in September 2007.

I am informed that the recruitment process is in hand and the Board of Management has advised that a person has accepted an offer of the principal's post in this school. The individual in question is currently working through a notice period in his present school. Every effort is being made to expedite the recruitment process for the two remaining staff vacancies with a view to re-opening the school as soon as possible.

Arrangements have been made to facilitate some of the children's attendance at other schools as a short-term measure. Where this hasn't been possible home tuition has been offered to the remaining families. My Department is continuing to liaise with the school in the context of re-opening the school at the earliest possible date.

Energy Resources.

800. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Defence the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33276/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): To date the emphasis in my Department and across the Defence Forces has been on energy conservation and increasing energy efficiency. In 2003, an Energy Efficiency Working Group was established in the Defence Forces to examine fuel economy measures throughout the Defence Forces. A number of initiatives to improve efficiency have since been implemented and have resulted in more efficient energy usage.

At present about 0.3% of the energy used by the Department and Defence Forces comes from renewable sources. It is intended to increase the use of such energy sources in the future by introducing a number of pilot schemes across the Defence Forces. This includes the use of Solar Panels for the provision of domestic hot water, Waste Oil burners and the introduction of Biomass boilers in a number of locations.

Departmental Expenditure.

801. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Defence the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33335/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): Following is the information required by the Deputy:

Combined totals for the Department and the Defence Forces are as follows:

Year		€	%
2006	Total Mobile Bills	253,117	
	Total Data Charges	20,964	8.28
	Total Roaming Charges	18,265	7.22
2007	Total Mobile Bills	347,499	
	Total Data Charges	32,016	9.21
	Total Roaming Charges	81,035	23.32

The increase in DF charges in 2007 is due mainly to participation in the Nordic Battle Group and the preparations for the EU mission to Chad/CAR. This is expected to revert to normal levels once local contracts are in place at the overseas locations.

802. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Defence the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33350/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): There are no payments of mobile telephone bills made, in the form of expenses, to staff of my Department or the Defence Forces.

803. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Defence the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33365/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): The amount paid in respect of the mobile telephone assigned to me as Minister for the years in question are as follows:

[Deputy Willie O’Dea.]

- 2006: €960.00 (Roaming charges €80.00; data charges €30.00)
- 2007: €1,046.97 (Roaming charges €110.00; data charges €40.00)

Departmental Reports.

804. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Defence when the value for money review on maintenance of aircraft was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33407/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea):

The Expenditure Review of maintenance of aircraft in the Air Corps was published in July 2006. The main findings of this review were that the efficiency and effectiveness of aircraft maintenance was being compromised by the age and diversity of the fleet that the Air Corps operated over the period of the review.

The ongoing investment in Defence equipment has resulted in significant modernisation of the Air Corps fleet and has resulted in reduced fleet diversity. Very significant improvements in logistical support for the modern aircraft types were put in place as part of the procurement contractual processes. Power by the Hour contracts are in place with Pilatus, Eurocopter, Agusta Westland, Learjet and McAlpines (for the Garda helicopters). These contracts improve the availability of spare parts for maintenance purposes. In two cases, Pilatus and Agusta Westland, the aircraft manufacturers have placed a consignment stock of spares in a bonded store at Baldonnel to maximise logistic efficiency.

The ongoing infrastructure investment programme has seen improvements to the maintenance infrastructure. Other recommendations which focused on organisational matters, have been considered and implemented where appropriate. It is anticipated that all these changes will significantly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of aircraft maintenance in the Air Corps.

805. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Defence when the value for money review on the Defence Forces clothing programme was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33408/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea):

The Value for Money Review of Clothing Procurement in the Defence Forces was published in September 2007. The review has identified potential for increased efficiency and effectiveness in the clothing storage and distribution system. An implementation group, tasked with drawing up a detailed implementation plan has been estab-

lished. The anticipated improvement in inventory turnover ratios should decrease the volume of clothing stock on hand. However, it is vitally important to ensure that the Defence Forces clothing needs continue to be met. The optimisation of inventory levels and the clothing distribution system are inextricably linked to supplier performance and the implementation group will consider this factor in their deliberations.

806. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Defence when the value for money review of usage of military training land will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33409/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea):

The Value for Money Review of the usage of military training land is scheduled for completion by end December 2008. As the review group have not completed their deliberations, I cannot comment on any potential value for money improvements that may arise.

807. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Defence when the value for money review of Naval Service of vessel maintenance will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33410/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): I anticipate that the Value for Money Review of Naval Service Vessel Maintenance will be completed by the end of March 2008. As the Review Group have not, as yet, completed their deliberations, I cannot comment on any potential value for money improvements that may arise.

Departmental Staff.

808. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33505/07]

810. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33535/07]

812. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33565/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): I propose to take Questions Nos. 808, 810 and 812 together.

My Department currently employs the services of private media monitoring companies to provide it with copies of articles relating to Defence matters in local and national newspapers. Copies of these articles are circulated by the Press Office to myself and senior officials within my Department and are also available to all members of staff on the Department's intranet. The average annual cost of the service is €29,368.19.

The following are the details of the staff employed in the press office:

Number	Position	Salary Scale
1	Press Officer	€62,990–€78,543
1	Press Advisor	€82,016–€101,446

The role of the Press Adviser and the Press Officer in my Department is to provide, in conjunction with the Defence Forces Press Officer and the Government Information Services, a high quality press and information service to the media and the general public. The Press Officer is also the Information Officer and the Freedom of Information Officer while the Press Adviser advises me on media matters. Information is circulated by both the Press Adviser and the Press Officer to myself, officials within my Department, members of the Defence Forces, other Government Departments, members of the media and the general public as required. No Press Adviser was employed in my Department in the period prior to 1 November 2004 when the current holder of the post was appointed.

Departmental Expenditure.

809. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33520/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): Details of newspapers purchased by my Department are as follows:

Daily

Irish Times 10

Irish Independent 5

Irish Examiner 3

Star 2

Sun 2

Mirror 2

Financial Times 1

Herald Tribune 2

Daily Mail 1

Evening Herald 2

Weekly

Limerick Leader 1

The number of newspapers provided to my own office is six dailies and one weekly. Two dailies are provided to the Minister of State's office. The cost of providing newspapers in the last twelve months was €10,141.

Question No. 810 answered with Question No. 808.

Consultancy Contracts.

811. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33550/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): It has not been possible in the time available to compile all the information requested by the Deputy. Whilst the information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible, I would draw the Deputy's attention to PQs 303 and 305 on Wednesday November 21st November 2007.

Question No. 812 answered with Question No. 808.

Departmental Expenditure.

813. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33580/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): A total of five posts in my Department have been authorised for the use of credit cards.

- Minister for Defence (This credit card was never used by me and the account was closed on my request.)
- Private Secretary to Minister for Defence
- Private Secretary for Minister of State at the Department of Defence

[Deputy Willie O'Dea.]

- Secretary-General of Department of Defence
- Human Resources Manager

The total of the annual amounts purchased, including the cumulative interest and the cost per annum on each of the first four of the above-mentioned cards is as follows (figures for 2000 and 2001 were converted to euro):

Year	Annual Amount purchased	Cumulative Interest	Cost per annum includes maintenance charges and Government levy
	€	€	€
2000	16,470.57	Nil	107.95
2001	19,670.14	5.41	114.30
2002	32,878.10	Nil	95.10
2003	34,334.86	2.54	158.10
2004	34,884.19	Nil	265.40
2005	5,598.29	Nil	158.10
2006	4,568.67	Nil	132.70
2007	4,022.52	14.10	169.05
Totals	152,427.34	22.05	1,200.70

In relation to the Credit Card held by the Human Resources Manager, the position is that prior to 2005 the information requested was collated in such a manner that it would require a disproportionate amount of resources to provide it. However for the years 2005 to date the value of items purchased is €5,963.35. The standard charges imposed by the Banks and a Government levy applies.

814. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33595/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): The cost to my Department of photographers to date in 2007 is €14,654.19. The cost for 2006 was €14,589.41. The information with regard to the cost of photography to the Department prior to 2006 is not readily available.

815. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33610/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): Since my appointment as Minister for Defence in September 2004, I have incurred no make-up costs. There is no record of make-up costs having

been incurred by previous Ministers for Defence in the period from 1997 to September 2004.

816. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33625/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): The provision for official entertainment for my Department is included under Subhead A3.2 of the Defence Vote. The amounts charged against this provision for the years requested are as follows:

Departmental Entertainment	
Year	Amount
	€
1997	22,725
1998	17,131
1999	30,917
2000	13,830
2001	23,399
2002	15,928
2003	15,537
2004	21,316
2005	13,363
2006	10,066
2007	11,771

Government Information Services.

817. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33640/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): Both my Press Advisor and the Departmental Press Officer receive text messages throughout the day, Monday to Friday inclusive, from the Government Information Services (GIS) which summarise the headlines of the daily national newspapers and the main news bulletins. In addition, throughout the course of the day they also receive regular emails from the GIS outlining the main news headlines. This information is circulated to myself and officials within my Department as often as it is considered necessary.

Official Engagements.

818. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Mini-

ster for Defence if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33655/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea):

The attendance of my press advisor at official visits and engagements is decided on a case by case basis, depending on the significance and nature of the event, including if the media have been invited to attend. There have been many official engagements and visits in the past year when my press advisor was not present.

Departmental Transport.

819. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33670/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea):

The Minister of State at my Department is also Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach. No transport costs are incurred by my Department in respect of the Minister of State or his staff.

820. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the cost of him using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to junior Ministers and staff for the same period. [33685/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea):

While I do use public transport on occasions, no costs have been incurred for either myself or the Minister of State in my Department for the use of public transport for the period 1997 to date in 2007. The amounts paid in respect of the use of public transport (excluding taxi fares) by staff in my Private Office, my Constituency Office and the Private Office of the Minister for State was: €516.50 in 2006 and €145.50 to date in 2007. Information for the years prior to 2006 is not readily available and compiling it would require a disproportionate amount of resources.

Departmental Communications.

821. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence if his Department carries news summaries on its internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33715/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea):

News summaries relating to Defence matters are provided on my Department’s intranet, which is

an in-house network and is accessible by all users of the network. The service is accessed via a standard web browser interface and is updated on a daily basis. The service is provided by Business & Finance Ltd. and average annual cost is €27,600.

Departmental Expenditure.

822. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33730/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): I use one mobile phone supplied by my Department; available costs are as follows:

2006 — €960.00

2007 — €1,046.97

Costs of these items from 1997 are not readily accessible and there may be statutory and other implications relating to disclosure of individual financial records for periods going back a number of years. I will clarify this and will correspond with the Deputy as soon as the position is resolved.

823. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33745/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea):

Staff appointed directly by me have been assigned mobile phones, blackberries and laptop computers. Costs relating to these items are as follows; Mobile phones and blackberries:

2006 — €8,595.34

2007 — €9,550.38

Laptop computers are drawn from a Departmental pool and costs are not attributable on an individual basis. Costs of these items from 1997 are not readily accessible and there may be statutory and other implications relating to disclosure of individual financial records for periods going back a number of years. I will clarify this and will correspond with the Deputy as soon as the position is resolved.

Departmental Travel.

824. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if

[Deputy Fergus O'Dowd.]

he will make a statement on the matter.
[34090/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea):

It has not been possible in the time available to compile the information requested by the Deputy. The information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Communications.

825. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Defence the number of staff in his Department who are provided with a Blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment.
[34219/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea):

Blackberries are provided to six staff in my Department.

826. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Defence the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34234/07]

Project	On budget	On deadline
Joint Departmental and Defence Forces Management Information Framework *	Yes	No
Defence Forces Server Replacement programme	Yes	Yes

*The Department of Defence engaged Oracle EMEA Ltd on a fixed price contract, which was signed in April 2004. The target go-live date was January 2005, however it was not possible to meet that target date due to the design, build and testing of the new systems (including a complex technical architecture) taking longer than expected to meet the requirements of the Department and the Defence Forces. The system went live in January 2006.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

828. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Defence the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34264/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea):

On foot of the commitment in the Programme for Government on carbon offsetting official air travel, I understand that the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is in the process of developing a scheme for use by all Government Departments and the bodies under their aegis. Details of the scheme are expected to be announced shortly.

Data Protection.

829. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Defence if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his departmental databases is safe from

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea):

My Department uses two major databases relating to payroll and management information, including accounts, which are wholly operated within the Department. A third Human Resources Management database is used by Departmental HR staff and is owned and operated by Department of Finance. A number of smaller local databases are owned and operated by staff of the relevant administrative areas within the Department. The Defence Forces also maintain Operations, Personnel and Logistics related databases, which are owned and operated by Defence Forces personnel.

827. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Defence the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34249/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea):

Following is the information requested by the Deputy:

hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34279/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea):

All databases in my Department and the Defence Forces are protected by anti-virus software, filters, password authentication and firewalls, which are constantly updated and operate within a closed network. I am satisfied that this affords the highest levels of protection for personal information and all sensitive data.

Hearing Impairment Claims.

830. **Deputy James McDaid** asked the Minister for Defence the amount of compensation paid to claimants in County Donegal under the victims of Army deafness compensation scheme; the amount of money paid in legal fees to legal representatives of these victims; the breakdown of the fees paid to individual legal representatives in County Donegal; the reason it appears legal representatives of these victims were not adequately reimbursed by the State, for their work on behalf of the victims, as a percentage fee

on the overall amount of compensation allocated was charged by some solicitors, prior to the victims receiving their compensation; and if in instances where victims feel they have been overcharged by legal representatives in relation to fees, there is provision for them to seek reimbursement under the scheme. [34290/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea):

To avoid any confusion I should clarify that all hearing loss claims were initiated as personal injury actions in the civil courts and there was no statutory Army deafness compensation scheme. The so-called “Early Settlement Scheme” (ESS) was an administrative process used to negotiate early settlements in hearing loss cases where liability was not contested. The ESS process was introduced to dispose of the large volume of claims more cost effectively and speedily than would have been the case had proceedings been allowed to reach finality through the court system.

In all cases, whether settled under the “Early Settlement Scheme” or otherwise, claimants engaged their own legal representation. The solicitor and client relationship is private as are the terms of engagement agreed between the claimant and solicitor. The statutory provisions relating to solicitors charges to clients are contained in Section 68 of the Solicitors (Amendment) Act, 1994. This Section has been incorporated into guidelines issued by the Law Society of Ireland to practitioners. In simple terms, when taking instruction from clients, the law requires solicitors:

- (a) At the outset of a case to provide details in writing of the actual or estimated charges or basis of calculation of charges for the legal services being provided, and
- (b) At the conclusion of a case provide the client with a summary of the legal services provided, the amount of expenses incurred in the provision of these legal services and details of the costs that have been recovered by the solicitor from any other party to the proceedings.

Section 68 also precludes solicitors from:

- (c) Acting for a client on the basis that any charges to a client are to be calculated as a specified percentage of any damages recovered for the client.
- (d) Deducting or appropriating any or all of their charges to a client from any damages or money that may become payable to a client unless there is a prior written agreement between a client and his/her solicitor that this may be done.

I will make arrangements to have the full text of Section 68 placed on my Department’s website for information and easy access.

It may not be generally known that there are two main categories of costs that arise in litigation such as personal injury cases. The categories are “party and party” costs and “solicitor and client” costs.

In hearing loss cases, where a Plaintiff received a settlement or court award (other than “all in” settlements which included costs in the settlement amount), the Department generally paid the “party and party” costs only. “Party and party” costs are described as those necessarily and properly incurred for the attainment of justice or for enforcing or defending the rights of the party concerned. The “party and party” costs were generally agreed following negotiation between the Chief State Solicitor and the Plaintiff’s solicitor.

In cases settled under the “Early Settlement Scheme” the costs negotiated with solicitors reflected the fact that cases were being settled more rapidly which reduced the cost to the solicitors of bringing cases to conclusion.

In accordance with usual practice in such litigation, the Department did not pay “solicitor and client” costs. Such costs broadly cover any costs over and above those recoverable under the criteria for “party and party” costs. The Department is not responsible for such costs, which are a matter for agreement between client and solicitor.

The issue of claimant legal costs in hearing loss cases should not be confused with the special arrangements in relation to claimant legal costs for applicants under the Residential Institutions Redress Scheme. Under that scheme, legal costs were paid to the legal representatives of applicants at a fixed rate, which was agreed in advance with the State. There was no such arrangement in hearing loss cases.

In responding to queries on the issue of costs, my Department informs claimants of the provisions of Section 68 Subsection 6 of the Solicitors (Amendment) Act, 1994 entitling them to obtain details of the costs from their solicitor. The Department also informs claimants that the Law Society of Ireland is the statutory body entrusted with responsibility to investigate complaints against solicitors by any client and that the Law Society has procedures in place in this regard. Where claimants have been unable to obtain details of costs from their solicitors, the Department has tried to obtain copies from the Chief State Solicitor. This is not always possible given the passage of time.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to County Donegal is not readily available. The system of recording hearing loss claims does not allow for its retrieval without a considerable use of staff resources. Any details retrieved would not in any event show whether there had been any breach of the law in relation to solicitor and client charges in any particular cases. However I will contact the Deputy with relevant information that may be available. Also, if the

[Deputy Willie O’Dea.]

Deputy has any particular cases in mind he should write to my Department, which will try to assist as outlined above. I also intend writing to the President of the Law Society on the matter to look at the issue again.

Management Information Framework System.

831. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Defence if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34316/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): My Department commenced the process of rolling out the Management Information Framework system in the Department and throughout the Defence Forces in January 2006 with the implementation of the financial and inventory management modules. Interfaces to and from human resources and payroll applications were also developed in that context.

The core financial management system is currently being enhanced by the addition of a business intelligence layer, with the capacity to report on key performance indicators. Limited use has been made of performance indicators from the core system over the past two years. Key performance indicators, and the measurement of performance, are being further developed in the context of the new Annual Outset Statements, which were introduced earlier this year.

A number of reports and queries are used for collecting and reviewing costs. The General Ledger module contains data relating to costs attributed to subheads and cost centres. An Enterprise Assets Maintenance application provides maintenance cost management capabilities. The Projects product is currently being reviewed as a mechanism for providing an integrated cost management solution for all projects and activities across the Department and Defence Forces.

The financial and management system contains a wide variety of management reports to inform decision-making regarding the allocation and use of resources. The use of the business intelligence facility referred to above will further enhance management information capabilities as will other initiatives, such as making available periodic management reporting packs, which are currently being developed.

832. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Defence the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34447/07]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea):

The Management Information Framework (MIF) project aims at ensuring more efficient processing of financial transactions and accounts; better decision-making about the allocation of resources; more efficient and effective management of resources once allocated; and greater transparency in, and accountability for, the use of resources. While the implementation of the new system has resulted in improved business processes, better availability of timely and accurate management information to support the decision-making process and better resource management based on this information, it is not possible to quantify any financial savings that may have accrued during 2007 as a result of the operation of the new system.

European Arrest Warrants.

833. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will establish with the office of the Attorney General whether a European arrest warrant has been received from the Italian authorities in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8; the status of the warrant; when it will be passed to the Garda Síochána to be executed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33295/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Under the provisions of the European Arrest Warrant Act 2003, as amended, where a judicial authority in a Member State of the European Union duly issues a European Arrest Warrant, the European Arrest Warrant shall be transmitted by, or on behalf of, the issuing judicial authority to the Central Authority in the State. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform is the Central Authority in the State for the purposes of the 2003 Act.

I wish to inform the Deputy that it is not the practice of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to confirm or deny the receipt of a European Arrest Warrant for the surrender of a person to another Member State of the European Union.

Equal Opportunities Employment.

834. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the definition of disability used in the public service in relation to the 3% employment quota as introduced by the Disability Act 2005; if this target has been met in all areas of the public services; the monitoring and review mechanisms in place to monitor same. [34398/07]

928. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, further to Parliamentary Question No. 183 of 7 November 2006 regarding fulfilment of the 3% employment quota for people with disabilities under the Dis-

ability Act 2005, if all public service bodies have reported to their relevant monitoring committees as required under section 48 of the Act; if these reports in relation to 2006 were all furnished to the relevant Minister and the National Disability Authority before 30 June 2007; the findings of same in relation to fulfilling the quota; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34399/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 834 and 928 together.

The Disability Act 2005 provides that “disability in relation to a person, means a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment”.

Part 5 of the Act provides a framework for monitoring the employment target, which stands at 3%, in all public bodies through monitoring committees under the aegis of relevant Ministers of the Government. Under the Act, public bodies are required by 31 March each year to submit reports to monitoring committees on their compliance with the target; the monitoring committees are required to report on such compliance by 30 June each year to the relevant Minister and the National Disability Authority. The Authority has an overall monitoring and reporting role under the Act.

The National Disability Authority has prepared its first report under Part 5 of the Act on the employment position in 2006. This report was recently submitted to the Minister of State, Dr. Jimmy Devins, T.D. who has arranged for submission of it to the Government. Copies of the report, when published by the Authority, will be forwarded to the Oireachtas library. The National Disability Authority is undertaking a review of the first year of monitoring and reporting on the requirements and will report to the Minister of State in relation to this in due course.

Visa Applications.

835. **Deputy Beverley Flynn** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason the visa applications for persons (details supplied) were refused when they have already been granted work permits by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. [33229/07]

906. **Deputy Beverley Flynn** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason the visa applications for persons (details supplied) were refused when they have already been granted work permits by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment. [34112/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 835 and 906 together.

The applications referred to by the Deputy were received in the Visa Office, New Delhi on 6 November 2007. They were refused by the Visa Officer on the ground that there was insufficient documentation submitted in support of the applications — it is a requirement that applicants submit evidence of their qualifications and experience in relation to the position the work permit refers to. The applicants did not do so.

The decision of the Visa Officer may be appealed within two months of the date of decision, in this case before 6 January 2008. The appeal should be lodged in the Visa Office, New Delhi. The applicants have been advised of this both verbally and in writing. Guidelines on making an appeal can be found on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service at www.inis.gov.ie.

Citizenship Applications.

836. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be made on the application for citizenship for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33232/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the first-named person was received in the Citizenship section of my Department in September 2007. The application has not yet been examined in detail. Examination of the residency requirement will take place in the near future and the applicant will be contacted again at that time informing her when her application will be further examined or of any shortfall in her residency.

I am pleased to inform you that I have recently approved the applications of the second and third-named individuals. Officials in the Citizenship section have written to the parents of these persons and requested certain documentation. Certificates of naturalisation will issue on receipt of the documentation.

Asylum Applications.

837. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the circumstance surrounding the arrest and detention in Mountjoy of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; the provision made for their welfare and care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33248/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The person concerned arrived in the State on 25 June 2001 and subsequently claimed asylum on that day. Her application was refused following consideration of her case by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner. She appealed this decision and

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

was notified by the Refugee Appeals Tribunal that her appeal had been refused and the original recommendation upheld.

The person concerned was informed by letter dated 16 October 2002 that the Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of her and afforded her three options in accordance with Section 3(3)(b)(ii) of the Immigration Act, 1999 (as amended) namely to leave the State voluntarily, to consent to the making of a Deportation Order or to submit, within 15 working days, written representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why she should be allowed to remain temporarily in the State i.e. why she should not be deported.

Representations were received on her behalf on the 10th of December 2002 setting out the reasons why she ought to be granted leave to remain in the State under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999. Her case was examined under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act, 1999 (as amended), and Section 5 of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) on the Prohibition of *Refoulement*. Consideration was given to all representations submitted on her behalf for permission to remain temporarily in the State. On the 27th of February 2004 the then Minister refused permission to remain temporarily in the State and signed a Deportation Order in respect of the person concerned. A notice of the order dated 5 March 2004 was served by Hand on the person concerned.

The person concerned was given presentation requirements with the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB). She failed to comply with the requirements of GNIB and was classed as an evader and arrested and lodged in Dochas Women's prison for the purpose of deportation. The person concerned suffered from medical problems and was released from Dochas. Judicial Review Proceedings were filed in the High Court on the 8th December, 2005 challenging the then Minister's decision to seek to deport her. On the 6th July, 2007, the Judicial Review leave application was heard. The person concerned failed to appear in court therefore breaking her conditional release conditions. The Judge then ordered that she attend court on 11th July 2007. In his judgement of 13th July, 2007 he refused the Applicant's Leave Application. Arrangements were then made to deport the person in question.

On the 22nd August, 2007 the person concerned was sent an arrangements letter affirming the Deportation Order and requiring the person concerned to comply with the reporting arrangements of the Garda National Immigration Bureau. The person concerned complied on a number of occasions until she failed to attend GNIB as requested on the 29th November, 2007 and was subsequently arrested and lodged in Dochas Women's Prison for the purpose of

deportation. On the 5th December, 2007 the person concerned was released on medical grounds.

I am satisfied that the applications made by the person concerned for asylum, for temporary leave to remain in the State, together with all *refoulement* issues, were fairly and comprehensively examined and, as such, the decision to deport her is justified. The enforcement of the Deportation Order remains an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

Citizenship Applications.

838. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary. [33255/07]

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 July 2006. Officials in that section are currently processing applications received at the beginning of 2005 and have approximately 8,000 applications on hand to be dealt with before that of the person in question. 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 late next year or early 2009. I will inform the Deputy and the person concerned when I have reached a decision on the matter.

Visa Applications.

839. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will reconsider the application for a visa by a person (details supplied) in view of the content of their appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33262/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the application in question was approved on appeal on 26 November 2007.

840. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he would be favourably disposed towards treating with urgency on compassionate grounds the application of a person (details supplied) for entry to Ireland under the family reunification scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33264/07]

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 February 2006. A request for documentation recently issued to the 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.

Energy Resources.

841. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33283/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I can inform the Deputy that the nature of the energy supply arrangements to my Department is such that the information sought is not readily available.

Garda Recruitment.

842. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath can defer their entry to the Garda centre, Templemore until they have completed their degree course at University College Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33287/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Recruitment to An Garda Síochána is a matter in the first instance for the Public Appointments Service and then for the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána. I have no function in the process. However, I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that there is a provision for successful candidates in Garda Recruitment Competitions to defer entry under certain circumstances. Each case is judged on its own merit but in any event deferrals are only until the last intake of the competition in which they were successful. The applicant referred to by the Deputy is free to make a new application in any future competition providing he/she meets the statutory conditions pertaining to that competition.

Visa Applications.

843. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will reconsider an application by a person (details supplied) for a 12 week holiday visa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33292/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Visa Office, Dublin on 8 November 2007. It was refused by the Visa Officer on 13 November 2007 for a number of reasons:

1. There was no clear link to the reference shown.

2. The obligations shown by the applicant that they would return to the home country were not deemed sufficient.
3. The financial evidence provided was deemed to be insufficient or incomplete.

The decision of the Visa Officer may be appealed within two months of the date of decision, in this case before 13 January 2008. Guidelines on making an appeal can be found on the website the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service at www.inis.gov.ie. The information received from the Honorary Consulate in Bangkok is that it is the policy to return all original documentation and to keep photocopies on file. No original documents for the application referred to have been held, lost or misplaced.

Garda Investigations.

844. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will request a report from Garda authorities on progress in the case of a murder (details supplied); if closed circuit television footage in the case was sufficient to identify one of the suspects; the reason this person has not yet been charged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33303/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the investigation into the death of the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing. As this is an ongoing Garda investigation it would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Departmental Reports.

845. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the response by his Department to the recommendations made to his Department by the Competition Authority in its December 2006 report on competition among solicitors and barristers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33322/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 504 of 31 October 2007. I have nothing further to add to the details of that reply other than the following by way of some updating. Following Government approval I am moving amendments at Committee Stage of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2006 to delete Part 2 which provides for the establishment of a Legal Services Ombudsman. I am arranging to publish in its place a Legal Services Ombudsman Bill. The Bill is currently being drafted. The Government also agreed my proposals to replace the Irish language requirements for barristers and solicitors. I presented the Legal Practitioners (Irish Language) Bill 2007 to the

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

House on 28 November 2007. Second stage is scheduled for 13 December 2007.

Road Traffic Offences.

846. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of successful prosecutions made in the each of the past five years with regard to failure to comply with the vehicle registration plate laws; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33323/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In the time available it has not been possible for the Garda authorities to supply the details requested by the Deputy. I will be in contact with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Departmental Expenditure.

847. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33342/07]

848. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33357/07]

849. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33372/07]

873. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33737/07]

874. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile phones and other equipment sup-

plied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33752/07]

919. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a Blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34226/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 847, 848, 849, 873, 874 and 919 together.

I can inform the Deputies that mobile communications devices have become essential business tools without which the Department could not adequately deliver the services expected from it. They add enormously to productivity, flexibility and speed of response. My Department's total expenditure on mobile phone accounts, including accounts supporting various other mobile communications and data devices, amounted to €335,000 in 2006. Expenditure for 2007 to date is €290,189. Figures for expenditure in previous years is not readily available. Analysis of the Department's bills indicate that data charges are estimated to comprise approximately 20% and roaming charges 15% of the overall bill. However, it should be noted that the data charges include those incurred in respect of devices primarily designed for the transfer of data. The number of mobile phone accounts at any point in time varies in accordance with operational needs. At the present there are 669 mobile accounts, including accounts to support other communications devices. 118 of these accounts relate to Blackberry devices.

Total expenditure on mobile phones and other mobile communications devices in respect of staff appointed directly by myself, as well as my own mobile phone, amounts to €4236.67 since my appointment as Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Residency Permits.

850. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will ensure that a residency application for a person (details supplied) in County Sligo is processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33376/07]

853. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will ensure that a residency application for a person (details supplied) in County Sligo is processed immediately as their current work permit is about to expire and they have been recently made redundant and are now job seeking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33389/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The position in relation to granting long term residency is as follows: Persons who have been legally resident in the State for over five years on the basis of work permit/work authorisation/work visa conditions may apply to the Immigration Division of my Department for a five year residency extension. In that context they may also apply to be exempt from employment permit requirements.

The dependants of the aforementioned, who have been legally resident in the State for over five years may also apply for long term residency. This particular long term permission does not grant an exemption from employment permit requirements to any such dependants. Time spent in the State on student conditions cannot be counted towards long term residency. While applications for long term residency are under consideration, the person concerned should ensure that their permission to remain in the State is kept up to date.

Applications for long term residency are dealt with in chronological order as this method is deemed to be the fairest to all applicants. An application for long term residency from the person referred to by the Deputy was received on 2 June 2006. A refusal letter was issued in July 2006 as she did not meet the criteria. A second application was received in December 2007. I understand that applications received in July 2006 are currently being dealt with. The Immigration Division of my Department will be in contact with the person concerned outlining the options available to her.

851. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when an application for a stamp four will be approved for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if this matter will be expedited to enable the applicant to complete the purchase of a house. [33377/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The position in relation to granting long term residency is as follows: Persons who have been legally resident in the State for over five years on the basis of work permit/work authorisation/work visa conditions may apply to the Immigration Division of my Department for a five year residency extension. In that context they may also apply to be exempt from employment permit requirements.

The dependants of the aforementioned, who have been legally resident in the State for over five years may also apply for long term residency. This particular long term permission does not grant an exemption from employment permit requirements to any such dependants. Time spent in the State on student conditions cannot be counted towards long term residency. While applications for long term residency are under

consideration, the person concerned should ensure that their permission to remain in the State is kept up to date.

An application for long term residency from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in March 2007. I understand that applications received in July 2006 are currently being dealt with. As soon as a decision is made on the case, the person concerned will be notified.

Citizenship Applications.

852. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when an application for a certificate of naturalisation will be finalised for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [33378/07]

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 September 2005. On examination of the application it was determined that the person concerned did not meet the statutory residency criteria as set out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. A letter informing him of this was issued on 29 September 2005. It is open to the person in question to lodge a new application if and when he is in a position to meet the statutory requirements applicable at that time.

Question No. 853 answered with Question No. 850.

Departmental Bodies.

854. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the budgets of all the boards, bodies, authorities, agencies, committees, commissions and quangos within his remit for the years 1997 to 2006 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33416/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 471 and 472 of 2 October, 2007. The position regarding the budget information sought remains as outlined in my earlier reply.

Garda Deployment.

855. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of community gardaí in Ireland; and the number of same in Tipperary south. [33451/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of 30 September last, the latest date for which figures are readily

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

available, the total number of Community Gardaí was 598. The total number of Community Gardaí in the Tipperary Division is 9. It is the responsibility of the Garda Commissioner to allocate personnel throughout the Force taking everything into account. The situation will be kept under review and when additional personnel next become available the needs of Tipperary Division will be fully considered by him within the overall context of the needs of Garda Divisions throughout the country.

Liquor Licensing Laws.

856. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the plans in place to prevent below cost selling of drinks in night clubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33470/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The position is that section 20 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 contains provisions which are intended to prohibit the supply of intoxicating liquor at a reduced price during a limited period on any day. For the purposes of the section, “reduced price” is defined as a price less than that regularly being charged for the intoxicating liquor during an earlier period on the day concerned. The penalty on conviction for an offence under this section is a fine not exceeding €1,500 for a first offence or €2,000 for a second or any subsequent offence.

I should also say that section 22 of the 2003 Act provides for the making, should the need arise, of regulations prohibiting or restricting a licensee from doing or permitting, for the purposes of promoting the licensee’s business or any event or activity taking place on the licensed premises, anything that is intended or likely to encourage persons on those premises to consume intoxicating liquor to an excessive extent.

Citizenship Applications.

857. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when an application for naturalisation will be finalised for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [33496/07]

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 September 2006.

Officials in that section are currently processing applications received at the beginning of 2005 and have approximately 8,300 applications on hand to be dealt with before that of the person in question. These are generally dealt with in

chronological order as this is deemed to be the fairest to all applicants.

However, I understand that the person concerned is a refugee. In accordance with the Government’s obligations under the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951, every effort is made to ensure that applications from persons with refugee status are dealt with as quickly as possible, having regard to the general volume of applications on hand. It is likely, therefore, that further processing of the application will commence in early 2008. I will inform the Deputy and the applicant when I have reached a decision on the matter.

Residency Permits.

858. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when an application for residency will be completed for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and when the passport of the applicant will be returned to them for renewal purposes. [33497/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I wish to inform the Deputy that the passport concerned has been located and is being returned to the person concerned by registered post. The person made an incomplete application for permission to remain in the State under the IBC/05 Scheme. Despite two reminders, the applicant failed to submit the documentation needed to complete the process and her application was formally refused on 18 November 2005. My Department is currently awaiting the outcome of an appeal to the Supreme Court regarding matters related to the IBC/05 Scheme. No further consideration can be given to the person’s application until the Judgment of the Court has been received.

Departmental Staff.

859. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33512/07]

861. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33542/07]

862. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33557/07]

863. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33572/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 859, 861, 862 and 863 together.

There is one Press Officer in my Department. The Press Officer is an Assistant Principal Officer on a salary scale of €66,302 — €82,679. The Press Officer is responsible for all matters relating to press and media for my Department. There are no Press Advisers or Media Consultants and nor have there been for some time. In relation to the situation as it obtained pre-2002, my Department is checking its records and I will communicate directly with the Deputy when this process is completed. In relation to media monitoring, while no staff have specific responsibility for this activity, the Deputy will appreciate that monitoring of the media is part and parcel of the day-to-day activity of all Press Offices.

Departmental Expenditure.

860. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33527/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I wish to inform the Deputy that the number of newspapers purchased by my Department on a daily and weekly basis are as follows:

Newspapers	Daily	Weekly
Irish Times	103	2 (Saturday edition)
Financial Times	1	0
Irish Independent	52	2 (Saturday edition)
Irish Examiner	34	2 (Saturday edition)
The Guardian	8	0
Daily Star	8	2 (Saturday edition)
London Times	6	1 (Saturday edition)
London Independent	1	0
Daily Telegraph	1	0
Daily Sun	1	0

Newspapers	Daily	Weekly
Daily Mirror	1	0
Daily Mail	3	0
Belfast Telegraph	2	0
Evening Herald	14	5 (Saturday edition)
Sunday Tribune	0	3
Ireland on Sunday	0	2
Sunday Independent	0	3
Sunday World	0	2
Sunday Business Post	0	4
Sunday Telegraph	0	2
Sunday Times	0	3
Independent on Sunday	0	1
Mail on Sunday	0	1

The total cost of the above newspapers to date in 2007 is €70,218.00.

I can also inform the Deputy that amongst the above figures are the newspapers which are supplied daily to my Office and to the Offices of the Minister of State at my Department.

Questions Nos. 861 to 863, inclusive, answered with Question No. 859.

864. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33587/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Eight officials of my Department are issued with credit cards of the type where outstanding balances are paid directly by the Department to the issuing credit card company. The total amount incurred on expenditure on these cards for the period 2005 to 2007 (to date) is €105,127. In addition, a further three similar type cards are currently on issue by my Department to senior officials of bodies associated with the Department. The expenditure incurred in respect of these cards for the period 2005 to 2007 (to date) was €100,639. A total of €49 was incurred in interest over the period 2005 to 2007.

I should also point out for the information of the Deputy that due to the nature of the duties of officials of my Department and its associated bodies, it is not possible to procure some goods and services other than by credit card. I am referring here to airline tickets and hotels where in some instances the suppliers insist on advance payment for the service or goods provided.

865. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33602/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I can inform the Deputy that the information requested for the years 2005, 2006 and for 2007 to date is set out in tabular form. All of the photography costs in question were in relation to official business.

Year	Cost
	€
2005	4,934.49
2006	5,120.88
2007 to date	9,530.75

Information in relation to the period prior to 2005 is not readily available.

866. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33617/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I can inform the Deputy that my Department has incurred no costs on my behalf in this regard.

867. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33632/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The cost of my Department's official entertainment for the years 2005-2007 (the period for which records are readily available) is €171,940. These costs were incurred in hosting visiting dignitaries, official functions and so forth for my Department.

Government Information Services.

868. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33647/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Department does not receive from Government Information Services a daily summary of stories relevant to my Department. However, the Communications Unit of the Department of the Taoiseach does provide my Department with generic summaries of news headlines and programmes in electronic format throughout the day. These bulletins are brought to my attention as appropriate.

Official Engagements.

869. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33662/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Press Officer, or a representative from my Press Office, accompanies me on official business as required. As the Deputy will appreciate my Press Officer is in regular contact with me concerning official matters.

Departmental Transport.

870. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the cost of using departmental transport including ministerial cars for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to Ministers of State and staff in his Department for the same period. [33677/07]

871. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the cost of him using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to Ministers of State and staff for the same period. [33692/07]

903. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34097/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 870, 871 and 903 together.

I wish to refer the Deputy to my responses to questions 27694/07 and 29049/07 of 7 and 15 November respectively, in which I provided information regarding certain aspects of my transport arrangements and those of Ministers of State at my Department.

Insofar as my official car is concerned, the position is that cars are made available for use by Members of the Government and certain other officeholders and these cars are operated and maintained as part of the Garda fleet. I am informed by the Garda authorities that information on the cost of providing this service for the ten year period referred to by the Deputy is being compiled. However, in the time available it has not been possible to finalise this exercise. I will communicate the information to the Deputy as soon as it is to hand.

The position with respect to Ministers of State is that they are entitled to utilise their own personal vehicles and to claim mileage at the rates set centrally for that purpose. The Department also funds the employment of civilian drivers for this purpose. The Department incurs transport related costs under a wide range of headings, including by means of travel claims submitted in the normal fashion. It is not feasible to extract this data in the time available. I can, however, inform the Deputy that total expenditure by my Department under the subhead items for taxi and transport costs in 2006 and 2007 was €193,148 and €109,870 respectively, with taxi costs representing the majority of the expenditure.

Departmental Communications.

872. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his Department carries news summaries on its internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33722/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Department does not carry news summaries on its internal web, however it does subscribe to a commercial press clippings service updated daily. All staff have access to this service via the Department's internal website. It costs, on average, €20,000 per annum.

Question Nos. 873 and 874 answered with Question No. 847.

Residency Permits.

875. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position of the application for long term residency by a person (details supplied). [33757/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The position in relation to granting long term residency is as follows: Persons who have been legally resident in the State for over five years on the basis of work permit/work authorisation/work visa conditions

may apply to the Immigration Division of my Department for a five year residency extension. In that context they may also apply to be exempt from employment permit requirements.

The dependants of the aforementioned, who have been legally resident in the State for over five years may also apply for long term residency. This particular long term permission does not grant an exemption from employment permit requirements to any such dependants. Time spent in the State on student conditions cannot be counted towards long term residency. While applications for long term residency are under consideration, the person concerned should ensure that their permission to remain in the State is kept up to date.

An application for long term residency from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in June 2007. I understand that applications received in July 2006 are currently being dealt with. As soon as a decision is made on the case, the person concerned will be notified.

Departmental Reports.

876. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when the value for money review of the maintenance of Garda premises was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33758/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): An expenditure review of the maintenance of Garda premises is being carried out at present. The purpose of the review is to examine spending from the Garda Vote on maintenance of Garda premises, which is carried out by the Office of Public Works at the request of the Garda authorities. I expect the review to be completed early in 2008. Its findings are unlikely to be implemented on a stand-alone basis but will feed into a broader Garda accommodation strategy which is being developed at present by An Garda Síochána and the OPW.

877. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when the value for money review of asylum and immigration schemes was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33759/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The value for money (VFM) review of Asylum and Immigration commenced in late 2004 and was completed in early 2006. An external quality assessment of the report was completed in July 2006 and the report

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

was published on my Department's website in November 2006.

The VFM review of asylum and immigration was carried out during a period of significant change, a key feature of which was falling numbers of asylum applications in the State and very significant increases for other immigration services. The review involved a combination of, inter alia, financial and business analysis, resource mapping and allocation modelling and performance management. The outcome of the review was a comprehensive series of recommendations clustered around nine key areas.

A unique feature of the review was that it was a dynamic constantly evolving process. As recommendations were agreed, the implementation cycle also began. This meant that by the end of the Review, all of the recommendations had been accepted and implemented or were at early stages of implementation. A key recommendation in the Report which has been implemented was the establishment in March 2005 of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) to provide a "one stop shop" for immigration, asylum, visa and citizenship services. The visa office of the Department of Foreign Affairs also transferred to INIS in January 2006.

While it is not possible to put a figure on the value of savings to the Exchequer generated from implementation of the Report's recommendations, I can say that greater overall value for money has been achieved in the delivery of services across all asylum and immigration areas in recent years, through improved use of resources and improved efficiencies in the processing of applications. For instance there are now much faster processing timescales for asylum determinations and the backlog which existed a number of years ago has been essentially eliminated. Visa processing times have also been significantly speeded up. Savings have also been achieved through various operational and enforcement strategies and other initiatives undertaken in the asylum and immigration areas in recent years.

Further improvements in service delivery and value for money will be achieved arising from the implementation of a suite of IT systems, including a new case management system for INIS. The implementation of the new Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill will also give rise to greater efficiency in how services are provided. In the area of protection, the Bill provides for the introduction of a single procedure for determining all asylum, subsidiary protection and humanitarian leave to remain issues. This will replace the current three stage process under which each of these matters is determined sequentially.

878. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when the value for money review of the prison capital

projects was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33760/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):

I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that a review of certain aspects of its capital expenditure programme was commissioned in June 2006 under the framework of the Expenditure Review Initiative of the Department of Finance. The report of the independent review group was published in August 2007. The review concluded that the response made by the Irish authorities, in terms of capital investment, has at a general level been strategic in terms of its aims, appropriate in terms of the projects undertaken, and reasonably effectively delivered within the budgetary, operational and policy context and constraints in which it has occurred.

The review group also made recommendations in relation to forward planning, capital programming and project appraisal and review. The Prison Service has accepted all of the recommendations and a Capital Programme Monitoring Committee has been established to oversee the recommendations set out in the report. These recommendations are largely of a procedural nature and it is not possible to quantify the potential savings to the Exchequer as they relate to future projects.

879. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when the value for money review of the probation and welfare service, assistance to voluntary bodies will be completed; the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33762/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan):

The Report referred to by the Deputy is nearing completion and will, early in the new year, be forwarded to the Central Steering Committee on Programme Evaluation in the Department of Finance, for consideration. As the findings of the review are still awaited it would be premature to comment on the anticipated value of savings to the Exchequer due the implementation of this report. However, I can assure the Deputy that in line with Government policy I am committed to implementing all appropriate measures which will achieve better value for money and provide greater accountability on what is being achieved for public expenditure.

Compensation Payments.

880. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount An Garda Síochána has paid out in claims for

injured officers between 2000 and 2007 broken down by year and by Garda division. [33798/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Awards to members of the Garda Síochána fall into two categories. The Garda Síochána (Compensation) Acts 1941 and 1945 deal with injuries (including death) maliciously inflicted. Awards (including costs) made under those Acts between the years 2000 and 2006 amount to €54.1 million. A breakdown by year is available on my Department's website at www.justice.ie/en/jelr/pages/compensation_statistics. For the first eleven months of 2007 awards (including costs) made under those Acts amounted to €11.4 million.

Payments made to members who initiated court proceedings regarding non malicious injuries occurring while on duty are set out in the table.

Year	Amount
2000	£534,000
2001	€715,342
2002	€191,374
2003	€306,034
2004	€334,321
2005	€196,902
2006	€297,110
2007 (to end November)	€290,000
Total	€2,865,083

Computerised records are not maintained in a manner that facilitates a breakdown by Garda Division and such information could only be obtained by the expenditure of a disproportionate amount of staff time and resources.

881. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the highest compensation payment for injuries received to a member of An Garda Síochána since 2000 to date in 2007; and the extent and nature of the injury. [33799/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The highest compensation award issued under the Garda Síochána (Compensation) Acts 1941 and 1945 concerned a member who sustained fatal burns following an arson attack on the station where he was on duty. The payment awarded to the member's family by the High Court came to £859,900 (€1,091,848).

882. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the highest compensation payment for injuries received to a prison officer since 2000 to date in 2007; and the extent and nature of the injury. [33800/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that

during this period the highest compensation payment to a prison officer was €530,000.00. The person in question suffered from post traumatic stress to such a degree that it resulted in early retirement. The amount reflects the loss of potential earnings due to that early retirement.

Forensic Drugs Analysis.

883. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the substances detected by the Forensic State Laboratory to cut down cocaine and heroin since 2000 to date in 2007. [33801/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Forensic Science Laboratory that the following list of substances have been detected in cocaine and heroin respectively; Cocaine: Lignocaine, benzocaine, procaine, phenacetin, caffeine, manitol, inositol, sorbitol, creatine, sucrose and lactose. Heroin: Paracetamol, caffeine and glucose.

Prison Drug Treatment Services.

884. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of inmates been treated for drug overdoses in jail between 2000 and 2006 broken down by year and by prison. [33802/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that the collation of the information requested has not been possible in the time available. I will transmit the information to the Deputy as soon as is possible.

Prisoner Releases.

885. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of convicted rapists released from jails here on licence since 2000 broken down by year. [33803/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that the numbers of offenders serving sentences for rape who were released on completion of sentence between 2001, which is the earliest year for which computerised records are available, and 2006 are set out in the table.

Year	Number of Releases
2001	26
2002	40
2003	40
2004	33
2005	37
2006	35

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

The vast majority of persons convicted of such offences would have remained in custody right up to their remission date. However, a small number would have been released a single day before their remission date in order to facilitate accommodation and social welfare arrangements.

Prison Staff.

886. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason or if he will investigate the reason members of the Irish Prison Service who were supposed to be paid moneys under an agreement on new pay and working conditions did not receive such moneys during the third week in November 2007 as promised, and were instead informed that this money was required to pay for other services; if such moneys will definitely be paid on 20 December 2007 as per the latest information being given to prison officers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33813/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that it was planned to make the lump sum payment to eligible officers on 22 November 2007. It is appreciated that the delay in making payment is causing difficulties for staff and this is very much regretted, however, a deferral of the payment was unavoidable. The main requirement was to meet commitments under the prison building and security enhancement programme.

I do not need to reiterate the challenges presented by an aging prison infrastructure and the need to keep pace with the numbers sentenced to imprisonment. In addition the Deputy will appreciate the ongoing security challenges faced by the Irish Prison Service, particularly in the context of combating drugs in prisons, keeping contraband out of prisons and the management of serious criminals in our prison system. This investment in the additional prison places and enhanced security measures is addressing these key issues.

In that context, additional funding was required for the Prisons Vote and certain procedures needed to be followed. A Supplementary Estimate was passed by the Dail on 6 December 2007 and the Irish Prison Services will make this lump sum payment on officers' next pay date of 20 December 2007.

887. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason prison officers are being asked to use the current ten minute period, originally agreed years back on the introduction of clocks, for security screening in view of the fact that this is a new procedure and that queues may cause them to be delayed leading to the potential loss of incremental review money; if he will review the time allocated for

security clearance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33814/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Earlier this year the Irish Prison Service received Government approval to introduce a package of enhanced security measures in our prisons to prevent trafficking of contraband such as mobile phones, drugs and weapons. These measures are being introduced in the best interests of the safety and security of staff, prisoners and the general public. The Prison Officers' Association have publicly acknowledged their support for these measures.

The measures relate to the establishment of Canine Units, Operational Support Units and Security Screening Units. The Security Screening Units will involve all visitors and staff passing through screening areas where x-ray machines and detectors will be in use.

The Irish Prison Service engaged in extensive consultation with the Prison Officers' Association regarding the introduction of these measures. During these negotiations an issue arose in relation to the placing of the staff attendance clocks. The Prison Officers' Association are insisting that these clocks must be placed before the screening areas on the basis that their members should not have to pass through security procedures on their own time. However, the Irish Prison Service are firmly of the view that staff are not ready for duty and in a position to clock in until they have cleared the security procedures. This in fact is the historical position in Portlaoise Prison where such searching has been ongoing for many years.

Prison Officers already benefit from a 10 minute grace period at clocking-in time, which studies by management indicate would more than adequately cover the screening process. However, in an effort to resolve the impasse, the Irish Prison Service made an offer to the Prison Officers' Association on 3 December 2007, to extend the existing grace period by 50% to allow staff to transit through the proposed new security screening procedures. This offer was rejected. Instead the Prison Officers' Association have opted to pursue a course of further industrial action rather than availing of the relevant industrial relations machinery in contravention of the current National Agreement, Towards 2016 and the Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme.

Visa Applications.

888. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, in relation to a person (details supplied) in County Cork who has been residing here for eight years and is the parent of an Irish born child, his attention has been drawn to the fact that having had to return to Ukraine in order to obtain a replacement for their lost passport, they have been

informed by the Irish Embassy that it will be three months before they can obtain a visa to enable them to return to Ireland; if he will take steps to ensure that a visa is issued in this case without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33817/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a visa for the person concerned was approved by the Visa Officer in Moscow on 7 December, 2007.

Asylum Applications.

889. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of an application for asylum for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33835/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The person concerned arrived in the State on 9 June, 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 30 June, 2003, 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.

Garda Deployment.

890. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí in Raheny, Coolock, Howth and Malahide Garda stations; the shifts that they work; the number that work the night shift in view of the fact that this Deputy was recently advised that there was only one Garda car available for patrolling areas (details supplied) at night time; if this is correct; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33837/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As of 30 November 2007, the latest date for which figures are readily available, the strength of each of the Garda

Stations referred to by the Deputy is as set out below:

Station	Strength
Raheny	69
Coolock	119
Howth	42
Malahide	48

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that for security and operational reasons, it is Garda policy not to disclose the number or percentage of personnel on duty at any specific area or over any given period of time.

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. 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 by operational circumstances. The allocation of Garda resources is monitored and reviewed on a continual basis and the policing needs of the areas referred to by the Deputy will be fully considered in the context of overall policing requirements.

Citizenship Applications.

891. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo is being dealt with. [33850/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the individual concerned was received in the Citizenship section of my Department in August 2007. The application has not yet been examined in detail. Examination of the residency requirement will take place in the near future and the applicant will be contacted again at that time informing her when her application will be further examined or of any shortfall in her residency.

Deportation Orders.

892. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will reconsider a decision to deport a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33883/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The person concerned arrived in the State on 17 October, 2006 and applied for asylum. The application was refused following consideration of his case by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and, on appeal, by the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

In accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, the person concerned was informed by letter dated 26 November, 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 a deportation 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. 518 of 2006 which came into force on 10 October, 2006. To date no response has been received in my Department to this letter.

The 15 day period referred to in my Department's letter of 26 November 2007, expires on the 17 December 2007. It is open to the person concerned to make representations and/or apply for subsidiary protection within that period. In any event, a final decision on this case will not be made prior to the expiry date above.

Residency Permits.

893. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be made regarding an application for long-term residency made by a person (details supplied) in Dublin 20. [33995/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The position in relation to granting long term residency is as follows: Persons who have been legally resident in the State for over five years on the basis of work permit/work authorisation/work visa conditions may apply to the Immigration Division of my Department for a five year residency extension. In that context they may also apply to be exempt from employment permit requirements. The dependants of the aforementioned, who have been legally resident in the State for over five years may also apply for long term residency. This particular long term permission does not grant an exemption from employment permit requirements to any such dependants. Time spent in the State on student conditions cannot be counted towards long term residency. While applications for long term residency are under consideration, the person concerned should ensure that their permission to remain in the State is kept up to date.

An application for long term residency from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in June 2007. I understand that applications received in July 2006 are currently being dealt with. As soon as a decision is made on the case, the person concerned will be notified.

Vetting of Personnel.

894. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will address the issues described in correspondence (details supplied) in relation to a Garda vetting request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34014/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Until December 2005, the Garda Síochána operated reciprocal vetting arrangements between Ireland and Britain, whereby vetting requests on behalf of registered recruiting organisations in the two jurisdictions were channelled through the Dublin and London Interpol Offices. However, in December 2005, the London Interpol Office, operated by the London Metropolitan Police, introduced significant processing changes in its dealing with all other countries which, unfortunately, had the practical effect of ending the reciprocal vetting arrangements.

Since 2006, my Department, in conjunction with the Garda Síochána, has been actively seeking to enter into reciprocal vetting agreements with the organisations responsible for criminal history vetting in Britain, namely, the Criminal Records Bureau in respect of the England and Wales and Disclosure Scotland in respect of Scotland. In particular, draft agreements have been submitted to these organisations for their consideration. Subject to the consent of these organisations, it is hoped that these vetting agreements would allow registered recruiting organisations in both jurisdictions to vet persons who are nationals of or who have lived in the other's jurisdiction, via the established vetting organisations of both jurisdictions.

Road Safety.

895. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when the preferred tenderer for the speed safety cameras will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34015/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In accordance with EU Directives, relevant legislation and national public procurement procedures, a Request for Information (RFI) for the provision and operation of safety cameras on behalf of An Garda Síochána was published on the Government's procurement website on 24 November, 2006. Following the evaluation of the submissions received in respect of the RFI a total of six companies/consortia were short-listed in February, 2007 to participate in the next stage of the process. A detailed Request for Tender (RFT) was issued to the six short-listed candidates, with a closing date of 23 August, 2007 set for receipt of tenders. The process of selecting a preferred bidder is at an advanced stage. Follow-

ing the completion of that process, I intend to submit proposals regarding the project to Government in the near future.

Citizenship Applications.

896. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of an application for naturalisation made by a person (details supplied) in Dublin 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34033/07]

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 December 2005. Officials in that section inform me that processing of the application has commenced and that the file will be forwarded to me for a decision in the near future. I will inform the Deputy and the applicant when I have reached a decision on the matter.

Criminal Prosecutions.

897. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of cases brought to court in relation to the operation of unlicensed bus operators for each year since 2000; the result of such cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34056/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In the time available it has not been possible for the Garda authorities to supply the details requested by the Deputy. I will be in contact with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Visa Applications.

898. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position in relation to a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if this will be re-examined with a view to allowing them to visit at Christmas, 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34063/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The applications referred to by the Deputy were received in the Visa Office, Dublin on 21 November 2007. They were refused by the Visa Officer on 29 November 2007 for a number of reasons:

1. The immigration history of the applicants
2. Obligations to return to home country were not deemed sufficient
3. It was the opinion of the Visa Officer that the applicants may not observe the conditions of the visa.

The decision of the Visa Officer may be appealed within two months of the date of decision, in this case before 29 January 2008. Guidelines on making an appeal can be found on the website of the Irish naturalisation and Immigration Service at www.inis.gov.ie

Prison Discipline.

899. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount of prisoners in the prison system here who have been caught in the possession of mobile phones in the past five years; the number of prosecutions this resulted in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34081/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The confiscation of mobile phones has until recent times been recorded by our prisons under the generic description of "prohibited articles". An accurate breakdown of statistics as requested by the Deputy is not therefore available without the manual examination of records going back over a considerable time period.

Section 36 of the Prisons Act 2007, which was brought into operation from 1 May, 2007 makes it an offence for prisoners to have unauthorised possession of or use mobile telecommunications devices. Under the Act it is also an offence to supply such a device to a prisoner. The penalty for such an offence, on summary conviction, is a fine not exceeding €5,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or both, and on conviction on indictment, a fine not exceeding €10,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or both.

It is Irish Prison Service policy to report seizures of mobile phones to the Garda authorities. It is important to note that prosecutions will not arise in respect of all instances of mobile phone seizure, owing to the number of mobile phones found in double cells, toilet areas or in the prison yards. It would be impossible to determine in such instances what prisoner was the owner or intended recipient of such devices.

Statistics in relation to the number of mobile phones seized during the course of 2007 to date are recorded in the table.

Prison	Number of Mobile Phones Seized
Arbour Hill	5
Training Unit	49
Shelton Abbey	25
Portlaoise	60
Castlerea	94
Midlands	143
Cloverhill	120
Limerick	241

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

Prison	Number of Mobile Phones Seized
Mountjoy	687
Dóchas	67
St. Patrick's Institution	132
Wheatfield	188
Loughan House	85
PSEC	6
Cork	108
Total	2,010

There are thirty proceedings commenced recorded on PULSE relating to possession of a telecommunications device without the permission of the Governor of a prison, with twelve convictions recorded.

900. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of prisoners in the prison system here who have been caught in the possession of drugs in the past five years; the number of prosecutions this resulted in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34082/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The confiscation of drugs (or suspected drugs) is recorded by our prisons under the generic description of “prohibited articles/substances”. An accurate breakdown of statistics as requested by the Deputy is not therefore available without the manual examination of records going back over a considerable time period. The Gardaí are contacted once suspected drug seizures are made. Issues of investigation and prosecution fall within the remit of the Garda authorities.

The table shows the number of proceedings commenced for possession or sale / supply of drugs offences for years 2002 to 2007 where the location of the offence has been recorded as a prison.

Proceedings commenced a for possession or sale/supply of drugs offences in a prison for years 2002 to 2007

Year	Number of Proceedings Commenced
2002	31
2003	44
2004	44
2005	97
2006	67
2007	45*

*Please note that these figures are provisional and may be liable to change.

It would necessitate a disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources to identify the

number of persons who were prosecuted for these offences while prisoners in the prison system, as this information could only be ascertained from a manual trawl of station records.

Garda Deployment.

901. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí who have retired or transferred from the Limerick city area since April 2007; if they have all been replaced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34083/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that 12 members who were assigned to the Limerick Division have resigned, retired or otherwise left An Garda Síochána since 30 April 2007. The personnel strength of Limerick Division as at 30 April 2007 was 552 and on 30 November 2007, the latest date for which figures are readily available, it was 592. This increase reflects the Government's ongoing commitment to meet the specific demands for increased Gardaí in the Limerick area as identified by the Fitzgerald report.

The Deputy will appreciate that, as with any large organisation, on any given day the overall strength of the organisation may fluctuate due, for example, to retirements, resignations etc. The Deputy should also be aware that Garda Divisional/District boundaries do not necessarily correspond to county or city boundaries.

It is the responsibility of the Garda Commissioner to allocate personnel throughout the Force taking everything into account. The situation will be kept under review and when additional personnel next become available the needs of Limerick Division will be fully considered by him within the overall context of the needs of Garda Divisions throughout the country and the contents of the Fitzgerald Report.

902. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí currently deployed in the Limerick city area; the number of gardaí assigned to patrol duty on any given day; the corresponding number of gardaí deployed and on patrol duty in Limerick city in April of 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34085/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The total personnel strength of the Limerick Division on 30 November 2007 and 31 April 2007 was 592 and 552 respectively. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that for security and operational reasons, it is Garda policy not to disclose the number or percentage of personnel on duty at any specific area or over any given period of time.

Question No. 903 answered with Question No. 870.

Court Procedures.

904. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of bench warrants over three months old that have not been executed and are being actively pursued by the Garda. [34108/07]

905. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of committal warrants over three months old that have not been executed and are being actively pursued by the Garda. [34109/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 904 and 905 together.

In the time available it has not been possible for the Garda authorities to supply the details requested by the Deputy. I will be in contact with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Question No. 906 answered with Question No. 835.

Visa Applications.

907. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason a person (details supplied) was refused a visa; if he will reconsider the refusal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34118/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Visa Office, Dublin on 16 August 2007. It was refused by the Visa Officer on 30 August 2007 for a number of reasons:

1. There was insufficient documentation submitted in support of the application
2. No evidence of finances shown
3. No clear link to the reference was shown
4. No letter of invitation was submitted
5. Obligations to return home were not deemed sufficient
6. It was the opinion of the Visa Officer that the applicant may not observe the conditions of the visa

An appeal was received on 1 October 2007. The decision of the Visa Appeals Officer was to uphold the original decision. As each applicant is entitled to one appeal only, no further review of this matter can be facilitated. It is however open to the applicant to make a fresh application. Comprehensive information on making a visa application is available on the website of the Irish

Naturalisation and Immigration Service at www.inis.gov.ie

908. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of an application for family reunification by a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34123/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The person in question made a Family Reunification application in respect of his wife in February 2007. The application was forwarded to the Refugee Applications Commissioner for investigation as required under Section 18 of the Refugee Act 1996. This investigation is completed and the Commissioner has forwarded a report to my Department. This application will be considered by my Department and a decision will issue in due course. At the present time Family Reunification applications are taking up to 24 months to process.

Registration of Title.

909. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to the drafting error contained in section 55 of the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006; his plans to rectify that error; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34124/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Section 55 of the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, referred to by the Deputy, is contained in Part 4 of the Act that is specified as dealing with amendments of the Registration of Title Act 1964. While the section as it stands omits reference to the Act of 1964 it could have no possible application to any Act other than the Act of 1964. In any event I shall consider making such express reference in the section to the Act of 1964 at the next legislative opportunity.

Visa Applications.

910. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a holiday visa will be issued to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34138/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The applications referred to by the Deputy were received in the Visa Office, Dublin on 29 November 2007. They were refused by the Visa Officer on 6 December 2007 for a number of reasons:

1. The Visa Officer considered that there was no clear link shown to the reference

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

2. There was insufficient documentation submitted in support of the application; such documentation should give full details of the reason for visit
3. Financial evidence provided was deemed insufficient or incomplete
4. The granting of the visas may result in a cost to public funds and public resources
5. The Visa Officer was not satisfied that the conditions of the visas would be observed and considered that the applicants may overstay following their proposed visit
6. The Visa Officer deemed that the applicants do not have sufficient obligations to return to their home country

The decision of the Visa Officer may be appealed within two months of the date of decision, in this case before 6 February 2008. Guidelines on making an appeal can be found on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service at www.inis.gov.ie

911. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1 who is married to an EU national; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34173/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The person concerned arrived in the State on 14 September, 2002 on foot of a student visa. Her permission to remain in the State expired on 30 September, 2005 and was not renewed. On 29 December, 2006 an application for residence in the State under the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) (No. 2) Regulations, 2006 was received in my Department on behalf of the person in question. The application was refused and this was notified to the person in question by letter dated 13 August, 2007. This letter also informed her that she had no current permission to remain in the State and was therefore unlawfully present in the State.

Subsequently, in accordance with Section 3(4) of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, she was informed by letter dated 28 August, 2007 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.

This person's case file, 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.

Prisoner Releases.

912. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of prisoners released from prisons in the past five years who did not benefit from remission or early release and therefore had fulfilled their full sentence which was originally handed down by a court of justice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34180/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Prior to the coming into operation of the Prison Rules, 2007, the legal basis for remission of sentence was Rule 38(1) of the Rules for the Government of Prisons that had been part of Irish law since 1947. The courts were aware, when passing sentence in any case, of this statutory entitlement to remission of sentence. The granting of sentence remission is a feature of prison systems worldwide. Under the 1947 Rules, sentenced prisoners were entitled, by law, to remission of one quarter of sentence provided they were of good behaviour during their time in custody. Where a prisoner does suffer loss of remission for a disciplinary offence, the amount of remission taken away would not normally be the full amount of remission that the prisoner would potentially earn.

There were a number of categories of prisoner who were excluded from remission of sentence under the 1947 Rules and these were as follows:

- Life sentence prisoners
- Persons convicted of debtor offences
- Persons convicted of contempt of court
- Persons being held on remand warrants
- Persons serving a sentence of less than one month

Prison records are not maintained in such a way as to allow the detailed information sought by the Deputy to be readily compiled. I can inform the Deputy that approximately 40% to 50% of the persons committed to prison each year would be in a category not eligible to earn remission. These would be mainly remand prisoners. It is worth noting that the numbers in prison custody for debtor offences or for contempt of court at any given time amount to less than 1% of the total prison population.

Almost every sentenced prisoner eligible to earn remission would receive remission. It is also important to note that a life sentence is indeterminate and there is no guaranteed release date. All prisoners who are serving life sentences are eligible to have their cases reviewed by the Parole Board when they have served seven years in custody. The Board, which was established in 2001, makes recommendations to myself in relation to

the management of offenders serving long sentences. While it is open to the Parole Board to make any recommendation, the experience of recent years with both the Parole Board and the Sentence Review Group (the predecessor to the Parole Board) is that life sentenced prisoners are normally reviewed on a number of occasions over a number of years before any substantial concessions are recommended.

Residency Permits.

913. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7 can expect a decision on their application for long-term residency which they made in July 2006; and the reason there has been such a delay in processing their application. [34182/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The position in relation to granting long term residency is as follows: Persons who have been legally resident in the State for over five years on the basis of work permit/work authorisation/work visa conditions may apply to the Immigration Division of my Department for a five year residency extension. In that context they may also apply to be exempt from employment permit requirements.

The dependants of the aforementioned, who have been legally resident in the State for over five years may also apply for long term residency. This particular long term permission does not grant an exemption from employment permit requirements to any such dependants. Time spent in the State on student conditions cannot be counted towards long term residency. While applications for long term residency are under consideration, the person concerned should ensure that their permission to remain in the State is kept up to date. I understand the Immigration Division of my Department is currently considering an interdepartmental report in relation to the application. They will be in touch with the applicant in due course.

914. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position of an application for residency in Ireland by a person (details supplied); the specific issues pertaining to this application in view of its apparent slowness through the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34187/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Immigration Division of my Department that an application by the person concerned for residence in the State based on EU Treaty Rights was received on 15th November 2007. Applications based on EU Treaty Rights are currently being processed within the six month statutory time

frame allowed. A decision will issue to the applicant in due course.

Crime Prevention.

915. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding the provision of anti-social behaviour teams as outlined in the programme for Government; the areas in which these teams are in place; the time-frame for the rolling out of these teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34196/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I attach a high priority to the combating of anti-social behaviour. One of the priorities I have set for An Garda Síochána for 2008 under section 20 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 is to combat, particularly in cooperation with other agencies and the community generally, the problems of public disorder with particular emphasis on alcohol related behaviour (including underage drinking) and socially disadvantaged communities especially through utilisation of the legal mechanisms being made available.

To this end An Garda Síochána are driving forward the establishment of interagency activities against anti-social behaviour, including the deployment of CCTV in urban areas. In addition, they are identifying local public order and anti-social behaviour hot spots and developing responsive actions and plans.

The Agreed Programme for Government contains a wide range of commitments to combat anti-social behaviour. One of these commitments is the creation of Anti-social Behaviour Action Teams in each local authority area. My Department, in consultation with the relevant agencies, is examining the experience of such teams in other jurisdictions, with a view to drawing up proposals to implement this measure.

Garda Transport.

916. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when he will to provide a Garda patrol car for Palmerstown, Dublin 20 in order to enhance policing in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34197/07]

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. 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 by operational circumstances. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Palmerstown area is policed by both Ronanstown

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

and Ballyfermot sub-Districts, and the transport and other resources available from those Districts are deployed as needed to the Palmerstown area. The allocation of Garda resources is monitored and reviewed on a continual basis and the policing needs of Palmerstown and the surrounding areas will be fully considered in the context of overall policing requirements.

Garda Deployment.

917. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister

Station	31/12/02	31/12/03	31/12/04	31/12/05	31/12/06	30/11/07
Clondalkin	82	78	76	81	92	105
Ronanstown	72	81	82	88	92	90
Ballyfermot	73	78	81	80	88	88
Lucan	73	65	74	68	70	86

The Deputy will appreciate that, as with any large organisation, on any given day the overall strength of the organisation may fluctuate due, for example, to retirements, resignations etc. It is the responsibility of the Garda Commissioner to allocate personnel throughout the force taking everything into account. The situation will be kept under review and when additional personnel next become available the needs of the Garda Stations referred to by the Deputy will be fully considered by him within the overall context of the needs of Garda Divisions throughout the country.

Visa Applications.

918. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, further to Parliamentary Question No. 510 of 20 November 2007, if it is possible for a non-visa required national to obtain a D visa or its equivalent prior to their entry to the State as the spouse of an Irish citizen in order that they can avail of the same one-year permission to reside in the State that would be given to a visa-required national in the same circumstances. [34210/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): A visa cannot be issued to a non-visa required national. The granting of an Irish visa is only a form of pre-entry clearance enabling a visa required national to travel to the State for the specific purpose stated. A visa does not grant permission to enter the State and visa holders are subject to normal immigration control at the port of entry, as are non-visa required nationals. The actual permission to enter the State is given by the Immigration Officer at the port of entry who has discretion whether to grant entry and who can also indicate the duration of stay permitted.

for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí stationed in Garda stations (details supplied) in 2007 and in every year between 2002 and 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34198/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the table. The 2007 figures are as of 30 November 2007 which is the latest date for which Garda numbers are readily available.

Question No. 919 answered with Question No. 847.

Departmental Communications.

920. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34241/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): All databases and other electronic file storage and retrieval systems used by my Department are operated by Departmental staff or by contractors working directly with the Department on its IT network.

921. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34256/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Department has undertaken a number of internal information technology projects since 2004. They include routine upgrades of software and hardware to ensure the Department's capability to meet performance and security requirements. Moreover, the addition of agencies to my Department's shared IT service, and the movement of staff and agencies between locations as decentralisation progresses, have also identified a need to ensure that their IT systems are appropriately maintained

and, in some instances, enhanced to meet business needs. These projects are individually short term but, due to the rapidly expanding nature of the Department's remit, can vary in scope from year to year, in part depending on the budget available.

Projects designed to deliver services to the public are:

- AISIP (integrated asylum and immigration project) which is within acceptable time parameters and within budget
- AVATS (Automated visa system) which went live in November within an acceptable timeframe and within budget. Both of these projects are fixed price.
- New websites for the Department and INIS which went live on time and slightly over budget.

The Department is also participating with An Garda Síochána and the Courts Service on a Pilot Project on Criminal Justice Integration which, because of its inherent complexity, is taking longer than anticipated but is broadly in line with the budget set aside for it.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

922. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34271/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I can inform the Deputy that my Department has not incurred any expenditure in respect of carbon offsetting. I understand that, on foot of a commitment in the Programme for Government on carbon offsetting official air travel, the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government is developing a scheme for use by all Government Departments and bodies under their aegis and that he hopes to announce details of this scheme shortly.

Data Protection.

923. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his Departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34286/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am satisfied that my Department has sufficient perimeter and internal access controls in place to ensure reasonable protection of any personal information it holds relating to members of the public.

Management Information Framework System.

924. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34308/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): A Management Information Framework system has been in use by my Department since 2004. The regular monitoring and scrutiny of expenditure within my Department has resulted in more effective and efficient use of resources under my control.

925. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34323/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The management information system has been fully rolled out in my Department since 2004. Full functionality is provided by the system and this functionality is fully utilised within my Department. My Department places a strong focus on the outcomes caused by its actions. Performance indicators have been developed to monitor and where appropriate to improve performance. A Departmental costing framework has been established as an aid to managerial decision making and a range of relevant management reports are produced on a regular basis.

National Drugs Strategy.

926. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his views on whether a zero tolerance testing regime using drug testing systems already available and used here in places of detention should be immediately put in place taking into account the recent tragic cases in the media; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34384/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I assume the Deputy's question to be in respect of testing drivers for the presence of illegal drugs. Currently, the Road Traffic Acts provides that a member of the Garda Síochána may, where he or she is of the opinion that a person in charge of a mechanically propelled vehicle in a public place is under the influence of a drug or drugs to such an extent as to be incapable of having proper control of that

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

vehicle, require that person to go to a Garda station and further require that person submit to a blood test or to provide a urine sample.

The Medical Bureau of Road Safety analyses blood and urine specimens received under the Road Traffic Acts for the presence of a drug or drugs. Urine analysis is the principal method used in testing for drugs in places of detention. Enforcement of the law on drug driving is a matter for An Garda Síochána. When a member of the Gardaí suspects that a motorist is driving under the influence of any intoxicant the Garda may arrest the suspect under Section 49 of the Road Traffic Act 1961.

As the Deputy will appreciate, road traffic legislation is a matter for the Department of Transport and I am informed by my colleague, the Minister for Transport, that at present there is no reliable equipment available for the purpose of roadside testing for drugs.

I am further informed that the Department of Transport will keep under review the development of technology internationally for such testing and that when suitable technology becomes available, any further legislative measures, if required, to facilitate its use will be introduced.

Garda Stations.

927. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a new Garda station will be provided at Clonmel, County Tipperary. [34385/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation around the country is based on agreed priorities established by An Garda Síochána in consultation with the Garda representative associations. The programme is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close co-operation with the Office of Public Works, which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

I am informed that the Office of Public Works is currently seeking a site for the development of a new Garda District Headquarters in Clonmel. Responses to a recent advertisement placed by it seeking a suitable site are currently being assessed. I assure the Deputy that there will be no avoidable delay in progressing this project.

Question No. 928 answered with Question No. 834.

Asylum Applications.

929. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the plans he has to update legislation and provision for long-term asylum seekers to allow them to work

or continue in funded education after completion of second level, until their residency status has been determined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34404/07]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In relation to access to the labour market, it is not proposed to allow asylum applicants to take up paid employment pending a final decision being made on their applications. Section 9(4)(b) of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) provides that an applicant for asylum shall not seek or enter employment. It must also be borne in mind that under the 1996 Act asylum seekers only have temporary permission to remain in the State pending the determination of their applications. However, we must face the fact that, despite its humanitarian purpose, people seek protection under the 1996 Act (which gives effect to the State's obligations under the 1951 Geneva Convention) for the purpose of avoiding legitimate immigration controls in order to gain a foothold in the State for economic reasons. Similar trends have been experienced by other EU Member States.

I believe that extending the right to work would have a very negative impact on the number of asylum applications, as was experienced in the aftermath of the July 1999 decision to do so. The immediate effect of that measure was a threefold increase in the average number of applications per month leading to a figure of 1,217 applications in December 1999 compared with an average of 364 per month for the period January to July 1999. Any proposal to grant asylum seekers access to the labour market would also undermine the current and effective work permit system which provides a comprehensive channel for legal migration to the State. It would further widen the gap in a negative manner in terms of reward between those who access the labour market legally through the work permit and visa channels and those who simply abuse the asylum process to gain entry.

It is a well established fact that those engaged in trafficking and those seeking to access the labour market without going through the appropriate legal channels are very quick to identify any perceived attractiveness of a country as a preferred or easily accessed destination. It is clear from the profile of applicants, and the results of the determination process, that a significant number of people have sought asylum in Ireland with a view to seeking work. Many people are already working illegally. It is my very strong belief that any extension of the right to work along the lines proposed by the Deputy would be portrayed abroad by people traffickers to potential victims as a guarantee of a right to work.

Schemes and measures available to assist students in third level education are, in the first instance, a matter for the Minister for Education

and Science. However, under the Free Fees Initiative asylum seekers are not eligible for the payment by the Exchequer of tuition fees in respect of approved third level courses. For similar reasons to those outlined above, in relation to access to the labour market, I am not in favour of any extension of the Free Fees Initiative to asylum seekers.

Planning Issues.

930. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that under section 160 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 any other person may make an application to the High Court where unauthorised development is being or is likely to be carried out (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33223/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): As Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, I am precluded, under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, from exercising any power or control in relation to any individual planning application with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned.

It is the responsibility of the planning authorities, who have wide enforcement powers under planning legislation, to halt and rectify unauthorised development. Anyone who feels that land is being developed or used without planning permission may contact the relevant planning authority who will investigate the matter. In addition any person may apply, in either the Circuit or the High Court, for an order restraining unauthorised development or use of land.

Section 160 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides that where an unauthorised development is being, or is about to be, undertaken, a planning authority or any other person can apply to the Circuit or the High Court for an injunction preventing it. This is significant as it allows any person to seek an injunction against an unauthorised development, without reference to the planning authority.

Local Authority Staff.

931. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the ethics officers for each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33235/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Under the Local Government Act 2001, responsibility for the nomination of a person to perform the duties of ethics registrar rests with each local

authority manager. My Department does not have the details sought.

Energy Resources.

932. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the percentage of energy consumed in his Department and in all agencies for which his Department has responsibility that comes from renewable sources. [33279/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department is fully committed to obtaining its electricity from renewable sources, following a tender process under the auspices of the Office of Public Works a contract is in place with Energia for the supply of electricity from renewable sources to the Department's main offices. This accounts for electricity supply to some 70% of the staff of the Department. My Department also uses gas and oil for heating purposes. Energy consumption by Agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for the Agencies themselves.

Departmental Reports.

933. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the response by his Department to the recommendations made to his Department by the Competition Authority in its March 2006 report on competition in the architecture profession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33318/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Report of the Competition Authority entitled Competition in Professional Services — Architects was published in March 2006. The Report contained a number of recommendations in regard to the legislative proposals in the Building Control Bill 2005, which was then before the Oireachtas, for registration of the titles of building professionals, including that of "Architect". The Report received detailed consideration in my Department, and a number of its recommendations were subsequently incorporated in the Bill, which was enacted in April 2007.

Departmental Expenditure.

934. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that

[Deputy Ruairí Quinn.]

applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33338/07]

936. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33369/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 934 and 936 together.

The amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by my Department in the years in question is as follows:

- 2006 — €288,056.68, of which €33,515.00 related to data charges
- 2007 (year to date) — €259,812.60, of which €54,893.45 related to data charges

Details in relation to roaming charges are not recorded in the payments system.

935. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33353/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The following amounts were paid as expenses to staff in my Department in respect of phone calls in the years in question.

- 2006 — €824.92
- 2007 — (to date) €1,137.36

However, the payments system does not record whether these relate to mobile or other types of communication.

Question No. 936 answered with Question No. 934.

Local Authority Regulations.

937. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will give local authorities the power to

introduce regulations and control of graveyards (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33452/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The management and maintenance of a local authority burial ground is entirely a matter for the local authority concerned and one in which I have no direct function. Local authorities have a general power to make bye-laws. The making of such bye-laws is a matter for decision by individual local authorities and is a reserved function of the elected members. I understand that several local authorities have already made bye-laws in relation to graveyards in which they have an interest.

Tax Clearance Certificates.

938. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when an application will be completed for a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33453/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I understand that the office of the Chief State Solicitor has been in contact with the vendor's solicitor seeking a tax clearance certificate in this case.

Departmental Reports.

939. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the value for money review of the motor tax on-line initiative was completed; the value of savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33471/07]

940. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the value for money review of the preliminary review of the rental accommodation scheme was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33472/07]

941. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the value for money review of the rural water programme will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33474/07]

942. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the value for money review of the ex-post review of the ERDF element of the water services infrastructure provision of the economic and social infrastructure OP will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33475/07]

943. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the value for money review of the rental accommodation scheme will be completed; the anticipated value of the savings to the Exchequer due to the implementation of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33476/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 939 to 943, inclusive, together.

The review of the motor tax on-line system was completed in February 2007, and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas and presented to the Select committee. The report concluded that the system has improved customer service through improved convenience/access and reduced transaction times/costs for citizens using the service. The report also found that the on-line system is the most administratively efficient licence renewal channel both in terms of productivity and cost per transaction.

The review of the rural water programme will be completed this month. The review of the Rental Accommodation Scheme will be completed in March 2008 and will cover the period from commencement up to the end of 2007. The review of the ex-post ERDF element of the Water Services Infrastructure Provision of the Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme will be undertaken and completed in 2008 as scheduled.

Departmental Staff.

944. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33508/07]

946. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of press officers and

press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33538/07]

948. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of press advisers employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33568/07]

953. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33643/07]

954. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33658/07]

957. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his Department carries news summaries on its internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33718/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 944, 946, 948, 953, 954 and 957 together.

In line with Section 11 of the Public Service Management Act 1997 governing the appointment and role of Special Advisers, I have appointed an Adviser as Press and Information Officer in my Department. The Officer is employed at Principal Officer level and receives a salary of €93,363 gross per annum. The role of the Officer includes:

- Departmental Press and Information Officer, including provision and oversight of press information and liaison for Minister and Ministers of State;

[Deputy John Gormley.]

- liaison, on Ministers' behalf, with Government Press Office;
- liaison, on Ministers' behalf, with the Deputy Government Press Secretary;
- adviser on external communications and publicity on behalf of the Ministers and the Department.

The Press and Information Officer is supported in his role by three civil servants — one Higher Executive Officer, one Executive Officer and one Clerical Officer.

Summaries of breaking news stories are provided to the Department's Press Office electronically throughout the day by the Government Information Service. I am alerted, as necessary, in relation to any items of relevance to my Department.

As part of the work undertaken in the Press Office, a daily news cuttings service is made available to all staff. This service is provided by the Press Office and is accessible to all staff via the Department's intranet. The cost of the licence to provide the service is just under €1300 (incl. VAT) per annum. In addition, regional cuttings are provided on a weekly basis by News Access Ltd. These are circulated to the Department's senior management team, the Minister's and the Ministers of State's Offices. The cost of the service is €175/week (excl. VAT).

The Press and Information Officer or one of the civil servants supporting the Officer usually accompanies the Minister on official visits. It is normal practice for a member of the Press Office to maintain contact with the Minister as necessary throughout the day.

A Press and Information Officer has been appointed as Special Adviser within the Department since June 2002 at Principal Officer level. Between 1997 and 2002 the Press and Information Officer function was undertaken by a civil servant employed at Assistant Principal Officer level within the Department. In addition, a Communications Coordinator was appointed as Special Adviser to the Minister from October 1999 to June 2002 at Assistant Principal Officer level.

Departmental Expenditure.

945. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33523/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The following table sets out the information in relation to the name and number of newspapers purchased daily and weekly in my Department.

Title	Monday–Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekly
The Irish Times	65	1		
The Irish Independent	15	1		
The Irish Examiner	8	2		
Evening Herald	16	1		
Irish Daily Star	5			
Cork Evening Echo	1	1		
Daily Mirror	1			
Daily Mail	3			
London Independent	4			
The Guardian	3			
London Times	2			
Sun	1			
Lá	1			
Sunday Independent			3	
Sunday Business Post			3	
Sunday Tribune			2	
Sunday Times			2	
Sunday World			2	
Mail on Sunday			2	
The Observer			1	
Independent on Sunday			1	
Star on Sunday			1	
News of World			1	

Title	Monday–Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekly
The Corkman				1
The Southern Star				1
The Clare People				1
The Clare Champion				1
Foinse				1
Total	125	6	18	5

Five newspapers are provided to my Office each day (Monday-Friday) and 2 papers are provided to my Constituency Office (Monday-Friday).

Six newspapers are provided to Minister of State O’Keeffe’s Office each day (Monday-Friday) and 2 weekly newspapers are provided. Four newspapers are provided to Minister of State Killeen’s Office each day (Monday-Friday) and 2 weekly newspapers are provided. The annual expenditure for the purchase of newspapers amounts to approximately €46,000.

Question No. 946 answered with Question No. 944.

Consultancy Contracts.

947. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Mini-

ster for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33553/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested in the Question is set out in the table. The firms were involved generally employed to promote awareness of important issues relating to my Department’s functions and in these cases the greater portion of the costs were incurred in buying media time.

Work Done	Consultant	Cost	Date
		€	
Advertising associated with the Register of Electors including the Publicity campaign for Draft Register of Electors — 1998/1999	Saatchi & Saatchi	78,441	1997
Cohesion Fund Publicity Project: monitoring and management of activities by local authorities in relation to fulfilment of publicity and information requirements under Cohesion Fund Regulations	Bill O’Herlihy Communications Group	53,645	1997
Cohesion Fund Publicity Project	Boyle Design Group	21,620	1997
Cohesion Fund Publicity Project	O’Herlihy Group	44,492	1998
Provision of advice and assistance in the arrangements relating to the publication of the new Local Government Funding System	Drury Communications	8,799	1998
Christmas Recycling Campaign 1998	Brindley Advertising Ltd.	60,159	1999
Cohesion Fund Publicity Project	Carr Communications	175,833	1999-2000
Environment Awareness Campaign	Drury Communications	1,147,370	1999-2000
Continuation of Environment Awareness Campaign (new contract)	Drury Communications	359,777	2000
Communications campaign for the National Spatial Strategy	Drury Communications	13,326	2000
Consultancy services: environment awareness campaign	Irish International OMD/ Drury Communications	1,236,583	2001
Development of anti-litter cinema advertisement	Drury Communications	44,100	2001
Anti-litter awareness advertisement	Irish International OMD	81,262	2001
Publicity campaign for draft register of electors — 2002/2003	Irish International OMD	151,369	2001
Communications consultancy in relation to the national spatial strategy	Drury Communications	383,557	2001
Cohesion fund publicity project	Carr Communications Ltd.	83,737	2001
Anti-litter awareness advertisement	Irish International/OMD	135,249	2002

[Deputy Fergus O'Dowd.]

Work Done	Consultant	Cost	Date
		€	
Advertising campaign for plastic bag levy	Irish International OMD	153,728	2002
Advertising campaign to publicise the supplementary register used for referendum on the Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy, general election 2002 and referendum on the Treaty of Nice	Brindley Advertising Ltd.	117,885	2002
Cohesion fund publicity project	Carr Communications Ltd	5,337	2002
Communication consultancy	Monica Leech Communications	47,197	2002
Communications consultancy in relation to the National spatial strategy	Drury Communications	115,128	2002
Environment awareness campaign	Drury Communications	648,460	2002
Production of advertisements instructing the public on how to use electronic voting machine	Brindley Advertising Ltd.	20,173	2002
Publicity campaign for introduction of plastic bags levy	Drury Communications	61,525	2002
Publicity campaign for the draft Register of Electors- 2003/2004	Brindley Advertising Ltd.	99,999	2002
Publicity work on promotion of electronic voting including road show.	Carr Communications Ltd.	133,044	2002
Communication consultancy	Monica Leech Communications	135,036	2003
Communications consultancy in relation to the National Spatial Strategy	Drury Communications	97,635	2003
Electronic voting awareness campaign	McConnells Advertising service Ltd/q4 public relations	3,315,049	2003
Management of National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness campaign	Hunter Red Cell	301,895	2003-2005
Publicity campaign for the draft Register of Electors — 2004/2005	Cawley NEA Ltd.	159,607	2003
Race against Waste — PR Element	Lyle Bailey (Mary Murphy Associates)	145,200	2003-2004
Communication consultancy	Monica Leech Communications	139,392	2004
Production of advertisements regarding the Register of Electors	Brindley Advertising Ltd.	38,017	2004
Publicity campaign for the draft Register of Electors- 2005/2006	McConnells Advertising Service Ltd	158,758	2004
Race against Waste — PR Element	Lyle Bailey (Mary Murphy Associates)	320,166	2004 –2005
Media support for the launch of the Burren LIFE Project	Ann Jones	423	2005
Publicity campaign for the draft Register of Electors- 2006/2007	Bloom	155,696	2005
Race against Waste — PR Element	Lyle Bailey (Mary Murphy Associates)	344,850	2005-2006
Short term communications consultancy regarding emergency planning	Grayling Ltd	4,840	2006
Draft Register of Electors 2008/2009 Awareness Campaign	Brindley Advertising, 17 Upper Mount St,Dublin 2	136,983	2007
Communications and public awareness campaign for National Climate Change Strategy	Cawley NEA/TBWA	12,500,000	2007

Question No. 948 answered with Question No. 944.

Departmental Expenditure.

949. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year

since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33583/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Six credit cards are currently in official use in my Department. These are held by two Private Sec-

retaries, Minister of State O’Keeffe, two Principal Officers and one by the Assistant Director of Met Eireann. These credit cards are for official business use only, for example in circumstances where it may be necessary to facilitate the immediate delivery of goods or services. Transactions on these credit cards must be certified by the holders as pertaining to official business and are checked by the Department’s Personnel and Accounts Sections.

Taking account also of seven other Departmental credit cards which are no longer extant, the amounts incurred including charges totalling €3,334.17, for each year is set out in the table. There was no interest incurred on these cards.

Year	Amount
	€
2000	9,645
2001	18,427
2002	23,159
2003	32,797
2004	24,876
2005	37,954
2006	60,293
Up to October 2007	23,506

950. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33598/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The cost of photographic services to the Department in respect of official functions for all Ministers in each year since 1997 to date are as follows:

Year	Cost
	€
1997	15,765.60
1998	11,808.15
1999	12,404.07
2000	8,645.65
2001	11,845.39
2002	20,119.91
2003	13,419
2004	17,073
2005	10,835
2006	10,554
2007	11,068

951. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33613/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department has incurred no costs on make-up on my behalf or on behalf of any of my predecessors in the period in question.

952. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the cost of his Department’s entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33628/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Details of my Department’s expenditure on entertainment, incurred under my Department’s Administrative Budget, are set out in the table for the period concerned. Some other such expenditure, charged to individual projects/programmes, has not been included in the figures as the extraction of this information would involve a disproportionate allocation of staff time and resources.

Year	€
1997	€79,000
1998	80,000
1999	69,000
2000	93,000
2001	98,000
2002	133,000
2003	116,000
2004	124,000
2005	131,000
2006	127,000
2007	110,000

Question Nos. 953 and 954 answered with Question No. 944.

Departmental Transport.

955. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33673/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The cost of providing transport to Ministers of State and staff in my Department amounted to €1.3m for the period in question. A breakdown of this

[Deputy John Gormley.]

expenditure is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

956. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the cost of him using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to Ministers of State and staff for the same period. [33688/07]

984. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34093/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 956 and 984 together.

I refer to the reply to question No. 186 of 15 November 2007 in relation to public transport costs for myself and Ministers of State in my Department since I came into office. A breakdown of public transport costs for my prede-

cessors and for Ministers of State since 1997 is not readily available and would take an inordinate amount of time and staff resources to compile.

The bulk of expenditure in relation to my transport is incurred by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform which provides me with a Ministerial car and driver. The need to hire transport does not generally arise, therefore, apart from when on official business abroad. In this regard such costs are incurred by the Department of Foreign Affairs in the first instance.

Question No. 957 answered with Question No. 944.

Departmental Expenditure.

958. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33733/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested in the question, in relation to those years for which details are readily available, is set out in the table.

Minister	Noel Dempsey	Martin Cullen	Dick Roche	John Gormley
Number of Mobile Phones	1	1	2 (Phone and Blackberry)	2 (Phone and Blackberry)
Year	Annual Cost	Annual Cost	Annual Cost	Annual Cost
	€	€	€	€
1998	4,142.90			
1999	4,448.84			
2000	5,072.16			
2001	2,732.09			
2002	1,806.44	3,215.41		
2003		6,021.22		
2004		5,257.34		
2005			2,837.86	
2006			3,933.46	
2007			2,117.51	456.84

959. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33748/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested in the question, in relation

to those years for which details are readily available, is set out in the table. The number of advisers or staff appointed directly by the Minister varied between 3 and 6.

Year	Annual Cost
	€
1998	2,441.08
1999	4,390.58
2000	9130.63
2001	8556.32

Year	Annual Cost
	€
2002	10,687.21
2003	10,135.54
2004	13,529.82
2005	10,166.35
2006	11,370.92
2007	13,460.59

Planning Issues.

960. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on whether the decision of An Bord Pleanála to allow Dublin Port to apply for land reclamation to facilitate 600,000 TEU capacity per annum as a strategic infrastructure will pre-empt finalisation by Dublin City Council of best future options for the bay, the preferred option recommended to the council having been the total relocation of port activities; his role to date in this application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33781/07]

961. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on whether the decision of An Bord Pleanála to allow Dublin Port to apply for land reclamation to facilitate 600,000 TEU capacity per annum as a strategic infrastructure will pre-empt the work of the task force on Dublin Bay which he proposes to establish which has the mandate to recommend new legislation to maximise the potential of the bay. [33782/07]

962. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on whether the decision of An Bord Pleanála to allow Dublin Port to apply for land reclamation to facilitate 600,000 TEU capacity per annum as a strategic infrastructure will pre-empt the planned SPA designation to include this part of the bay to meet the requirement of EU directives on protection of the natural environment. [33783/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 960 to 962, inclusive, together.

As Minister, I am precluded, under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, from exercising any power or control in relation to any individual planning application or appeal with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned. However, in the event that an application is received in respect of the project referred to, the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 requires the Board to notify Dublin City Council, as the planning authority within which the proposed

project would be situated, that an application for strategic infrastructure development has been received. The Act requires the Manager of the relevant planning authority to prepare a report on the likely effects of the proposed development on the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The views of the elected members of the planning authority must also be sought and attached to the Manager's report. In making a determination on such application, the Board is required to consider this report.

I have been informed by Dublin City Council that public consultation on the Study on Dublin Bay: An Integrated Economic, Cultural and Social Vision for Sustainable Development has been underway over the last number of months. A large number of comments have been received and are currently being summarised by the City Council. The study has not been formally adopted by the Council.

The decision of An Bord Pleanála on the Dublin Port proposal will not pre-empt the planned Special Protection Area (SPA) redesignation of Dublin Bay. The unambiguous legal requirement under the EU Birds (79/409/EEC) and Habitats (92/42/EEC) Directives is that SPA designations are to be put in place solely on the basis of ornithological evidence.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to establish a Dublin Bay Area Task Force to maximise the potential of the Bay for the people of the capital city. As I indicated in reply to question no. 493 of 13 November 2007, I am currently considering the scope, terms of reference, structure and composition of the Task Force. Any relevant decisions of An Bord Pleanála in relation to Dublin Bay will be taken into account by the Task force in due course.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

963. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Athlone, County Westmeath water treatment plant upgrade will be completed, in the interest of public health. [33854/07]

964. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Rochfordbridge, County Westmeath sewerage scheme, treatment plant and network will be completed, in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33855/07]

965. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the upgrading treatment plant of the Clonmellon sewerage scheme, County Westmeath will be completed, in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33856/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 963 to 965, inclusive, together.

These schemes are being funded under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 and I understand that construction will be completed during the first half of 2008.

966. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the non-domestic water metering project, County Westmeath will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33857/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): This is primarily a matter for Westmeath County Council. However, I understand from informal enquiries with the Council that some delay has occurred due to the liquidation of the firm sub-contracted to install the meters and that the main contractors hope to engage new sub-contractors shortly.

967. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Lough Owel, County Westmeath water treatment plant will be completed, in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33858/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The construction of the Lough Owel Water Treatment Plant Scheme was funded under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme and has been completed.

968. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the water conservation project, 70 district metering areas, County Westmeath will be completed, in the interest of water conservation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33859/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): An allocation of €4.7 million has been made to Westmeath County Council under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 for water conservation works, including the establishment of 70 district metering areas which I understand have now been completed.

969. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Glasson/Ballykeeran/Coosan, County Westmeath sewerage scheme will be completed, in the interest of public health;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33861/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Phase 1 of the Glasson/Ballykeeran/Coosan Sewerage Scheme Phase is approved for funding under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 as part of the Rural Towns and Villages Initiative. My Department has approved the Preliminary Report for this scheme and it is now a matter for Westmeath County Council to advance the scheme through the tender and construction stages.

970. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Mullingar, County Westmeath sewerage scheme, including sludge management, will be completed in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33862/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Mullingar Sewerage Scheme is included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 as a scheme to begin construction in 2008. Westmeath County Council's Tender Report for the wastewater treatment plant element of the scheme (including sludge management) is being examined in my Department and is being dealt with as quickly as possible. Under devolved procedures, the tender process and the appointment of a contractor for the collection network is a matter for the Council itself.

971. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Delvin, County Westmeath sewerage scheme will be completed in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33863/07]

972. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Rathowen, County Westmeath sewerage scheme will be completed in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33864/07]

975. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Athlone, County Westmeath main drainage scheme will be completed in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33867/07]

977. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Finnea, County Westmeath sewerage scheme will be completed in the

interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33869/07]

978. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Kilbeggan, County Westmeath, sewerage scheme will be completed in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33870/07]

979. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Moate, County Westmeath, sewerage scheme upgrade will be completed, in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33871/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 971, 972, 975, 977, 978 and 979 together.

I refer to the replies to Questions Nos. 219 to 224, inclusive, of 14 November 2007.

973. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the County Westmeath sewerage scheme will be completed, in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33865/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Details of approved sewerage schemes in County Westmeath are published in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 which is available in the Oireachtas Library. No proposal identified as the County Westmeath sewerage scheme was contained in the Council's most recent assessment of needs which informed the selection of new schemes for inclusion in the Investment Programme.

974. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the south Westmeath regional water supply scheme will be completed, in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33866/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The South Westmeath Regional Water Supply Scheme is included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 as a scheme to begin construction in 2009. My Department has approved Westmeath County Council's Preliminary Report for this scheme. It is now a matter for the Council to secure a Water Abstraction Order and to prepare Contract Documents.

Question No. 975 answered with Question No. 971

976. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Coole, County Westmeath sewerage scheme will be completed, in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33868/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Coole Sewerage Scheme is included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 as a scheme to advance through planning. Westmeath County Council's Preliminary Report and Water Services Pricing Policy Report for the scheme are being examined in my Department and are being dealt with as quickly as possible.

Questions Nos. 977 to 979, inclusive, answered with Question No. 971.

980. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Lough Lene, County Westmeath, water supply scheme including sludge management will be completed, in the interest of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33872/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Lough Lene Water Supply Scheme is included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 as a scheme to advance through planning. My Department is awaiting submission by Westmeath County Council of a Brief for the appointment of consultants to prepare a Preliminary Report for the scheme.

981. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Royal Canal feed and Lough Ennell abstraction, County Westmeath will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33873/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Mullingar Regional Water Supply Scheme Improvement (incorporating Lough Ennell Abstraction) is included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 as a scheme to begin construction in 2008. My Department is awaiting submission by Westmeath County Council of a Brief for the appointment of consultants to prepare a Preliminary Report for the scheme, which also incorporates proposals to meet the Council's obligation to supply water for the Royal Canal.

Library Projects.

982. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

Government if he will arrange for his Department to liaise with South Dublin County Council to provide a library for Palmerstown, Dublin 20; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34049/07]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Tony Killeen): Provision of a public library service is a matter for the local authority concerned. The Department liaises regularly with local authorities as a matter of course in relation to a wide variety of library matters and provides capital assistance in respect of projects included in the public library capital programme. No firm proposals have been submitted to the Department by South Dublin County Council in respect of a library in Palmerstown.

Local Authority Housing.

983. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will reverse the decision of South Dublin County Council to build houses on land at two locations on Taylor's Lane, Rathfarnham, understood locally to have been provided as public open space; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34070/07]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): My Department has not received a proposal from South Dublin County Council on this matter.

Question No. 984 answered with Question No. 955.

Animal Welfare.

985. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the data regarding the dog pounds which are normally released in September for the previous year; and the reason for the delay. [34131/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Annual returns for 2006 under the Control of Dogs Acts 1986 and 1992 have recently been collated by my Department based on data supplied by local authorities. The information is available on my Department's website. The publication of these figures depends on the receipt of returns from every local authority, and this process has only recently been completed.

Planning Issues.

986. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the right of a group

(details supplied) to have at least one member on the board of An Bord Pleanála, in view of the fact that 33% of the population is rural and that this group is entitled to proportionate representation on an Bord Pleanála. [34132/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The procedures for the appointment of ordinary members of An Bord Pleanála are set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended by Sections 14-16 of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006. In addition, Article 11 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2006 amended the list of prescribed bodies for the purposes of making nominations to the Board and the Irish Rural Dwellers Association are now included on the list. I am satisfied that the current nomination and appointment processes are fair and transparent. Furthermore, as the legislative provisions underpinning these processes have only recently been endorsed by the Oireachtas, I have no proposals to make any further amendments at this time.

Departmental Communications.

987. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34222/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): 37 members of staff in my Department are provided with a blackberry device and 2 members are provided with a mobile phone configured to receive e-mail.

988. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34237/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Some 1400 staff of my Department use a large number of electronic and non-electronic databases in the course of their work. The more complex electronic databases operated within the Department are subject to maintenance and support contracts with outside organisations. The information sought on the numbers in each category is not readily available and its compilation would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work.

989. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of information tech-

nology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34252/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department has completed 9 information technology projects since 2004 and details are outlined below. Information technology projects are, as a matter of policy, subject to fixed price contracts and where projects have gone over budget it is as a result of a change in the scope of the project.

Projects delivered over budget	2
Projects delivered on budget	7
Projects delivered after deadline	4
Projects delivered on time	5

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

990. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34267/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): On foot of the commitment in the Programme for Government on carbon offsetting official air travel, I am developing a scheme for use by all Government Departments and bodies under their aegis. I hope to announce details of the scheme shortly. Notwithstanding the fact that the proposed scheme will apply retrospectively to air travel since this Government came into office, I have in the meantime made separate arrangements to offset the air travel related to my attendance at the Ministerial segment of the ongoing meetings of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.

Data Protection.

991. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his Departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34282/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department ensures that all relevant security measures, including the use of hardware firewalls, are in place to protect its network against potential intrusion by hackers via the internet. Access from within the Department to all services over the network is password protected. Staff members are authorised to access only that data which is relevant to the carrying out of their day to day business. All of my Department's computer security systems are subjected to ongoing independent security audits to ensure all systems are updated as required.

Management Information Framework System.

992. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34304/07]

993. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34319/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 992 and 993 together.

The implementation of the financial management system under the overall management information framework has provided the Department with efficient modern accounting systems and processes. These allow the financial management and accountancy functions to be undertaken and operated in line with best practice in financial management and modern accounting standards. My Department is satisfied that these functions are being carried out in the most cost effective manner. Benefits are being achieved through a reduction in transaction processing times and a switch from labour intensive manual activities to more value added activities. It is intended to update these systems on an ongoing basis to maintain optimum performance and efficiency.

The key elements of the management information framework have been rolled out by my Department in accordance with the criteria of the project plan. This provides management with management information to support decision-making about the allocation and management of

[Deputy John Gormley.]

resources, and to ensure accountability for the use of such resources. The financial system is currently also being used to provide management reports on financial performance. A costing framework is being used to capture costs against the Departments business units, which are included in management reports. Performance indicators are being used to manage performance across the Department's range of activities. In particular, indicators are included in the Department's Statement of Strategy, Business Plans and Annual Output Statement, and they are used in monitoring outputs under Towards 2016 and National Development Plan.

Housing Management Companies.

994. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position in the matter of the status of estate management companies at an estate (details supplied) in County Kildare; if management companies are at liberty to impose levies or fees on residents where the development has not been completed and the services taken in charge by the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34364/07]

995. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if and when he might instruct Kildare County Council to take in charge an estate (details supplied) in County Kildare in view of ongoing difficulties with the developer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34365/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 994 and 995 together.

As Minister, I have overall responsibility for the legislative and policy framework governing the taking in charge of estates. I have no function in relation to the taking in charge of particular estates as this is a matter for the relevant planning authority concerned. Legislation governing management companies is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Planning Issues.

996. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans for the future use of the Old Monastery, Kilcock, County Kildare; the extent to which plans have been formulated or progressed for its conversion as a library for educational purposes or other civic use; the extent to which this forms part of the regeneration plans

for the town square; the intended timescale for its future development or alternative use; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[34372/07]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Tony Killeen): I understand that the library authority in Kildare has made no final decision in respect of Kilcock. Further information regarding the other issues raised in the question may more appropriately be sought directly from the local authority.

Departmental Correspondence.

997. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his letter of 5 November 2007 to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo refers to a particular quarry rather than the quarry stated in his reply. [34442/07]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The letter from my Office dated 5 November 2007 incorrectly refers to a quarry at Creevagh, Cong, Co. Mayo. The information in the reply, however, refers to a quarry at Cahernicole, The Neale, Co. Mayo, which was the subject of the correspondence referred to in the question.

Fisheries Protection.

998. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will extend the deadline for the draft net hardship scheme beyond 31 December 2007; the tax implications of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33261/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As stated in replies to previous Parliamentary Questions, the closing date for receipt of applications under the Salmon Hardship Scheme was 27 April 2007. Applicants have, however, until the 31 December 2007 to accept any offer under the scheme. This deadline, I believe, provides ample time for those concerned to give the scheme due consideration and accordingly, there are no plans to extend the application deadline. The treatment of payments made from the Salmon Hardship Fund for tax purposes is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners in their assessment of each individual's liabilities.

I am advised, however, that the Revenue Commissioners have indicated that payments from the Hardship Fund will be taxable on recipients as income in the year of receipt. Commercial fishermen will have to include any payment received under the scheme as a receipt in their accounts. That part of the payment which relates to pay-

ment of six times the value of the 2006 licence fee will not be liable to tax.

I understand that, when making payments from the fund, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, which is administering the scheme, will identify that part which is specified as a multiple of the 2006 licence fee so that recipients can exclude that amount from their income tax returns. Eligible applicants may receive any payment due under the scheme as a single payment or they may opt to spread any payment due over a three-year period.

999. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will review the salmon hardship scheme with a view to offering reasonable buy out rates to fishermen, some of whom have fished seasonally for several generations; when such a review will commence and conclude; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33983/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As

Year	Total Amt	Data	%	Roaming	%	Data Roaming	%
	€	€	%	€	%	€	%
2006	164,967.57	16,800	10.18	33,635.45	20.39	1,615.04	0.98
2007	134,645.22	11,016	8.18	16,751.97	12.44	2,764.78	2.05

1001. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in the form of expenses to staff by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33348/07]

Year	Total Amount spent	Refunds to Staff	Percentage	Data/Roaming
	€	€	%	
2006	164,967.57	1,865.84	1.13	Figures not available
2007	134,645.22	00.00	0	

1002. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount of mobile telephone bills paid in relation to the departmental mobile telephone assigned to him by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33363/07]

previously stated, most recently in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 219 of 8 November 2007, the approach to determining the hardship payments under the Salmon Hardship Scheme is fair and reasonable and there are no plans to review the scheme.

Departmental Expenditure.

1000. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount of mobile telephone bills paid directly by his Department in 2006 and to date in 2007; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to data charges; the percentage or amount of this for each year that applies to roaming charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33333/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The following is a breakdown of costs paid by my Department for 2006 and 2007 respectively. Breakdown also shows costs incurred in respect of roaming and data charges.

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): It is assumed that the Deputy is referring to refunds paid to staff in respect of mobile phone charges. The total amount spent on refunds to staff for 2006 and 2007 in respect of mobile phone charges incurred by them is outlined below. It is not possible to isolate costs in respect of roaming and data downloads for these costs.

1020. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of mobile phones used by him and supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33728/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1002 and 1020 together.

[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

This material relates only to the period since my appointment as Minister for Communications, Energy & Natural Resources on 14th June 2007.

The breakdown of costs for my official issue mobile phone and Blackberry, since my appointment, is set out in the table.

Year	Cost	Roaming	Percentage	Data	Percentage
2007	€517.67	€24.16	4.66%	€108.90	21%

Departmental Reports.

1003. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the value for money review on energy, conservation and alternative was completed; the value of the savings to the Exchequer generated by the implementation of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33397/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The value for money review on the Sustainable Energy Priority of the ESIO was published and laid before the Oireachtas in July 2006. Recommendations assisted in the establishment of the 'Greener Homes Scheme', which has a total value of €57m and is estimated to contribute to substantial CO2 savings of 40,000 tonnes per annum. Further recommendations from this report, which will yield an increased return on State investment, are in the process of being implemented by the agency concerned.

1004. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the value for money review on broadband infrastructure will be completed; the anticipated savings to the Exchequer due to the implementations of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33399/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): It is anticipated that the value for money review carried out on broadband infrastructure will be published in Quarter 1 2008. Value for money savings are anticipated but cannot be quantified in advance of a range of policy decisions which will be made in the years following the publication of the report.

1005. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the value for money review on the group broadband scheme will be completed; the anticipated savings to the Exchequer due to the implementations of the conclusions from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33400/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The group broadband scheme operated from March 2004 to December 2006. The value for money review carried out on the group broadband scheme will be published prior to the current year end. As the scheme was closed prior to the completion of the review no specific savings will occur in relation to the scheme. However, the recommendations made are expected to substantially contribute to greater efficiency and effectiveness in expenditure on the proposed National Broadband Scheme which aims to deliver broadband services to consumers and businesses located within those parts of the country that have no form of broadband available at present.

Departmental Staff.

1006. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number, rank and pay of all civil servants in his Department and Ministerial staff, personally appointed by him or otherwise, who are engaged in media monitoring; the nature of the work done; the persons who the information is circulated to or the people who have access to this information; the cost of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33503/07]

1008. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of press officers and press advisers in his Department; the rank and pay of each; the description of work done; the persons to whom the information is circulated or made accessible to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33533/07]

1010. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of press advisors employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33563/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1006, 1008 and 1010 together.

The number, rank and annual salaries of the civil servants currently assigned to the Press Office and Ministerial staff, personally appointed by me, who are engaged in media monitoring are as follows:

Name	Title	Duties	Salary
Ms Bríd McGrath	Press Advisor	Advisor on Press/Policy issues with specific concentration on media relations, public events/ statements/speeches and managing the Press Office.	Principal Officer (standard) salary scale (modified PRSI) €82,016 (min) to €95,363 (max)
Ms Grace Milton	Personal Secretary	Providing secretarial support to the Minister concentrating on media relations.	Secretarial Assistant salary scale €22,064 (min) to €41,019 (max)
Higher Executive Officer	Press Officer	Providing advice to the Minister and the Department relating to the provision of information to the public on the activities of the Department.	Higher Executive Officer salary scale €46,646 (min) to €59,213 (2nd LSI)
Clerical Officer	Clerical Officer	To provide clerical support in the Press Office	Clerical Officer salary scale €445.02 p.w (min) to €721.57 p.w (2nd LSI)

The Press Office communicates with the Department, the wider civil service, the media and the public. Information on the areas under my remit is widely available on the Department's website, through press releases and also through the service provided by the staff in the Press Office.

The following press advisors were employed by the former Department of Communications, Marine and Natural resources which was established in 2002:

Name	Title	Date of Appointment	Salary Level
Ms. Olive Stephens	Press Advisor	09 October 2006 to 14 June 2007	Principal Officer salary scale (Modified PRSI) €78,066 (min) to €90, 770 (max)
Ms. Grace Cappock	Press Advisor	30 September 2004 to 20 September 2006	Principal Officer salary scale (Modified PRSI) €70,578 (min) to €82,066 (max)
Mr. Richard Moore	Press Advisor	18 June 2002 to 29 September 2004	Principal Officer (standard) salary scale (modified PRSI) €61,121 (min) to €75,603 (2nd LSI)

Departmental Expenditure.

1007. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number and name of newspapers purchased by his Department daily and weekly; the number provided to himself and to the Minister of State's office; the yearly cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33518/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): A summary of the current number of newspapers and magazines ordered per month is set out in table A and a more detailed breakdown in table B. The delivery to my office consists of the Irish Times daily, and a number of magazines monthly, at an overall annual cost of €2,211.12.

The Minister of State's newspaper order consists of six papers; Irish Times, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, Irish Star, Evening Herald and Farmers Journal. The Minister of State's office also receives a number of magazines each month. The total cost per annum for these newspapers and magazines is €2,751.12. The overall cost/spend on papers and magazines for this

Department from December 2006 to November 2007 was €44,639.03.

Table A

Daily Papers	Weekly Papers	Total Papers	Magazines	Grand Total
1,822	64	1,886	133	2,019

Table B

Name of Paper	Total
Irish Times	889
Irish Independent	324
Financial Times	165
Examiner	187
Guardian	22
Irish Star	70
Irish Sun	29
Irish Mirror	22
Daily Irish Mail	33
Evening Echo	33
Evening Herald	48

[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

Name of Paper	Total
Anglo Celt	5
Sunday Times	9
Sunday Independent	9
Sunday Tribune	5
Sunday Business	5
Sunday World	5
Irish Mail on Sunday	5
News of the World	4
Sunday People	4
Sunday Mirror	5
Dundrum Gazette	8
Total	1,886

Name of Magazine	Total
Economist	32
Economist The World in	8
Farmers Journal	14
Phoenix	14
Phoenix Annual	5
New Yorker	10
New Scientist	15
Time	20
Business & Finance	8
National Geographic	2
Construction Ireland	1
Newsweek	4
Total	133

Totals	
Daily papers ordered per month	1,822
Weekly papers ordered per month	64
Total Papers ordered per month	1886
Magazines ordered per month	133

Question No. 1008 answered with Question No. 1006.

Consultancy Contracts.

1009. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number, cost and name of any media consultants employed by his Department; the cost of such advice for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the nature of the work done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33548/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In the

time available, it has not been possible to identify and assemble all of the information requested. I am arranging for the compilation of data and a detailed reply will issue to the Deputy shortly.

Question No. 1010 answered with Question No. 1006.

Departmental Expenditure.

1011. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of credit cards held by his Department; the cost of same for each year since 2000 to date in 2007; the persons who hold these cards and for whom they are used; the annual amounts purchased; the cumulative interest on same for each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33578/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In the time available it has not been possible to assemble the information requested by the Deputy. It will be forwarded to him as soon as possible.

1012. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the cost to his Department of photographers used by all Ministers in his Department on a yearly basis for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33593/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department was created in 2002 from a merger between the Department of Marine and Natural Resources and the Department of Public Enterprise. As such figures from 2002 to date are provided. The table herewith provides the amount spent by the Department's Press Office on photography from 2002 to date in 2007. The figures are inclusive of VAT.

Photography Costs Incurred by Press Office

Year	Cost
	€
2002	10,955.72
2003	18,825.40
2004	25,314.45
2005	13,014.15
2006	9,439.78
2007	12,097.23

1013. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the cost of make-up for him for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33608/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department incurred no expenditure on make-up over the period in question.

1014. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the cost of his Department's entertainment allowance for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33623/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In the time available, it has not been possible to identify and assemble all of the information requested. I am arranging for the compilation of data and a detailed reply will issue to the Deputy shortly.

Government Information Services.

1015. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his Department receives a daily summary of stories relevant to his Department from Government Information Services; if this summary is in written, verbal or electronic format; if these are furnished to a departmental press officer or press adviser; and if the press officer or adviser furnishes this information to him every day or how often it is furnished. [33638/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department's Press Office receives a summary of the main headlines from broadcast media, from the Government Information Service via e-mail. The summaries are received several times a day. My Press Office may draw my attention to particular topics that are of relevance to my Department but I do not, in general, receive copies of the material supplied by Government Information Services.

Official Engagements.

1016. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if a press adviser travels with him on official visits; and if there were official visits attended by him in the past year at which a press adviser was not present or was not in contact with him. [33653/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My press advisor accompanies me on some official visits, though not all. There is no formal policy or criteria for which official visits my press advisor attends. There is no record of which official visits my press advisor did not accompany me to, though there were certainly many events my press advisor did not attend.

Departmental Transport.

1017. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the cost of providing transport including their official car to Ministers of State in his Department and staff for each year from 1997 to date in 2007. [33668/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In the time available, it has not been possible to identify and assemble all of the information requested. I am arranging for the compilation of data and a detailed reply will issue to the Deputy shortly.

1018. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the cost of him using public transport for every year since 1997 to date in 2007; and the cost of providing similar services to junior Ministers and staff for the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33683/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In the time available, it has not been possible to identify and assemble all of the information requested. I am arranging for the compilation of data and a detailed reply will issue to the Deputy shortly.

Departmental Communications.

1019. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his Department carries news summaries on its internal web; the persons who have access to such information; the way they access same; the person who compiles same; the cost of same; the regularity with which this information is updated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33713/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department's Press Office operates a press clippings service that is available to all staff in the Department. The press clippings are provided by an outside agency, which was contracted by the Department following an open tender competition. Each morning the agency e-mails the Department with any clippings from the print media that relate to areas of the Department's responsibility. The press clippings are then e-mailed to all staff that have signed up for the service and are made available on the Department's Intranet. The contract carries a fixed cost of €2,032.80 including VAT, every month.

Questions No. 1020 answered with Question No. 1002.

Departmental Expenditure.

1021. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural

[Deputy Fergus O'Dowd.]

Resources if any of the advisers or staff appointed by him directly have mobile phones and other equipment supplied by his Department; the annual cost of same since 1997 to date in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33743/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The following material relates to the period since my appointment as Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources on 14 June 2007. A number of my advisors have been assigned mobile phones or Blackberries for use in the course of carrying out their official duties. The total cost incurred for this is €1,213.96 since their appointment.

I set out in the table the relevant details:

Equipment	Quantity	Cost
		€
Mobile phone	1	207.84
Blackberries	5	1,006.12
Total costs incurred		1,213.96

Departmental Transport.

1022. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the cost on a yearly basis for transport hire of any kind for his transport and that of his staff for each year since 1997 to date in 2007; the reason for such hire; if tenders were sought; the locations brought from and to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34088/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): It has not been possible to provide the information requested by the Deputy in the time provided. The information will be forwarded to him as soon as possible.

Fisheries Protection.

1023. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question No. 605 of 4 December 2007, when details of the hardship scheme were sent to Brussels; the reason for the delay in payment of the hardship scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34117/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Salmon Hardship Scheme, being administered by the Loughs Agency, is intended to provide a measure of relief to individuals in line with the degree of hardship likely to be experienced on foot of the cessation of fishing for salmon arising from the closure of the interceptory fishery sea-

ward of Lough Foyle and the reduction of the number of commercial licences operating within the Lough.

The scheme is joint-funded by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. Both sponsoring Departments simultaneously lodged a State Aid Notification with the Commission on 12 September 2007, pursuant to Article 88 (3) of the EC Treaty. The necessary State Aid approval by the European Commission of the Hardship Scheme is still awaited and it has not been possible for payments to be made by the Loughs Agency to date. The European Commission is being pursued for an urgent decision. I am advised that as soon as approval is received, applicants will be invited to complete their applications and payments will commence.

Telecommunications Services.

1024. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway is not able to avail of broadband from the Shrulue exchange; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34169/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The provision of broadband services is primarily a matter for private sector service providers. Broadband service providers operate in a fully liberalised market, regulated by the independent Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). There are a number of platforms for delivery of broadband, and service providers are now offering broadband by wireless, satellite, fibre or standard telephone cable and more recently by mobile in all areas of the country. The enabling of exchanges to provide Digital Subscribers Line broadband services is a matter for the service providers. I have no function in this matter.

Departmental Communications.

1025. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of staff in his Department that are provided with a Blackberry device or similar mobile e-mail equipment. [34217/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department has issued forty staff members with Blackberry devices.

1026. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of databases used by his Department; and the number of these that are wholly and partly operated by external organisations or individuals and operated solely within his Department. [34232/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The information sought by the Deputy is as follows.

Wholly operated by external organisations or individuals	Partly operated by external organisations or individuals	Operated Solely within Department	Total
0	6	24	30

1027. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of information technology projects undertaken by or for his Department since 2004 that have been delivered over budget, after their original deadline, on budget, under budget, on their original deadline and ahead of their original deadline; and if he will present the information in tabular readable form. [34247/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Budgets are allocated on an annual basis so some projects may be included in multiple years.

Year	Type of Project (Infrastructure, E-Government, Internal Business systems)	Total no. of projects [min cost €50k]	Delivered Over Budget	Delivered On Budget	Delivered Under Budget	On Original Deadline	After Original Deadline	Ahead of Original Deadline
2004	Infrastructure	3	0	3	0	1	2	0
2004	E-Government	6	0	6	0	0	6	0
2004	Internal Business Systems	3	0	3	0	1	2	0
2004	Totals	12	0	12	0	2	10	0
2005	Infrastructure	2	0	2	0	1	1	0
2005	E-Government	6	0	6	0	2	4	0
2005	Internal Business Systems	3	0	3	0	1	2	0
2005	Totals	11	0	11	0	4	7	0
2006	Infrastructure	3	0	3	0	1	1	1
2006	E-Government	8	0	8	0	0	7	1
2006	Internal Business Systems	5	0	5	0	2	3	0
2006	Totals	16	0	16	0	3	11	2
2007	Infrastructure	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
2007	E-Government	6	0	6	0	3	3	0
2007	Internal Business Systems	3	0	3	0	0	2	1
2007	Totals	12	1	10	1	4	6	2

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

1028. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the steps he has taken to offset the carbon dioxide emissions caused by ministerial travel in his Department; and if none to date, the plans he will put in place on the matter. [34262/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): On foot of the commitment in the Programme for Government on carbon offsetting official air travel, the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government is developing a scheme for use by all Government Departments and bodies under their aegis. He will be announcing details of the scheme shortly. Notwithstanding the fact that the proposed scheme will apply retrospectively to air travel since this Govern-

ment came into office, I have, in the meantime, made separate arrangements to offset the air travel undertaken to date as part of my Ministerial functions.

Data Protection.

1029. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he is satisfied that personal information relating to members of the public held on his Departmental databases is safe from hackers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34277/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department is very aware of the risks such as identity theft to individuals should their personal information be made available to criminal elements. Despite the fact that my Department

[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

holds very limited personal records relating to members of the public, it has invested heavily over a number of years in ensuring that every effort is made to maintain the security of those records.

Hackers generally gain access to networks through exploiting server vulnerabilities or through Trojan malware inadvertently installed by users. My Department has installed multi-layer electronic firewall defences backed up with electronic intrusion detection systems which actively monitor network traffic. These are tuned to identify network traffic which would indicate an attack. All internet traffic is scanned by three different technologies before being passed to a PC. Connections between my Department and other Departments or the Naval Service are across the private government network.

My Department's e-government website is subject to an annual audit by external security consultants who are charged with attempting to hack into the applications both from the public internet and the internal trusted networks. Any changes to that infrastructure will also be tested by external experts. My Department carries out some electronic sales via our websites. The credit card transaction is processed by a third party, and the card details are not recorded on any of our systems.

Management Information Framework System.

1030. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the estimate of the money saved to the Exchequer in 2007 by the use of the management information framework system; the way this saving was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34300/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Through the use of the management information framework system, the overall financial service in my Department has improved with a much quicker throughput of transactions, higher levels of productivity and better quality information for managers to support the overall decision-making process generally.

Since installation of the new financial management system at end 2004, staffing levels in the core financial areas have undergone some reduction. In the interests of efficient and effective embedding of the system throughout the Department, it has been necessary to retain sufficient staffing levels to support roll-out of the

system, improve the control and compliance environment and the overall effectiveness of financial management services.

Following completion by year end of the transfer of the operation of the Accounts and Finance functions to the Department's decentralised offices in Cavan, coupled with the recent reduction in the breadth of functions of the Department, staffing levels in the core financial areas will see a reduction of the order of 30-40% with effect from early 2008.

1031. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the management information framework system has been fully rolled out in his Department; the use being made of performance indicators, the costing framework and management reports provided by this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34314/07]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department has fully rolled out the management information framework system, with the new financial management information system, AGRESSO, having been installed in November 2004 in the core financial areas. By November 2006, the essential functions of the system had been rolled out to all Divisions of the Department for the purposes of Departmental financial control, processing, management and reporting.

The Department systematically monitors financial performance information on a monthly basis with a view to ensuring high standards of internal financial control, management and reporting, high quality customer service, enhanced efficiency and productivity in financial matters. A costing framework is in place to support the capture and apportionment of all Departmental costs. It delivers quality, timely and telling performance information in relation to resource affiliation. Both direct and indirect Programme costs, as well as key non-financial performance indicator information is available in the context of the new Annual Output Statement process.

In overall terms, better accountability for resource use and more informed decision-making in my Department has been made possible as a result of implementation of the management information framework system. Decisions by the Management Committee in relation to allocation and reallocation of resources are informed by timely and accurate monthly management reports. Furthermore, financial and non-financial performance information is reviewed at the regular meetings which I hold with the Management Committee.