

DÁIL ÉIREANN

DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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Wednesday, 17 December 2008.

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

Paidir.
Prayer.

Leaders' Questions.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It now is patently clear that this is the most incompetent Government in the history of the State. On Sunday, the Minister for Health and Children announced she had approved and authorised a statutory service plan from the HSE involving cuts of €500 million. That plan was placed in the Oireachtas Library yesterday and is obsolete today. My understanding is the Health Service Executive prepared its service plan and submitted it to the Minister for Health and Children for authorisation.

However, in light of changing circumstances, the chief executive of the HSE will be obliged to seek a further €400 million in cuts. This will strike at the heart of the most vulnerable in our society as it pertains to a critical major public service plan. The Minister for Health and Children, who sat at the Cabinet table and heard of the changing economic circumstances from the Minister for Finance, should have been in a position to tell the HSE it was basing its service plan on the wrong figures, in the same way the budget was drafted using incorrect figures. Arising from the service plan submitted by the HSE that now must be amended, can the Taoiseach explain to the House the numbers of beds that will be cut and the number of people who will be made redundant? Can he spell out the impact on waiting lists and trolleys, 400 of which were occupied yesterday, as well as on capital projects for hospitals nationwide next year?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Kenny often has spoken of the need for efficiencies in the delivery of public services, which is precisely the context in which—

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Front line services should not be cut.

The Taoiseach: —the HSE has devised its service plan.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: What about beds?

The Taoiseach: It has obtained efficiencies totalling €280 million during this year, which will be repeated next year. The figures being spoken about in the public debate this morning are not those of the HSE.

As Deputy Kenny observed, the HSE has set out a public service plan to support its goals, which are to maintain services to patients and clients in both hospitals and community settings in a manner that is fully consistent with patient safety and best practice. It is to expand certain services, particularly in respect of cancer and therapies for children with disabilities, to which additional funds of €15 million and €10 million, respectively, have been allocated, as well as an additional €120 million in other areas. Moreover, it is to support the reorganisation of services and the management of costs in such a way that services will be maintained and expanded. Furthermore, it is to work with the social partners in the health sector to achieve the objective of maintaining services to the public with a much tighter budget and to manage closely the significant risks of cost increases arising from the need to provide medical cards and other services as a result of the economic downturn.

The HSE service plan has been prepared and approved by the Minister on that basis. It refers to the budget of €14.7 billion that will be paid for health services next year, which constitutes an increase of 3.2% over this year's budget. Her approval and the finalised plan take account of all recent developments, including the budgetary position, the deterioration in the economy and the need to manage risks. In her letter approving the plan, the Minister also has set some specific and challenging requirements for the HSE.

This is a challenging and much-improved service plan, which sets out clearly the links between the services planned, the budget for those services and the staff needed. It is a plan that will require more than ever the active involvement of staff at all levels to make the changes necessary to deliver it. The goals desired by the Government across all areas only can be achieved with real co-operative engagement of management and staff from the outset of the year, drawing on the commitment of all to patients first and foremost. The HSE's management is engaged with staff representatives on these issues. I believe this is the best way to proceed and is the basis on which the plan was set up.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: An injection of reality is needed.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Can the Taoiseach explain the reason this Health Service Executive service plan, which was placed in the Oireachtas Library only yesterday, is out of line by a further €400 million this morning? Everyone is in favour of efficiencies—

Deputy Noel Dempsey: In theory.

Deputy Enda Kenny: —and of giving patients the best level of service. While there were ten HSE employees at grade 8 in 2000, there were 713 in 2007. I asked the Taoiseach what are the implications, in respect of the cutting of front-line services, on foot of an amended plan involving cuts of €900 million from this service? What are the implications for front-line services, the employment of nurses and doctors and patient care? The Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, appears to be the only person in Ireland who states that too many people are working in accident and emergency units nationwide. Last night, 400 people were obliged to lie on trolleys.

A Deputy: She never visited any of them.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Again I ask the Taoiseach, how many beds will be taken from the system by this cutback?

Deputy Brian Hayes: That is the question.

Deputy Enda Kenny: How many people will be let go from the Health Service Executive? What are the implications for waiting lists and patient care? What are the implications for any future development to take place in the health business in 2009? The Taoiseach should answer these questions clearly and unequivocally, based on the up-to-date information in his possession. As this is the Taoiseach's last morning in the House, this matter should be sorted out in order that Members know where they stand.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Hopefully it will be his last morning.

The Taoiseach: Certainly——

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Until next spring.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach, without interruption.

The Taoiseach: The health service would never be sorted out were Deputy Kenny in charge, because he is in favour of the *status quo* plus——

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Please.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: The Taoiseach was in that Department for long enough. He was glad to get out of it. He called it “Angola”.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Dermot Ahern: What did Fine Gael do?

An Ceann Comhairle: Please let the Taoiseach finish.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: He ran out of it.

Deputy Mary Coughlan: I do not know what the Deputy is on about.

The Taoiseach: Are the Deputies opposite finished?

An Ceann Comhairle: Let the Taoiseach finish.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Taoiseach has blown his chance.

The Taoiseach: Are they finished?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: He was afraid to face up to the problems and he ran out of it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach to finish.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: He ran out of it.

An Ceann Comhairle: I remind Deputy Kehoe this is Leaders' Questions.

The Taoiseach: Whenever the Whip is ready.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach, without interruption.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: If the Taoiseach had his way, he would have——

The Taoiseach: Whenever they are ready.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: The Taoiseach is seeking a diversion. He is trying to back out of it.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach, without interruption.

The Taoiseach: The position with Deputy Kenny is that he calls for reforms but when they are being implemented he opposes them.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I asked the Taoiseach a question.

The Taoiseach: A continuing reconfiguration is taking place in the health service. There will be a continuing emphasis on more——

Deputy Brian Hayes: Beds.

The Taoiseach: ——day places and day surgery.

Sorry, Deputy Brian Hayes is talking about beds.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Beds, yes, that was the question.

The Taoiseach: Beds do not determine the health service. There is more than a hospital service in developing our health service and the HSE is involved in a reform of the service.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: Tell that to my constituent who cannot get one this morning.

The Taoiseach: To stick to the point.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Bed numbers. Answer the question.

The Taoiseach: Sorry, Deputy Hayes. I will answer it in my own way. If he ever become leader, he can ask the questions.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach is answering Deputy Kenny's question. Please allow him to do so.

The Taoiseach: The whole purpose——

(Interruptions).

Deputy Noel Dempsey: They have no idea.

The Taoiseach: ——for driving these efficiencies is to maintain, not to cut, service.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: They are being cut every day.

The Taoiseach: They are not being cut every day. In fact, there have been improvements in the health services in a range of areas. Where waiting times were two to five years, they are now two to five months. In 60% of all of those specialties for which there are waiting lists, they were reduced during the course of this year, if the Deputies look at the statistics that have been produced by the relevant authorities.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Does the Taoiseach believe that?

The Taoiseach: If Deputy McCormack wants to portray the health service being totally dysfunctional in every respect, that is his point of view but it is not fair on those who are working in the health service and it is certainly not the experience of the vast majority who receive health services in this country.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Nobody said that.

The Taoiseach: That is not to contend for a moment that we do not have problems, but those problems are being dealt with on the basis of reforms of health services and we all know, if we were honest enough to admit it, that the *status quo* plus will not give us a sustainable level of services. We need work practice changes.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Why do they not do it then?

The Taoiseach: We must see——

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: ——and we are already seeing in the engagement that is taking place——

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Ten years.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: ——between the management and staff representatives that we have had efficiencies of €280 million alone this year, which will be repeated next year.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: What we have seen over the past ten years, to respond to Deputy Stagg, has been a continuing improvement——

Deputy Emmet Stagg: They poured money into a black hole.

The Taoiseach: ——and an increase in funding to the health service.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: It is also clear that resources alone will not provide the solutions to the health service, but continuing and concomitant reforms with it, and that is what the HSE management is engaged in. If people were fair and looked at the changes taking place, they would recognise that in many cases those changes have been for the better.

Deputy Brian Hayes: We only asked about beds. The Gettysburg Address all over again.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Gilmore, without interruption.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Taoiseach seems to think that things are fine in the health service. Yesterday there were 390 people on trolleys in accident and emergency units. That is just ten less than the number who were on trolleys on the day that the Minister, Deputy Harney, announced an emergency in accident and emergency in 2006.

On Wednesday last, the HSE published a service plan which stated that there would be €500 million cut from the health services and yesterday it emerged that the figure is now closer to €1 billion. There are 500 beds already gone out of the health service and it is proposed to remove another 600, that is, 1,100 beds. It costs €200,000 to provide a bed, in other words, €220 million that has already been spent in providing hospital beds will not be used under this plan.

We are faced with a situation this morning where the Taoiseach or his deputy will come in here tomorrow morning to propose that Dáil Éireann be suspended for six weeks — that we go out of business for six weeks — at a time when the country is facing its worst economic crisis, when our banks are in crisis and at a time when Ministers, including the Minister for Health and Children, are seeking additional cuts in services. This country needs a Government and leadership. It needs people who have got a handle on the problems that are facing the country and the people. It does not have that.

What we have——

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: A shambles.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: ——is a Government that is politically and economically dysfunctional, that is adrift and that is now staggering exhausted to the Christmas break.

One thing after another the Taoiseach is not getting right. He has not got the banks right. He told us on Sunday that there was going to be a €10 billion rescue plan and when I asked him direct questions on it yesterday, he could not answer a single one of them. We are no wiser today about what he is going to do about the banks than we were last week.

On the economy, the Taoiseach stated two weeks ago we did not need an economic recovery plan. At the beginning of this week he stated he had such a plan. We still have not seen it. We are now told it is some kind of a framework. When will we see this economic recovery plan that the Taoiseach has been talking about and dining over in Farnleigh? The problem is that the Taoiseach is not governing. The country has serious economic, social and service problems that are not being addressed by his Government and people are becoming increasingly depressed by that.

Everybody knows that the country is facing enormous challenges and economic difficulties and people are prepared to step up to the plate and to address them collectively. However, the problem we have in this country is that we do not have a Government which is giving leadership and direction and providing any sense that there is a solution and that we can get through these difficult times.

Is the Taoiseach serious about closing down the House for six weeks in these times? When will he tell us what the Government will do about the banks? When will we get the detail of these health cuts about which the Minister for Health and Children is talking? When will we see the economic recovery plan about which the Taoiseach has been talking?

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: There are more questions, as far as they want to go.

The Taoiseach: I reject the assertions that are being made by Deputies Gilmore and Kenny continuously in this House and that provide the soundbites for the daily business here.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: Deputy Gilmore spoke about people being prepared to step up to the plate. I believe people are prepared to step up to the plate and when they do, under the social partnership process, I will be interested to see what the Opposition in this House will do. The Opposition all agree with everything in theory but when it comes to practice, they oppose everything on every day, and they have no alternative.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: There were four questions.

Deputy Brian Hayes: We are the problem.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Let him finish now.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: It is manufacturing.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: With regard to the framework plan and what Deputy Gilmore stated about economic recovery——

An Ceann Comhairle: Hold on now. Fair is fair.

The Taoiseach: One will not get it here.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore was listened to in silence. The Taoiseach must be listened to in silence as well.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The blueshirts are back.

Deputy Michael Ring: What was that, Deputy O'Dea, about the Blueshirts? He himself is wearing one.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: The Taoiseach is losing it.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Another leader in the Fine Gael-Labour benches.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy McCormack, I have told you before this is Leaders' Question.

The Taoiseach: Another intellectual giant on the second bench over there.

Deputy Michael Ring: Deputy O'Dea is wearing a blue shirt.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Another Mayo leader.

The Taoiseach: Whenever they are ready. I would like to answer to the Deputy.

Deputy Michael Ring: The *Sunday Independent* will hear from Deputy O'Dea but we do not hear anything from him.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: We heard Deputy Ring was moving to the Labour Party.

An Ceann Comhairle: Have a chat about that later.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: On the other points raised by Deputy Gilmore, on the question of economic recovery, the Government has based its programme on the agreed programme for Government. A new economic situation has emerged over the past six months and we will set out a framework which will shape the debate around the social partnership talks that will take place in the coming weeks. What we must do is rely on some of the strengths of this economy which we have built up over the past ten years. The totally negative way in which this economy is being portrayed in every respect by the Opposition is not a fair appraisal of an economy that is under stress—

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: He is €8 billion out.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: —faces huge challenges, but one that has some strengths it can market and utilise.

With regard to the recapitalisation of the bank, I made the point yesterday that the negotiations between Government and banks continue and that we will protect the taxpayer in respect of any exposure in which it involves itself. We will do that in the way that we have done it up until now.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: When will they be walking the plank? That would be one idea.

The Taoiseach: Other countries have welcomed the initiatives that we have taken.

Deputy Joan Burton: That was 11 weeks ago.

The Taoiseach: We will continue to protect the taxpayer in the context of trying to maintain confidence and stability in our banking system.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Look at the Taoiseach's backbenchers.

The Taoiseach: With regard to the final matter Deputy Gilmore raised, it is our intention in the Government to continue to lead. It is our intention to engage with the social partners and to provide ourselves with the means by which we can deal with these challenges. These challenges will not be dealt with in the partisan way in which Deputy Gilmore wishes to deal with them. They will be dealt with through social partnership where we will set a credible timeframe within which health can be restored to the public finances on an agreed basis, which is the best and only way forward to deal with the magnitude of the challenge that faces us.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Will Deputy Cowen be here to do that?

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: I am not sure there is any leadership there anyway.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Taoiseach's problem is not the Opposition.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Let Deputy Gilmore put his question now please. Put your question. Deputy Gilmore, without interruption.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Taoiseach's problem is the Government that he is leading. It is not doing its job.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: You know a lot about co-operation. We have memories.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Taoiseach received more co-operation from the Opposition than any other Government in a long time and, frankly, a lot more than he deserves.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Face up to it.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: He received co-operation from the Opposition on Lisbon, when a problem arose last week in regard to the pig industry and generally over the past several months in respect of the economy.

Deputy Seán Power: What about the banks?

Deputy Joan Burton: We were right.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Government received the Opposition's co-operation——

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The Deputy speaks out of both sides of his mouth.

Deputy Brian Hayes: That is good coming from Deputy Dempsey.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore should put his question.

Deputy Seán Power: What about the banks?

Deputy Joan Burton: Our analysis was correct.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: As far this party was concerned, we have turned out to be absolutely right in terms of the criticisms we made. What the Taoiseach is seeking, and what he will not get, is a silent Opposition.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Silent like his backbenchers.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: He does not want a Opposition at all. He wants silence.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore, put your question please.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The one thing that constrains me in saying what I really want to say about the incompetence and the lack of drive, initiative and effort on the part of the Government, is that I might cause damage by doing so.

Deputy Johnny Brady: Spit it out.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: That is the biggest constraint that I have.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore, put your question.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I will be absolutely clear lest there be any doubt. This Government is appalling. It is a deadbeat Government.

An Ceann Comhairle: Put your question.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Eamon in Wonderland.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is not able to lead this country out of the problems it created in the first place.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It has driven us into the worst economic problem the country has experienced in decades.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: We have to deal with the problem.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore must put a question.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: Deputy Gilmore just comes here to criticise.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It has no idea about how to get out of it.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: It squandered it all.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to put his question.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I asked the Taoiseach four questions but with all his bluster he forgot to answer them. Is he serious about closing the Dáil for six weeks during this very difficult period? When will we be told exactly what he intends to do about the banks? What cuts will be made to the health service, when will they be outlined to us and will we have an opportunity to debate them or is it his intention to reveal them when the House is closed down for six weeks? Finally, when will we see the economic recovery plan? There is no point in telling us about discussions with the social partners in regard to the plan. It is the Taoiseach's responsibility to produce it. Neither is there any point in telling us that negotiations have been entered into with the very same bankers who got us into the banking problem in the first place.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Deputy Gilmore has asked the questions, so let the Taoiseach answer.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: When will the Taoiseach tell us what he intends to do about recapitalising the banks?

The Taoiseach: I have already answered Deputy Kenny regarding the health situation and have indicated that the need for more efficiencies and effective delivery of services is a critical part of maintaining services in the health service next year. That is on the basis that €14.7 billion is being made available to the health service, an increase which takes account of the €580 million cost of the nursing home subvention scheme over this year. Negotiations are ongoing between management and unions and there is every indication that we will achieve the work practice changes necessary to ensure that we have flexibilities, deliver services to the front line to the greatest extent possible and minimise adverse impacts on patients. That is the purpose of the exercise.

In regard to the banks, I have outlined the situation to the Deputy. The recapitalisation policy was enunciated in detail last Sunday. Proposals must now come from the banks with which we are in negotiations. It must be understood that the only interests I have are the stability of the financial system so that we have a banking system that serves the modern economy we have built and protecting the interests of the taxpayer in that effort. These are our primary considerations in dealing with the matter. We have indicated that proposals should be brought before the Government in early January.

The committees will return on 7 January and we will be involved in trade delegations to support Irish industry abroad. We will ensure the Government returns on 7 January. The Government is working hard, despite what Deputy Gilmore wants to say.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Bring the Dáil back on 7 January.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy can do all the name calling he wants because he is good at it. That is part of the rough and tumble of politics and I have no problem with it.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: The Taoiseach seems to have a problem with it.

The Taoiseach: However, I assure the Deputy that the Government will work hard on maintaining this country's reputation as a good economy, a place to do business and a location where enterprise can prosper. We also know that an Irish recovery can only happen when a global recovery takes place because this is an open economy and we are affected by what happens abroad. We are not total masters of our own economic destiny in every respect—

Deputy Seymour Crawford: You claimed we were.

The Taoiseach: —when one considers our membership of the eurozone and the fact that exchange rate policy is not decided here.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Pretend you did nothing.

The Taoiseach: We also know we have inherent strengths on which we can build. While we experience these difficulties in the economy, can we please desist from suggesting that the past ten years were an illusion and that we did not create the numbers of jobs that were created or improve the quality of life of our people?

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: Where has the money gone?

Deputy Joan Burton: You blew it.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: The chance was squandered.

The Taoiseach: We certainly did these things. We are now facing higher unemployment levels and we need to put in place policies that will help us to deal with the situation. This phase will pass. We have to indicate to the public where this economy can be in a number of years if we take the correct decisions now. I believe the correct decisions — the elephant in the room if Deputies would prefer — involve the discrepancy between expenditure and tax revenues which has emerged during the course of this year in particular as a result of the international downturn.

We have to be prepared to work with the social partners on finding a way to deal with the problem so that everyone gets behind the wheel to ensure we come through the difficult time that lies ahead. That is the approach of the Government and it is the right strategy. It is not a matter of instant gimmicks, soundbites for the media every morning or saying that we should have change but we will oppose change every time it is proposed.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: I am not asking the Opposition to be silent. That is a matter for Opposition Deputies.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Thanks a lot, that is great.

The Taoiseach: They are capable of articulating their own points of view and that is a part of our democracy.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Fantastic.

The Taoiseach: However, I will not have it said when I defend this Government's record that I am suddenly attacking the Opposition.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Why not defend the economic plan in here?

The Taoiseach: I am entitled to defend our record.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: It is indefensible.

The Taoiseach: It has been a proud record and now that we have entered a new situation, this Government will ensure our response is appropriate to the challenges we face.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: No change there.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Are we going to see the recovery plan?

Ceisteanna — Questions.

Official Engagements.

1. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if a date has been set for the proposed visit to Ireland of the French President, Mr. Sarkozy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37826/08]

2. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he has received an agenda for the December 2008 meeting of the European Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37827/08]

3. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he has received an agenda for the December 2008 EU summit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39365/08]

4. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach the bilateral meetings he plans to have with other EU leaders in advance of the December 2008 summit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39366/08]

5. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the special EU summit meeting in Brussels on 7 November 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40575/08]

6. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent meeting in Dublin with the President of the Czech Republic, Mr. Vaclav Klaus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40576/08]

7. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on his participation at the informal meeting of EU Heads of State and Government in Brussels on 7 November 2008. [40596/08]

8. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on his recent meeting in Dublin with the President of the Czech Republic, Mr. Vaclav Klaus. [40597/08]

9. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the European Council meeting on 7 November 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40652/08]

10. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the Finnish Prime Minister, Mr. Matti Vanhanen, on 27 November 2008. [43599/08]

11. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on his meeting with the Swedish Prime Minister, Mr. Fredrik Reinfeld, on 28 November 2008. [43600/08]

12. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent visit to Sweden; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44679/08]

13. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent visit to Finland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44680/08]

14. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on the outcome of his meetings with the British Prime Minister, Mr. Gordon Brown, in advance of the December 2008 European Council summit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45079/08]

15. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on the outcome of his meetings with President Sarkozy of France in advance of the December 2008 European Council summit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45080/08]

16. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on the outcome of his meetings with the German Chancellor, Ms Angela Merkel, in advance of the December 2008 European Council summit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45081/08]

17. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Summit on 11 and 12 December 2008. [45967/08]

18. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the recent European Council meeting in Brussels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46193/08]

19. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his participation at the latest European Council meeting. [46289/08]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 19, inclusive, together.

I travelled to Paris on 1 October to meet with President Sarkozy. During the meeting we undertook to work closely together between that date and the December European Council. President Sarkozy expressed interest in coming to Ireland again during his Presidency but this was overtaken by my visit to Paris on 5 December.

I travelled to Brussels on 7 November for an informal meeting of Heads of State and Government. The meeting was called by President Sarkozy to discuss the current financial crisis. While there are no formal conclusions from the meeting, it gave the Union the opportunity to frame its general approach to the G20 discussions in Washington on 15 November on examining ways of reforming the international financial system.

[The Taoiseach.]

I met with President Vaclav Klaus on 10 November as part of the three day State visit to Ireland by the President of the Czech Republic. We held a bilateral discussion, following which I hosted a Government lunch in honour of the President and Mrs. Klausová. President Klaus's visit, which was arranged earlier this year, was a return visit following President McAleese's State visit to the Czech Republic in 1999. As Deputies will be aware, the Czech Republic will assume the Presidency of the European Council on 1 January 2009. We discussed the priorities for the Czech Republic's forthcoming Presidency, the global financial crisis, the Lisbon treaty and bilateral relations between Ireland and the Czech Republic.

I travelled to Helsinki on Thursday, 27 November for an evening meeting with Prime Minister Vanhanen. While in Helsinki I also had a meeting with President Tarja Halonen. I then travelled from Helsinki to Stockholm for a meeting with Prime Minister Reinfeldt. On 3 December I met with Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker in Luxembourg. Following my meeting with Prime Minister Juncker I travelled to Berlin for a meeting with Chancellor Angela Merkel. The following morning I had a meeting with Prime Minister Gordon Brown in Downing Street. I met with the current President of the European Council, President Nicolas Sarkozy, in Paris on Friday, 5 December.

Our discussions were dominated by the Lisbon treaty and on his part, President Sarkozy confirmed that his contacts with the other member states made clear that the process of ratification could not be reopened. The meeting was part of an ongoing and intense cooperation with the French Presidency in our effort to secure a way forward that responds to the concerns of the Irish people while securing the support of all member states.

11 o'clock

After my meeting in Paris I travelled to Brussels for a meeting with European Commission President Barroso. Once again, discussions at our meeting focussed primarily on the Lisbon treaty. We also touched on the climate change and energy package.

During each of these meetings the main topic of discussion was the Lisbon treaty and in particular the concerns of the Irish electorate and how they needed to be addressed. We also discussed other key EU issues, including the climate change and energy package and the international financial crisis.

I also made a series of phone calls to my colleagues in the European Council in the run-up to the summit in Brussels on 11 and 12 December, during which I explained to them what we were hoping to achieve at the European Council, and sought their support. I attended the European Council on 11 and 12 December in Brussels and as I will be making a statement to the House later today I will merely give a summary account of the proceedings.

For Ireland, discussions of the Lisbon treaty was a major focus, and I explained to the Council the concerns of the Irish people. First I indicated that retaining a Commissioner was a real concern for the Irish people and it agreed to that. Second, I stated that I needed an undertaking that the other concerns of the Irish people, such as tax, family and ethical matters and the Common Security and Defence Policy would be addressed in a legally robust manner. This was also agreed upon.

On the basis of the agreements made at the European Council, and on the condition of our being able to satisfactorily put guarantees in place, I have said that I would be prepared to return to the public with the new package and to seek approval of it. It is important to stress that there is much detailed work to be carried out in the months ahead regarding the content of the guarantees to be provided. In addition to the Lisbon treaty, the Council also reached agreement in a number of other areas, most notably the energy climate change package and economic and financial measures.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Arising from the Taoiseach's lengthy reply, is he giving consideration to the appointment of Ireland's next Commissioner? Apparently some people want the current Commissioner to come back here.

An Ceann Comhairle: Whether he is coming or going, I do not see a question put down on it here.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Given the delicate circumstances under which the Taoiseach worked in Brussels and Paris, this country's reputation has been damaged somewhat in the past 12 months. It is very important that a strong and early nomination would be made in order to secure a priority commissionership.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is going completely outside the boundaries of these questions, with all due respect.

Deputy Enda Kenny: One of the central issues of the Taoiseach's discussions in Brussels and Paris——

Deputy Dinny McGinley: An Irish Commissioner

Deputy Enda Kenny: ——regarded the concerns expressed by the Irish people about each country having a Commissioner. I am merely asking the Taoiseach an extension of that question.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is asking who it will be, which is a different matter.

Deputy Tom Hayes: It is a very sensible question.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Ceann Comhairle would ask it himself were he standing over here.

An Ceann Comhairle: Carry on.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: He would be a friend of the Ceann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy knows what I am saying.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I know the Taoiseach will not answer the question but I am asking him anyway if he is turning his thoughts to the early nomination of a Commissioner to represent the country, assuming a satisfactory conclusion is reached and the people of the country endorse the Lisbon treaty whenever they are asked, be it the back end of next year or another time.

Is it intended that the Government will participate in the €200 billion economic stimulus plan presented by the President of the European Commission, Mr. José Manuel Barroso? This is clearly a costly but important exercise. We are all aware of the European position and if Europe does not lead on all this alternative recyclable green agenda, it will be difficult to get other countries to follow suit. Has the Government decided to participate in the Barroso plan and teased out the cost and strategy implications for Ireland?

The Taoiseach: I have not been turning my mind to the early appointment of the next Commissioner. On the second point, from our perspective the stimulus brought to the economy in view of our financial position has been the maintenance of our capital investment programme, which is twice the European Union average. Were it the European average, the capital programme would be approximately €4 billion next year, when we will have a programme of €8 billion.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Has the Taoiseach given consideration to a matter I referred to him before, the opting in to the justice and security issue which was part of the Lisbon treaty? I make the point because the Taoiseach is aware that over €700 million of drugs was seized off the Irish coast a number of months ago and earlier this year over €100 million of drugs was washed up at Mizen Head. Given the scale of international crime now, be it from human trafficking or the fact that this country is both a conduit and destination for serious amounts of drugs, does the Taoiseach consider it would be an important element of our central participation in Europe to opt into the justice and security element of the treaty?

The Taoiseach is well aware of the academic arguments put up by legal minds on the difference between common and civil law. The people of the country would like to know that the Government wants to participate fully — and demonstrate this — in all elements of justice and security, so our citizens are safe and our young people are not continuously exposed to the pressures of drugs, drug abuse and drug addiction. That scale of crime is happening on a continuous basis.

The Taoiseach: Our position on the justice and home affairs area is to participate as fully as possible. There is a reserve in terms of ensuring the difference between common and civil law is respected and understood. We are legally advised there may be occasions where that full participation might not be possible as would otherwise be the case. Our demeanour in the area is to work co-operatively with colleagues in the European Union and further afield, such as in Interpol and other organisations, to deal with the worldwide criminal networks which run the drugs trade and bring much agony, sorrow and tragedy to so many lives. They blight many societies in the modern world in which we live.

These are legal questions which have been assessed by our Attorney General and the Government has followed that advice. All our colleagues are aware that it is our full intention to participate in all of these matters and our reserve is simply in the event of there being a legal problem by doing so.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I wish to ask a few questions about the conclusions reached at the summit. It was agreed that if the Lisbon treaty is ratified and comes into effect, each member state will have the right to appoint a Commissioner. Has any consideration been given to what will happen with regard to the appointment of the new Commission if the Lisbon treaty is not ratified?

There were agreements on legal guarantees in a number of areas in respect of taxation and security and defence policy. I do not see any great difficulty with these because, as I read it, they were not affected by the Lisbon treaty in any event. There is also a provision for a guarantee that the provisions of the Irish Constitution regarding the right to life, education and family are not in any way affected by the Treaty of Lisbon, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the justice and home affairs provisions of the treaty.

We all understand that the abortion issue was raised during the course of the referendum on the Lisbon treaty. I cannot recall anybody raising issues relating to education during the course of the referendum campaign. In so far as family issues were raised, they certainly were not central. I have been through the research which was done following the referendum, but I cannot see anywhere in it that family or education issues surfaced as matters of concern. Perhaps the Taoiseach could explain where those issues emerged from, the nature of the legal guarantees being sought, and how that will be squared with the charter of fundamental rights.

I also wish to ask the Taoiseach about workers' rights issues, which he raised during the European summit. The text of the conclusions states that high importance will be given to

those issues but not legal guarantees, as is the case in the other areas. Can the Taoiseach explain why that is so and what he proposes to do to address it?

The Taoiseach: As regards the issue of a commissioner per member state, in the event of the Lisbon treaty not being ratified the Nice Treaty arrangements will be operable. Those arrangements state that when the membership reaches 27 the Council will have to agree to a reduction of that number and provide a solution along the lines of the Nice treaty. Therefore one cannot guarantee a Commissioner per member state if the Lisbon treaty is not ratified. If it is ratified, these conclusions confirm that the Heads of State and Government are prepared to undertake a procedure which will ensure that every member state has a Commissioner. That situation cannot continue under the Nice treaty. The Lisbon treaty currently states that a Commissioner per member state will be available to every member of the Union until 2014, whereupon on a principle of rotation a reduced number, to 18, will be agreed. That is an important point which arose during the course of the referendum. I am glad to note that the commitment given by the European Council last week is quite clear in that respect.

As regards other matters, we are involved in work in progress and further detailed texts will have to be worked out. We can keep the Deputy and his party apprised of that. The Deputy raised questions concerning the right to life, the family, the right to denominational education and other issues, some of which concern minority groups in this country.

The issue of workers rights is about ensuring that, by ratifying the treaty, we incorporate the charter — which is part of the treaty — into the treaties of the European Union. On any objective reading of the situation, it is accepted that that would greatly enhance and protect workers' rights in future. The difference in some respects is that the workers' rights issue is not simply an Irish-specific question, it is one for all 27 member states. The other issues are Irish-specific ones, but that is not to say for one moment that we do not accord importance to this matter, which was raised during the last campaign. There are dossiers going through various sectoral councils at the moment dealing with delineating the exact implications of certain cases that were brought before the European Court of Justice, which were specific to those particular states. However, they obviously caused concern as to whether they would have a wider application or — in respect of the issues that were dealt with in those cases — what policy response will emerge between member states that would be agreed at Council level. Those dossiers will continue to be addressed in the forthcoming Czech Presidency and probably during the Swedish Presidency as well. That is the context in which these matters arose.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I am still not clear about the references in the text of the summit conclusions to education and the family, or what is contemplated in those areas. Perhaps the Taoiseach might return to that.

I acknowledge that if the Charter of Fundamental Rights was adopted, it would strengthen the rights of workers both here and elsewhere in the EU. It would also strengthen the right to collective bargaining. As matters stand, however, that charter has not been adopted. That aside, would the Taoiseach acknowledge that the judgments in the Laval case and other somewhat similar cases before the European Court of Justice, have given rise to concern about the possibility of undermining pay and working conditions which are accepted as the norm here? Does he agree that it would be necessary to have those issues satisfactorily addressed in advance of another referendum on Europe?

Does the Taoiseach intend to involve the Opposition parties, particularly those which have supported the Lisbon treaty, in constructing the texts of the legal guarantees, assurances and other matters which are to be concluded as part of this process?

The Taoiseach: Providing support for vulnerable workers is of central concern to the Government. The development of European policy and practice reflected in the Union's legislation has been hugely positive for workers in Europe, including Irish workers. To take but one example, this is reinforced by the adoption of the directive on temporary agency work. This measure continues the long established pattern of significant and effective protection for workers being reinforced by and, in many instances, originating with European initiatives. It is that tradition and its continued potential which was reflected in the decisions of the executive of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the European Trade Union Confederation to support the Lisbon treaty. As I said earlier, through the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the draft treaty represents a significant advance in the articulation of workers' rights, not least in respect of the operation of collective bargaining.

Regarding the ECJ judgments to which Deputy Gilmore referred, the particular issues raised in, for example, the Laval and Viking cases relate to the specific social partnership and collective bargaining context which exists in Scandinavian countries. Therefore, the judgments are case-specific. Our legal advice is that there are no particular implications arising from the ECJ judgments in these cases for Ireland, with the particular arrangements in place as part of the Irish industrial relations system. We have a strong body of employment rights legislation which protects workers, including posted workers — that is posted from another EU member state — who have the same rights as Irish workers under Irish law. It is important to note that the transitional agreement, which was recently ratified by IBEC and ICTU, will serve to bolster and enhance our body of employment rights legislation. That said, the Government has made the case to our European counterparts that these ECJ judgments should be discussed among the social partners at EU level. In this context, we welcome the fact that the European Commission, backed by the Troika of French, Swedish and Czech Presidencies, has asked the EU social partners, as part of their work programme in 2009, to undertake an analysis of the balance between workers' rights and competitiveness issues, having particular regard to the ECJ rulings. In the time available to us, we will continue to use that process to the greatest extent we possibly can, as a means of bringing the necessary clarity and orientation to that debate, which will provide reassurance to those who may continue to have concerns in this area. We would also be glad to apprise party leaders in the House, particularly those who support the treaty, of our efforts to go ahead with the envisaged detailed work arising out of the conclusions and to listen to and see in what way we can accommodate the ideas or proposals of others as part of a collective effort as comprehensively as possible.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Will the Taoiseach confirm that, at the European Council meeting last week, he secured no changes and no commitments to make any changes to the actual text of the Lisbon treaty? Given that no changes have been secured and no commitments to make any changes to the actual text have been made, why has the Taoiseach agreed to put the same treaty to the electorate, which has already rejected it? In a previous manifestation, it was rejected by other European electorates.

The Government has told us that key issues that arose in the referendum will be dealt with by what have been described as legally binding guarantees. What is the nature of those guarantees? Will the Taoiseach spell out for this Deputy and the House exactly what it is that the Government is proposing? How would he respond to this Deputy's opinion and that of many others that the guarantees will be of questionable enforceability and will not measure up to amendments or protocols to the treaty, the necessary critical elements? Will they amount to nothing other than political declarations with no legally binding powers? Is it the case, as indicated by President Sarkozy, that some declarations or all of what has been suggested by the Taoiseach and other national commentators on these recent developments will accompany the accession treaty for Croatia in 2010 or 2011?

The Taoiseach: Regarding the questions raised, this is an exercise in democracy. Concerns were raised by our people about the Lisbon treaty, which meant the treaty was rejected last May in a referendum. The Government undertook a process, as did the Oireachtas, to see in what way we could first of all identify the main concerns. As the Deputy knows, different points of view were expressed on different issues by people who voted on any particular side, not all of them mutually supportive or mutually coherent.

We sought to identify those issues and a very structured process was undertaken, both in terms of a modern means of assessing public opinion and also, of course, ensuring the Oireachtas was fully involved in bringing forward a number of groups and discussing the matter publicly in our committee system in a transparent and open manner. Having done that, the Oireachtas sub-committee came forward with, while not a unanimous report, what was very much the view of the vast majority of those who sat on the committee, namely, that the concerns that influenced people to vote in any particular way could be identified. Those are reflected in the main in the conclusions suggested.

The Oireachtas sub-committee has other recommendations in respect of national procedures and national issues that could be dealt with at country level and that do not require the agreement or consent of our member state colleagues. These relate to how we deal with European legislation, scrutinise it and provide a further reassurance to people that, not only has the appraisal undertaken been rigorous on the part of governments or the Commission in terms of initiating legislation and the subsequent work at Council of Ministers level, but that the issue of subsidiarity should be given expression in this House to a greater degree than has been the case before. This point is well taken.

I have always believed that, as a proponent of European issues, we should contextualise many of the issues that we discuss here to a far greater extent, whether they are economic, social or cultural, in the context of the European Union itself. There is an interdependence and interlinking, not just in terms of financial resources in many respects, because we are moving on from that phase of membership, but also in terms of policy formulation and where competence lies in these areas, where there is a very strong European influence.

We need to articulate that to a far greater extent in our national debate on a whole range of questions in order for people to see the relevance and importance of European Union affairs in the daily lives of our own people. It is not simply a constitutional matter. While European issues have been dominated by an effort to accommodate enlargement and to define structures and systems within the European Union and its institutions to make it responsive to the wider needs of the new united Europe in the post-communist era in which we live, the constitutionalisation questions have, perhaps, dominated to an extent that has bemused many. We wish to move on from that.

The Lisbon treaty, perhaps, provides us with the best way of doing it. It represents the seven-eight year compromise that was reached after much deliberation. It is specific in terms of protecting member states' interests and accommodating their concerns, perhaps by its complexity of structure, but this is an inevitable outcome of the accommodating and inclusive nature of the Union itself in reaching agreement on matters of importance to member states in a coherent fashion.

For that reason, it is important that we seek to address the concerns of the Irish people. It is totally open to them to come back to any issue at any time where our national interests are at stake. I strongly believe that our national interests are at stake. Deputy Ó Caoláin may disagree, which is his entitlement, but I strongly believe it. From the position I hold, I am all the more convinced of it as every week and month passes.

[The Taoiseach.]

Be that as it may and to answer the specific questions raised, I am glad to note from Deputy Ó Caoláin's remarks that, if it were to occur that we would be able to obtain legal guarantees of protocol status, it would give him the reassurance that he requires in these matters, since he seems to be emphasising the importance of legal effect of the concerns raised being provided. I do not wish to move beyond the conclusions as they are currently stated at the December Council meeting or to anticipate the outcome of further discussions that must take place, but I have a clear political understanding that the legal effect that we will require can and will be forthcoming subject to a satisfactory conclusion of the work that is yet to be done.

This is an indication of the willingness of colleague member states to seek to accommodate the concerns that we have democratically assessed in this Parliament and that we are now communicating to colleagues in the European Union. If it is the case that this is ultimately what is to emerge, I would be delighted if it were an influential part of Deputy Ó Caoláin's thinking on this issue for the future. I would welcome that.

The Deputy asked a question about ratification of the treaty. We are involved in a discussion with 26 member states. It has been portrayed by some who oppose the treaty that our work on this matter began two or three weeks ago. One would be quite naive to suggest that the objective results achieved at the Council meeting last week could have been achieved on the basis of two or three weeks work. In the aftermath of the rejection of the Lisbon treaty, I went to a European Council meeting where I informed the Council of the rejection of the treaty and the need for that rejection to be respected. In other words, if they were ever to return to this matter, they would need to try to address the concerns which caused the people to reject the treaty. It was made clear to me that a re-ratification of the treaty was not an option the other 26 member states wished to consider. We can take one of two approaches from that. We could decide there is no more we can do or we can decide to work in solidarity with those member states to try to resolve the problems that were specific to Ireland's rejection of the treaty. I took the second approach because that is in the interests of the country and that we have an obligation to do that.

The response that is emerging from member states indicates a respect for the concerns to which I refer and a preparedness to give legal effect in the future for those concerns and to deal with the fundamental question relating to the representativeness of the Commission — that is, one Commissioner per member state — at all times. That is an advance on both the Lisbon and Nice treaties. Had I done nothing, we would have lost our Commissioner on the basis of the Nice arrangements. By engaging and negotiating with member states and asking them to respect the issues raised by the Irish people, we have come with a conclusion that is specific in respect of the institutions. This has not happened previously in respect of other countries that found themselves in a position similar to that of Ireland. Other member states are prepared to make this institutional change and to commit to it now in an effort to convey to the Irish people their willingness to address that important matter so people can reconsider the treaty. Had I taken the approach suggested by some, what we have achieved might not have been possible.

I understand the Deputy's party, in the context of the criticism it has offered, has set down a range of issues in respect of which changes should be made. The problem is that the other 26 member states are not minded to do so. We must, therefore, make a decision: should we address and try to deal adequately with the main concerns identified Sub-Committee on Ireland's Future in the European Union or should we continue to set the bar so high, as the Deputy's party has done, to ensure that matters will never be renegotiated?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Taoiseach referred to people not being minded to make changes. If Sinn Féin had accepted that position over the years, the dramatic and important developments——

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Deputy's party has ways of softening people up.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——in the North of this island would never have occurred. The significant achievements made in the past 12 months were brought about because people were prepared to continue to play their part and to imaginatively explore the options. Does the Taoiseach accept that he has not so explored the mandate the electorate gave him in the referendum on the Lisbon treaty to the effect that he should engage directly in respect of this matter? Let us ignore the fact that other member states are not minded to introduce changes. We have heard that mantra on many occasions from the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The reality is that the Taoiseach had a task to undertake. Does he accept he has not taken action in respect of that task?

The Taoiseach stated this matter relates to democracy. That is certainly the case. However, whether he has been engaged in an exercise of democracy is another matter. Many of us who voted "No" can detect neither respect nor regard for the position we articulated when we made our choice in the referendum held earlier this year.

The Taoiseach did not reply to a number of the questions I posed. In respect of President Sarkozy's contribution *vis-à-vis* the expected treaty relating to Croatia's accession in 2010 or 2011, will the Taoiseach state whether, unlike the position heretofore, this treaty and all future accession treaties will not be put to the Irish electorate? If President Sarkozy is indicating that the legally binding declarations relating to Ireland are to be part of such a proposition and if it is the case that these will not be put to the Irish electorate, does it not follow that the Taoiseach is asking the people to buy a pig in a poke? On foot of his earlier comments, will the Taoiseach acknowledge that he does not have a clear vision, in written form or otherwise, of what was allegedly agreed in the run-up to and during the European Council meeting which took place last week?

An Ceann Comhairle: Other Members are offering. Questions to the Taoiseach cannot be allowed to last as long as *Paradise Lost*.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Does the Taoiseach accept he does not possess a clear formula to allow him to answer my question regarding the status of these oft referred to legally binding declarations? Does he also accept that, critically and clearly, no changes to the Lisbon treaty as presented to the Irish electorate, either by amendments to the text or by protocols, have been secured, and that is the critical fault line?

The Taoiseach: It is best to use the language of the conclusions to avoid confusion. That is if one is not interested in spreading confusion. The conclusions state they are legally binding guarantees.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Will the Taoiseach explain how they are legally binding?

The Taoiseach: I just explained that I have a clear political understanding with regard to obtaining legally binding guarantees as per the conclusions. We are in a work-in-progress phase. We will carry out the detailed work and when that is done, we will bring them before the House and explain them further. We will then hear from the European Council as to how it wishes to give legal effect to those guarantees. As President of the European Council, President Sarkozy indicated at the Council meeting, at the press conference which followed it and at the

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European Parliament yesterday what he believes will be the means by which these legally binding guarantees will be given. I am prepared to await a formal decision from the Council on those matters. However, I have a clear political understanding which allowed me to provide the conditional commitment I gave. If I did not have such an understanding, I would not have given that commitment.

It is on the basis of that clear understanding that we are proceeding to the next phase involving detailed work on the text. The Deputy will have to accept that is the position at present. When the detail is completed, we will bring it before the House and have a further discussion on it and see what is the position at that point.

Deputy Ó Caoláin made a point about people being minded and not having put the case sufficiently. I put the case. He referred to his party's involvement in compromise. He had to make some fundamental compromises in order to achieve political progress. However, that does not disbar him from continuing to pursue his political vision for the country, as I pursue mine. I do so with quite transparent and unsophisticated democratic principles. The Deputy's experience could perhaps inform him better than anything I could say. One advances the position nationally in so far as is possible, based on the ability of others to agree with one.

Sinn Féin or the Deputy might prefer other changes to be made to the Lisbon treaty. However, the treaty can only be agreed, not on the basis of a diktat of his party or mine, but on the basis of a consensus agreed among 27 member states. The other 26 member states have come forward with a consensus position and they must take account of our concerns. They are seeking, willing and anxious to do so out of respect for the Irish people, for the fact they want Ireland to be fully part of the Union and in terms of the additional changes to the Lisbon treaty construct. The Deputy suggests there has been no change. Where in the Lisbon treaty does it say there will be one Commissioner per member state? It does not say that.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It does not say in the Nice treaty that we cannot.

Deputy Dick Roche: It does.

The Taoiseach: To be clear, the Nice treaty says that when the Commission reaches a size of 27 members it must be reduced.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It is to be reduced to 27.

The Taoiseach: There is no need for confusion.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Let us stick to the facts.

The Taoiseach: Yes, let us stick to the facts. Is there sufficient generosity in Deputy Ó Caoláin to acknowledge that we have achieved, as a result of discussions and negotiations with 26 other members states, one Commissioner per member state.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Is there sufficient generosity in the Taoiseach to acknowledge—

The Taoiseach: Is that accepted?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: —that only the majority of Irish people voted “No” he would not have sought that and was prepared to have us accept far less than is even provided for in the Nice treaty?

An Ceann Comhairle: Never mind generosity. Please allow the Taoiseach to finish his reply.

The Taoiseach: No.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Does the Taoiseach have the generosity to acknowledge that?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Caoláin cannot interrupt again.

The Taoiseach: My answer to that question is that were I to accept the “No” vote and do nothing about it I would have to have a Commissioner under the Nice treaty arrangements, which were worse than the existing Lisbon treaty arrangements. We put forward a proposal in the December Council that is better than the Lisbon treaty position.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It does not have to be worse under the Lisbon treaty.

The Taoiseach: That is the situation.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Not at all.

The Taoiseach: That is the legal situation and the Deputy cannot get away from it.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It could be done by way of unanimity.

The Taoiseach: What the Deputy cannot get away from is his continuous effort——

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: No.

The Taoiseach: ——to suggest that to reject the Lisbon treaty puts Ireland in a better position. To reject the Lisbon treaty puts Ireland in a worse position.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: No. We want to secure agreement in the interests of the Irish people and the broad electorate.

The Taoiseach: Anyone who knows anything about politics or political economy understands that point. We are engaged in a democratic process. We must address the concerns that the people raised, as they are entitled to do, in terms of the democratic decision they made last May. That is what we are doing.

Sinn Féin has decided to use a different tactic, namely, to go about suggesting to the Irish people — I cannot recall how many amendments Sinn Féin was seeking, it may have been 25, in its famous document produced within a week of the rejection of the Lisbon treaty — that if the Government does not achieve what it suggests it cannot put the treaty to the people. Deputy Ó Caoláin has a problem in that the other 26 member states do not agree with him.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: That is not the way that was presented.

The Taoiseach: The other member states do not agree with Sinn Féin.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The only one trying to paint that picture is the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: One cannot dictate what people should do. People sometimes think one can dictate but one cannot. One must work with practicalities and realities and deal with the concerns of the Irish people. The people must be given the reassurances they need not only in respect of sensitive issue in regard to our Constitution but in regard to workers’ rights and the Commission. We must give a clear indication to the people that if they vote “Yes” Ireland will

[The Taoiseach.]

keep its Commissioner. That, perhaps, is the reason the poster erected by Sinn Féin will be redundant if we ever get to the next referendum.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It is our duty and responsibility to point out to the electorate the deficiencies contained in that which the Taoiseach and other parties in this House have been promoting for so long. We will continue to inform them truthfully.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Costello.

Deputy Joe Costello: I agree with the Taoiseach that there has been major progress in terms of the achievement of a Commissioner for each member state and that should be acknowledged.

I wish to put a question to which there are two aspects. The Taoiseach stated that his function was to ensure that the concerns expressed by the Irish people, in so far as we understood them, in terms of their rejection of the Lisbon treaty referendum, were addressed. There are two ways the Government can do this. It must first show good faith by addressing the issue of workers' rights and protecting the hard won rights of workers in this country.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Hear, hear.

Deputy Joe Costello: Why has the services directive not been passed into law? We have only until the end of next year to do so. We must address this issue quickly.

Also, we should pass the agency workers' directive which is currently awaiting transposition in Irish law. Why not do that? Why has the migrant workers' directive not been passed? It is causing mayhem in terms of employment of migrant workers in the service industry and, especially in restaurants, an issue raised yesterday by the migrant workers' centre? What is the position in respect of the compliance Bill? We must deal with that legislation. The Government must, first and foremost, show good faith at home.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Hear, hear.

Deputy Joe Costello: The Taoiseach also stated that the Viking and Laval cases do not concern us. They could concern us if a business from another country were to take a similar case. The European Court of Justice would then have to determine in respect of national law and practises and the freedoms of the European Union. We must put in place a legal mechanism that will protect us in the future. Otherwise, there is not much sense in putting a new referendum to the people.

The Taoiseach: On the first matter, the parliamentary committee outlined various recommendations, some of which must be addressed with member state colleagues at European Council level and others which must be dealt with at national level. In the context of employment rights legislation and so on, it should be pointed out that we have a good record on employment rights. Employment rights legislation which protects migrants workers has been bolstered. For example, on the posted workers issue, these people now have the same rights as Irish workers under Irish law. Other issues are being discussed in the social partnership process. We have a voluntary industrial relations system.

Deputy Joe Costello: Let us show some urgency about this.

The Taoiseach: There is urgency in respect of this issue. However, there are also issues to be dealt with such as how we balance workers' rights——

Deputy Joe Costello: When does the Government propose to do this?

The Taoiseach: —with competitiveness issues in the interests of maintaining workers in employment, which is also a critical workers' right. We must consider these matters in a sensible way.

There is no major ideological chasm between us in respecting the rights of workers, which is something to which I adhere. What we need to do is ensure this is addressed in a context that does not affect competitiveness or makes less likely that we will have more rather than fewer workers in employment. We must also maintain standards. I have no problem with any of this. It is something to which I subscribe. I was formerly a Minister for Labour.

Dialogue is taking place within social partnership. We will do anything we can to progress this issue and to provide reassurance on these matters. They are issues, at a national level, that must be considered with others in the Parliament during the coming months. Of course, we should do this. We must be helpful, open and co-operative in these matters. The contention was made that if one voted "Yes" to the Lisbon treaty one would be adopting a construct; that there is no such thing as a social market or social Europe and the European Union is hostile to workers' rights. We all know that the genesis of much of the most progressive social legislation in our employment legislation originated from the European Union and the Commission.

It was the late Paddy Hillery who, through the first Commission on Social Affairs, introduced equal treatment and equal rights directives which have been transposed not alone into Irish law but European law. This is an area where the European Union has differentiated itself from the neo-liberal market economics of other major trading blocs in the world. We are seeking all the time to strike this balance, not because we are trying to dilute its importance but because we want to ensure that the context within which workers' rights are exercised is an economy that will provide employment and a more fulfilled life for workers. It is a difficult balance and is a matter of judgment and of changing circumstance.

I take the point that this is not an exact science. In making these I am not suggesting that one is not committed to inclusion and to dealing with reassurances in this area. We need to do so with that context in mind. For this reason, and if, as Deputy Costello stated, I am to proceed in good faith on these matters, which is my intention, I do not believe this should be an issue between us.

Requests to Move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 32.

An Ceann Comhairle: Anois, iarratais chun tairisceana a dhéanamh an Dáil a chur ar athló faoi Bhuan Ordú 32. We now come to deal with Requests to move the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: I see the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, whether the Government will seek publication of a report by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland into issues relating to child protection procedures in the diocese of Cloyne, if the Government will confirm if this report was commissioned by the Department of Health and Children, if the recommendations of that report have been implemented, and if certain persons have been removed from positions of responsibility in relation to child protection.

Deputy James Bannon: I see the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of extreme national importance, namely, the huge risk posed to public health by the announcement that the HSE must save up to €900 million in 2009, with acute services in the midlands and the south east facing review next year and many developments uncertain.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pat Breen: I seek the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to discuss a matter of extreme importance, namely, health and safety issues regarding farmers who are desperately trying to complete slatted house units in order to comply with the deadline of 31 December under the farm waste management scheme. Two people have already been seriously injured while erecting slatted houses on farms in County Clare in the past two weeks. The deadline is unreasonable and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food must put forward a case at this late stage to extend the deadline due to the continuing inclement weather conditions before lives are lost.

An Ceann Comhairle: Tar éis breithnithe a dhéanamh ar na nitheardaithe, níl siad in ord faoi Bhuan Ordú 32. 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. *a*12, motion re Spent Convictions Bill 2007; No. 25, statements on European Council, Brussels; No. 12 motion re leave to introduce Supplementary Estimate [Vote 31] and, subject to the agreement of No. 12, to take Supplementary Estimate [Vote 31]; No. 4, Appropriation Bill 2008 — Order for Second Stage and Second and Remaining Stages; No. 24, Finance (No. 2) Bill 2008 — Report Stage (resumed) and Final Stages; and No. 37, Spent Convictions Bill 2007 — Second Stage [subject to the agreement of No. *a*12]. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that: (1) the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. tonight and business shall be interrupted on the conclusion of No. 61 — motion re housing (resumed), which shall be taken for 90 minutes at 7 p.m. or on the conclusion of No. 24, whichever is the later; (2) No. *a*12 shall be decided without debate; (3) the proceedings on No. 25 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 80 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply: the statements shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 60 minutes, and shall be confined to the Taoiseach and to the main spokespersons for the Fine Gael Party, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin, who shall be called upon in that order, who may share their time, and which shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case; (ii) immediately following the statements, a Minister or Minister of State shall take questions for a period not exceeding 20 minutes; (4) the suspension of sitting under Standing Order 23(1) shall take place at 1.30 p.m., or on the conclusion of No. 25, whichever is the later, until 2.30 p.m.; (5) No. 12 shall be decided without debate and any division demanded thereon shall be taken forthwith, and subject to the agreement of No. 12, Supplementary Estimate [Vote 31] shall be moved and the proceedings thereon shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 65 minutes, and any division demanded thereon shall be taken forthwith, and the following arrangements shall apply: the speeches shall be confined to a Minister or Minister of State and to the main spokespersons for the Fine Gael Party, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin, who shall be called upon in that order, who may share their time, and which shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case; a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed five minutes; (6) No. 4 shall be taken today and Second and Remaining Stages shall be decided without debate by one question which shall be put from the Chair, and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Finance; and (7) the proceedings on the Report Stage (resumed) and Final Stages of No. 24 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 7 p.m. by one question which shall be put from the Chair and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Finance.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are seven proposals to put to the House. Is the proposal that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. agreed to?

Deputy Enda Kenny: I agree with the point Deputy Gilmore made in his leader's question about the Dáil rising until the end of January. I wish to comment on Dáil sittings. The Taoiseach rightly pointed out that the committees are back on 7 January. I respect the fact that Ministers will be abroad at some stage in January on delegations and carrying out national business. That is part of Government responsibility and it is necessary that, on occasion, Ministers lead delegations abroad to make further connections with other countries on behalf of this country. I respect that.

However, at a time when 10,000 people a month are losing their jobs, and when the most time off for those who have jobs is a week at Christmas time, it is perverse that the Parliament — the Dáil — should be off until the end of January. It has always been a matter of perception that because the committees are back, the Dáil is in session. That is true to an extent.

I object to the Order of Business because I would like the Dáil to come back on 7 January, the same day as the committees, to conduct its business on behalf of the people. I know the Chief Whip does not like that but 10,000 people a month are losing their jobs and those who have jobs have a week off at Christmas and that is it. There is a real job of work to be done for the country. There is a real challenge facing Government and a need for drive, enthusiasm and leadership. I will accept the Order of Business if the Taoiseach tells me that the Dáil will be recalled on 7 January but, if not, I will vote against it.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I agree with what Deputy Kenny has said. This House should be back on 7 January. When he was replying to me earlier the Taoiseach indicated the Government would be back on 7 January. He outlined that some Ministers have overseas commitments, which I understand, and that can be facilitated in the normal course of how we do our business.

It is important there is public confidence in politics. A Dáil recess up to the end of January will scandalise the public. Here we are in the middle of an economic problem and the Dáil is going into recess until the end of January. The history of Dáil recesses to the end of January goes back to a time when the budget was at the end of January. The rationale for it was that the Dáil did not come back after the Christmas recess until the end of January because the Government was dealing with the budget and needed time to prepare the budget. That no longer applies. There is no justification whatever for a recess up to the end of January.

I support what Deputy Kenny has said. The House should be back in business on 7 January. I support also his opposition to the Order of Business unless the Taoiseach can give us an assurance on the matter.

Deputy Alan Shatter: Of course there might be a budget in January.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Tomorrow's Order Paper will inform us of the Government's intentions regarding the recess over Christmas. As the Taoiseach is present today can he bring the Order Paper forward and advise the House as to what it will reflect tomorrow?

Yesterday, in my case, but other voices again this morning have reflected on the serious situation that now stands in the offing in regard to the health service. Yesterday we thought cuts of €500 million were planned but that has risen to some €1 billion in real terms in cuts within the health service. That needs to be addressed. The issue is critically important and it affects every one of us, irrespective of politics, as every citizen will be in need of health care in this State at some point in their lives. There is great concern already in regard to the haemorrhage of services and the continued move towards centralisation and privatisation. We need to

[Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.]

have a full-blown debate on the floor of this House regarding the Government's intention for the health service in 2009. I ask that the Taoiseach accommodate that as early as possible, if not before Christmas at the earliest resumption date in the new year.

The Taoiseach: I reiterate that the Government will be back at work, indeed before 7 January. There will be a Government meeting on 7 January but the Government will be back before then due to the pressing issues we are dealing with. In the course of the coming weeks

I have indicated that as a result of meeting with the social partners there will be intensive discussions on bringing forward a plan for economic renewal, which will include a fiscal stability programme based on those discussions. We can come into this House and debate them. Similarly, that will also be the case with the service plan for 2009 for the health service.

It is important to point out that there will not be inactivity either on a Government or parliamentary level until the end of January. From the beginning of January there will be parliamentary activity in the committee system and the Government needs the time and ability to get on with that work we are talking about in terms of preparing such a plan for economic renewal with the social partners and also engaging in necessary trade delegations out of this country as we try to maintain and shore up the orders that Irish business is finding hard to win in the present circumstances.

Question put: "That the proposal that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 76; Níl, 64.

Tá

Ahern, Dermot.
 Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Andrews, Chris.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Aylward, Bobby.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Áine.
 Brady, Cyprian.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Browne, John.
 Byrne, Thomas.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Pat.
 Collins, Niall.
 Conlon, Margaret.
 Connick, Seán.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Cullen, Martin.
 Curran, John.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Fahey, Frank.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Michael.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Flynn, Beverley.
 Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Grealish, Noel.

Harney, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Healy-Rae, Jackie.
 Hocht, Máire.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Kenneally, Brendan.
 Kennedy, Michael.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Michael P.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 Mansergh, Martin.
 Martin, Micheál.
 McEllistrim, Thomas.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M.J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghail, Seán.
 O'Brien, Darragh.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keeffe, Batt.
 O'Keeffe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 O'Sullivan, Christy.
 Power, Seán.
 Roche, Dick.

Tá—*continued*

Ryan, Eamon.
Sargent, Trevor.
Scanlon, Eamon.
Smith, Brendan.

Treacy, Noel.
Wallace, Mary.
White, Mary Alexandra.
Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
Bannon, James.
Barrett, Seán.
Breen, Pat.
Broughan, Thomas P.
Bruton, Richard.
Burke, Ulick.
Burton, Joan.
Byrne, Catherine.
Clune, Deirdre.
Connaughton, Paul.
Costello, Joe.
Coveney, Simon.
Crawford, Seymour.
Creed, Michael.
Creighton, Lucinda.
D'Arcy, Michael.
Deasy, John.
Doyle, Andrew.
Durkan, Bernard J.
English, Damien.
Enright, Olwyn.
Ferris, Martin.
Flanagan, Charles.
Flanagan, Terence.
Gilmore, Eamon.
Hayes, Brian.
Higgins, Michael D.
Howlin, Brendan.
Kehoe, Paul.
Kenny, Enda.
Lynch, Ciarán.

Lynch, Kathleen.
McCormack, Pádraic.
McGinley, Dinny.
McGrath, Finian.
McManus, Liz.
Mitchell, Olivia.
Morgan, Arthur.
Naughten, Denis.
Neville, Dan.
Noonan, Michael.
Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
O'Donnell, Kieran.
O'Dowd, Fergus.
O'Mahony, John.
O'Shea, Brian.
O'Sullivan, Jan.
Penrose, Willie.
Perry, John.
Rabbitte, Pat.
Reilly, James.
Ring, Michael.
Shatter, Alan.
Sheahan, Tom.
Sheehan, P.J.
Sherlock, Seán.
Shortall, Róisín.
Stagg, Emmet.
Stanton, David.
Timmins, Billy.
Tuffy, Joanna.
Upton, Mary.
Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pat Carey and Niall Blaney; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg.

Question declared carried.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with No. 12 without debate, motion re Spent Convictions Bill 2007, agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 25, statements on the European Council, Brussels agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal regarding the suspension of sitting under Standing Order 23 (1) agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 12 without debate, motion re leave to introduce and take Supplementary Estimate agreed to?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I would like clarification on No. 12 before agreeing to proposal No. 5 on the Order Paper, which refers specifically that leave be given by the Dáil to introduce Supplementary Estimates relating to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I would like confirmation that this is in the context of the recent crisis in the pork and bacon industry.

Will the Taoiseach clarify, in the absence of the Minister, the Government's disposition towards the applications for compensation from farmers north of the Border who used the

[Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.]

feedstuffs supplied by the producer on this side of the Border? Will the Taoiseach also comment on the Minister's remarks on Monday that it was the Government's intention only to compensate what he described as "Irish producers"? It is my understanding that the applicant farmers north of the Border are exactly that, Irish producers. They have used feed supplied and produced on this side of the Border.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot go into that now. Does the Deputy oppose proposal No. 5?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It is most unusual that a matter of this importance would be met in the House with such heckling and interference. This is a hugely important issue with regard to the principle of the acceptance of farmers throughout the island of Ireland as Irish producers and the Government's responsibility to compensate without discrimination based on geographic location. Can we please have clarification on this?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach on No. 12.

The Taoiseach: This relates to a Supplementary Estimate to provide €50 million to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the context of the food scare that arose recently. Unfortunately, we can only apply it to people in our own jurisdiction.

Question, "That the proposal to deal with No. 12 without debate, motion re leave to introduce and take Supplementary Estimate, be agreed to," put and declared carried.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with No. 4 without debate, Order for Second Stage and Second and Remaining Stages of the Appropriation Bill 2008 agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 24, Report and Final Stages of the Finance (No. 2) Bill 2008 agreed to?

Deputy Joan Burton: We have just agreed that the Appropriation Bill, which used to be the subject of a long debate in the House and an Adjournment debate at the end of a Dáil term, does not merit debate from the Government. We are now being asked to guillotine the Finance (No. 2) Bill for 7 p.m. this evening. Many of the amendments on Committee Stage of the Bill did not have an opportunity to be discussed. The country is facing severe economic difficulties and we propose to guillotine the Bill and barely allow any decent discussion on what is happening in the economy or on the implications of a Bill that disastrously decided to raise VAT by 0.5% and send people in flight to shop in the North of Ireland.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot go into that now.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is important to be consistent in the House. I made the point to the Chief Whip at the start of this session that Fine Gael would oppose, as a matter of principle, the guillotining of Bills. Therefore, I oppose the guillotining of this Bill. There are occasions where a Bill might run out of steam in any event, but I have made the point to the Chief Whip that we will oppose every proposal to guillotine a Bill. I object to this proposal on that basis.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: It is most unacceptable that a Bill dealing with millions of euro of expenditure will pass through the House without open-ended debate. It would be appropriate to have such debate. I oppose the guillotining of the Bill.

The Taoiseach: The time allocations were set out clearly in the normal way and the sections were grouped to enable a full debate were Deputies minded to move along those lines. Obviously, this is an issue we must address before we leave.

Question put: "That the proposal for dealing with No. 24, Report and Final Stages of the Finance (No. 2) Bill 2008, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 76; Níl, 62.

Tá

Ahern, Dermot.
 Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Andrews, Chris.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Aylward, Bobby.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Áine.
 Brady, Cyprian.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Browne, John.
 Byrne, Thomas.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Pat.
 Collins, Niall.
 Conlon, Margaret.
 Connick, Seán.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Cullen, Martin.
 Curran, John.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Fahey, Frank.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Michael.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Flynn, Beverley.
 Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Harney, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Healy-Rae, Jackie.
 Hoctor, Máire.

Kelly, Peter.
 Kenneally, Brendan.
 Kennedy, Michael.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Michael P.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 Mansergh, Martin.
 Martin, Micheál.
 McEllistrim, Thomas.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M.J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghail, Seán.
 O'Brien, Darragh.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keefe, Batt.
 O'Keefe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 O'Sullivan, Christy.
 Power, Seán.
 Roche, Dick.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Scanlon, Eamon.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Mary.
 White, Mary Alexandra.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
 Bannon, James.
 Barrett, Seán.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burke, Ulick.
 Burton, Joan.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Clune, Deirdre.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Crawford, Seymour.

Creed, Michael.
 Creighton, Lucinda.
 D'Arcy, Michael.
 Deasy, John.
 Doyle, Andrew.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Enright, Olwyn.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Higgins, Michael D.

Níl—*continued*

Howlin, Brendan.	O'Sullivan, Jan.
Kehoe, Paul.	Penrose, Willie.
Kenny, Enda.	Perry, John.
Lynch, Ciarán.	Rabbitte, Pat.
Lynch, Kathleen.	Reilly, James.
McCormack, Pádraic.	Ring, Michael.
McGrath, Finian.	Shatter, Alan.
Mitchell, Olivia.	Sheahan, Tom.
Morgan, Arthur.	Sheehan, P.J.
Naughten, Denis.	Sherlock, Seán.
Neville, Dan.	Shortall, Róisín.
Noonan, Michael.	Stagg, Emmet.
Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.	Stanton, David.
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Timmins, Billy.
O'Dowd, Fergus.	Tuffy, Joanna.
O'Mahony, John.	Upton, Mary.
O'Shea, Brian.	Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pat Carey and Niall Blaney; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg.

Question declared carried.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I ask the Taoiseach to be more specific about the Government's framework for the economic recovery plan and that he offer clarification. In that regard I understand there is to be a series of statements and questions tomorrow in the House in respect of banking, recapitalisation and the issues arising.

With regard to the report this morning, will the Government make an announcement tomorrow about a framework for economic recovery, or about a framework for a plan for economic recovery? Is that announcement to be made in the House, or has a different forum been chosen for it? It would appear somewhat unusual for the House to discuss the banking business, at my party's request, and the Government to be found in a different forum outlining an economic framework. When will the Dáil have an opportunity to see the framework and discuss it?

Deputy Joan Burton: A total of 65 minutes has been set aside to discuss the recapitalisation of the banks. That is inadequate and there is no provision for questions and answers from a Minister.

In the context of what we learned in the past 48 hours about the budgetary issues and cuts in the health services, and also about what the Taoiseach has said about an economic framework, it is very difficult to discuss the provision of up to €10 billion for Irish banks when other serious budgetary issues face the country over the Christmas period.

Can the discussion be expanded to cover not only to the banks but to include the budgetary emergency that yet again faces the Health Service Executive? Can it also include the general framework that the Taoiseach spoke about, an economic plan for getting the country through 2009? We need more time for that. If the time to be allocated was to be doubled and if there were to be provision for a question and answer session, there would then be some notion of parliamentary accountability about the exercise.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On the same issue, given the schedule for tomorrow, it is within the Government's compass to accommodate what is being sought by Opposition voices here this morning. We need additional time to address the critical issue of the proposed recapitalisation of the banks. We need the opportunity to quiz the Minister. Some 20 minutes is not sufficient, as we have had examples of this and will have them again today in regard to other

matters. We need a full-blown opportunity. That is the critical focus this House should have tomorrow, which would include the service plan for the HSE.

The Taoiseach: The Order of Business tomorrow will be dealt with. It is important to point out that yesterday I met the social partners and asked them to engage in a process, which they agreed to do. I will set out the shape of that debate by issuing a framework for those discussions which will be ongoing over Christmas and into January. That is the right way to proceed. As a result of those discussions bringing forward a comprehensive approach containing an input from all the social partners on the issues, there will be an opportunity available to the House to discuss this when we come back. That is the time when we should do so.

With regard to the question of statements, as a result of a query made yesterday, I said I would agree that we could have them if Members wanted to have statements on this matter and put their views on the record of the House. The Chief Whip has accommodated this and has provided for time tomorrow in what is a very busy schedule as we head into the last week of our deliberations for this session. Sixty-five minutes should be sufficient for people to set out their position based on the statement issued on Sunday.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Cá bhfuil an Aire Comhshaoil, Oidhreacht agus Rialtais Áitiúil? Tá sé as láthair arís inniu. An bhfuil slaghdán air? Ar sheol sé nóta chuig an Taoiseach?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Tá sé suas i Lapland.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Cá bhfuil na leasuithe a bhí sé le moladh, i dtaobh caiteachas le linn na toghcháin áitiúla, ar an Bille Toghcháin (Leasú) 2008? Níl na leasuithe foilsithe aige. Has he gone completely AWOL or has he given up?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should leave that matter alone.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Does he accept there is a single-party Government?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the Taoiseach on the legislation.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: He promised amendments on the spending limits for the local elections.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the Taoiseach on the Electoral (Amendment) Bill.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Report Stage of that Bill is about to be taken but there is no sign of the amendments. Another issue in which the Minister had an interest and which I would like the Taoiseach to address is the civil unions Bill, which we were to have some time ago. When will that be published? When are we likely to see the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government making a——

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: A guest appearance.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: ——a guest appearance in the House?

The Taoiseach: To be fair to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, he is here on all occasions he is required by the House.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: He is never in the House.

A Deputy: He might be here in spirit.

Deputy Joe Costello: He is like Lord Lucan.

The Taoiseach: As is patently clear, the mandatory attendance of all the Front Bench Members at the Order of Business has been decreasing, although I see an additional honourable inclusion arriving. Tá a lán nótaí ag an Teachta Gilmore. Bíonn a lán daoine as láthair ó am go ham.

An Ceann Comhairle: Ar aon nós, níl sé sin in ord in aon chor.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I am glad the Taoiseach can give the attendance record.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The Minister made the 12 o'clock news, where he was wiped out by the Labour Party leader.

The Taoiseach: It is hard to get going. On the question of the legislation, I understand the Electoral (Amendment) Bill will come to the House tomorrow for Report Stage.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: That is the problem. He was to have amendments for it but he does not have them.

The Taoiseach: Amendments will be taken on Committee Stage in the Seanad tomorrow.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Committee Stage is over.

An Ceann Comhairle: What of the civil unions Bill, Taoiseach?

The Taoiseach: It will be early next year.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I raised with the Ceann Comhairle yesterday the fact the Minister for Health and Children sneaked the national service plan for the HSE into the Oireachtas Library at the end of last week and did not lay it before the House until yesterday and did not tell the health spokespersons in time for the debate.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will stop the Deputy there. I will write to the Deputy about that. The Minister for Health and Children was not at fault. Unfortunately, it emanated from an error in our office for which we apologise.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I wish to raise a further issue. This document is now a complete work of fiction because there is a further €400 million in cuts, which the Minister neglected to tell us yesterday on Question Time.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The Ceann Comhairle should get to the bottom of that.

An Ceann Comhairle: I accept we definitely made mistakes——

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: It is an entire work of fiction. One has only to read the front of the plan, which reads: "Easy Access — Public Confidence — Staff Pride". We are faced with huge cuts. I want to know——

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot go into that now.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: We need a debate on the health services before the recess.

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

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: Anything positive in this document is entirely negated by the €400 million which we were not told about before.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy knows I cannot go into that now.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: It is absolutely meaningless. We have Mary in wonderland as Minister who says——

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Crawford.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: We need a debate on the health services. We did not have the information yesterday when we——

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a matter for the Whips. I cannot do anything about it. I call Deputy Crawford.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: It is ridiculous to publish the service plan yesterday and then yesterday evening tell us there is another €400 million in cuts.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am certain Deputy Stagg will be able to represent the Deputy’s views at the Whips meeting. I call Deputy Crawford.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: It is disastrous for the health services.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: I would gladly give time for a discussion on that issue because it is vital there is a full-blown discussion on the mismanagement of the health service.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy heard what I had to say about that so he should move on.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: I want to raise three specific issues. First, thankfully, the industrial development Bill was given to us today. When will it be debated in the House? Retail and manufacturing business in the whole Border region in particular is disappearing and it is vital we get the Bill into the House as quickly as possible.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot talk about the Bill now.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: Second, I am not sure whether the following Bill will be any use because Monaghan Hospital will be closed when the Minister gets away tomorrow.

Deputy Mary Coughlan: It has nothing to do with that.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: It may not be relevant here but it is certainly relevant to the people of Monaghan. When will the eligibility for health and personal social services Bill be brought to the House?

Lastly, in light of the fact farmers in REPS 4 were promised their money last September and are now told they will not get it until the end of January, when will there be a debate on that whole issue——

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot go into that now.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: ——so these people will know when they will be paid?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the Taoiseach on the three Bills.

The Taoiseach: I understand the first Bill was published today. There is no date for the second Bill and the third issue does not require a Bill.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I understand the industrial development Bill concerns aggregate grants for research and development and also concerns Enterprise Ireland taking over from Shannon Development with regard to indigenous industry in the locality. It is critical that this is brought before the House as a matter of urgency in the context of the recession and, further, in the context of Dell in Limerick. I have written to the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste on the issue.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to wait for a reply because we cannot talk about it now.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I would like the Taoiseach to intervene. It is critical that this is brought before the House. The Tánaiste needs to make a statement on her discussions with Michael Dell. There is uncertainty and I would like the Taoiseach to comment.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach has indicated when it will come before the House.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I support Deputy O'Donnell fully with regard to Dell in Limerick. It is dreadful for the area.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Durkan.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The Taoiseach should comment because----

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not in order. I will try to facilitate the Deputy. I call Deputy Durkan.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I have put it down for the Adjournment debate.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I am sure the Ceann Comhairle, like me and many others, is very concerned about the continued invisibility of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not, and the Deputy should not be either.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I am just trying to help at this festive time. I suggest the heading of a Bill: the restoration of visibility Bill. Perhaps the Taoiseach would consider introducing such a Bill to encourage him back into the House. It would increase his visibility.

Deputy Seán Barrett: He should wear a high-visibility vest.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I have two issues which are pertinent. One is in regard to the transfer of undertakings (pensions) Bill, which could be an appropriate Bill to discuss at present given that the Government proposes to raid the National Pensions Reserve Fund. The other issue is in regard to the concerns of the coastal and inland fisheries interests and anglers. Both the fisheries (amendment) Bill and the fisheries (consolidation) Bill would have an impact and are pertinent in the context of the current discussions at EU level.

The Taoiseach: There is not a date for the first Bill mentioned by the Deputy and the other two will be next year, probably.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Is there a date for the disability Bill?

The Taoiseach: There is not a date.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: A parliamentary question I tabled has been disallowed. I asked the Minister for Transport the action he will take following the recent “Prime Time Investigates” programme on the haulage industry. The question was disallowed on the basis that the Minister has no responsibility for this area and that it is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. Does the Minister have responsibility for anything?

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry, but we cannot go into that matter now.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: This is a very serious matter concerning road safety and the Minister has said he has no responsibility.

An Ceann Comhairle: That matter is not in order. I strongly advise the Deputy to table the matter on the adjournment.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I am pressing this issue and I call on the Minister to respond.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot press any further with this matter.

Deputy James Reilly: I thank the Taoiseach and the Minister for Social and Family Affairs for their response to an issue I raised last week on the Order of Business. However, the people of Balbriggan still have no labour exchange and——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy can find out somewhere else. That is not related to any legislation.

Deputy James Reilly: It is under legislation also. This has happened through lack of planning which is symptomatic of the Government. Everyone knew this lady would retire and that a new office was needed. People were left high and dry.

An Ceann Comhairle: What is the relevant legislation?

Deputy James Reilly: In the past 24 hours, 60 more jobs have been lost in north Dublin.

An Ceann Comhairle: To what legislation does the Deputy refer?

Deputy James Reilly: Some people must now travel to Coolock and Gardiner Street.

An Ceann Comhairle: I cannot allow this.

Deputy James Reilly: Is there any legislation planned for so-called head shops selling what should be illicit substances? They are legal substances under the law as it currently stands. Will legislation be tabled by the Minister for Health and Children, or the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to control these shops?

An Ceann Comhairle: Is legislation promised in this area?

The Taoiseach: Not of which I am aware.

Deputy James Reilly: I am disappointed, because the Minister for Health and Children said she would consider the matter.

I refer to the VHI legislation. People are receiving bills now. The levies are in place, yet there is no legal basis for them. When will the legislation for the VHI be tabled?

The Taoiseach: Next year.

Deputy Jack Wall: What is the position regarding the adoption Bill? I have received numerous representations concerning the adoption of children from Vietnam. I seek an up-to-date position on the adoption Bill 2008.

The Taoiseach: I expect it will be published shortly. It was discussed recently at Cabinet.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: One evening recently at 9 p.m. there were 11 citizens aged more than 80 years of age sitting on chairs in the accident and emergency unit of the Mater Hospital, Dublin. I represented a 96 year old constituent at the time.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot deal with that matter now.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Is the Taoiseach ashamed of this?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy may ask about legislation.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: My second question relates to the slashing of the budget for Pobal and local development companies. Will the Taoiseach indicate if there will be a chance to discuss this? The Minister for Community, Rural and Gaelatacht Affairs, Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív, told us in one of his more lucid moments there would be major cutbacks in the local development area.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot go into that now.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: This is at a time when we need more resources.

An Ceann Comhairle: I must move on if no one else has a contribution.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: My colleague has fought a very valuable campaign on the matter.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is unfortunate that neither of the matters raised by the Deputy are in order. If I allow Deputy Broughan to ask such questions and if I allow the Taoiseach to answer, then I must do likewise for everyone else. I am sure the Deputy understands that we must be consistent. We will move on to the motion on the Spent Convictions Bill 2007, but first I call Deputy Burton.

Deputy Joan Burton: The National Pensions Reserve Fund Act 2000 requires the Government to make a contribution of 1% of gross national product to the National Pensions Reserve Fund every year. The Minister for Finance stated during the budget that he would call on Mr. Maurice O'Connell, the former secretary general of the Department, to review the situation.

An Ceann Comhairle: That does not sound as if it is in order.

Deputy Joan Burton: Has the Government now decided not to contribute to the National Pensions Reserve Fund?

An Ceann Comhairle: There is another way of raising that matter.

Deputy Joan Burton: That may require amending legislation and, if so, when will the legislation be tabled?

An Ceann Comhairle: I will short-circuit the question for the Deputy. Is the legislation promised?

The Taoiseach: The statement last Sunday referred to the prospects of amending that Bill next year.

I conclude by wishing all Members of the House a happy Christmas. I hope everyone enjoys the break. I wish the Ceann Comhairle, his staff, the Superintendent, the Captain and all the staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas a very happy Christmas and I thank them for their courtesy.

Spent Convictions Bill 2007: Motion.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Pat Carey): I move:

That the Order of the Dáil of 25th October, 2007, that Second Stage of the Spent Convictions Bill 2007, be taken in private members' time, be discharged and that Second Stage of the Bill be taken today in Government time.

Question put and agreed to.

European Council Meeting: Statements.

The Taoiseach: I attended the meeting of the European Council in Brussels on Thursday and Friday, 11 and 12 December. I was accompanied at the meeting by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Micheál Martin, The Minister of State with responsibility for European Union affairs, Deputy Dick Roche, and the Attorney General.

The Council had an unusually heavy agenda. While the bulk of discussion centred on the Lisbon treaty, energy and climate change negotiations and the economic and financial crisis, other issues were also dealt with. That such a heavy agenda could be completed with unanimously agreed conclusions is testament to the excellent French EU Presidency of the past six months. France deployed its own highly successful mix of pragmatism, determination and dynamism. In acknowledging France's success, I single out the particularly effective role played by President Nicolas Sarkozy. I met him on several occasions in recent months. We are indebted to him for the leadership and assistance he has provided for Europe. President Sarkozy has shown himself to be a friend of Ireland.

When I reported to the House following the October European Council, I said our task in the period ahead would be to work out how to address our concerns on the Lisbon treaty in a way which could be endorsed by all 27 member states. With the co-operation of our partners in the European Union, the outcome of last week's Council represents a significant step towards delivering the way forward. Before outlining the detail of last week's meeting, I will briefly recap on the context against which it took place, and the steps the Government has taken since the referendum.

The Government accepted the outcome of the referendum last June, and undertook to manage the *impasse* arising as a result of it. We sought to gain an understanding of the reasons underlying the rejection of the treaty. That included the commissioning of very comprehensive research, the findings of which have been published and with which the House is familiar. The Government co-operated with the other parties in the Oireachtas in the establishment of the Sub-Committee on Ireland's Future in the European Union, which undertook intensive and broad work, hearing from some 110 witnesses from more than 40 organisations.

We then brought the key concerns, as identified in the Government's research and examined by the sub committee, to our partners in Europe and requested that these concerns would be addressed. We did this through direct and extensive contact at many levels. The Minister for

[The Taoiseach.]

Foreign Affairs, the Minister of State with responsibility for European Union affairs and our diplomatic network were very active in engaging with all other member states.

I stayed in close contact with President Sarkozy, meeting on several occasions. As the Council meeting approached, I undertook a number of visits to European capitals to meet leaders and to discuss our approach with them and to hear their views. Early last week I spoke by telephone with as many of my European Council colleagues as proved possible to outline again our concerns and explain the nature of the response we felt was required. Last week, we took those concerns to the European Council. The following is a summary of what I said last week to my EU counterparts at the European Council.

I began by reminding my colleagues that Ireland had agreed in October to seek to identify the elements of a solution which could command the support of all at the December Council meeting. I stressed the Government's belief that the Lisbon treaty is important for the Union's future development. I also recalled that it could only enter into force if it is ratified by all 27 member states. I made clear that the concerns of the Irish people as expressed during the referendum must be reflected in any solution. I elaborated on my comments in October about those concerns. Many people felt that they lacked sufficient information or understanding to vote "Yes". Many were concerned at a perceived loss of influence to Ireland, especially when the Commission ceased to include a national of every member state. Others were concerned that decisions on important social and ethical issues, especially, but not only, abortion, would be taken out of Irish hands. Some were concerned that workers' rights would somehow be constrained. Some felt that the position on tax, notably corporation tax, was somehow undermined by the Lisbon treaty. Others were concerned that our traditional policy of military neutrality, to which very many Irish people, whether they voted "Yes" or "No", hold a very strong sense of attachment, would be compromised by the Lisbon treaty. Some were even misled to fear that it could lead to conscription to a European army. I said that while some of these fears and concerns were misplaced or based on misapprehension or misinformation, it did not take away from the fact that they were sincerely held and require a respectful response.

I briefed my colleagues on the European Council on the work of the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Ireland's Future in the European Union, noting that it had representation from across the political spectrum. Again, I record my appreciation for the work of that committee and the way in which it carried out its business. I informed the European Council that the Committee's report stated clearly that to help secure Ireland firmly at the heart of Europe, the concerns that arose during the referendum campaign must be addressed. I made clear that the response to the concerns of the Irish people had to be satisfactory. I then set out the nature of the response to the concerns that I believed was required.

I stated that retaining a Commissioner was a real concern for the Irish people. There was no doubt that this was a very significant part of the debate during the referendum campaign, and that a change was necessary to respond to the belief among the public that the loss of a Commissioner represented a considerable loss of influence.

Second, I stated the Government needed an undertaking that the other concerns of the Irish people, which I had set out and that are recorded in the annex to the conclusions, would be addressed satisfactorily and in a legally robust manner, where appropriate. Moreover, such an undertaking required the inclusion of a reaffirmation by the Union of the value it attaches to issues such as workers' rights and national competence in respect of key public services.

Negotiations on the conclusions lasted for many hours last Thursday evening and resumed on Friday morning. I am pleased to report to this House that the Council was able to reach unanimous agreement on the response to Ireland's concerns. This unanimous agreement rep-

resents an extremely encouraging response to the concerns of the Irish people. Our partners are prepared to adjust the institutional balance agreed within the Lisbon treaty to provide that member states keep a Commissioner each in response to Irish concerns. This is a very significant move. While several member states were strongly opposed, ultimately they accepted that this change is required.

Second, with regard to the other areas of concern I have outlined previously, the Union agreed that our concerns should be responded to satisfactorily, including through the use of legally binding guarantees. While the detail is yet to follow, our partners are clear about the nature of those guarantees. The Union also agreed on the need to confirm the importance of issues such as workers' rights. On the basis of the agreement on these elements and on condition of our being able to put in place appropriate guarantees, I stated that I would be prepared to return to the public to put a new package and to seek their approval of it. I believe this to be a significant outcome.

I emphasise that considerable work lies ahead on the responses to such concerns. I also emphasise the nature of the agreement on the Commission because there was considerable confusion at the time of the referendum. The maintenance of one Commissioner per member state is not possible under the existing treaty arrangements, as the Nice treaty requires the size of the Commission to be reduced. Only if the Lisbon treaty enters into force will Ireland and every other member state now keep a Commissioner. The conclusions agreed last week are very clear on this point.

While my focus and that of my delegation was necessarily on the Lisbon treaty issue, other important issues also were discussed. On the economic front, there has been extensive coverage of the European economic recovery plan. This represents a framework for member states' efforts and is designed to ensure consistency and maximum impact. In Ireland's case, while we will continue to sustain our capital spending at a level far above the historical norm, the immediate focus of our efforts must remain on redressing the budgetary imbalance. The Council also agreed to take forward work on better global regulation of financial markets, better global governance and ensuring there is not growth in protectionism at a time of economic stress. As a small exporting nation dependent on favourable international trading conditions, avoiding growth in protectionism is important for us.

The agreement by the European Council on the climate change and energy package is of huge importance. It is a good outcome for the environment and for Ireland and a number of our key concerns were taken on board at a late stage of the negotiations. I pay particular tribute to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, and his officials for their excellent work in negotiations on this agreement. It represents a significant step in the effort to forge a wider international agreement to tackle one of the greatest challenges of our age. Nearly two years ago, under the leadership of Chancellor Merkel, Europe agreed to unilaterally reduce our emissions by 20% compared to 1990. Friday's agreement under President Sarkozy's watchful eye was, in effect, the setting down in detail of how that is to be done and Ireland played its full part in delivering on that.

The agreement represents the culmination of intensive and highly complex negotiations. Many people hoped for a more robust deal and Ireland supported the Presidency and the Commission in pushing for a package that was stronger than that which finally was agreed. However, one must recognise that compromise was necessary. The compromises, with which some are unhappy, were necessary to ensure that agreement was reached. Failure to reach agreement last week would have represented a serious set-back to the momentum we must bring to the climate change negotiations.

[The Taoiseach.]

The Minister, Deputy Gormley, led the Irish delegation at the UN negotiations in Poznan while the European Council was under way and we remained in close contact. Ireland sought an acceleration of the international negotiations to agree a deal next year and the EU's leadership in this process was reinforced by last week's deal in Brussels. The reality for all countries is that if progress is to be made in tackling climate change, meaningful adjustments must be made and inevitably this will involve some change for all. The agreement is testament to Europe's ability to keep working, however challenging that may be, until agreement is reached. While this may be slow, and at times, tortuous, it is the best and the only way. On climate change, Europe now has shown the way forward by setting down its approach in detail on how it will reach reductions of 20%. If the rest of the world rises to the challenge, the Union is committed to stepping up its target to minus 30%.

The Council also adopted conclusions in several other areas, including agriculture, external relations and security and defence policy. The full text of the conclusions has been laid in the Oireachtas Library. As for the developments in Ireland in the pigmeat sector, at our request the Council agreed to invite the Commission to contribute to our efforts to support farmers and slaughterhouses. The Government is following up with the Commission on this welcome development. I record my appreciation to the Council and to Commission President Barroso in particular, for their support of, and solidarity towards, Ireland on this issue,

The extent of the challenge Ireland faces in respect of its future relationship with Europe can hardly be over-stated. There will be much written, accurately and regrettably otherwise, about the agreement reached last Friday and about what the Lisbon treaty itself does and does not do. We must be careful not to lose sight of the wood for the trees. My view, which I believe is shared by the vast majority of Members, is that our future must be within Europe. Within Europe, we must be close to the centre and not at the margins or with some semi-detached status. This has been the approach of Irish Governments of various hues for more than 35 years and it has served the country well.

This shared approach over a sustained period reflects the reality that Ireland's relationship with Europe and its European partners is a truly national issue that transcends party politics. I appreciate the approach adopted by Opposition leaders, with whom I have had discussions in recent days. Whatever about our differences, we share a view that our future in Europe is so important that it requires as strongly united a position as possible within this House. Those who suggest Ireland can remain at the heart of Europe while refusing to work with its fellow member states, which are convinced of the necessity for more efficient and effective institutions and a stronger EU voice internationally, are attempting to render a great disservice to the public. Moreover, lest anyone consider that another referendum would create a pressure point around which concessions might be leveraged from the Government in return for support, I wish it to be understood that no good can come of such an approach. Advancing sectoral or narrow interests in such a way could be highly damaging for this country, especially at this time.

These are difficult times on a variety of fronts. Just as many of the challenges Ireland faces are international, so must be the response to them. Ireland must face outwards, not inwards, in seeking to advance its interests and protect its people and the hard-won improvements in living standards over the last decades. Serving our national interest requires us to play our full role within Europe.

Friday's conclusions on the Lisbon treaty move us further along the path of identifying a way forward that could gain the support of the Irish people, while at the same time being acceptable to all our partners. The outcome of last week's meeting augurs well. I am confident the Irish people's concerns can be addressed and will be addressed satisfactorily. If a satisfac-

tory outcome to the work I have described is achieved in the coming months, the Government will put the issue to another referendum. Whether our future relationship with Europe will be based on Ireland playing a full and constructive role in the European Union or otherwise, ultimately will be for the Irish people to decide.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I wish to share time with Deputies Timmins and Creighton.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Some time ago I criticised the Taoiseach and the Government for not being up front with those Opposition parties that have supported the Lisbon treaty. I acknowledge and thank him for his response, in that the Government now is open to keeping Opposition leaders briefed on the issues that are emerging as we proceed with this business. This is important, because whatever differences may exist between the Government and the Opposition, and there are many on matters such as the economy and the manner in which the country is run or otherwise, the Taoiseach may take it that Fine Gael always has supported Ireland's position in Europe and will continue to do so. Some weeks ago, I stated that the only way the Lisbon treaty can come into effect is when the people give their decision on a different question, whenever that is to be asked. I also made the point that this must take place towards the latter part of next year. I acknowledge the response from the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs on being open to discussing these questions and how they should be dealt with.

It will be necessary to put in place a structure pertaining to ways of demolishing the extant myths, falsifications and lies about what was not contained in the Lisbon treaty and the fears generated for those who had concerns.

Let me repeat for the record that I think it is appropriate that either the sub-committee of the Joint Committee on European Affairs, which was chair excellently by young Senator Paschal Donohoe, or some other independent group would carry out an audit of how we have transposed European directives into Irish law. This is important because there is a range of measures that were causing people concern such as red tape in business, for sheep farmers on the hills etc. Those concerns will not go away due to the fact the Taoiseach will hold a second referendum. It is important that we would be able to demonstrate that people have listened to those concerns and that at least the Government has tried to address them in the sense of having examples of how the directives have been transposed into law in France, Italy or Germany as against in Ireland, and so that one can say to people that these directives were agreed and this is the way they have been implemented in Ireland as distinct from other areas. I do not want to lessen the impact of a directive in any way but, in terms of common sense and flexibility, Government should respond here with an independent assessment of how that has happened.

In my capacity as a Vice President of the European People's Party, I attended that party's meeting before the Heads of Government meeting. I was struck by the generosity of the 14 prime ministers in that group towards this country and in wanting to help Ireland to deal with its difficulty. They recognise that Europe needs Ireland and Ireland needs Europe.

In the next 20 years, there will be the emergence of new global powers like China, India, Russia because of its natural resources, South Africa and Brazil, in addition to the United States. In there, at the tail end of that, is the European Union. Nobody wants to see a situation where catastrophe stares us in the face, as has happened with Iceland being outside of the eurozone and not having access to the European Central Bank. These all are elements of having a prosperous society where one can use the fruits to build a country where people can live their dreams and fulfil their aspirations.

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

It might be appropriate if the Taoiseach could respond and give us an indication of when he intends to hold the referendum. I seek clarification from the Minister for Foreign Affairs about how the declarations can become legally binding. I hope they evolve to a point where there is a specific protocol given on these matters.

I campaigned on the basis of what was contained in the Lisbon treaty in respect of the commissionerships, and I was happy with that. However, it is a concern of people and I take the point that if people feel that a Commissioner for every country is an important element of this, then I will not object to it. The declarations given from the European Council meeting for Ireland are important and valid, and will go a long way towards ameliorating people's concerns about this. If one gets to a point where the French Presidency under Presidency Sarkozy or, in June, the Czech Presidency, can evolve to a point of a legally binding protocol, then so much the better.

I would like to say a great deal about climate change and other areas of fiscal responsibility in this regard but time does not permit me to do that today.

Deputy Billy Timmins: I take this opportunity to wish the outgoing Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Dermot Gallagher, well in his retirement. He has given a full life to public service and I wish him well. I hope he can find time in the days ahead to spend floating around regions of the upper Shannon. I wish his successor, Mr. Cooney, well.

Coming to the end of the French Presidency of the EU, the Taoiseach mentioned the role played by President Sarkozy. The French President got much flak in certain quarters in this country at the end of June last, but one must acknowledge the tremendous role he played in taking on board the concerns of the Irish people and the Irish Government. He ensured, through his vigour and enthusiasm, that the EU responded in a positive manner to the needs of Ireland. The way he dealt with the crisis in Georgia, and the tremendous role that Europe played in it, his dealing with the international financial crisis and his efforts to get a global approach to financial difficulties epitomised for me the need for a full-time president of the European Union based on the two and a half year concept. That, to me, is one of the most essential ingredients required, as is outlined in the Lisbon treaty.

I also welcome the steps taken by Government to get undertakings on measures. One must acknowledge that from our point of view in the main, with the exception of the Commissioner, all of these were dealt with in the treaty. However, there was a lack of certainty among people. There were concerns and it is important those concerns have been addressed.

The EU is probably the most democratic political concept on the planet. I must admit it is much more democratic than we are here in this country where the Opposition gets generally only crumbs from Government, irrespective of who is in Government, and we are not blaming the Minister, Deputy Martin, exclusively for that. In the EU, everyone has a say, views are taken on board and compromises are made, notwithstanding the fact that many countries do not agree with the provision of a Commissioner for every member state because they feel that it will impinge upon efficiency.

I note from the "No" side of the campaign that the argument has moved on a little. The treaty contains so many matters that there are many new claims, and many new battles will be fought over the months ahead on new territory. It is important we do not lose sight of the treaty's tremendous advantages.

The Lisbon treaty is not meant to replace what is there. It is not something new coming in for something old or unworkable. It enhances what is already there. It is an improvement on what is already there. The practitioners who operate on a day-to-day, month-to-month and

year-to-year basis feel the need for it. I cannot come around to the concept that there is a conspiracy by 26 or 27 governments to make life difficult for their people or for their administrators. We must bear in mind that the concept of this is for the common good.

I look at the many positive things it can do. It can deal with cross-border crime, and I hope that we can see it in our wisdom to opt in on judicial and home affairs. It can deal with the energy crisis. We are here at the periphery of Europe, at the end of the pipe. Where would we stand trying to create an energy security policy on our own? It would not be possible.

Ireland is the gateway to Europe. We projected ourselves as the young Europeans for decades. Europe has been very positive for us. Jobs are an issue with respect to Europe. I heard some of the “No” campaigners talk about scare tactics and I thought it was a little rich of them. Certainly, Ireland being at the heart of Europe is essential for our foreign direct investment needs and the “No” to the Lisbon treaty sent out a negative message. The message is not that tangible at present but, as some of the contributors to the sub-committee mentioned, by the time it becomes tangible it will be too late.

The Taoiseach mentioned earlier the issue of workers’ rights. It is important the legislation that is necessary here on home territory to deal with workers’ rights issues should be put in place in the first half of next year.

On the treaty, this morning I read bits of an extract from a speech by Mr. Gay Byrne. In the last campaign there was the great slogan, “If you don’t know, vote No”. In my view, if you do not know, you try to learn and find out about. If you do not find out about it, do not go and impinge upon other people who have taken the time to go and find out about something and make an informed decision. I am not picking on Mr. Byrne specifically, but I will use him as the figurehead for many of the people in that campaign. He stated, “I agree with Ulick McEvaddy that the entire thing is unintelligible bilge”. If I adopted the same approach to the transport legislation on road safety as Mr. Byrne has done on this occasion, I would be saying to the public that if they had a vote on this legislation, do not pass it because they will not understand it. That approach is too simplistic. It is too serious a matter for opinion makers to adopt that approach. One goes out and informs oneself of the rights or wrongs. One does not need to know every comma and full-stop in the treaty but the information is freely available even if knowledge and interest is more limited.

I challenge opinion makers to study the material before they make an informed decision and, if they then discover an ideological difficulty with the text, people will respect them for it. They should not take the simplistic view that it is in vogue to vote “No” if one does not know. In regard to the idea of signing a contract on a house, I do not know how many people have read their mortgage contracts. I have not read them even though I have bought more than one house in my time. I signed my name and accepted my solicitor’s advice that matters were in order.

Mr. Byrne wrote: “One other thing I’ll guarantee: within six months of Ireland voting “Yes”, our special corporate tax rate will be gone”. The untruth of that statement will be copperfastened by a protocol following the commitment received by the Government on taxation. If Mr. Byrne and other commentators intend to participate in a national debate, they should at least afford the public the courtesy of learning the issues before they pass pronouncement. Their views will be respected even by those who disagree with their judgment if they are based on informed knowledge.

Senator Donohoe has produced a report on the findings of the Sub-Committee on Ireland’s Future in the European Union which is available on the Internet for free or the Government publications sales office for €4.10. Efforts are also being made to circulate copies of the report to libraries. It will not be the most exciting read this Christmas but it will probably be one of

[Deputy Billy Timmins.]

the most important. A recent “The Gerry Ryan Show” included a segment in which information was sought on the report. The programme was contacted shortly after this segment aired but a decision was made not to inform viewers on the report’s availability. Anyone who wants a copy of the report could obtain one from the Government, Fine Gael or the Labour Party.

As this is probably the most serious issue we will decide in a referendum for a generation, people should inform themselves. If they make their decision on an informed basis, nobody can argue with them, but they should not vote “No” because they claim not to know. That is a simplistic and irresponsible approach. This is not the opinion of a Europhile or a member of an unelected elite lecturing to “No” people; it is basic common sense.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I wish to share time with Deputy Costello.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Last week’s summit was critically important for Ireland and Europe because it considered a €200 billion recovery plan for the European economy and the urgent issue of climate change. These should have been the priorities for the European summit and today’s discussion. Instead, as a consequence of last June’s referendum, the first priority at the summit and for this House is the Lisbon treaty and the future constitutional arrangements for Europe. That may be good news for those who wish to slow down Europe for the sake of their commercial or political interests or whose politics thrive on institutional paralysis but it is not good news for those who need the European Union to respond more effectively to the economic crisis or wish the European Union to lead on the future of the planet.

The big story coming out of the summit was that a deal was struck on the Lisbon treaty and a second referendum will be held. Already people are lined up in their trenches. Those who were for it are for it again and those were against it are against it again regardless of what is written in the document. I do not take that approach. This is by no means a done deal. Important progress has been made but this matter remains a work in progress. What has been agreed is a carefully constructed formula which under certain conditions should lead to a second referendum. However, as the Taoiseach confirmed in the comments he made this morning, the holding of a second referendum is conditional on a satisfactory outcome for the work currently in progress.

If we have learned anything from the last referendum, it is the importance of reading the small print. I welcome the recognition in Europe that the same question cannot be put to the people again. Significant changes are required to address the concerns raised during the campaign and major progress has been in that regard. The decision to revert to one Commissioner per member state is a significant change to the proposition that was put to us last June. The proposal to reduce the size of the Commission arose from a concern for making that body more efficient. It was an agreed and important part of the new architecture but as my colleague, Proinsias De Rossa, MEP, has pointed out and to paraphrase the Secretary General of the Commission, if one has to choose between efficiency and legitimacy, one chooses legitimacy. The decision that each member state will retain a Commissioner should be acknowledged as representing a real response to concerns raised during the Irish referendum.

The European Council has also undertaken to address a number of the other concerns that arose during the campaign. The proposals on abortion, neutrality and taxation are not controversial and were never going to be affected by the treaty anyway. Nonetheless, it is welcome that a belt and braces approach is being pursued in order to reassure voters on these points. However, I have concerns about two other issues.

The first issue pertains to the summit conclusions, which commit to “a guarantee that the provisions of the Irish Constitution in relation to the right to life, education and the family are not in any way affected by the fact that the Treaty of Lisbon attributes legal status to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights or by the justice and home affairs provisions of the said Treaty”. What does that mean? I am aware that abortion was an issue in the referendum and I have no objection to a restatement of the *status quo*, in other words, that abortion is entirely an Irish matter. That was done in the Maastricht treaty. However, I have serious concerns about this paragraph in terms of where it came from and what it might mean. Exactly what are these issues of education and the family in respect of which it would appear that Irish recourse to the charter is to be restricted? I heard some ingenious falsehoods being peddled during the campaign but these issues are new.

One of the principal reasons why the Labour Party supported the Lisbon treaty in June was the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which we believe would greatly strengthen the rights of the individual citizen in the European Union. We would be very concerned if the charter was watered down or if Irish citizens had more limited access than other European citizens to the rights enshrined therein. Clearly, the devil is in the detail and a process of negotiation must now begin. A mechanism should be found to allow the involvement of pro-Lisbon treaty parties in that process.

The other issue about which I have concerns is workers’ rights. I was satisfied that the Lisbon treaty would significantly enhance worker’s rights but a perception was successfully created during the campaign that the opposite was the case. This was not helped by the Government’s poor record in protecting and enforcing workers’ rights at home or in progressing European initiatives to enhance rights. The issue was further complicated by decisions of the European Court of Justice, including the Laval case. There is a real concern among working people that the way has been opened for undermining the levels of pay and working conditions accepted as the norm in this country and most other member states. These issues must be satisfactorily addressed before another referendum is held.

Working through the Sub-Committee on Ireland’s Future in the European Union, Deputy Costello has advanced a number of proposals that would protect workers’ rights. However, these proposals, which are discussed in the report of the sub-committee, were not adequately taken up by the Government. I welcome the political commitment made in the conclusions to attach high importance to this issue but this needs to be fleshed out. We also need to see a commitment from the Government to address this issue domestically. Again, I am aware this is intended to start a process of drafting and I am prepared to engage with the Government in this regard but the importance of this issue does not seem to have been grasped.

The Government has committed to holding another referendum before the end of next October. The proposition to be put to the people in that referendum is to be changed. We can see the shape of some of that change, but we do not know the detail. It is the detail of the change which concerns me and which will determine the Labour Party’s response.

This is not a done deal and two issues arise which are of real concern. These are the Charter of Fundamental Rights and workers’ rights. If a second referendum is to be held or passed, those concerns must be addressed and the Opposition parties need to be involved in the process that addresses them.

I want to say a few words about the economy and climate change. I welcome the decision made by the European Council to launch a co-ordinated economic recovery package across the European Union. The plan wisely avoids a one-size-fits-all approach but emphasises instead the need for a co-ordinated approach. It also endorses some key principles. The initial thinking from the Commission pointed to the need for short-term action that would build long-term

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competitiveness. It pointed, for example, to the potential of the green collar sector to create employment, and the importance of investment in research and development and in infrastructure.

These are points which the Labour Party has been making for some time. I also believe that Ireland should play its part in this European initiative but again, there is no clarity as to what the Government is thinking or doing. After months of doing nothing, last Monday there was a big public relations exercise at Farmleigh, although there is still no plan. It is by no means clear whether the Government's economic plan, when it eventually appears, will fit with the overall EU strategy. It should do so.

The EU has, in recent years, been one of the strongest advocates of international action to prevent runaway global warming. It was in this context that the Commission's energy and climate change package was published at the beginning of the year. The intervening 11 months have changed global economics and politics almost beyond recognition. The reality of global warming has not changed, nor has our obligation to stop it.

Whereas much of the detail of the energy and climate change package is welcome, the major concessions to big polluters and the conditions now attached to a 30% reduction if goodwill is shown in Copenhagen by the United States, China and others are a cause for concern. This watering down of the original package is delaying the inevitable — that we must take radical, collective action to prevent catastrophic climate change, and that we must take it sooner rather than later.

The EU has been the most important vehicle for progress in recent European history. It has been vital for progress in Ireland of its citizens, economy and environment. We must not allow our current difficulties, or the political difficulties of this Government, to reverse this progress for the sake of a short-term fix.

Deputy Joe Costello: I thank Deputy Gilmore for sharing his time. He has articulated very well the issues of major concern to the Labour Party and those matters which still need to be addressed. This European Council meeting was one of the most significant in many years. Some of the issues being addressed were major global matters, including the financial crisis, as now the full 15 eurozone countries have now slipped into recession. The €200 billion recovery package has been extremely important in that respect.

As I understand it, none of the Irish banks has taken up the €30 billion package put forward in October, some two months ago, for small and medium enterprises. That would have been fantastic for providing liquidity in this credit crunch, with 54% of the small and medium enterprises in need of cash flow. Likewise, I was amazed to hear last night on "Oireachtas Report" the spokesperson from Allied Irish Bank, who appeared before a committee, saying that the bank did not need any liquidity and was quite happy not to get the €10 billion from the Government. Where are we on the banking issue and the money being made available from Europe?

On the climate change issue, it is good to see we have at last made the first rung on the ladder to the 20% reduction, efficiency and sustainability with regard to greenhouse gases. The challenge we face is that from 2012, it will cost the Irish economy an estimated €1 billion. We must address the challenge and ensure this becomes a benefit to the Irish economy, and the area of industry dealing with cutting greenhouse gases becomes an advantage. We have enormous resources in wind, geothermal and others that should enable us to add to the economy.

The central issue addressed with regard to this country was the aftermath of the Lisbon treaty rejection in June. We had a circle to square in that the people rejected the Lisbon

treaty while at the same time indicating strongly that they were in support of participation and engagement in the European Union going forward. We had preliminary work arising from the Millward Brown survey and the work of the sub-committee, which lasted for two months.

The Government went to the European Council with five central identified issues to address. The first was the matter of the Commissioner, which we must recognise was very successfully addressed. The second was the matter of taxation and legal guarantees have been given on this. The third was the matter of the European security and defence policy and how this relates to neutrality, and legal guarantees have also been provided on this. The fourth matter was right to life, education and the family, and again legal guarantees were provided in this area.

The fifth issue raised by the Government was the protection of workers' rights and public services. No legal guarantee was sought or given in this respect, although assurances were sought and given. Even at this, it appears the United Kingdom was not happy with that level of assurance. This can be seen in almost the same terms as 40% of Irish voters voting in respect of the Lisbon treaty having considered the protection of workers' rights as very important. The Council confirmed it considers the issue very important but it did not assert it would act on it, which was the case in terms of the other four issues.

The question remains of what will be done. How will we make the assurances sufficiently robust for the issues to be addressed? The nub of the problem is that we must find a legal mechanism to ensure that when a conflict arises with regard to the four freedoms of the marketplace and the movement of goods, services and people, it must be addressed in the context of not allowing them take precedence over the protection of the rights of workers. These are fundamental rights which have been based on long-term national law that has been discussed and put in place. Agreements and practices have also been engaged in, and these must be protected rather than undermined.

I am not so sure I wish to engage again in an all-party sub-committee where one party uses the forum to grandstand rather than engage. The party attempted to delete everything proposed within that sub-committee's findings. Another party to that sub-committee did not make any submission of its own but went out to the plinth just as the sub-committee's findings were being drafted and made statements of its own which, to a large degree, undermined the good work done in the previous seven or eight weeks.

Deputy Noel Treacy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Joe Costello: If we are to engage in an all-party sub-committee, we must engage with integrity and in a manner so that everybody will participate fully in it. No party should seek to use political sharp practice in the relationship.

We must have constant consultation with the Taoiseach and Ministers on this matter. I am not sure whether it would be better done on a bipartisan level at this point rather than with a process of re-establishing a sub-committee.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It is interesting to note how difficult some colleagues find it to accept that everyone will not always agree with them.

Throughout the Lisbon referendum campaign Sinn Féin argued that a better deal was possible. We argued that the Irish people's concerns on workers' rights, public services, neutrality, democracy, tax sovereignty and international trade were valid and had to be addressed. The Taoiseach, Deputy Brian Cowen, and his fellow "Yes" campaign supporters told the people that there was no better deal to be had. Last week's meeting of the EU Council has proven this proposition wrong. However, the EU Council agreement raises more questions than answers. Earlier this morning, we had some opportunity to commence teasing that out.

[Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.]

As it stands today, the Government has committed itself to re-running a referendum on the same treaty the people rejected on 12 June. They have not secured any changes to the Lisbon treaty or its protocols. The deal struck will not address the substantive issues raised by the electorate time and time again before and after the Lisbon referendum. Sinn Féin wants to see these issues addressed. Ireland is a full and active member of the European Union and will remain so. We want to see Ireland's influence maintained and enhanced. We want to see neutrality protected. We want to see a social progress clause that will protect workers' pay and conditions. We want to see a new approach on public services. We want to see the promotion of a trade policy that is good for Irish farmers and the developing world. We want to see the Government deliver on the mandate it was given.

What did the Government agree to? Over the last number of days we have listened to Ministers in the media telling us that the changes they secured on the issue of a Commissioner and a number of declarations will allow them to return to the people and re-run the referendum. The question is whether these assertions stand up to scrutiny. In our opinion, on the evidence before us, they do not.

We are told that the agreement which was reached allows all member states to keep their Commissioner if the Lisbon treaty is passed by October 2009, but that is not true. Under the Nice treaty unanimity is required to decide the number of Commissioners. An interim solution could have been found to allow for every state to keep its Commissioner until the broader issue of the reform of the EU was resolved. This could have been done while the broader issues of the EU's democratic deficit, workers' rights and public services, militarisation and the influence of small countries in the EU institutions were being addressed. The Government had the opportunity to put these issues on the table but, with respect, it failed to do so.

The second assertion is about legally binding guarantees. The Government has told the people that a number of the key issues of debate during the referendum will be dealt with through legally binding guarantees. We are also being told that this may happen in the context of the Croatian accession treaty in 2010 or 2011. How this is to be achieved, and what impact it will have on the Lisbon treaty, is not clear. What is clear, however, is that any future accession treaty will not be put to the people in a referendum. What we are likely to get is some form of declaration, promising protocols to an accession treaty that we may or may not see prior to a second Lisbon treaty referendum. That is a very important point.

Contrary to claims made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Micheál Martin, in newspapers this week, Sinn Féin has not rejected any deal before considering its detail.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is new.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The problem is that the Government has agreed to hold a second referendum without putting the detail into the public domain, but why? The answer is that the Government does not have it, and it is telling us that it will not have it until later in 2009. How therefore does the Government know it will in any way resolve the substantive concerns that led people to vote "No" in June?

Declarations are not worth the paper they are written on as they are not legally binding. They are exactly what they are called — political declarations made by politicians with no legal status or force. They are like promises made by a Government at election time, sadly, more likely to be broken than implemented. Unless protocols are secured and ratified by all member states, guarantees as described by the Government are worthless.

On the issue of neutrality, even if this declaration were legally binding there would be huge questions about its value. The declaration refers to Ireland's "traditional policy of neutrality"

which, given the role this State plays in assisting the transit of US troops to Iraq, would hardly instill confidence. It will do nothing to halt the drift towards militarisation of the EU, the enlargement of the EU's military tasks, and the establishment of the European Defence Agency. It will not prevent closer, so-called EU co-ordination with NATO.

The declaration on taxation changes nothing in the treaties. Unanimity in the Council is still required for tax harmonisation measures, but the Council will have the ability to bypass popular referenda in order to take such a step. This point was confirmed in a legal opinion secured by the Oireachtas sub-Committee on Ireland's future in the European Union. For the record, I will quote the legal opinion:

Article 48 expressly gives power to change the mechanism of voting and a ratification of this Article or the Treaty containing this Article by the Irish people in referendum gives authority in referendum for any subsequent change which complies with Article 48 without the necessity of further recourse to the people.

There is obviously a belief among EU leaders that a future Irish Government will be convinced to go along with such a move. A declaration, even if legally binding, would not change that. That is a crucial point. The authority of the Irish people to decide on this matter by referenda will be removed.

The Council conclusions on the issues of workers' rights and public services are deeply worrying. These issues have been totally ignored by the Government since the "No" vote, despite Sinn Féin and others insisting they were critical issues that had to be addressed. The Government and the Council seem to have recognised, belatedly, that they are important issues but the way in which they are dealt with is completely inadequate. The undermining of workers' pay and conditions has caused serious disquiet across the country. It is totally unacceptable that the Government has failed to secure a social progress clause to prevent the exploitation of workers in Ireland and across the EU. This is a missed opportunity.

The conclusions refer to ". . . public services, as an indispensable instrument of social and regional cohesion". Not only is this limiting in terms of what public services are, for the conclusions of the Council make it clear that EU leaders have absolutely no intention of halting or reversing the liberalisation of public services as provided for in the treaties.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Read on.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The same is true with regard to "the responsibility of member states for the delivery of education and health services". The conclusions also refer to:

. . . the essential role and wide discretion of national, regional and local governments in providing, commissioning and organising non-economic services of general interest, which is not affected by any provision of the Treaty of Lisbon, including those relating to the common commercial policy.

That is a reiteration of protocol 9 of the Lisbon treaty. The "non-economic services of general interest" definition is, as we know, constructed in such a way as to limit governments' role in the broader field of public services, namely health, education, social services, transport, utilities etc.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Rubbish.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: All in all, the Council conclusions appear to be an exercise in smoke and mirrors. They do not provide credible guarantees where they are needed. They divert attention away from many of the real reasons for the "No" vote. They fail to deliver

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positive reasons for voting in favour of the Lisbon treaty. They attempt to confuse a number of issues in order to give full reign to fear and misinformation in a rerun of the referendum.

Having seen them in action over this past short spell, the approach of some members of the Government, including those present, has been arrogant.

The Taoiseach: Sinn Féin's canvassers in Tullamore were talking about conscription.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It has been in evidence over the past six months.

The Taoiseach: Sinn Féin's is the only army that one cannot leave.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: When one interrupts and heckles, one has already lost.

The Taoiseach: I have not lost it.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It shows a complete lack of respect——

The Taoiseach: The Deputy has some neck talking to me about misinformation.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——for both the democratic institutions of the State and the democratic will of the people. That is what it amounts to. The Taoiseach can make all the mocking sounds he likes as to the irony of my saying this, but——

The Taoiseach: The Deputy accused me of peddling misinformation.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——I point it out to him, nevertheless. However uncomfortable it makes him, it is his problem, not mine.

The Taoiseach: Sinn Féin's canvassers were going around my town talking about conscription and getting into an army, but there was nothing wrong with the one they were in themselves.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Rerunning the referendum on the Lisbon treaty, albeit one that will not be altered by one iota, would be a denial of democracy. It is no different from a defeated Government rerunning a general election in the hope that the people will change their minds. We have often wished it, but we know that it is never an option. If the Taoiseach proceeds with his intention to put the same treaty to the people for a second time, as matters stand and according to the information provided today, not only in the Taoiseach's contributions to these statements but the earlier engagement with him during questions to the Taoiseach, he will have profoundly misjudged the public mood once again and be in for another sorry response.

Deputy Billy Timmins: I would not like to hear Deputy Ó Caoláin's contribution when Sinn Féin decides a position if that was his contribution while his party is still deliberating. Notwithstanding that, he is entitled to make his contribution.

Will the Minister for Foreign Affairs confirm whether, under the Constitution, the Government can introduce a proposal for a constitutional referendum as often as it wishes? I will not go down the road of discussing the number of times America's suffragettes needed to make proposals. They were told "No" 30 or 40 times before they got the vote.

Will the Minister confirm the co-finance measures to deal with the pork crisis? What funding, if any, will be available from the EU? At the bishops' conference this week, Bishop Fields called on the Government to urge the EU to send peacekeeping troops to the Congo. Did this possibility arise during the Council meeting? While the African Union-UN force in the Congo

is working to the best of its ability, additional forces are required in the region to restore peace and stability to the Congo. Currently, this could only be done by EU troops.

Reference was made to the Middle East peace process. Will the Minister inform the House of the EU's role in the Quartet discussions?

Regarding the €200 billion economic stimulus package, what input will Ireland have and over what period will it last?

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): There are precedents of organising multiple referendums on various issues, such as electoral representation, divorce and abortion. There is no constraint on reverting to the people to allow them to decide on any particular question.

Regarding pigmeat, the issue was handled in the context of the EU through the European Food Safety Authority. This showed the importance of belonging to an international organisation where people on the veterinary, food safety and public health sides work collectively in accordance with best principles, such as the precautionary principle, as it gives the markets confidence. There is a direct link between an EU public health surveillance and food safety network and ultimate market confidence in food products. This was clearly displayed in the pork issue.

Last week, a private storage scheme for pigmeat was exclusively introduced for Ireland. This will allow the storage of some 30,000 tonnes of pigmeat products with an underlying value of €15 million for a period of six months. We managed to achieve a Council conclusion in text format, which will enable the Council to express its support for Ireland's effort to deal with the situation and for its prompt precautionary action and ask the Commission to support farmers and slaughterhouses in Ireland by way of co-financed measures to remove the relevant animals and products from the market. The conclusion has been given politically and the Commission is working with the Government on the details in terms of how the former can add supports over and above what has been offered in terms of the private storage area. This demonstrates the good faith shown by our European partners during the exceptional situation in which we found ourselves.

Last week, the EU's Foreign Ministers held two significant discussions on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC. The first occurred at the General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting on Monday and the second occurred over dinner at the European Council meeting on Thursday, 11 December. The key issue was our response to the request of the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, for assistance and support. The original request was for a deployment by the EU or some of its member states of a multinational force for up to four months, pending the arrival of reinforcements requested by the UN Security Council. The matter has been under discussion, including a detailed discussion at the meeting and a briefing by Javier Solana.

There have been some welcome developments on the regional political side of the issue, as leaders are engaging. There is no unanimity on the deployment of a battle group, but we agreed on further engagement with Ban Ki-moon concerning the details of what would be required on the ground and what could be deployed effectively. From a humanitarian perspective, we believe that there should be a positive and meaningful response to the Secretary-General's request, which I articulated at the Foreign Affairs Council.

One can argue that the whole idea of battle groups was to have them in readiness to be able to respond to such situations. Obviously, circumstances are moving quickly. At Thursday's meeting, there was a sense that matters had improved somewhat and that we should keep them under consideration. Discussions are continuing at senior level under Javier Solana's office.

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

At the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on Thursday, our text contributed significantly to an extended discussion on the Middle East and found its way into the ultimate conclusions of the overall text in terms of developing broader support for the Arab peace initiative and a broader regional dimension and encouraging the prioritisation of the Middle East question by the incoming American presidential Administration.

With regard to the economy, we are spending approximately twice the EU average on capital investment. We are ahead of the game in that regard in the context of the stimulus policy. We welcome the initiative on the part of President Barroso in respect of this matter.

Deputy Joe Costello: How does the Minister propose to progress the agreements reached at the summit in respect of the Lisbon treaty? What is the position regarding the conditional response to a second referendum? How does the Minister propose to deal with the Opposition in the House in respect of this matter? Does he intend to establish a new committee or will the existing sub-committee remain in place? What steps does he propose to take in the context of introducing domestic legislation relating to the EU directives — such as the services directive, the agency workers directive and the migrant workers directive — that are awaiting transposition into Irish law? There is also the question of the employment law compliance legislation. A report published yesterday indicates that fewer than half of those employed in the hotel and services industries are paid the minimum wage and that 75% of them are not paid overtime at weekends.

Between now and the summer of next year — when the Czech Republic will hold the Presidency of the EU — what steps does the Minister propose to take to deal with the issues raised at the summit? How does he propose to progress matters relating to them to a satisfactory conclusion?

On the €200 billion stimulus package, why does Ireland seem to have difficulty in drawing down the money available from the European Investment Bank? Why has none of the €30 billion available from this source in respect of small and medium enterprises not been drawn down by Irish banks to date? Such enterprises here are crying out for cash but the banks are not making it available. The banks are stonewalling these businesses and stating that they have no problem as regards liquidity. However, there is no sign of credit being provided. Why do we appear to have a problem with regard to drawing down EU money?

Matters relating to Zimbabwe were discussed at the Council meeting and I understand the case of Jestina Mukoko, a campaigner for human rights in that country, was raised. Was any progress made in the context of pressurising South Africa, the key player in the region, to take action? Did the possibility of imposing sanctions arise at the Council meeting? I understand certain Irish pension funds are invested in the region. Perhaps taking action in respect of these might be an appropriate avenue of action.

Deputy Micheál Martin: As the Taoiseach stated, detailed work will have to be carried out in respect of dealing with the issues on which we received undertakings from our European colleagues and obtaining legal guarantees. These three issues are the protection of our traditional policy of military neutrality, ensuring that nothing under the Lisbon treaty will affect our competence in the area of direct taxation and our freedom to decide on ethical questions. Detailed texts will have to be drawn up in respect of these matters. These will be the subject of negotiations with our European colleagues.

Deputy Joe Costello: Who will have responsibility in that regard?

The Taoiseach: The Government negotiates with other governments in the context of obtaining agreements. Normally it works with the member state which holds the Presidency, which then negotiates with the other member states.

On the domestic front, the Deputy made the point that there should be constant communication between the parties on a bipartisan level. Such communication will continue to be the norm. I am of the view that it may be useful to retain the Sub-Committee on Ireland's Future in the European Union, which produced a report prior to the Council meeting. Notwithstanding some of the reservations articulated earlier by the Deputy, the sub-committee operated as an extremely effective vehicle within the Oireachtas for facilitating a debate on issues relating to Ireland and the European Union, particularly in the aftermath of the Lisbon treaty referendum result.

The sub-committee may have an opportunity to continue its work. I have been working on this matter since July and when we established the sub-committee, Deputy Costello suggested that it should issue an interim report and that there should, perhaps, be a second phase to its work. That may be one possibility as to what might happen. I will consult with the Deputy and others in order to decide on what might be the best way to proceed. We must go about our work in an effective and efficient manner.

On workers' rights, it is important to again point out that we work with the other member states on the amendment of the EU's body of law on labour and that we draw up domestic legislation in respect of this matter. We ensured that the conclusions agreed last week contain an acceptance and confirmation in respect of the importance attached by European Union member states to the issue of workers' rights. That is a better outcome than we anticipated prior to the Council meeting. Our original presentation to the Presidency took the form of the attachment to the conclusions of an Irish text relating to this matter. Through a process of negotiation, however, we moved beyond that to a position where the undertakings to give legal guarantees to issues specific to Ireland — neutrality, tax and ethics — are contained in the conclusions, which are strong as a result. In addition, there is an attachment of high importance to the issue of workers' rights.

Deputy Joe Costello: The EU would have no choice but to attach high importance to workers' rights.

Acting Chairman: Deputy Costello should not interrupt. Time is limited and Deputy Ó Caoláin wishes to ask his questions. The Minister should conclude his reply.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The matter relating to the hotel industry does not revolve around introducing even further legislation, rather it relates to the implementation and enforcement of existing law. The critical issue is that Ireland has in place a minimum wage. Sweden did not have a minimum wage and, as a result, the Laval judgment is extremely specific to that country. The absence of legal frameworks in Sweden made it fundamentally vulnerable. In this country there are recognised employment agreements, REAs, in the area of construction, joint labour committees, JLCs, operate in certain sectors and there is also the minimum wage.

Deputy Joe Costello: The agreements to which the Minister refers are being breached because we do not have employment law compliance legislation in place.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We are consulting with the social partners in respect of the employment law compliance Bill. I was involved in the process to establish the National Employment Rights Authority and also the appointment of almost 60 additional inspectors.

Deputy Joe Costello: When will all to which the Minister refers be implemented?

Deputy Micheál Martin: As the Taoiseach stated, the decision on holding a referendum is conditional on our obtaining satisfactory resolutions in respect of the issues we have identified. In any event, it will all be implemented in 2009.

Acting Chairman: There are just over four minutes remaining. In those circumstances, I ask Deputy Ó Caoláin to keep his questions brief.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I wish to put two straightforward questions to the Minister. The Taoiseach indicated that a number of member states were opposed to the retention of a Commissioner by each member state but stated that they ultimately accepted that this change is required. Will the Minister indicate the states that were strongly opposed and outline the specific arguments they put forward in this regard? Will he provide detail in respect of this matter in order that we might be assured that the undertaking relating to Commissioners is not merely being included to create the appearance of serious engagement?

President Sarkozy referred to the treaty relating to Croatia's anticipated accession in 2010 or 2011. It has been stated that some of the declarations to which the Minister, the Taoiseach and their colleagues have referred since the European Council meeting would form part of that treaty. Will the Minister indicate if that is the case? Will we have a second Lisbon treaty referendum prior to our even seeing some of the ostensibly "legally binding declarations", to use the wording employed by Government, that they will not present until 2010 or 2011? Perhaps the Minister would clarify the position in this regard.

Deputy Seán Barrett: Will the Minister arrange for a reply to be sent to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Change and Energy Security in respect of the points made by it when scrutinising the proposals for 2012-20?

In the context of changes made to facilitate other countries, was agreement reached on the establishment of a fund to deal with carbon capture and storage from coal? Also, was there any discussion on the energy super-grid, which would be of great interest to Ireland in terms of wind and wave generation?

Deputy Micheál Martin: There were fundamental contradictions in Deputy Ó Caoláin's original contribution in which he stated a better deal than expected was achieved. However, he quickly moved away from that. On his point in regard to the Commission, under Lisbon there will be fewer members of the Commission; that is a legal fact. There is no getting around this; an interim agreement cannot be provided.

Deputy Joe Costello: I think the Minister is speaking about the Nice treaty.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I apologise. Under the Nice treaty the number of Commissioners must be reduced. That is a legal imperative.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: We understand that.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Deputy does not.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: That is not the question I asked the Minister.

Deputy Micheál Martin: No, through the Chair——

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Minister is slating——

Deputy Micheál Martin: I will address the point made by the Deputy.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: —once again, which is typical of his arrogant approach. The Minister will not answer the questions I have asked.

Acting Chairman: Only one minute remains and if the Deputy wishes to have answers to his questions he will have to restrain himself.

Deputy Dick Roche: If there is one arrogant man in this House, it is Deputy Ó Caoláin.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Minister should, at the very least, answer my questions.

Acting Chairman: Deputy Ó Caoláin must restrain himself.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Minister should answer my question given we have only limited time.

Deputy Dick Roche: It is Deputy Ó Caoláin who is arrogant and manipulative.

Acting Chairman: We have one minute remaining. I call the Minister to respond.

Deputy Dick Roche: I beg the Chair's pardon.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I did not interrupt Deputy Ó Caoláin who asked about the Commission. I am making the point that we succeeded last week in obtaining agreement that under Lisbon there will be one Commissioner per member state. Everybody in this House knows that during the last referendum campaign Sinn Féin erected on every lamppost in Ireland posters stating "Vote No, Keep Your Commissioner".

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I asked the Minister to outline the member states involved and their arguments.

Deputy Micheál Martin: If the Deputy allows me to finish, I will tell him. The member states in question are the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: What were their arguments?

Deputy Micheál Martin: They believed that there was an institutional balance to be arrived at and had no difficulty articulating the view that they believe a reduced Commission would lead to more efficiency and so forth. They have articulated this view publicly and within the Council. Others had reservations earlier in the negotiating phase. I respect the positions they presented to us. This was a difficult and substantial issue. It was a major concession by our colleagues to Ireland to agree to change the situation in regard to implementation of the Lisbon treaty.

Deputy Ó Caoláin continually uses the word "declaration". We never used that word. That word is not contained in the conclusions or used in any public articulation of the issues. I have nothing against the word "declaration". One of the most far-reaching declarations we ever had was the "Downing Street Declaration" with which Sinn Féin had no problem. What we have referred to here are "decisions" of the European Council which in themselves have legal validity.

What we are talking about in this regard is a decision from the European Council which has undertaken to give robust legal guarantees that would have treaty status and will be attached to the treaties. Obviously, these will be attached to the treaties at the time of the next accession treaty, which potentially is the Croatian accession. There is a precedent in this regard in terms of the Danish experience. This is far better than Deputy Ó Caoláin ever thought we would get.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It is a hell of a lot better than the Government was prepared to accept, but we are not there yet.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Deputy Ó Caoláin jumped the gun prior to Council and during the debate. Sinn Féin's spokespeople continually stated we were getting meaningless declarations. They are more surprised than anybody by what has been achieved. President Sarkozy was open and honest and told the 27 members at the Council meeting that this will mean a legal guarantee, a protocol, will be attached to the treaties.

I would like to make a final and important point in respect of workers' rights, an issue raised by all Deputies. The Charter of Fundamental Rights is key to Lisbon. It is part of Lisbon and refers to the right of workers to negotiate and conclude collective agreements at appropriate levels; to take collective action to defend their interests, including strike action; workers' and their representatives guarantee of information and consultation in good time; workers' rights to protection against unjustified dismissal in accordance with union laws, national laws and practices; workers' rights of access to a free placement service; workers' rights to working conditions which respect their health, safety and dignity; workers' rights to limitation of maximum working hours, to daily and weekly rest periods and to periods of paid annual leave; and the prohibition in respect of the employment of children. It states that the minimum age of admission to employment may not be lower than the minimum school-leaving age, without prejudice to such rules as may be more favourable to young people and except for limited derogations. Also, young people admitted to work must have working conditions appropriate to their age and be protected against economic exploitation and any work likely to harm their safety, health or physical, mental, moral or social development or to interfere with their education. These provisions are contained in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Why, in the name of God, does Sinn Féin insist on voting against these fundamental rights for workers?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Why does the Government not, in the first instance, include them in the Irish Constitution? Doing so would provide it with an opportunity to demonstrate its good faith on this issue. Then we might believe the Government is sincere. The Government continually refuses——

Acting Chairman: I ask the Minister to reply in writing to the questions put by Deputy Barrett.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I will do so. I wish to confirm that a substantial provision of up to €300 million was agreed for carbon capture and storage. There was a robust debate on that issue, in respect of which we obtained a satisfactory outcome. I will reply formally to the Deputy in regard to the committee's work.

Sitting suspended at 2.10 p.m. and resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Ceisteanna — Questions (Resumed).

Priority Questions.

Air Services.

59. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport his position on the proposed takeover of Aer Lingus by a company (details supplied); the implications that would have on aviation policy; if competition law would allow such a takeover; the communication he has had

with Aer Lingus and the company's management on the latest takeover bid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46631/08]

60. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport his national aviation strategy in view of his recent comments that he will consider a takeover bid for Aer Lingus by a company (details supplied) in the context of the national aviation strategy; the directions he has given to the three Government-appointed directors to the board of Aer Lingus in view of the recent €748 million proposal by the company to acquire Aer Lingus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46527/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 60 together.

I wish to bring to the attention of the Deputies the fact that under the applicable takeover rules there are constraints on any comments I can make about the matter at this stage. The reply is given in that context.

Ireland's aviation policy, as set out in my Department's current statement of strategy, is to promote regular, safe, cost-effective and competitive air services linking the country and key business and tourism markets. The priority, from an Irish economy perspective, is to maintain the highest possible levels of connectivity between Ireland and key markets around the world. That remains the strategic context against which any proposal for the purchase of the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus will be considered.

Following its initial announcement on 1 December, Ryanair posted a detailed offer to Aer Lingus shareholders on 15 December. In accordance with the takeover rules, the board of the company must set out a detailed response within 14 days following the release of the detailed offer so that shareholders can make a decision on the acceptance of the offer or otherwise. The Deputy will be aware that the board of Aer Lingus has publicly announced its rejection of the proposed offer.

I have said that the Government would consider the Ryanair offer when received. It is now being examined by my Department. The State's nominees on the board were issued with a mandate to seek to reconcile commercial and public policy objectives on 31 January 2008. I have not given any specific directions to the State's nominees on the board in regard to this matter. All members of the board of directors are subject to the requirements of the Companies Acts to uphold their fiduciary responsibilities and to act in the interests of the company and its shareholders.

Even if a sufficient number of Aer Lingus shareholders were willing to accept Ryanair's offer, the completion of a merger between Ryanair and Aer Lingus would only be possible with the approval of the European Commission. The Deputy will be aware that Ryanair's previous takeover bid, initiated in 2006, failed to obtain the necessary approval and that decision is now under appeal by Ryanair to the Court of First Instance.

On 11 December, I agreed to meet with the CEO and chairman of Aer Lingus who wished to convey to me their opposition to the Ryanair offer. The Deputy will be aware that the company made a public statement following the meeting.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: What is Government policy on this issue and how does it impact on the board members nominated by the Minister? If the Government were to decide to accept this offer, would the Minister be in a position to instruct his nominees on the board to do so or are they separate to and independent of his policy decision?

On 1 December, the Minister said there were two key issues. He did not include competition today. What is his view on competition? Would it be bad for consumers if there was only one

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airline option in Ireland, in other words, if Aer Lingus and Ryanair were part of the one fleet and under the same ownership?

Does the Minister consider that the recent Ryanair offer, which is much less than a previous offer, is bad for the taxpayer in the context of the Government investment in Aer Lingus? The key point is that on 1 December the Minister said the Government's shareholding was being held, in particular, to prevent hostile bids or takeovers. Can he define what he means by a "hostile bid"?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: As I indicated at the outset, I must be careful in what I say until such time as the Government makes a final decision on the issue. To try to be helpful to the Deputy, I repeat that it is Irish aviation policy to have maximum connectivity and competition. We have pursued a two-airline policy for many years, in the sense that we believe two airlines is the minimum number that should fly in and out of Ireland. We have more than that and we would want to see more than that, but in the context of that particular aviation policy I will present to Government when I know the full facts of the offer, and when I have the full response from Aer Lingus, which is due to be made on 29 December. At that stage I will make my recommendation to Government on the shareholding we have. I will take into account the matters the Deputy legitimately and correctly raised, namely, whether the offer is good value for taxpayers and whether it will enhance or hinder competition.

I have explained the specific details regarding the directors to the Deputy. The directors of the Aer Lingus board have already made their views on the offer known, but they have to make a formal response to it. The directors must have regard to the general aviation policies of the Government, but they must also ensure their fiduciary responsibilities are fully met. I cannot dictate to them how they should act but I can point out what is Government policy at the time. I will not make a decision on the matter until, first, I have seen the offer, which I have now seen and that is being examined, and second, Aer Lingus has made a full response to the offer.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: On behalf of the Labour Party, I have heard from both sides and I have read the Coinside Limited offer document. I have also heard from Aer Lingus. I agree with Mr. Conor McCarthy. I think this is an ego trip and a complete distraction by the chief executive of Ryanair. On competition and connectivity grounds, but above all on behalf of the Irish travelling public, I believe the offer should be rejected out of hand and Aer Lingus should stay as a totally independent airline. That is where my party stands. Tomorrow we will have an opportunity to question again representatives of the two airlines in public.

The Minister outlined the Government's aviation policy. Does it encompass a two major airline policy? In other words, are we in favour of two major airlines connecting this island nation to the United Kingdom and to Europe?

I understand the three Government-appointed directors to the board of Aer Lingus are Mr. Hackett, Mr. Wall and Dr. Hunt. Has the Minister been in contact with them in any way? Has he spoken to them and will they fulfil the objectives of the national aviation policy? Has the Cabinet discussed the matter? Has the Minister spoken to any of the other large shareholders, such as, for example, Bank of Ireland, which I understand owns 4% of Aer Lingus, Mr. Denis O'Brien and, above all, the ESOT itself and Aer Lingus?

Will the Minister comment briefly on the competition issue? Is it not a fact that if the takeover were to be achieved, the number of routes out of Ireland would increase by approximately 20% or 25% immediately, that it would increase in terms of being a single airline route

and there would be much less competition? Is it not the case that this would be a major blow, that we would have a dominant, monolith airline with 75% or 80% of traffic?

In terms of connectivity, regarding the slots in Heathrow, for example, and Shannon, is it possible for the kind of guarantees Mr. O'Leary has said he would give to be incorporated into any takeover agreement, given the comments of the Stock Exchange on a number of offers?

Most Members would agree that Ryanair has a dismal record — sometimes an appalling record — in regard to the conditions and salaries of workers who work for the company on this island and in other parts of Europe. Does the Minister have concerns about the future treatment of the workforce of any merged airline?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I thank the Deputy for his contribution and his statement of Labour Party policy. I trust he will appreciate that Fianna Fáil has a party policy on the matter also but I cannot act on the basis of party policy. I have a particular role as adviser to the Government and to the shareholder, who is the Minister for Finance. I am somewhat constrained in what I can say. On aviation policy, which I outlined to the Deputy earlier, it is not that we just have two major airlines coming in here. If we could have ten major airlines, that would be Government policy, but at a minimum we should have competition — the point the Deputy made.

As I explained in the House the last day, very specific rules have been put in place by takeover panels, competition authorities, the Stock Exchange and everything else as regards shareholders acting in concert during a bid period. Therefore, when Mr. O'Leary requested a meeting with me, I felt it necessary, as did he, to have a legal adviser present to ensure these rules were obeyed. From that viewpoint, I can confirm that I have not had conversations with other shareholders, nor would it be right or proper to have had, as this could give rise to competition difficulties — and Stock Exchange difficulties.

As regards the slots at Heathrow, the “initial offer” suggested the Government would have to give its approval for changes to those. In the offer document it is now suggested that the Houses of the Oireachtas is the body that should have the say in that regard. I do not know, legally, whether that is a possibility and we shall take legal advice on that as we will on the other aspects.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: On the Government policy to have at least two airlines, is it not implicit that there will not be two separate airlines if Ryanair owns both? In terms of the hostile bid — the point the Minister referred to on 1 December — a hostile bid means that something would not be in the best interests of the company or of the Government's shareholding, which is what I presume the Minister is talking about. It seems that implicit in what the Minister is saying is that he will reject this, even though, perhaps, he cannot say that.

What Ryanair is guaranteeing is the connectivity from Heathrow to Ireland. If Aer Lingus is taken over by any other company, that guarantee will not necessarily be there. Will the Minister please comment?

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: At the time of the first attack on Aer Lingus by Ryanair, which the Minister's predecessor should have expected, Commissioner Kroes demolished the bid on economic grounds, in terms of the severe lack of competition and connectivity and pointed out that this was different from other takeover bids in Europe. Has the Minister had any contact with the Commissioner?

Looking at the two airlines over the past year or so, is it not a fact that Ryanair has performed quite badly from its shareholders' viewpoint, with massive losses and a serious failure in the hedging of fuel costs as well as other problems on the closure of bases and so on? At the same

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time, the smaller airline has had a relatively good six months and looks as if it will break even in this very difficult period. Is this not really a smash and grab exercise by Michael O'Leary, in his typical buccaneer fashion, on an enormous asset which is worth three or four times the valuation he has put on it?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I do not know whether I can add much. However, Aer Lingus has done well in very difficult circumstances this year and the agreement reached with the trade unions and workers will help it to do even better, into the future.

I do not agree with knocking Ryanair, however. Ryanair employs a good many Irish people as well. It is a very successful Irish company, and we should bear that in mind, whatever our views might be as regards the current offer, or anything else. There are sufficient people across Europe knocking the airline, who are competitors of Ryanair, and would like to see it going out of business, without us starting to do so in this House. It employs a good many Irish people and while I would not share Mr. O'Leary's attitude to trade unions, people who work in the airline are, by and large, well paid. That should be kept in perspective.

Departmental Agencies.

61. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport if he has met the board and senior management of all 37 agencies under the aegis of his Department; the outcome of such meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46632/08]

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Since my appointment as Minister for Transport, my practice has been to keep open lines of communication with the agencies operating under the aegis of my Department, primarily by maintaining regular and appropriate levels of contact with the chairpersons of the boards of the agencies, or their equivalents in the case of certain regulatory bodies. Communication takes place in several ways including by telephone and by way of both formal and informal meetings and encounters. Occasionally I meet the full board of an agency in a structured setting. I have also on occasion met senior management as required from time to time to address matters of particular pertinence for a given agency.

These discussions, encounters and occasional formal meetings have addressed, *inter alia*, issues such as review of overall strategies, business plans, financial outlook, performance by agencies, safety, reform and modernisation of the various sectors, structures or possible rationalisation, updates on investment programmes or on specific projects, or proposals for legislative change.

Clearly, my engagement with the agencies focuses mainly on issues of strategic note but I am aware that my discussions are complemented by talks which take place on an ongoing basis between my officials and the management of the agencies operating under the aegis of the Department.

While this form of engagement and oversight has worked well in the past, I recognise that there is always scope for improvement. For this reason, earlier in 2008 the Department carried out a comprehensive review of its corporate governance relationship with the State agencies. As a result of this review, I wrote to the chairpersons of the State agencies under my remit last month announcing the introduction of a new approach to corporate governance. This initiative is aimed at: providing a clearer mandate to each of our State agencies and enhancing the Department's monitoring of their performance; ensuring continuing compliance by agencies with the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; and ensuring that more regular and structured engagement takes place at ministerial and senior management level with all

agencies, as a means of reviewing performance and ensuring that the Department's objectives are being met.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

Specifically, I have proposed to each agency the particular schedule of regular structured meetings, which should become the norm for that agency from now on, as meetings with me or alternatively with senior officials in the Department may be more appropriate in different cases. I propose to meet the boards of the larger agencies. The agenda at such meetings will cover my mandate and expectations, as well as the agency's performance and will address any other pertinent corporate governance issue arising in the context of the particular agency.

The responses I have received to date from the State agencies have been very positive and I am confident that this new approach will significantly improve the oversight of the agencies under my remit and ensure that the performance dialogue will become more structured, focused and productive with all the agencies concerned from now on.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The Minister has some 37 agencies under his remit. How many has he met? As he knows there was a review of his Department by the Department of the Taoiseach. Transport is a very critical Department, where €1.27 billion of taxpayers' money is being spent on public transport, €2.1 million on national, regional and local roads, €40 million on road safety, €48 million on coastguard activity and so on. It is a very important Department. He mentioned the word, "governance". The governance of his Department is inadequate. There is little consensus within the Department as to whether users of the services of these agencies are customers of the Department and what its oversight role is.

The criticism is that the Minister is not doing his job, that he is sitting back and not meeting these agencies. They are spending billions of taxpayers' money and the Department does not know whether it has oversight. Those semi-State bodies do not know whether they are overseen by the Minister, either. In fact, they complain of the lack of direction and leadership from the Minister.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: If the Deputy spoke to some of those people, they would probably say I take too great an interest in their activities — to ensure I know what is happening. That has always been my style. It was for that reason we initiated the review of the relationship between the State bodies and the Department earlier this year. I did the same in the last Department I was in, the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. The Deputy is talking about an internal organisational review report of the Department, but the criticisms levelled in it are not levelled at the Minister, as he will see if he cares to read the report carefully.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The Minister is accountable in the Department.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I am accountable for what I do in this regard and for ensuring my Department keeps in close contact with the various agencies.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: How many has the Minister met?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I have met with all of the major agencies of the Department, at CEO, chairman or board level, since I became Minister.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The Minister has not answered the question I asked him. How many of the 37 has he met? The criticism I made is of the Department and the Minister is the leader of the Department in terms of policy. The report clearly states the Department needs

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to take a more proactive leadership role in setting and clarifying strategies. The issue is that taxpayers' money is being wasted in some of these bodies, but the Minister has no oversight of them.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: If I was in here in other circumstances and interfering in the day-to-day operation of the companies in question, the Deputy would make another complaint. He asked about the various bodies I had met. I have met with all the major ones since joining the Department. I met with Aer Lingus, Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann, the Cork Airport Authority, CIE, the Commission for Aviation Regulation, the Commission for Taxi Regulation, the Dublin Airport Authority, the Drogheda Port Company, the Dublin Transportation Office, Dublin Port Company, Galway Harbour Company, Iarnród Éireann, the Irish Aviation Authority, the National Roads Authority, the Port of Cork Company, the Railway Safety Commission, the Road Safety Authority, the Railway Procurement Agency, representatives of the three airports and the Shannon Foynes Port Company, and the Minister of State, Deputy Noel Ahern, has responsibility for the ports.

Public Transport.

62. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport the size of the subvention for CIE in 2009; if he has had contacts with the Department of Finance, Bus Éireann or Dublin Bus on the subvention and any proposed programme of cutbacks for Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus services and jobs; if his Department or the Minister for Finance have suggested any series of cutbacks for public transport companies; if he will rule out large scale cuts to critical bus and rail services provided by public transport companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46528/08]

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The 2009 Exchequer subvention to CIE will be €313.279 million, an increase of 1.5% on the 2008 figure. During the course of the Estimates discussion, my Department had discussions with the Department of Finance and with CIE on the overall financial position of the CIE operating companies, Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann. The chairman and chief executive of each of the companies also briefed me on the financial outlook on 1 December.

CIE is projecting an operating deficit of €39.5 million for 2008 after Exchequer subvention, compared to an operating deficit of €1.47 million in 2007. This significant deterioration in the financial position of CIE is due in the main to losses in revenue due to a drop in demand for services and increases in costs, particularly fuel costs in the earlier part of this year. The outlook for 2009 is for a further deterioration in the group's financial situation in the absence of corrective measures. In order to preserve the financial stability of the group, each of the companies must, in addition to increasing fares, pursue some rationalisation of services, ranging from frequency reductions, to service withdrawals. The CIE subsidiaries are considering service reductions that maintain the integrity and attractiveness of their networks and achieve significant cost reductions over time.

Following my discussions with CIE and its subsidiary companies and taking account of the emerging findings of a cost and efficiency review of Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann by Deloitte, to be completed shortly, I have agreed the following package of measures to protect the financial position of the CIE group and to maintain public transport services to the maximum extent possible: an increase of €5 million in 2009 over 2008 in the compensation paid to CIE in respect of its public service obligation, provided for in the Estimates; a fares increase of 10% for January 2009; CIE to identify a package of service rationalisation and reductions, focused on heavy loss-making services, sufficient when taken together with the other measures set out to

ensure the financial stability of the CIE group; and measures to improve bus priority and bus journey times.

It is a matter for the CIE group of companies to secure operational efficiencies and to reduce costs so as to maintain services at the highest level possible. I have requested that, in deciding on service reductions, the group should aim to maintain rail services, peak-time bus services, and bus services to developing areas. Service reductions should be a last resort in the group's efforts to maintain financial stability.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive reply. Does what the Minister now proposes to do with regard to bus transport and public transport generally not completely pull the rug from under his sustainable transport policy? The Minister will launch the sustainable policy in a few weeks' time, but with these cutbacks he is completely wrecking the sustainable policy in terms of bus transport. Is it the case that the subvention to the CIE group of companies is among the lowest of the 27 European Union member states? It is certainly the lowest of the old EU 15. Is it the case that the cutbacks now proposed will involve the loss of 40 Dublin Bus routes, of 150 Bus Éireann routes, the withdrawal of 170 Bus Éireann buses and of 100 Dublin Bus buses and the loss of 400 jobs? Is the Minister not effectively eviscerating the whole bus-public transport strategy?

A few months ago the Minister agreed with me that buses must perform the core role until we get the major investment required into heavier public transport over the next five or six years. Is he not wrecking that policy now by these short-sighted financial constraints he and the Department of Finance are imposing?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The country is in the financial situation it is in and no amount of burying one's head in the sand with regard to reality will help anybody. CIE is suffering as a result of the economic recession, just as is everybody else. Fewer people are using buses and trains and coming into towns to shop and fewer people are working. In that kind of environment, it is inevitable that services will end up in a loss-making situation.

The company has a responsibility to ensure that it trades responsibly. We provided an increase in the subvention and a fares increase. It is up to the company to try and ensure it works within those provisions to maintain services and try and grow them if possible. Taxpayers are providing €313 million to public transport, but there is no more money available from them. It is and will be taxpayers from whom these moneys must come. CIE, as it has done in the past and must do in the future, must live within its means and within its budget.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: When I spoke to CIE about nine months ago the key issue was escalating fuel costs, with oil at \$150 a barrel. That cost has been cut by two thirds, down to \$50 or so and I understand CIE and the various bus companies are well hedged for next year. Therefore, how can fuel be used as an excuse to cut back on transport? The Minister failed to get the European Union to do anything about the fuel rebate, which has hurt all public and private transport operators since 1 November.

Is it not the experience of our European sister countries that the lower fares are, the greater the number of people who will travel? Study after study has shown this to be true. Instead of increasing Luas, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann fares by between 5% and 10%, the Minister should be cutting them by 20% if he really wants people to use public transport. The Minister is taking a short-sighted and undynamic approach to policy, is he not?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I am somewhat confused by the Deputy. I am not sure what he wants me to do on this matter.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I want him to get more people on buses and trains. He is the regulator.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: He is telling me I should cut fares. I would be delighted not to approve a request for higher fares. The original request was for a 20% fare increase. I would be delighted to be able to say to CIE that I was going to get it to cut its fares. If the Deputy thinks that is a wise policy to pursue, that is okay. I will do that. The Deputy cannot complain, on the one hand, that CIE will not be able to operate as it wishes and, on the other, that somebody must pay for this. Taxpayers must pay the €313 million. CIE must promote itself as much as it can, as companies are obliged to do. It is clear there must be rationalisation within Dublin Bus. Many services can be saved if that rationalisation takes place.

I do not use fuel as an excuse. CIE has a very good record of hedging. The most it was caught for in fuel costs was approximately \$100 per barrel. It did well and saved. I am responding on the basis of what I have been told. I am not imposing anything.

Road Safety.

63. **Deputy Shane McEntee** asked the Minister for Transport the funding he has provided to local authorities for the provision of gritting; if he has been in contact with local authorities in 2008 regarding gritting; if so, when; if he is satisfied that all the stakeholders who are responsible for ensuring safe driving conditions during the winter months have acted appropriately; if he has communicated warnings to any of the stakeholders in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46633/08]

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Under the Roads Act 1993, the maintenance of roads, including winter maintenance, is a statutory function of each individual road authority. This work is funded out of each authority's own resources, supplemented in the case of regional and local roads by discretionary and block grants allocated annually by my Department. In the case of national roads, funding for maintenance, which includes the gritting of roads and other safety-related work in winter, is provided by my Department to the National Roads Authority which allocates it among the local authorities.

Local authorities are advised that they should set aside contingency sums from these resources to finance works necessitated by severe weather conditions. In 2008, the total discretionary maintenance grant allocated to county councils by my Department was €29.56 million and the total block grant allocated to urban authorities was €16.133 million. The maintenance grant by my Department to the NRA for allocation to local authorities in 2008 was €58.21 million. This includes provision for winter maintenance, forecasting and monitoring of weather conditions.

Local authorities are regularly reminded by my Department of their responsibilities in relation to winter maintenance of roads. During 2008, the matter was brought to the attention of local authorities on 5 February and again on 10 December.

Deputy Shane McEntee: I listened to the Minister on the radio last week. He said, rightly, that we have not had road conditions such as we have had in the past few weeks for a number of years. Many new drivers are not experienced in these conditions. I doubt there is a Deputy in this House who has not had many complaints in respect of our smaller roads, particularly those roads that were not maintained over the past number of years. We know our major roads are safer.

Is the Minister happy that the allocation he gave in 2008 is being used? There is a difference. If I contact local authorities in different areas some will claim, behind the scenes, that they are not funded properly. The Minister states that his Department funds them properly. Can the Minister clarify that all the county councils got the same money this year as they received last year?

We are coming near to the end of the year, and, please God, the Department can be proud of one thing, namely, that deaths are down. The Minister knows he has the backing of everybody in the House for every measure he takes in that regard. However, I am deeply concerned about the condition of our roads at present. I am concerned that funding is not being used specifically to grit roads if they continue to be in the same condition.

There is a serious problem throughout the country with regard roads that are newly tarmacadamed. They then have six-inch deep curves on their edges. I am aware of one road where there were four accidents last week due to non-maintenance of road edges.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: To my recollection, and I may be corrected, the amount of money provided under this heading at the beginning of 2008 was an increase on the figure given in 2007. There was no reduction in funding. The grants we give for roads are meant to supplement local authorities' own resources. If the authorities feel they have not got an adequate amount in the grant they receive from us, they should put money from their own resources towards it. That is the situation as it is supposed to be.

I agree with the Deputy there appears not to be the same amount of gritting on minor roads. That is my experience and I hear the same from colleagues on all sides of the House. Perhaps the reason is that it is a long time since we had such a prolonged cold spell. Judging from the level of complaints we have heard, there has not been the same level of gritting as previously. The responsibility lies with local authorities and it is one they should take very seriously. I know the Deputy made that point publicly and I agree with it.

Other Questions.

Air Services.

64. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to develop the aviation industry here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46416/08]

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Ireland's aviation policy, as set out my Department's current statement of strategy, is to promote regular, safe, cost-effective and competitive air services linking the country with key business and tourism markets.

To this end, within the European Union, Ireland has consistently supported market liberalisation measures, which have, to date, served as the platform for the rapid expansion of aviation generally. We have also sought to influence the emerging EU and wider international framework for aviation to ensure that it continues to promote competition and innovation in the marketplace.

The introduction of the EU-US open skies agreement and the conclusion of a more liberal agreement on a bilateral basis with Canada illustrates our commitment to supporting liberalisation measures.

Our approach to the encouragement of air services is complemented by our policy on the development of airport infrastructure within the country. The main objective is to ensure that the three State airports have sufficient capacity to respond to the growth opportunities of a

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competitive airline sector and to provide vital international access. The opening of terminal 2 at Dublin Airport in early 2010 will allow Dublin Airport to comfortably handle up to 35 million passengers per year and will create a vibrant modern airport that will be an efficient gateway to the Ireland of the 21st century.

In addition, the six regional airports have a role to play in facilitating access to the regions. My Department provides financial support for airport development and operations as well as for PSO services connecting Kerry, Galway, Knock, Sligo, Donegal and Derry to Dublin.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Is it not a fact that the number of tourists from Britain has dropped significantly in the past year? The figure is down 17%. Is it not the case that the Minister's airport departure tax of €2 per passenger travelling to the United Kingdom will have an adverse impact on this decreasing number? Does the Minister not think he should do away with that tax? It is affecting profitability on routes for the main airlines and it affects people's pockets, particularly when their income is reducing.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I do not accept that. The airport departure tax is not in play at the moment and it cannot be causing the fall in tourist numbers.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: It will. That is a facetious answer.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I could claim that the question is somewhat facetious if the Deputy talks about an airport tax when he asked about Irish aviation policy.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The Minister would not take my question.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy will allow the Minister to respond.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: It has not had any effect on tourism numbers. I expect that passenger numbers will reduce as they are currently reducing. That has more to do with the international economic situation and the recession we now face. I do not accept for a minute that the airport tax will be the deciding factor as to whether people travel in and out of this country.

Deputy Pat Breen: In the Minister's replies to questions put to him by the transport spokespersons, he mentioned aviation policy and Government policy in respect of maximum connectivity. Over the past few days we have had good news and bad news. In my own mid-west region we have seen 200 jobs announced for an American company in Ennis. The company is there because there is a daily direct transatlantic service which is very important. On the other hand, we have seen job losses because Heathrow was a very important hub of connectivity for the region. I know the Minister has had discussions with the airlines, particularly with Aer Lingus and Ryanair in recent days. Michael O'Leary mentioned that he would restore the Shannon-Heathrow slots in the event of his takeover bid proving successful.

The last time I questioned the Minister, I asked about the border customs protection facility and he told me he would make an announcement shortly, which he did two days later. Is the restoration of the Shannon-Heathrow service by Aer Lingus imminent and has the Minister had discussions with Aer Lingus in this regard? The news on the ground is that there may be an announcement before the end of the week. If there is, I hope the Minister will return to Shannon, make that announcement and act as Santa Claus for Christmas.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I do not think I would make a good Santa Claus. With regard to the Shannon-Heathrow route and the different meetings I have had with different representatives of Aer Lingus in the past 12 months, I have never failed to highlight that issue. I have also

discussed it on a number of occasions with our own directors on the board of Aer Lingus to try to ensure that the link, which is important, is restored. Again, we are back to the same situation as before. At the end of the day, it is a commercial decision that Aer Lingus will have to make.

Deputy Pat Breen: Does the Minister expect Aer Lingus to make a decision shortly?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I can only go by what was said in public some weeks back, when Dermot Mannion of Aer Lingus indicated at a meeting in Shannon that it was considering increasing the number of short haul flights. I can only hope.

Deputy Pat Breen: The Minister knows more than that.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: With regard to aviation policy, is it the Minister's intention to produce a Green Paper? One of the core issues of that policy is the State Airports Act 2004. Will that now be repealed having regard to the separation of Dublin, Cork and Shannon airports? There seems to be some row-back on this and a feeling that on economic grounds it should not proceed. What is the Minister's view?

On a related point regarding the investment we have made in the three national airports, is it not the case that the Ryanair company has been bitterly opposed to Terminal 2 at Dublin, the new facility at Cork and the additional facilities at Shannon? Do these issues concerning the past history of Ryanair concern the Minister given that the general plan in Dublin is for Aer Lingus to use Terminal 2?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is a very broad question with many extra wings to it. I will allow Deputy O'Donnell to raise a brief supplementary question.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: To follow on from what Deputy Breen has said, has the Minister sought a meeting with Dermot Mannion given the media speculation at the weekend with regard to the restoration of the Aer Lingus Shannon-Heathrow route? Will he seek a meeting with his directors on the board of Aer Lingus to ensure there is certainty on this and that we get a date as to when this vital connectivity for Shannon and the mid-west region, including Limerick, is restored?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: There are no plans to repeal the State Airports Act. The state of play is that the business plans have been submitted, the DAA commentary on the business plans has been submitted and the two airports, Shannon and Cork, have also submitted letters to me stating their views of the proposal to have separation at this point in time. Both airports remain committed to the concept of separation. The three chairpersons and the chief executive of the Dublin Airport Authority are currently in discussions and I expect them to make contact with me over the next few days to try to finalise this particular matter.

With regard to the investment in airports, it is a fair portrayal of the situation to say that on most occasions every proposed investment in the airports, particularly Dublin Airport, has been opposed by Ryanair, which believes that the Dublin Airport Authority is gold-plating everything in regard to Terminal 2, Pier D and so on. I had the discussion with representatives of Ryanair not that long ago that Government would see the airports, particularly Dublin Airport because of its size——

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: And Cork and Shannon.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Particularly Dublin. They are the gateway to Ireland and are the first impression people get of Ireland. It is particularly important that we have good facilities and I am committed to that.

I have not sought any meeting with Dermot Mannion. He sought a meeting with me last week and I had discussions with him at that stage.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Did he tell the Minister anything with regard to the restoration of the route? The Minister should give us details.

Departmental Review.

65. **Deputy Shane McEntee** asked the Minister for Transport the reason half the number of business customers who, as reported in the organisation review programme carried out on his Department, made a complaint to his Department in late 2005 and early 2006 have not had their complaint resolved; the nature of those complaints; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46472/08]

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The reference in the organisation review programme report is to a finding in our business customer survey for 2005-06, which surveyed 328 business customers and found that of 47 who had made a complaint, over half had not had their complaint resolved at the time of the survey. As the survey was carried out on an anonymous basis it is not possible at this stage to identify either the business customers concerned or the nature of their complaints.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department makes every effort to ensure that all complaints are dealt with and I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some areas where we have made improvements for our business customers. In May 2008, the Department introduced a new on-line facility that enables approved motor dealers notify vehicle ownership changes to the national vehicle and driver file, NVDF, over the Internet. The new on-line service at *www.motortrans.ie* presents an alternative to paper-based arrangements. In addition, the processing time for road transport operator licences has decreased from approximately 20 working days in 2006 to under five, and changes or additions to licences from ten working days in 2006 to two. Furthermore, following decentralisation to Loughrea in May 2007, the public office opening hours were extended by 1.5 hours per day.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: It is a serious issue to suggest that having made their complaints to the Department of Transport, its business customers have not had them resolved after two years. While I accept the survey may have been anonymous, is there a complaints system or process within the Department so it can track its business customers' complaints? If there was, I am sure they would not have waited two years for these issues to be resolved. Does the Department record all communications with regard to complaints?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The systems that operate in the Department are similar to the ones that operate in the Minister's office in that all communications are recorded when they come in and where they go in the system is also recorded. We endeavour to ensure that replies are given. It is possible that when people do not get the answer they want, they regard the issue as not being resolved. The 23 people of 328 who say it was not resolved are not necessarily saying they did not get a reply; they may not have got the reply they wanted.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Two years later, they were not happy.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: With regard to the efficiency of the Department, how far has decentralisation progressed and what percentage of the staff are now decentralised?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy is broadening the scope of the question. I do not expect the Minister to have that briefing before him.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: To answer generally, the major portion of the decentralisation, which was the move of the Road Safety Authority and the haulage licence section to Loughrea, is now complete. We were also to move some of our operations in maritime safety to Drogheda but because of the stage it was at, it will not go ahead until 2011 under the review. We complied with all of the deadlines and we are probably one of the better Departments in regard to decentralisation.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The staff in the Department are probably too decentralised and one of the complaints is that they are in far too many buildings. There is only one case in which an assistant secretary and all his staff are located in one building. Therefore, there is a significant lack of communication and efficiency. I am sure the Minister, Deputy Dempsey, will explain in answer to a later question how he intends to reduce the number of premises from six to three.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The Deputy is correct and I do not know how this situation arose. The transport portfolio has been shifted from place to place and from Department to Department and we have ended up with six buildings. It is totally unsatisfactory. We hope that during the course of next year we will resolve the matter and reduce the number to three.

Road Traffic Offences.

66. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Transport his views on the issue of driving under the influence of drugs; and the measures, in conjunction with other Departments, he will take in this regard. [40849/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): Driving under the influence of intoxicants, which includes prescription, non-prescription drugs and alcohol, is one of the primary causes of road fatalities and a serious road safety issue.

The Road Traffic Acts provide for the testing of drivers under the influence of drugs. If a garda is of the opinion that a driver is under the influence of a drug or drugs to such an extent as to be incapable of having proper control of a vehicle, he or she may require that person to attend a Garda station, and further require that person to submit to a blood test or provide a urine sample.

The Medical Bureau of Road Safety is keeping abreast of developments in the area of preliminary roadside testing for drugs, but there is as yet no reliable system available. In the meantime, the road traffic and transport Bill, currently being drafted, includes provisions for field impairment testing, that is, non-technological methods by which the Garda could look for the presence of drugs. The Bill is expected to be published early next year.

The Minister for Health and Children, in collaboration with the Road Safety Authority, recently launched a new road safety leaflet entitled Medicines and the Driver. The new leaflet highlights the effects that prescription and non-prescription medicines can have on a person's ability to drive safely. The leaflet also gives advice on how to avoid driving under the influence of medicines. I understand the Road Safety Authority hopes to collaborate in an initiative with the pharmacy sector shortly, whereby such information will feature on the bags used by pharmacy outlets.

Deputy Michael Ring: I thank the Minister of State for his reply. I have been very concerned, as have my constituents and people throughout the country, with the very significant increase

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in the number of people taking drugs in every town, village and county in the country. I spoke with some doctors this morning and we discussed the admission into psychiatric hospitals of people who have taken drugs. If this is happening, there must be more people driving under the influence of drugs. I welcome the compulsory testing measures for drink driving. The time has come in Ireland and every other country to put a test in place. There must be compulsory testing on a regular basis of people driving under the influence of drugs. There is no doubt there are hundreds of people killed in the country every year by people who have taken drugs and who subsequently walk away. We do not have the relevant figures. How close are we to having some compulsory drug testing in the country both for drivers and in the workplace?

Deputy Noel Ahern: I used to have responsibility for the drugs strategy and I am aware of the issues referred to by the Deputy. At present, there is no recognised system by which the Garda can test people on the road. In some countries throughout the world trials are ongoing and we will wait and see how they develop. Such trials are not at the stage where they could be in place on a legal basis, because various people in the courts and elsewhere would drive a coach and four through arguments based on such trials. Part of the function of the Medical Bureau of Road Safety is to keep abreast of developments in that regard. As soon as there is a reliable roadside test for drugs, we will change the legislation to allow its implementation. I agree with Deputy Ring. There is mandatory testing for alcohol but not for drugs, which is illogical. However, we cannot proceed until such time as the system is in place. The new legislation will help the Garda to request that people walk in a straight line and so on.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: A Medical Bureau of Road Safety study found that one in three drivers who test negative for alcohol test positive for drugs. Hibernian Insurance carried out a survey the results of which indicated one fifth of drivers under 35 years of age were under the influence. The Minister of State indicated there are no operational drug tests anywhere in the world. However, they are in place in several Australian states, such as Queensland, where a major roadside drug testing policy is under way. Tasmania is introducing its policy involving a particle detection test. Can we not emulate such places and have this fundamental issue dealt with once and for all?

Deputy Noel Ahern: I accept trials are ongoing in different parts of the world.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: They are not trials, they are tests.

Deputy Noel Ahern: They are not yet at a stage where they would stand up to a rigorous legal system.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The Minister of State should check it out.

Deputy Noel Ahern: The Medical Bureau of Road Safety is especially keen to keep abreast of such developments. As soon as such trials can stand up to such rigour, I hope they will be introduced as quickly as possible. Under the current system, if tests prove negative for alcohol, they are automatically tested for drugs. That is already in place. We wish to reach a stage where there is the equivalent of mandatory testing for drugs.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Only if the Garda is allowed.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: That was exactly the point I intended to raise with the Minister of State. One year ago, the Minister promised he would introduce legislation on mandatory testing at the scenes of accidents. If this were introduced and included a provision whereby a blood

sample is tested for other substances, it would give an accurate figure of those who are in accidents. Those are the people who would have taken more than most other people.

Deputy Michael Ring: I intended to ask the question raised by Deputy O'Dowd. Is data available on people who were tested following accidents who did not fail an alcohol test but who were found to have taken drugs? Such data would show the amount of people tested. I agree with the remarks of Deputy O'Dowd. We must do something as this is a very serious problem. The country is rife with drugs and the problem is increasing in every section of society. Some people are driving like lunatics killing others on the roads and we must do something about it.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Ring: Such people should at least be charged or put in jail if another person is killed.

Deputy Noel Ahern: There is another parliamentary question tabled dealing with testing at the scene of accidents.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The Minister of State could deal with that now.

Deputy Noel Ahern: We will include measures related to that in the new Bill. Deputy Ring referred to people driving like lunatics. I accept there are some people using drugs and that we must deal with them. However, the number of road fatalities this year is reduced considerably from the numbers of previous years. While there are people transgressing the law who we wish to catch, we must accept that generally there is a good deal of buy in from many motorists who obey the law.

Public Transport.

67. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Transport his views on recent figures showing a drop in number of people taking buses in the Dublin area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46487/08]

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Dublin Bus passenger numbers have increased from 134.2 million in 2000 to 147 million in 2007. This increase was achieved despite the introduction of the Luas and improved suburban rail services in the greater Dublin area. Dublin Bus is the largest operator of bus services in that area. In the course of the past year, passenger numbers on its services have declined by approximately 4%. Passenger numbers on suburban rail and the Luas are also experiencing a drop in demand. Various reasons are suggested to explain this situation. These include the general economic downturn, reduced shopping in the city centre area and fewer migrant workers living in the city centre area. This drop in demand is despite the marketing efforts of the company, which has implemented a campaign through the media and directly to households advocating the benefits of travelling by bus and the value for money which is available.

The cost and efficiency review of Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann, carried out by Deloitte, is expected shortly and I understand that it will advise that, while many aspects of the operations of Dublin Bus are efficient, there is further potential for efficiency gain to attract more people on to the bus. On the basis of the ultimate findings and recommendations of the review, Dublin Bus will be mandated to target overall operational efficiencies including changes to its network to simplify routes and eliminate duplication, to improve timetables and to improve coordination of services on common route corridors and to introduce other customer orientated initiatives.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: One point is the gridlock in Dublin city causes a problem for buses as well as for everyone else and consequently, bus travel speeds are reducing all the time. In many cases, it would be quicker to walk, if possible, and it certainly would be much more efficient were one to cycle. I accept there are reasons for the decline in usage and fewer migrants using public transport appears to be an issue. Nevertheless, the modal shift that Government policy has been promising has not happened. The key point is the Minister's policies have failed and, as I have pointed out previously, the Circle Line buses have been taken off the route. More than 30 buses are sitting idle and are parked forever because Dublin Bus has put them out of business. This simply is not good enough. New thinking is needed in the Department as the Minister's policies have failed in this regard.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I am unsure whether the Deputy asked a question, as that sounded more like a statement.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: It means the Minister's policies are not working.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I imagine the Deputy is asking whether the Minister agrees with him.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: No, I do not. The Deputy is aware the Department has introduced the Dublin Transportation Authority Act, which now is in place and will be rolled out. The question of competition in the market is dealt with in that Act and will be dealt with in the next national public transport plan.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Deputy O'Dowd may have inadvertently misled the House when he referred to a private company. I understand that a large part of the fleet in question is engaged in coach work and other tasks in hand and that the services it no longer fulfils were in addition to its core business.

Obviously, the 4% decline is disappointing. Does the Minister, who mentioned the network, envisage that the frequency and reliability of services could be increased? When operating a major public transport system, a major problem arises in respect of what to do with the fleet during off-peak hours. People have asked questions on this subject, which affects both private and public fleets. How does one cope during off-peak hours? Has the Department made proposals in this regard? I refer to ways to increase the usage of the fleets, particularly in urban areas.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Undoubtedly, the frequency and more particularly the reliability of a service are extremely important. I refer to frequency in the sense that one can predict when a bus will come. Once this is available to customers, people are encouraged to use the service. For example, on some of the quality bus corridors, QBCs, the service is reliable, there is the same headroom between each bus and so on. When such certainty exists, people use the service and in some cases this can result in an increase in usage of up to 40%. Consequently, there is a need for major change in the manner in which Dublin Bus operates. There is no question about that. Matters such as the frequency of the service, the operation of the networks, co-ordination of the services along the core corridors, direct routing and additional cross-city services all will be extremely important, as will real-time information in order that people will know when and where a particular bus will come. All such measures will be important in efforts to increase usage.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to facilitate brief supplementary questions from Deputy Broughan, followed by Deputy O'Dowd.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The Minister rightly referred to the Dublin Transportation Authority, which is of great importance to public transport. When will it become operational? Members spent a considerable amount of time discussing the legislation in committee rooms and so on. Are the provisions pertaining to planning, that is, all new development will have the integrated public transport function at its centre, effectively operational since the Act became law? The Minister referred to how the fleet could be better utilised and it also must be expanded. Would the Minister consider a differential fare structure, with much lower fares applying during the off-peak period to encourage people to use buses?

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The Minister stated that Dublin Bus must change, which is true. Does the Minister agree there must be a much more proactive policy from Dublin Bus to use the private sector at peak times to use spare capacity? It does not make sense to have the buses to which I referred parked on a lot somewhere in County Kildare while at the same time, Dublin Bus buses, in their original livery colour and with 1997 registrations, are providing public transport on the streets of some British cities. I have photographs of this.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The question of what to do during off-peak hours certainly is an issue. The Deputy's suggestion certainly could be considered by Dublin Bus. Bus Éireann uses quite a number of private subcontractors throughout the company. The off-peak issue also raises the question of work practices in Dublin Bus that must be addressed in respect of how one uses one's resources. As for Deputy Broughan's point, rather than more buses, capacity has increased by well over 30% and passenger numbers are falling. Consequently, it is not a question of not having the buses. Perhaps it is a question of not deploying—

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: For five or six years, between 2000 and 2005, not a single bus was bought.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Allow the Minister to reply.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I can show the Deputy the figures. Bus capacity has increased by 30%.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The Minister of State, Deputy Noel Ahern, remembers this. For a major portion of the lifetime of the Government, it refused to buy a bus.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Allow the Minister to respond.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Capacity has increased by 30% while passenger numbers are falling.

The simple question that must be asked is whether the buses available are being deployed to the best effect. The answer is "No" and this must be addressed to increase the numbers. Deputy O'Dowd's earlier point on congestion certainly is one of the causes of the problem of the service's unreliability. I refer to the scenario in which no buses come for a long time and then two or three come at once. Congestion is a factor that is outside the control of CIE, Bus Éireann or Bus Átha Cliath.

Departmental Agencies.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am conscious that the matter raised by Question No. 68 also has been dealt with as Priority Question No. 61. However, in accordance with the rules of the House, it also has been tabled as a number of ordinary questions. For clarity, the Minister will reply to Questions Nos. 68, 73 and 117 together. Members could go through the Minister's reply again.

68. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport the action he will take to significantly improve oversight of agencies under his Department's aegis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46428/08]

73. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for Transport if he has met the board and senior management of all 37 agencies under the aegis of his Department; the outcome of such meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46470/08]

117. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport the reason structured meetings with board and senior management of all agencies under his Department's aegis are not held regularly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46468/08]

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I propose to take Questions Nos. 68, 73 and 117 together.

I have nothing to add to my earlier answer.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The key point is this constitutes a criticism of the lack of oversight by the Department. Many of the transport services the taxpayer pays for through the Minister are dealt with by State and semi-State agencies. The criticism is there is inadequate oversight of them. To be specific the commentary is there is no consensus among agencies of the Department as to whether the latter should have a role in monitoring these services.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question?

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Does the Minister not agree this leads to inefficiencies and wastage of money? I refer to the lack of oversight and the consequential lack of accountability and transparency regarding the billions of euro that are being spent on Transport. There is no oversight of them.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The report stated that the Department of Transport makes every effort to ensure compliance with the code of governance by the agencies. The Department's responsibility is to ensure they comply with those codes. The report suggests the Department must adopt a strategic approach to the governance of the agencies, particularly in the context of the large number and variety of agencies under its aegis. It suggests structured meetings with the boards and that the Department should give them a clearer mandate as to what it expects from the agencies. It also suggests the Department should focus more on performance management and monitoring of the outcomes of those agencies and that it should try to improve the data flows from the agencies. The Department has addressed all four points in the initiative I instigated earlier this year to which I referred previously. I intend to implement the recommendations in this regard.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I understand the report states the Department must adopt a clear stance on customer services by its agencies. It states it is important that it considers this issue at a strategic level and develops a coherent viewpoint that is understood by all of its staff and all of its agencies. Clearly, there is a continuing serious problem in this regard.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: That means the Department should monitor the outcomes, not that it should respond to every complaint that is made by the public to the Department——

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I am not suggesting the Department should do that.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: ——which is what it is doing.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: It would be remiss of us during this debate not to state that many of the agencies we are talking about are doing a superb job. In particular, I would cite the Road Safety Authority. It is outstanding, as are some of the outcomes it is achieving with great difficulty. I commend the Minister of State with responsibility for the agency, Deputy Noel Ahern, who is here with us today.

One of the big problems with all of those agencies is that they are not answerable directly to this House. This is an issue which goes to the Leas-Cheann Comhairle and to the Ceann Comhairle, and the Committee on Procedure and Privileges. Unlike the House of Commons, we cannot raise issues, for example, such as the port tunnel in the case of the NRA and some of the safety issues in the case of the RSA. The Ceann Comhairle turned down eight or ten questions in this current batch from me and Labour Party colleagues such as the Leas-Cheann Comhairle on the basis that the Minister cannot talk about the agencies. In the House of Commons, the former Secretary of State for Transport, Rt Hon. Ruth Kelly, spoke about any issue to do with transport. The present Secretary of State, Rt Hon. Geoff Hoone, who I watched a few days ago, speaks on any issue to do with transport on policy grounds irrespective of whether it relates to an agency.

The 30th Dáil was supposed to be a reforming Dáil. Deputy O'Dowd feels the same as I do. We were supposed to have a reformed Dáil whereby answers on all transport issues in broad policy could be obtained through the Minister. Has this Minister any objection in principle to answering the policy questions on the NRA or any of his Department's other agencies? If those agencies are not answerable to this House, then we have a major problem. That, I think, is the thrust of the Fine Gael question.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I thank Deputy Broughan.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I am responsible in this House for policy on the agencies and I am answerable to it. The agencies are responsible and answerable to the House through the committees as well. They are also answerable through the Committee of Public Accounts.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Why turn down questions?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The types of questions generally turned down in the Ceann Comhairle's office are ones that ask about specific operational matters for which we are clearly not responsible.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: That is just a cop-out.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: While transport is not one of my portfolios, it is important that I rise to support the comments of Deputies O'Dowd and Broughan.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: This is actually Question Time. I hope Deputy Morgan intends to pose a question.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Should we really expect the Minister to answer questions given that the very purpose of bringing in these agencies was that Ministers would not have to answer questions? It is most unlikely that the Minister will change his mind and begin answering questions.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Deputy Morgan is welcome to intervene, even if transport is not one of his briefs. If he was here for all of the other Question Times he would be aware that his two colleagues on the other side have always held me to account very ably.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: In the 90 seconds we have left, there is no point in moving on to another question. I will allow a brief final supplementary question on this from Deputy O'Dowd.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: We need a sea change in this area. I agree with my colleague, Deputy Broughan. The criticism of the Department and, indeed, of the Minister, is that he is not doing his job and does not have oversight of these bodies. Is it not a fact that the Department is divided as to whether these bodies should be accountable to the Minister?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: There is no division at all. These bodies are accountable to me.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The report states they are not.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: They actually are accountable to me. They report to me and we have in place, from the middle of this year, even stronger accountability procedures on reporting to me directly. I have no difficulty with them.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That concludes questions for today.

Written Answers follow Adjournment Debate.

Adjournment Debate Matters.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 21 and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Neville — the level of suicide among the Traveller community; (2) Deputy Bannon — the need for a new school building and teacher numbers at St. Mary's national school, Edgeworthstown, County Longford; (3) Deputy McGinley — an gá atá le hathbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar chealú deontas caipitíochta do choláistí samhraidh i gceantair Ghael-tachta; (4) Deputy Burton — the potential loss in 2009 of 70 or more English language support teachers from primary schools in the Dublin 15 area; (5) Deputy Breen — the provision of accident and emergency and other services at Ennis General Hospital; (6) Deputy Upton — that Scoil Mhuire gan Smal, Inchicore, Dublin 8 be included in DEIS band 1 scheme in line with the remaining primary schools serving the same community in the immediate area; (7) Deputies O'Sullivan and Sherlock — the need to provide appropriate secondary care facilities at the mid-west and Mallow hospitals; (8) Deputy O'Donnell — the ongoing uncertainty with the future of and the recent jobs losses at the Dell Limerick plant; and (9) Deputy Broughan — the reduction in funding to Pobal.

The matters raised by Deputies O'Sullivan and Sherlock, Broughan, Bannon and McGinley have been selected for discussion.

Estimates for Public Services 2008: Leave to Introduce.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): I move:

That leave be given by the Dáil to introduce the following Supplementary Estimate for the service of the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2008:

Vote 31 — Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (*Second Supplementary Estimate*)."

Question put and agreed to.

Estimates for Public Services 2008.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): I move:

Vote 31 — Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Second Supplementary Estimate).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €50,000,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December 2008, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, including certain services administered by that Office, and of the Irish Land Commission and for the payment of certain grants, subsidies and sundry grants-in-aid and for the payment of certain grants under cash-limited schemes.”.

The Irish pig industry has faced many challenges in recent years but none more so than last week when its very survival was threatened. On Saturday, 6 December last, test results confirmed the presence of dioxins in Irish pork fat samples and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, FSAI, initiated an immediate recall of Irish pork and bacon products produced since 1 September 2008.

Not alone was the recall decision the right decision; it was the only responsible decision that could have been taken. It has been widely commended, particularly overseas and by a number of the country’s most important international customers. The decision was taken to reassure consumers that Irish pork and bacon products available on the market following the recall would be perfectly safe to consume. I am entirely satisfied that it has provided the necessary reassurance to consumers, as evidenced by the response of consumers to the reappearance of Irish pork products on the shop shelves last week.

That decision received the full backing of the European Food Safety Authority, EFSA, having been asked by the European Commission for urgent scientific and technical assistance and to provide scientific assistance on the risks for human health. The EFSA findings give considerable support for the decisions we took both in recalling products and in the actions taken to resume production.

The *Financial Times*, in an editorial on Tuesday of last week, stated of the Irish authorities’ actions that “the main lesson so far is a positive one: as soon as you can discover unacceptable contamination in food, act without delay to withdraw everything that might be affected — and tell the public exactly what you are doing”.

The importance of the Irish pig production and processing industry is clear when one considers that it is worth €1.1 billion per annum and employs approximately 6,500 people, with approximately 500 farm families involved in pig production. Since the positive tests results were confirmed and the product recall initiated, the FSAI and the Department have worked through the various phases — protection of public health, restoration of consumer confidence, securing the future of the industry, and maintenance of markets and national reputation.

The recall was in respect of Irish pork products from pigs slaughtered since 1 September last. That date was chosen on the basis of the evidence available to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland on a precautionary basis.

Contrary to suggestions, both in the media and elsewhere, the Dutch authorities only contacted my Department and the FSAI after my Department issued a press release on Thursday, 4 December last, confirming an investigation into the source of a contaminant in animal feed and the restriction of a number of farms.

Having recalled the product and taken the necessary steps to both protect public health and restore consumer confidence, the Government’s focus moved quickly to get processing resumed and get product back on the shelves.

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

The Government was particularly anxious that processing would recommence as soon as possible after the recall decision was made. We were conscious of the threat to the jobs and livelihoods of thousands of factory workers as well as hundreds of producers throughout the country. It was also important that our domestic and international customers saw Ireland as being back in business in pork production in the shortest possible time span and with the least possible disruption to trade, and I was acutely aware that many producers were ready to move animals for slaughter.

On Monday of last week, the Taoiseach and I, together with my officials, commenced detailed consultations with representatives of the Association of Pigmear Processors with the recommencement of processing being the principal objective of the discussions. We all agreed at the outset that it was in everybody's interest that slaughtering recommenced quickly and that we get back into the market, restore consumer confidence and protect what is a vital element in the wider Irish agrifood sector.

These discussions, while lengthy and complex, were extremely constructive and led early on Thursday morning last to an agreement on the terms of a funding facility that provided sufficient reassurance to processors to enable them to commence processing later that day.

The agreement provided that processors would commence slaughtering immediately following the Department's agreement to emergency funding for a product recall scheme in respect of eligible pigmeat products. The scheme will apply to all primary and secondary processed pigmeat produced from animals slaughtered in Ireland from 1 September to 6 December 2008. Detailed terms and conditions of the scheme are being prepared and I expect to be in a position to make interim payments to those directly affected who can demonstrate verifiably the extent of their need during this early period in the process. The total facility I am making available for this scheme amounts to €180 million and my request to the House is for an advance of €50 million for this purpose, which represents the amount that I can reasonably expect to discharge before the year's end.

Having secured agreement with the processors to recommence processing, I met representatives of the producers last Thursday morning and my officials have been engaged with them since Friday on agreeing an appropriate solution which would allow restrictions to be lifted so that normal production can resume as quickly as possible. These discussions are ongoing because, while some progress has been made, a number of issues are still outstanding. However, I remain optimistic that a satisfactory outcome can be achieved quickly. My aim is to get these suppliers up and running again in terms of supplying pigs for slaughter and processing.

I am acutely conscious of the particular difficulties that have arisen for pig producers, many of whom have thousands of pigs ready for slaughter. My Department is also exploring the potential for finding suitable slaughtering facilities so that the animals may be directly removed from the food chain in a manner that is separate and distinct from the normal processing of animals.

Over the past ten days, Ireland's EU partners and the Commission have been unstinting in their support for our efforts and actions. Last week's meeting of the European Council unanimously expressed its support for Ireland's efforts to deal with the situation relating to pigmeat and our prompt precautionary actions. The Council asked the Commission to support farmers and slaughter houses in Ireland by way of co-financed measures to remove animals and products from the market. We are in the process of following up on these initiatives and an application for funding is being finalised. Last Thursday the Commission presented a proposal to member states on a private storage scheme for pigmeat exclusive to Ireland. This proposal received the unanimous support of member states and will allow the storage of some 30,000

tonnes of pigmeat products, with a potential value of €15 million, for a period of six months. This important support measure will give the industry an appropriate breathing space in view of the difficulties that may arise in the coming months. These measures demonstrate the solidarity and support that the European Union offers when one of its members, which on this occasion was Ireland, finds itself in difficulty.

In the course of my statement to the House last week, I outlined the inspection regime operated by my Department. The national residue monitoring programme together with the national feed inspection programme comprise the national food and feed control plan for Ireland. The national residue programme implements a risk-based sampling regime in which upwards of 30,000 samples are taken from across the food chain and tested for over 200 possible contaminants. The feed inspection programme involves approximately 2,400 inspections per annum throughout the feed chain. The annual inspection programme covers a range of areas, including feed importers, feed manufacturing mills, mineral mixture plants, recycling plants that manufacture feed using unused food of non-animal origin, feed retailers, wholesalers, hauliers and farms. The level of inspections carried out complies with and in many cases exceeds the requirements of EU legislation.

The premises from which the contaminated feed originated is registered with my Department as a feed business operator under the feed hygiene regulations which came into effect on 1 January 2006. The premises were inspected in September 2006 and November 2007 but on neither occasion was any problem detected. It was also scheduled for an unannounced inspection in December 2008. The EU regulation laying down the requirements for feed hygiene clearly states that the primary responsibility for feed safety rests with the feed business operator. That responsibility includes an obligation on the operator to identify as required under the legislation any hazard and critical control points and to ensure that all appropriate actions are taken to eliminate potential risks to the feed chain.

In regard to the specific investigation into the source of the contamination, my Department is being assisted by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Garda. I also understand that Carlow County Council has visited the premises in the context of its responsibilities under the Waste Management Act 1996. The investigations focus on the type of fuel used in a burner which dried surplus food material for animal feed and the appropriateness of this type of oil. While the use of oil in the generation of feed drying facilities has not heretofore caused problems for the feed industry, this aspect is now being pursued with the industry and the relevant regulatory State agencies. In view of the apparent link to the type of fuel used in the drying process, I am asking the European Commission to consider whether the type of oil to be used by feed business operators can be more strictly regulated under EU Regulation 183.2005, which lays down the requirements for feed hygiene. I will also take the opportunity of tomorrow's meeting of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council to brief my colleagues on the events that led to the recall and the decisive response by the Irish authorities. I will also brief the Commissioners for Agriculture and Rural Development and Health.

When we have completed our investigations, we will review all activities associated with this incident. That review will inevitably include my Department's annual feed control programme. As the Taoiseach noted last week, lessons are sure to be learned from this review. My Department has always been prepared to consider and constantly review the adequacy of control measures in the area of animal health, whether in the context of foot and mouth disease, BSE, avian flu or blue tongue. The same is true on this occasion. It is imperative that we continually assess our control measures. We are proud of our country's reputation for food production and animal health and we work hard to maintain it. The House can be assured of my determination to ensure that the requisite measures will be introduced to maintain that reputation. While we are justifiably proud of Ireland's reputation as the food island, we have a responsibility to

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

protect that reputation. I am conscious that events such as this have the potential to tarnish our reputation and damage important markets. Bord Bia and our embassies abroad are assessing the impact of recent events on those markets. Last Thursday I travelled to Paris, where I had the opportunity to reassure a number of Ireland's most valuable customers of the safety and quality of Irish meat. I am ready to assist Bord Bia in any way I can to bolster our important international markets.

The actions we took after the discovery of dioxins in pork and beef samples were well judged and measured. We acted swiftly to protect public health, provide consumer confidence and safeguard a vital industry. It is the experience worldwide of food producing and exporting countries that the crucial factor is not the actual occurrence of an event but how it is addressed. Our response was balanced, proportionate and fully supported by our EU colleagues. Having made these vital decisions we have since acted in a decisive manner to get processing back on track and to keep Irish pork and bacon products on retail shelves throughout the world. Our actions will reassure consumers and, with the assistance of a new Bord Bia labelling system, Irish pork and bacon products will again be as popular as they were before this problem emerged.

The provision of a facility of up to €180 million secures an important element of Ireland's agrifood sector, which is worth €1.1 billion per annum and which employs 6,500 people if related sectors are included. Approximately 500 farm families are involved in pig production. The industry comprises 11 major processors and up to 800 related enterprises. Approximately 50,000 pigs are slaughtered per week, or 2.6 million pigs annually, and 65% of the 200,000 tonnes produced per annum is exported. Pigmear exports were worth €367 million in 2007 or over €1 million per day. It is estimated that the cost to the Exchequer from the loss of these 6,500 jobs in the industry in terms of social welfare payments and tax foregone would be €140 million in one year. That is to say nothing of the potential costs of statutory redundancy and the profound impact on both urban and rural communities throughout the country.

This assessment relates only to the impact of the loss of the processing jobs which would essentially mean the end of the pig production sector and the enormous impact on the 500 producers, many of whose enterprises would be lost, and the very severe impact that would have in rural communities up and down the country. The funding I am seeking today — €50 million — is part and parcel of this recovery. It is essential for my Department in meeting the commitments we have entered into with the industry and I commend it to the House.

I thank the Members with us, including party spokespersons Deputies Creed and Doyle from Fine Gael, Deputy Sherlock from Labour and Deputy Johnny Brady as chairman of the Oireachtas committee. I thank other colleagues from all sides of the House for their constructive contributions since difficulties arose last Saturday week.

Deputy Michael Creed: I wish to share time with Deputy Andrew Doyle with the approval of the House.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Michael Creed: The Acting Chairman might tell me when five minutes remain in the slot. Being here today is like waking up from a bad dream. It has also been a very expensive lesson for the State. We have previously had agricultural debates in this Chamber and in committee where we haggled over sums far less than the €180 million relevant here. Some €9.3 million would restore the installation aid and early retirement scheme on a national level when

money is not as plentiful as it was. We cannot find €10 million for a cervical cancer vaccination programme.

That puts into context the extent of the crisis we faced, and €180 million may well be an under estimation of the damage done to the food island reputation. That can only be quantified as we move forward and look at the implications in the marketplace. There is plenty of evidence emerging at the moment of markets being closed and difficulties, even within the EU market, of markets being cancelled. It is incumbent on us to learn from these mistakes.

I am pleased to report to the House that the agriculture committee, under the chairmanship of Deputy Johnny Brady, met today and approved a very early detailed analysis of this incident. We will call as witnesses all the main players, including political figures and the administrative senior civil servants in the Departments involved. It is incumbent on us to learn from this. We must find €180 million in these financially stricter times, which I agree with, but it is important we do not repeat the mistakes.

In essence, the three factors standing out for me are the failure in traceability; the inspection regime in plants and the tests carried out; and the proportionality of the response. I listened to the Minister's defence of the response and I must take that in the context of all the scientific evidence subsequently available. I accept there are issues between people on the marketing and medical or scientific side. Sooner rather than later we must critically analyse all these issues and decisions and report back to the House. I am pleased to say this work is under way in the Oireachtas agriculture committee under the chairmanship of Deputy Johnny Brady.

I am appalled that we are coming here today looking for a Supplementary Estimate of €50 million on a single sheet of paper. There is no detail available to the House or outlined in the Minister's speech on the draw-down. As a guardian of the taxpayers' money, that is the only document I received, with a brief statement from the Whip's office, which stated, "The proposed expenditure relates to payments to processors, producers and renderers for the destruction of certain product and slaughter and destruction of animals, the rendering of product and animal carcasses and associated costs."

I have been around long enough to know that people have undoubtedly had losses. There is potential in this compensation fund for persons not to be adequately dealt while others benefit disproportionately. I will approve the Supplementary Estimate but it is extraordinarily lax of the Minister and his Department to come in with a request that the House approve €50 million for 2008 with no detail of who the beneficiaries will be or the criteria under which this fund can be drawn down. It is slipshod work in the extreme. I am sorry to have burst the harmonious approach we have had on the issue but the material is extraordinarily bereft of any detail at a time when taxpayers deserve us to place the utmost scrutiny on how we spend their money. There is no detail in this single page, which requests €50 million.

I accept the time frame has been remarkably short and that officials in the Department and the Minister have been under considerable duress. I appreciate the urgency of getting funding to people affected. Notwithstanding any of that, it is extraordinary to ask this House to approve part of the overall sum required. I would like to hear the Minister in his response tell us more about the remaining balance. Is the total sum €180 million or €178 million? When will we see details on that?

We have done the budget for 2009 and there is no provision in the Department's Estimate for the balance of the fund. Where will it come from and who will fund it? Is there some other mechanism that the Department is not telling us about on funding? Were it not for the urgency and critical time scale involved for all, I would be inclined not to approve this Supplementary Estimate.

[Deputy Michael Creed.]

It is important to voice our concern that all who have innocently been injured by this debacle receive proportionate compensation. I am anxious, in particular, that the deal concluded in the Minister's Department between the main processors does not exclude secondary processors in the industry. The main players were in that room for many days but those locked outside are now most anxious that they receive their fair share of the compensation. I appreciate the reference in the Minister's speech to the issue that all primary and secondary processors would be compensated.

Will the Minister tell us more on the rendering process as we have not seen any lists of what is being charged to the State and where the product is to be rendered? What arrangements are being put in place? All that detail is necessary and if it becomes available before Thursday the Minister should lay the detail before the House before it rises for the Christmas recess. I appreciate that officials in the Department are working in a very difficult timeframe.

From my perspective, the most innocent victims are the individual pig producers who took feed in good faith. I will not stand in judgment on this issue until the Garda inquiries are concluded. The individual pig producers must be compensated and as I understand negotiations are ongoing I will not be prescriptive with regard to the outcome. If these people are to be out of business, it is reasonable to expect that those who put them out of business pay towards getting them back into business. It is reasonable that the losses should be compensated until the businesses are up and running, as they were put out of business by the State.

One of the biggest issues that must be addressed is the failure in traceability. This has been sold to farmers in all sectors on the basis that one could reach out and forensically recall contaminated product. We did not test it in beef and I am not sure we have the real answers as to why we did not. If we have the forensic capacity to recall contaminated animals or herds, why did we not do so and take the contaminated product off the market?

It does not work in the pig sector at all once pigs go inside the factory gate. We should either abandon all the investment we have made in traceability, or we should bring to heel the processors who up to now have not operated a clearly defined traceability system. If there is resistance to that it must be dealt with and it is incumbent on us to deal with it. My preferred solution is to continue with traceability while ensuring we have a system that works. We cannot tolerate a system whereby the industry dictates that it will not have traceability beyond the factory gate.

I appreciate the Minister is involved in a new marketing initiative with Bord Bia but that cannot be done on fresh air. It will require funding, so will that entail a further Supplementary Estimate in 2009? From press reports, I see that markets worth €30 million in China and Russia are closed to pork. In addition, the weanling cattle trade to Italy is in jeopardy, so I hope every effort is being made to secure it. We are also having difficulty in Poland, South Africa and other markets. This has been a nightmare scenario for the Irish food industry and particularly for the pork and bacon sector. We must learn from it and it is imperative that we remedy the defects that have been so expensively exposed the taxpayer. I look forward to hearing more details from the Minister on this matter.

Deputy Andrew Doyle: There is no doubt but that this Supplementary Estimate is needed. It will cost the State €180 million because of flaws within the food chain. We must rectify the matter to avoid being exposed to such a situation again. To that end, I compliment Deputy Johnny Brady and the other members of the Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for agreeing to hold an intensive series of sessions in January to prepare a report with recommendations that I hope will be put to the Dáil before the end of January.

The primary cause of this problem was that the regime of scrutiny, including testing, at the feed supplier end of the cycle was not up to scratch. Even if the premises were being tested only once a year, it should be mandatory to send samples of the product for analysis. It happens with feed compounders and also when milk is collected at the farmyard gate. It should be standard procedure to send samples from batch numbers for analysis, including the testing of dioxin levels.

In addition the sooner our dioxin testing capacity is up and running the better. There has been a cost factor in sending samples to York for tests. I acknowledge that the results came back very quickly in this instance, but such testing facilities should be available here. Samples from companies such as the one that caused this problem should be sent for testing as a matter of course every week.

We heard earlier from Deputy Ned O’Keeffe that in Denmark pork and bacon products are 100% traceable. In reply to parliamentary questions, I have been told by the Minister for Health and Children that such provisions can only be justified here on the grounds of protecting public health, prevention of fraud or unfair competition. All three grounds are applicable in the pig and poultry sectors. We must get serious about this. There has been resistance within the food processing industry to clear traceability, including country of origin and production. It has been convenient for certain elements to ignore traceability and present foreign products as being Irish. We saw that by virtue of the products that remained on shelves recently. In recent weeks, it became a virtue to do so because the products were not Irish. However, the same products were being marketed beforehand as if they were Irish.

We have 51 abattoirs that operate under a scheme whose closing date was 29 February 2008. Various Fine Gael Members tabled questions about this scheme in July, October and this month, but they received the same answer. In the last reply, dated 1 December, we were told that results were expected from the 51 abattoirs shortly. If we had a network of abattoirs that were subject to full scrutiny we would have been able to contain the problem.

If this problem is properly rectified it should not recur. If it were to recur, however, we should be able to isolate and contain it and thus minimise the financial damage to our industry.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: I wish to share time with Deputy Penrose.

Acting Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: I appreciate that we all had to act in unison last week and take the Minister’s statements in good faith as the crisis unfolded. Across the political divide we acted in the public interest. A total product recall was the only way to go to restore consumer confidence and export markets in the long run. This week, however, we are at a different juncture. The Minister is now asking us to stand over a payment of €50 million by way of a Supplementary Estimate. I have serious reservations about it because the Minister has not provided sufficient detail on how that sum will be spent down to the last euro. I agree that the compensation package must be negotiated but the lack of detail shows a certain disregard for Opposition Members who represent all sides, including consumers, farm workers and processors. We should be provided with far more detail of this Supplementary Estimate, given that it is taxpayers’ money.

My understanding is that this €50 million payout will cover interim payments to processors, although that is not stated in the Minister’s speech. Perhaps we can get some clarification on that. I did not hear anything in the speech to indicate that workers who were left out of pocket through last week’s closure of plants will be compensated. If plants such as Rosderragh are not in a position to compensate workers for loss of pay, which occurred through no fault of

[Deputy Seán Sherlock.]

their own, there is a strong case for the Government to compensate them. That is not an unreasonable request in this instance. I am disappointed, however, that there is no detail of such a scheme in the speech.

I did not write a speech in advance of this debate because I wanted to listen to the Minister before responding. I wanted my remarks to be based on his speech. Over the past 72 hours, I have read a great deal about Millstream Recycling company in Bunclody. The Minister stated: “In regard to the specific investigation into the source of the contamination, my Department is being assisted by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Garda”. Why is the Garda involved? Is it the Department’s opinion that an illegal or nefarious process was involved? If people are being asked to stand over a payout to the industry of between €50 million and €180 million, it is fair that they ask pertinent questions as to why the Garda has become involved.

The Minister also stated: “The investigations focus on the type of fuel used in a burner which dried surplus food material for animal feed and the appropriateness of this type of oil”. He went on to state: “In view of the apparent link to the type of fuel used in the drying process, I am asking the European Commission to consider whether the type of oil to be used by feed business operators can be more strictly regulated”. It appears that the use of this type of fuel is not governed by the Department’s rules, the hazard analysis and critical control point, HACCP, legislation or EU regulations. Will the Minister clarify this issue and inform the House as to why the Garda is involved? If the Garda is involved, a nefarious scheme is the presumption. If there was an illegal process, will there be a source of redress? Was the Millstream process illegal? It is the reason for this debate. The process will cost the State up to €180 million.

Ironically, anything that I have read about the factory in question suggested that the process was a forward looking venture well ahead of the posse in terms of new industry initiatives. This does not sit well and I hope that we are not hanging a particular individual out to dry. The issue must be addressed transparently. While we agree that compensatory measures must be put in place, we need to know who negotiated the package on behalf of the pig industry. We also need to know when the funding will be divvied up and, in light of the public interest, whether the details of who gets what will become available. If the taxpayers are to cover the cost, it is only fair that they know what is at stake and in play.

There has been a failure of regulation, but I do not attribute it to the Government necessarily. By way of constructive criticism, I suggest that we have a single figurehead — a supremo, if the House wills — to be in charge of food regulation. I am not discussing the creation of a new agency or quango. However, the statements issued by the Department, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, FSAI, and the European Food Safety Authority could give rise to a certain degree of confusion as to where competencies lie in food safety. It took some 24 hours to realise that competence lay with the FSAI. Rather than a merger of competencies, I propose there be one voice within the regulatory framework so that when the members of the Fourth Estate and the Legislature need questions answered, we will know to whom we should go.

More details are necessary. I will stand over the Department’s decision to effect a withdrawal. We stand over the necessary compensatory package, but there should be more detail.

Deputy Willie Penrose: I thank my colleague for sharing time. While it is his brief, I wish to say a few words because I have some knowledge of this area.

I endorse the Minister’s decision on behalf of the people last week, as it was a matter of national interest. We are well on our way back to market recovery. It will take some time because some organs of the media carried adverse publicity and used inflammatory and unwarranted terms.

It is important that we have a properly integrated system of identification and traceability in terms of all foodstuffs sold. As Deputy Brady is aware, it is easy to have traceability from the farm to the factory. The cattle movement monitoring system, CMMS, brings the process to a certain point, but what occurs after an animal goes into layerage? I once visited France as a member of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to try to identify sheep so that we could measure the impact of how the French advocate their own products to consumers. I remember well how a little French flag was placed in lamb on display. As Europeans, we are too good. We are reticent to show people the green, white and gold on our fine product and to tell them that it is traceable the entire way. It is the best product in the world.

There also appears to be a European reticence to country of origin labelling. The Minister should take Europe on and tell it to get lost, as the labelling must be done. There are idiotic ideas about substantial transformation, where something is supposedly manufactured or processed in Ireland if one throws a package of breadcrumbs on a basic product that comes from an external country. It is a nonsense. Deputy Edward O'Keeffe asked a necessary question forcefully. How is it that, within three or four hours of the announced withdrawal, some of our shelves were packed with hams and processed goods? They were already in stock and ready to hit the market.

We are not doing enough. We must call on everyone to put their shoulders to the wheel. We have a fine product and one little hiccup should not be used by people who want to say that there is an issue. Deputy Brady's committee and mine, the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment, respectively, will tell the Commissioner in plain Meath and Westmeath language what we want. It is time to stop kowtowing to eurocrats. Instead, we should tell them that we want country of origin labelling. The same situation obtained in terms of Brazil. We have strict regulations due to foot and mouth disease and BSE. Everything is in its place. It is about time.

I am generally not critical. However, I am critical of the waste management scheme. The Government met at Farmleigh House, but the Labour Party has been advocating the building of schools. Some 400 need to be built, a labour intensive project that would give construction workers a chance. The farm waste management scheme could be another project. Only half of the total number of people in question have submitted applications to the Department. There will either be a flood of applications between now and 31 December or many eligible applicants will be prevented from carrying out necessary work aimed at protecting the environment. What will be the position in respect of these people? The Minister had the ideal opportunity to extend the scheme. I accept that he probably fought hard in respect of it but I am sure, due to the fact that there was money involved, it was the Department of Finance which put the kibosh on it.

The closing date for the scheme is 31 December 2008 and there is a stipulation that there can be no additional entrants. The scheme provided people with the opportunity to carry out vital work. However, it also provided much needed employment in rural areas where construction workers are being laid off. In recent months, farmers obtained good value because people began to submit competitive tenders to carry out the building work they required. All these farmers would have required was an extension of three to four months in order that the work might be carried out after the winter. There were three or four months during the summer when the weather was so bad one would not have put a snipe out on one's land because it would not have survived. It is for these reasons I cannot understand why the scheme has not been extended.

I have heard that a new invigilation or inspection regime is going to be put in place and that local authorities will be given responsibility for it. I hope this will not lead to duplication or

[Deputy Willie Penrose.]

even triplication. The officials from the Department carry out examinations in respect of the matters under discussion and these are extremely satisfactory in nature. Like me, I am sure the Minister does not wish to see duplication arise in respect of such examinations.

Deputy Martin Ferris: In respect of the compensation package for the pigmeat sector, I am sure everyone is pleased that production was resumed relatively soon after the all-clear had been given. The compensation package agreed also seems to have addressed the concerns of the processors. However, another issue that must be addressed is the entitlement of workers in processing factories to receive compensation for wages lost while they were temporarily laid off. Several thousand workers in different factories, all of whom suffered loss of earnings, were affected.

The fact that €180 million has been made available for compensation means that there are adequate funds available to ensure that the losses of earnings to which I refer will be made up. I calculate that the actual sum involved would constitute a small proportion, perhaps only 1% , of the €180 million. One of the companies involved seems to be implying that the terms of the compensation deal agreed with the Government prevent it passing any of it on to its workforce. This appears to be a weak excuse for the company to fail to look after its employees, who were, after all, affected more than the owners of the factories. Not too many working families can afford any major loss of income for even a week and particularly at this time of the year. Even if the terms indicate that it is incumbent on the Government to ensure that workers obtain their fair share, as I have already stated the amount involved represents only a small proportion of the overall fund.

Now that the immediate issues relating to the crisis in the pigmeat industry have been or are in the process of being dealt with, a number of important questions remain to be answered in the context of how the dioxins in question came to be passed to the infected animals and with regard to the regulatory procedures that apply. One aspect that has struck many people, particularly farmers, is the apparent lack of rigour applied in monitoring certain sectors of the agricultural industry in comparison to the huge resources dedicated to farm inspections and subsequent investigations, often, it seems, in respect of trivial matters or on quite dubious grounds.

My office is dealing with one farmer who has been threatened with deductions to his single farm payment on the basis of an inspection supported by, of all things, evidence in the form of satellite photographs. He claims, and would appear to have proof, that the parcel of land in respect of which he was found negligent does not even belong to him and that the inspector involved changed the reasons for his negative report.

The contrast between the level of inspections for individual farms in respect of animal feed hygiene and companies such as that at the heart of the crisis is stark. On average, approximately 850 farms are identified, on a risk-assessment basis, for inspection each year. This illustrates that the level of attention paid to individual farmers is in contrast, it seems, to the monitoring of the plant, Millstream Recycling, which is at the centre of the pigmeat crisis. Said plant was not inspected at all in 2008 and only once in 2006. The only other plant involved was also inspected on one occasion in both 2006 and 2008. However, it was not inspected last year. As already stated, this contrasts with the level of on-farm inspection, particularly in light of the relative place in the scheme of things of an individual farm and a plant such as that to which I refer.

Even if an inspection had been carried out this year, it would not have examined the oil responsible for the contamination. This raises a number of serious issues in respect of regulatory procedures. Even though the contamination in this case was not sufficient to present a

serious threat to public health, it is crucial that in the future this aspect of processing should be monitored in order to prevent any recurrence of problems such as those to which I refer or a more serious contamination of the food chain.

As already stated, a number of questions remain to be answered. A number of these questions have been tabled by Deputies Ó Caoláin, Creed and I with regard to the use of the oils concerned. We inquired, in particular, as to the origin of these oils, how they were supplied to processors and the position with regard to their destruction. In reply to a parliamentary question tabled yesterday, the Minister stated that up to now the oils used have not presented any problem and that, therefore, a specific regulatory procedure is not yet in place in respect of them. The latter is something which must be addressed immediately.

We need to know where the oils to which I refer originate, where they were manufactured and bought, the procedures governing their use and how they are disposed of after use. We must also ensure that mineral oils, including those that have been used in electricity transformers or which have been contaminated with such oils, are not used in the drying processes for animal or human foodstuffs in any processing plant. We must be presented with a full report on any circumstances where the use of those oils has been detected.

I asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has engaged in discussions with the ESB regarding the traceability, sale, use and disposal of oils that have been used in its electricity transformers, particularly in light of concerns that such oils may have been responsible for the contamination of the Millstream Recycling plant. We also need to know the extent to which the ESB ensures that when oils are removed from its installations, they are kept under proper control and properly disposed of as per its agreement with the companies charged with responsibility in this regard. There are only three such companies licensed to carry out this work and only two are actually involved.

In reply to questions tabled yesterday, the Minister stated that he is satisfied with the annual inspection programme relating to other aspects of the sector. What he must do now is ensure that procedures which will lead to a similar level of confidence in respect of the use of these oils are implemented. That can only be accomplished if this is made part of the overall monitoring and inspection regime.

The Minister also said that the tests carried out by the Department enabled the source of the foodstuff that was responsible for the contamination to be identified. As a result the Department was able to identify and take appropriate measures in respect of the farms that received that feed. The animal foodstuff was confiscated and restrictions were placed on the movement of animals from the farms that were affected. Any other farms which received the same foodstuff were similarly identified and feed was removed from them.

In light of this information and in the context of the entire issue of traceability, which was an issue of central concern when this matter was debated last week, a number of questions must be asked. If the Department was able to identify the source of the contamination and the farms affected — and was able to do so quickly — was it appropriate to impose an overall ban? Does confidence in the existing traceability system not extend to situations where if the source of contamination and the destination of affected products are identified, the farms and products involved could be quarantined? Where confidence exists, as it seemingly should have in this case, that an outbreak has been limited and contained, should the remainder of the sector not be allowed to continue as normal? I raise these matters to highlight an aspect of the situation that should also be subject to departmental review.

There is also the question of whether meat from pigs reared organically should have been subject to the restrictions imposed. A further issue arises in that some of the wrapping that was supposed to be removed at the Millstream plant may have found its way into the pro-

[Deputy Martin Ferris.]

duction process. In a written reply yesterday, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food avoided answering in respect of this specific point but stated “there is no evidence to suggest that any residual wrapping material that may be present in the product presents any health or environmental hazards to human or animal health”. While that is all well and good, I do not think people will be satisfied that animals may have been fed foodstuffs that include plastic bags and wrapping paper. Surely ensuring that does not happen, and that the wrapping material is properly and fully removed, ought not be a huge task?

The article by Sean McConnell in today’s *The Irish Times* addresses some of the issues relating to the contaminated oil thought to have contained the dioxin found in pork. For example, he quotes some of those involved in the investigation to the effect that the oil, believed to have come from electricity transformers, may only be exported by companies issued with a special licence. Also, waste oil from the electricity transformers, and containing high levels of PCBs, is passed to these companies for export and destruction under special conditions, a process that involves incineration at temperatures greater than 1,200 degrees and which is not carried out in this country. I am told also that the same companies are involved in collecting similar oil from transformers in the Six Counties which they are supposed to take to England for destruction.

An even more disturbing aspect of this situation is that it has been claimed by some people involved in the general sector that one of those licensed to export the oil in question has been supplying the plant, where the contamination originated, with oil collected from the electricity transformers. Instead of the oil in question being exported and destroyed as detailed above, it was being used in the processing plant.

This, if true, is a serious claim and one that needs to be thoroughly investigated. I presume it is one of the aspects of the case currently being examined by the Garda. If it is the case that the oil was being sold in this manner, this raises several questions regarding the integrity of the company involved. Is it the case that these companies are being paid twice, once in respect of collection of the oil from ESB transformers for supposed export and destruction and again when they sell it on to the processing plants?

While the actual danger to human health in this instance may have been minimal, a huge question hangs over the supplier in question and his entitlement to hold a licence for the purpose of dealing with this oil. This, if found to be true, should be thoroughly investigated and dealt with. It is particularly important, in terms of the recovery of the pigmeat sector and for the overall image and of the food production industry, that companies involved in any aspect of food processing is operating in full compliance with the relevant regulations and is in general worthy of trust.

Sean McConnell also highlighted the fact that as yet no satisfactory response, or indeed any response, has been issued by the Environmental Protection Agency in regard to the licensing requirements to export the oils in question. Also, he referred to the fact that the Health and Safety Authority has not yet been requested to conduct an inquiry into any possible negative health issues concerning the workers at Millstream Recycling. It is hoped the level of risk involved is similar to that related to the eating of any contaminated pigmeat. Nonetheless this issue needs to be addressed, if only to put at ease the workers’ minds.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: On a point of order, may I ask——

Acting Chairman: I am sorry but the procedure is, according to the order of the day, that the Minister or Minister of State shall have five minutes to reply, following which I must put the question.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: Will the Minister of State respond to our questions?

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Trevor Sargent): I have taken note of the order and will endeavour to respond to Members' questions as best I can. I thank Members for their contributions.

There is no doubt that the pig sector has been adversely affected by recent events. The primary responsibility of Government was to protect public health and to safeguard the excellent reputation of Irish food. The evidence shows that the Government acted responsibly and correctly to the dioxin incident. This is not alone our view but the view of others who commented on the matter independently of Government.

When the positive analysis result was received, we acted immediately and effectively. The decision to recall pork products was not a decision taken lightly but it was, as acknowledged, a necessary one. It is worth referring again to the international and expert commentary cited by the Minister, Deputy Brendan Smith, that shows we are viewed as having taken decisive action and as having informed the public as to exactly what we were doing. In addition, the BBC was complimentary as to the manner in which we handled the incident and pointed to the "meltdown" the industry would have faced had we not acted as we did. The Minister referred earlier to the costly alternative, a bill of €140 million per annum, with which we would have been faced had workers been let go *en masse*, a danger while evident at the time has now been rectified.

As Deputy Creed stated the timeframe involved is critical. The Minister will tomorrow attend a Council of Ministers meeting in Brussels. We needed to bring before the Dáil this Supplementary Estimate prior to the Houses going into recess. In response to those Deputies who requested a further breakdown of the details in regard to this Supplementary Estimate, it was not possible, unfortunately, to do so as this would have caused unnecessary delay. We are caught between a rock and a hard place in this regard.

Deputy Michael Creed: Will the Minister accept we are buying a pig in a poke?

Deputy Brendan Smith: No, not in this instance.

Deputy Trevor Sargent: I do not accept that. On the public health issue, I need only refer to the independent scientific assessment from the European Food Safety Authority. I take this opportunity to once again emphasise that Irish pork and bacon is safe to eat. It is important also to reiterate that we continue to take seriously our food safety responsibilities.

The Minister, Deputy Smith, referred to the national residue monitoring programme, which together with the national feed inspection programme, makes up the national food and feed control plan for Ireland. The sampling regime under this overall plan is an internationally recognised risk-based assessment and is comprehensive in nature. I accept urgent lessons need to be learned. This review is part of the overall response to the crisis.

I visited the laboratories at Backweston and noted there a huge level of commitment and urgency in respect of testing. It is well established but not widely known that Irish laboratories can turnaround tests in respect of PCBs. While this is not yet the case in respect of dioxins, it is hoped it will be possible for them to do so by late February or March.

Apart from the determination to safeguard public health, our economic interests dictate that our agri-food sector is safe and of the highest reputation. For example, the meat sector accounts for €2.4 billion worth of exports and is a major contributor to employment and investment, in particular in rural areas. I agree with Deputy Creed that we should not exclude secondary processors who, along with renderers, were represented at the negotiations. They continue to

[Deputy Trevor Sargent.]

work with the Department to identify, quantify and value the product in-store and for recall. I assure Deputy Creed that they are being included.

The agreement between my Department and the pig processors provides the necessary framework and allows for stocks and other product covered by the product recall to be removed for destruction. This will free possible bottlenecks in the processing sector. As I stated earlier, we are caught between a rock and a hard place in this regard. Obviously, protection of workers was a huge priority and we need approval of this Supplementary Estimate to ensure this. It is not, unfortunately, possible to provide Members with all the details they seek although we would do so if we had the luxury of more time.

I am heartened by the support and understanding shown by our EU colleagues and the Commission. The financial assistance being provided for private storage is tangible evidence of their good will. I am grateful to Bord Bia, the Minister and his officials who worked hard while visiting other countries to ensure we return our market, following temporary suspension of our exports in some countries, to full capacity. I am also grateful to the House for the general interest and support in the national interest in the past ten days. The investigation is ongoing involving all agencies. In reply to Deputy Ferris, the investigations have to involve the Garda Síochána, given the reasons he outlined. The Supplementary Estimate is a necessary part of that process and I commend it to the House.

Vote put and agreed to.

Appropriation Bill 2008: Order for Second Stage.

Bill entitled an Act to appropriate to the proper supply services and purposes sums granted by the Central Fund (Permanent Provisions) Act 1965, to make provision in relation to deferred surrender to the Central Fund of certain undischarged appropriations by reference to the capital supply services and purposes as provided for by section 91 of the Finance Act 2004 and to make provision in relation to the Financial Resolutions passed by Dáil Éireann on 14 October 2008.

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I move: “That Second Stage be taken now.”

Question put and agreed to.

Appropriation Bill 2008: All Stages.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jack Wall): In accordance with the Order of the House today, I must put the following question:

“That the Bill is hereby read a Second Time, that sections 1 to 4, inclusive, the Schedule and the Title are hereby agreed to in Committee and the Bill is, accordingly, reported to the House without amendment, that Fourth Stage is hereby completed and the Bill is hereby passed.”

Question put and agreed to.

Acting Chairman: This Bill, which is certified to be a money Bill in accordance with Article 22.2.1° of the Constitution, will be sent to the Seanad.

Finance (No. 2) Bill 2008: Report Stage (Resumed) and Final Stage.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 15:

In page 38, between lines 10 and 11, to insert the following:

“8. Where medical expenses claimed as a tax credit consist of or include IVF treatment, the expenses shall to that extent be allowable at the higher rate.”

—(Deputy Joan Burton).

Deputy Joan Burton: I raised this issue yesterday. I pointed out to the Minister that where a woman is undergoing a course of IVF treatment, that treatment is only available privately and it is very expensive. First, there are detailed medical investigations to find out whether a woman is suitable and, second, people undergoing treatment are advised that they will often need three or more courses of treatment. As the cost of each stage can be in excess of €2,000, and even €3,000, it is not unusual for a course of IVF treatment to cost €10,000 and I have heard of cases where the cost was €20,000.

When the Minister flat-rated medical expenses he exempted, correctly, people paying nursing home fees. For the relatively tiny number of people who use IVF as one of their last avenues to have a baby, which they long to have, the Minister’s decision can make the finances of IVF extraordinarily, additionally expensive, especially for people who are in the middle of a course of treatment. For a course of treatment costing €10,000 the tax relief would have been €4,000 but that will now be slashed to €2,000, reducing the relief expected by €2,000, and that is at the cheaper end of the scale.

Even if the Minister does not accept the amendment I urge him to examine the situation to see if the State can do something. I spoke also to the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, who said she might consider some kind of State scheme. The amendment deals with a particular situation.

Yesterday we heard about the situation where children who are committed to undergoing an expensive round of orthodontic treatment cannot opt out once started. Again, that has a particular impact on families who often save to allow their child to undergo such treatment. Up to now the tax relief has been an important element in relieving the overall financial burden.

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): We dealt with the amendment in some detail last night. The position is that income tax relief in respect of health expenses will be granted at the standard rate of tax for 2009 with the exception of nursing home fees, which will continue to be granted at the marginal rate.

The changes provided for in the Finance Bill follow on from the changes made in the Finance Act 2007, with the removal of the *de minimis* threshold for a single individual and a married couple. The 2007 Act also provided for the removal of the requirement that there be a defined relationship between the taxpayer and the person who is the subject of the tax claim.

Standard rating health expenses relief will make the tax system fairer and more equitable for all taxpayers in accordance with Government commitments. The standardising of health expenses relief brings it in line with other reliefs such as rent relief, trade union subscriptions relief, medical insurance relief, third level fees relief and service charges relief.

In addition, the standard rating of health expenses relief will mean better value for money for the Exchequer and will ensure that the relief will benefit the broadest range of taxpayers in a fair and equitable manner.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Amendment No. 17 not moved.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I move amendment No. 18:

In page 47, between lines 20 and 21, to insert the following:

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

“(c) are derived from innovative activities meaning the development of a new technological, telecommunication, scientific or business process”.

I beg the Acting Chairman’s pardon. I was momentarily distracted. This matter came up in the Committee Stage debate when we were discussing the remittance tax basis, which is a concession being given by the Minister to certain high earners who come here for a limited period and who significantly add value by their location in Ireland. The Committee Stage debate revolved around the potential of the scheme to be used for purposes for which it was not really intended by the Oireachtas, as we were drafting and as I understood the Minister’s presentation of the proposal.

I have added an additional condition into the requirements of the scheme that would provide that the employee involved would derive income from innovative activities, namely, the development of a new technological, telecommunications, scientific or business process. It is a definition the Minister has used elsewhere in the Bill to ring-fence certain desirable activities he is seeking to promote in the research and development area and it could be similarly applied to the section here where we are trying to delineate the cases where the remittance scheme could apply.

It is a generous concession but at the same time I recognise that if individuals can be attracted to the area of science and development, for example, if one could have a team leader here even for a period of time he or she could be a catalyst from which beneficial activities could be derived. In the amendment I was trying to meet a broad sense of the committee’s deliberations that this should be more targeted than in the existing draft.

Deputy Joan Burton: I am happy to support amendment No. 18. In the course of Committee Stage the Minister spoke on several occasions about how he seemed to see this package as being particularly attractive to people in the financial services sector, such as the IFSC. Given that our economic situation is facing meltdown, does the Minister consider that this is the time to attract more international bankers to the IFSC with schemes, or whether it is time to regulate the IFSC properly?

I question whether this scheme should be concerned with traditional research and development and the improvement of new products and processes, especially where the emphasis is on science, technology and communication — the kind of areas that would employ many people and add real value to exports in terms of the Irish economy — or whether this is to be another string in the packages offered in the IFSC where, effectively, the Financial Regulator has a completely hands-off approach to regulation and where there is a kind of innovation in banking products. Some of this has found a home in the IFSC and has led to the financial ruin the world is facing. Does the Minister really want to attract more of this, or do we want Ireland to get back to work in a decent and sound manner, and forget the type of bubble of speculation that has characterised his party over the last ten years and brought the country close to a perilous economic situation? We shall not now see the brighter side of this for probably two to three years.

The amendment by Deputy Bruton seeks to corral and rein in the Minister’s desire to hand out the remittance basis to anybody who suggests he or she has something to offer. Deputy Bruton’s amendment seeks to corral the definition of who it applies to. It is a very reasonable comprehensive definition. It allows latitude to technology, communications, science and business procedures, and at least reins in latitude on fly-by-nights, who are interested in many cases in using the name of Ireland in a way that is no longer an advantage to us as an economy.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The purpose of section 13 of the Bill is the attraction of individuals from overseas with the necessary high level skills that are required in the current economic climate. These individuals will, in turn, act as potential magnets to attract individual levels of business to Ireland, which will enhance our ability to further develop the sectors within which they work. It will also enable us to benefit from emerging areas of growth in the future. These factors are especially important in light of the current increasing competition Ireland faces from other jurisdictions in attracting high skilled people.

The Deputy's amendment seeks to restrict the scope of the new remittance basis for foreign employment to individuals working only in certain industries. This would involve obtaining information from a number of Departments as well as substantial cost to the Exchequer. In relation to the high skill sectors, I mentioned specifically on Committee Stage, and I reiterate on the floor of the House, that I only received direct representations from foreign direct investment in Ireland in industry in connection with this particular relief. I referred to a report prepared by a high level group at the Department of the Taoiseach, which has responsibility for the financial services industry and its future.

Deputy Burton should realise that we are dependent not just on domestic banking, but on our international traded banking sector for a substantial proportion of our gross domestic product, so I hope the people involved in that sector are not fly-by-nights, or there will be a considerable loss to the State.

Those which should benefit from the remittance scheme include the ICT sector, where some of the biggest multinationals based here stressed the importance of having such a scheme. They indicate it would help them being the best people in Ireland in roles such as principal investigator for major research and development projects and vice-presidential roles overseeing plant expansion and other product line introduction. In the pharmaceutical sector it is seen as having particular potential to help attract plant and new process managers. In particular, specific skill sets likely to be attracted include research and development, senior management, quality, project and validation managers. For the medical devices sector, which is seen as very important for research and development, process development and also marketing are vital. Medical devices and marketing are seen to have a low-level capacity in Ireland and need to attract specialist skills.

As regards the financial services industry, it helps build businesses and employee teams around key talented people, with a significant multiplier effect.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Minister coughed at the moment he was saying that my amendment would prove to be of high cost to the Exchequer. My understanding was that restricting it would reduce the cost to the Exchequer, by confining it. I could not quite follow the logic of what the Minister was saying.

In his elaboration of the cases, where he sees opportunities for this scheme, the only deviation I saw from my amendment was that it should, perhaps, be the development and application in Ireland of new technological, telecommunication, scientific or business processes. He envisaged that the management of the installation of new processes would also be strategic. I should be happy, if the Minister is disposed towards broadening it slightly, to say "the development and application in Ireland" or words to that effect, which would catch the import of what he is saying.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I accept the essence of what the Minister is trying to do here. There is no doubt that globally there are many examples of people who come with gifts, for want of a better term, who are gifted and who can bring substantial worth, whatever their industry happens to be. I am instinctively supportive of Deputy Bruton's amendment, however, because

[Deputy Arthur Morgan.]

he shares my concern as regards monitoring as he said on Committee Stage. How can one ensure the system is not abused, and that we can keep an edge on it so as to stop the abuse that happened in the past? I suspect that is exactly what Deputy Bruton is doing here, trying to limit the areas where it might apply and in so doing, the potential for abuse.

I support what the Minister is doing, but I have a substantial concern as regards monitoring.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I thank Deputy Morgan for his support as regards the general principle of the measure. It is designed to attract people into this country and can play a key role in that regard. It is not being introduced on the same basis as in the past. Revenue will have a far more effective policing system for this relief in a number of ways. First, the relief will be by way of repayment of tax, so all of the salary related to the exercise of the foreign employment in the State will have to be subject to the PAYE system in the first instance. Indeed the levy will be deducted from it in addition to that, as I pointed out yesterday. If Revenue is not satisfied by the information provided by the person making a repayment claim under this section, the official may refuse it and the individual will then have to appeal if he or she is dissatisfied with the ruling. Any abuses of the new arrangements will be reported by the Revenue Commissioners to my officials. In those circumstances I believe that on this occasion, unlike in the past when this relief was enforced, we have ample powers of surveillance of the operation. It would be better to let the relief proceed on that basis, given the welcome it has had, and monitor its operation. If any disturbing trends emerge, we will be in a position to legislate to deal with them at that stage.

I do not believe it is a good idea to narrow it too much at the very initial stage, along the lines suggested by Deputy Bruton, although I cannot rule that out with the passage of time. However, rather than making a prejudiced view about a particular sector of industry or services, we should simply start on the basis that this is a way of attracting a number of individuals into Ireland who can generate economic activity here. If we are concerned about any trend establishing itself, we can immediately move to deal with that in next year's Finance Act.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I am not really satisfied with the Minister's response. I can see the "suck it and see" argument and accept that the "surrender and regrant" approach has a long tradition, which goes back into the annals of history. People pay the money, in effect, and the concession is regranted. That gives a better hold, as the original inventors of the scheme thought it would, over their fiefdoms. I am still uneasy, however. While the Minister says Revenue may refuse, it may not do so on grounds that are of concern to people on this side of the House, namely, that this is being used for purposes for which it was not intended. The only grounds on which Revenue could refuse it would be those as set out in the sections. The Revenue Commissioners cannot act unreasonably. They are not courts and cannot invent reasons for challenging a relief of this nature. While they can use these sections, they can only ask whether a claimant was here for a period of three years or whatever. It is a very limited box-ticking exercise. Once claimants comply with these very narrow requirements they will be seen to be in order, even if the purpose is wholly different from that which the Minister has described in his articulation of the scheme. I have no doubt the Minister has the numbers to get his way, but I am not happy about introducing a scheme that is loose in its drafting in the hope that it will work out. We, as an Oireachtas, never get to see these things again. Perhaps in ten years time some expensive consultant will do a report that tells us we got it wrong and defined the scheme too widely when it was originally designed. We will rub our hands sagely and say: "What foolish people the original draftsmen were." We might as well draft this tightly now and, perhaps, expand it next year if the Minister feels it is not achieving the required results.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Acting Chairman: I have been informed that I should have put amendment No. 16, in the name of Deputy Richard Bruton, to the House already. The amendment arises from Committee Stage proceedings and was discussed with amendment No. 15.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I move amendment No. 16:

In page 38, line 18, after “year” to insert the following:

“except in the case of persons aged 70 years or over, when it means the highest rate at which they paid tax”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Acting Chairman: Amendment No. 20 is related to amendment No. 19 and both may be discussed together.

Deputy Joan Burton: I move amendment No. 19:

In page 50, between lines 12 and 13, to insert the following:

“16.—Retirees partaking in a private pension scheme may postpone the purchase of an annuity for up to two years.”.

It is one of those delicious ironies of the parliamentary draftsman that the previous amendments concerned the Minister’s decision to reintroduce a remittance scheme for highly paid people coming into this country, where only the first €100,000 of their income would be subject to tax. Any tax they paid over and beyond that is to be refunded. On the other hand, amendment No. 19 attempts to address the situation relating to the pension funds of tens of thousands of people. Following the Minister’s predecessor’s — Charlie McCreevy’s — deregulation of much of the pension regulation here in order to let people make up or invest in their own pension fund and then purchase an annuity, many people followed that process. Many of those pension funds are now in crisis.

A proposal has been made, which I understand has been accepted in principle by the Minister, that people in a defined contribution pension scheme should not be required now, as normally required, to purchase an annuity when they come to retirement age. The Minister must bear in mind that, unfortunately, many of these schemes, as a result of what has happened in capital and investment fund markets, are worth only a fraction of what people reaching retirement age expected them to be worth.

The Government, through the Minister for Social and Family Affairs and all its Ministers for Finance over the years, encouraged people to invest in the private pension fund sector. My amendment seeks to provide some flexibility for these people so they can salvage something from the situation. Many people of relatively modest means who have worked hard all their lives put their money into a pension scheme and were encouraged by the Government to do so. They were encouraged by a Government which has also, through the kind of political economic structure it has developed, encouraged the disappearance of defined benefit schemes. Significant numbers of companies have closed such schemes in favour of defined contribution schemes.

We did not expect that Irish pension funds or funds in which Irish people looking forward to retirement hold their money would be subject to the kind of dramatic fall they have suffered. Therefore, my amendment urges the Minister to announce, as he has indicated he may do,

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

flexible arrangements with regard to the requirement to purchase an annuity. I see no reason the Minister cannot be positive and make this arrangement and announcement now.

With regard to the regulations governing the employers' side of defined contribution schemes, we know that under technical regulations, many of these schemes will be in default if the stock market continues its current trend, because employers are required by law to top up the contributions to an appropriate level to keep the fund viable. Again, we have suggested that the Government should state clearly the position in this regard.

I am aware that the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Mary Hanafin, has suggested on several occasions that she is agreeable to making this change with her colleague, the Minister for Finance. However, there is currently no certainty for people about to retire as to the situation. People who ring up to inquire about their pension funds can get no hard information or advice in this regard. They do not know what will happen if they reach the age of 65 in January or March or whenever. In the normal course of events, these people would, by law, be required to purchase an annuity within a short period of time.

I urge the Minister to accept the principle of this amendment. More importantly, he should set out clearly what will happen with regard to those people who are living in fear and dread. They do not know what has happened to the money they invested in good faith or what will happen to them now with regard to their pensions. The Government is going to provide up to €10 billion for bankers who have behaved unbelievably recklessly, but there is much less certainty about what it will do for people on trolleys in accident and emergency units where services will be cut or for people who in good faith put their pension funds into investments. They had no other choice but to do so, because they were required by their employer and encouraged by the State to do it. Will the Minister indicate clearly where they stand now?

Deputy Richard Bruton: I am not exactly clear as to the Government's intention. I understood it proposed a period to allow for the postponement of the purchase of an annuity.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The Deputy's understanding is correct. That has already been decided.

Deputy Richard Bruton: That does not seem to be reflected in the Finance Bill as we have seen it. My amendment is a reflection of an amendment I tabled last year and relates to the inequity of the current arrangements whereby people in defined contribution pension schemes are forced to purchase annuities, whereas self-employed people investing money in retirement funds have the flexibility, once they have other income that provides an income to the value of at least the non-contributory old age pension rate, to put their money into a fund and manage it according to different rules. There is clear discrimination, therefore, against people paying into a standard contributory scheme, which is the predominant type of scheme for people currently. People who pay into defined contribution schemes are being discriminated against by being forced to purchase these annuities.

The Government is being forced, due to the collapse of interest rates and the deplorable value in the purchase of an annuity, to make the provision it proposes for two years. However, I raise the wider issue of why it would treat some people as fish and others as flesh. It seems that the former Minister's, Charlie McCreevy's, approach towards the self-employed, allowing them flexibility, should be applied equally to people who pay contributions towards pension funds that are equally subject to the vagaries of the market. They should be allowed the flexibility to manage them as best meets their needs. I will be interested to hear the Minister comment on the wider issue, as well as on the two-year moratorium on what I regard as an unfair rule.

Deputy Seán Barrett: I support the principles behind both amendments. There is a simple point about pensions. A person gets tax relief on the amount of money put into a fund. When one takes it out one pays tax. I always felt it was wrong to put too many restrictions on the ways people deal with their pension money. Circumstances are different for different individuals. Some people may need money immediately and others may not.

When one's pension age, or retirement age, arrives one can take the pension, automatically. However, some people continue in employment, do not need the money and want to allow it increase. The way things are going, people will work beyond the usual retirement ages of 60 or 65. I always fail to see why the State should worry too much about when a person takes his or her benefit. Whenever people take their benefit they will be taxed fully.

Deputy Bruton made a point about the self-employed. I can offer a personal example. My retirement age was 60 and I got the fund but because I was still working I did not need to draw down my money. I spoke on this issue last year. The Minister required that 1% had to be taken last year, 2% this year, 3% next year. My fund has decreased considerably—

Deputy Joan Burton: Vanished.

Deputy Seán Barrett: —but I still must take out 2%. My point is that the tax the Minister will get on the 2% is far less than he would get if it were allowed to recover and grow. Taking 2% of a lesser amount means taking less tax. It seems crazy that people in my position are forced to take 2% at a time when it is not required. If my retirement age were 65 it would be a different matter. Flexibility, whether of defined benefit or defined contribution, or for the self-employed, is irrelevant. People should be treated as individuals. The money is theirs and they should be allowed take it when they feel like it. Once they pay their tax, whenever they take the money, the State will not lose anything.

This is a time for radical thinking in the whole area of pensions, particularly given the circumstances in which we find ourselves. I chose where I would invest my money and in what retirement fund I would invest it but everybody does not have that choice. Perhaps it is time we looked at regulations concerning where pension fund moneys should be invested. An employer, or the person advising an employer, can use his or her discretion to invest money in funds without the knowledge or the authority of the individual whose money it is.

I believe we have learned a lesson from what has happened to pension funds. Perhaps we should look at flexibility with regard to where people invest. It is different for the public servant who gets a pension and does not have to worry about the funds. This applies to all of us in the House. However, people outside here, whose retirement age is this year, are devastated. To say that the State will force them to purchase annuity at this—

Deputy Joan Burton: It is crazy.

Deputy Seán Barrett: —point would be criminal. I am pleased the Minister is making provision in this regard. Perhaps we might have an opportunity to discuss the issue further in respect of next year's Finance Bill.

There are two parts to section 15, which concerns the assessment of days spent outside the country. The Minister said the change in question will occur as and from 2009. Is it reasonable to expect somebody to change lifestyle from one year to the next? Would the Minister not consider that the appropriate date should be 2010? That would give people a chance to make alternative arrangements. The Minister is changing regimes all of a sudden and this will affect many people. Ultimately, he will lose revenue because of this move. The fewer days a person stays in this country the less money will be spent. To change from one regime to the next on 1 January appears to me somewhat harsh.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: This is a very important issue. We are dealing with people who have just arrived at their pension age. I agree with Deputy Barrett that people should have options. I shall give an example. In recent years I have seen a significant change in attitude in a number of Departments, including the Departments of Social and Family Affairs and Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and also within the Revenue Commissioners. To some degree, personnel are trying to give people what they are entitled to receive. Things could be better but in recent years there has been a considerable improvement.

In similar fashion, we should seek to accommodate people who arrive at pension age in order to get the best possible options for them. That is surely the least we can do for people who have worked all their lives. I support the amendments because they endeavour to give better options to people who have arrived at pension age. Making a simple change of date, from 2009 to 2010, would be an immediate example of a better option, if it were possible to do that.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Members will be aware I recently announced that the rules relating to the requirement for members of defined contribution occupational pension schemes to purchase an annuity with their pension funds in retirement are to be relaxed by the Revenue Commissioners, on a temporary basis.

These amendments have, therefore, been overtaken by events. The deferral arrangement will be operated on an administrative basis by the Revenue and I understand it has finalised the detailed arrangements of the initiative with the pensions industry since my announcement. Under the arrangement, members of defined contribution occupational pension schemes who retire in the period from 4 December 2008 to 31 December 2010 have the option of taking their tax-free lump sum and purchasing a retirement annuity immediately on retirement, or they can take the lump sum and defer the annuity purchase, subject to agreement with their scheme trustee, up to and including 31 December 2010, by which date the concession will end.

By way of background, my Department was approached by the Irish Association of Pension Funds and others in the pensions industry to look at this issue. They were seeking some flexibility on the timing of annuity purchase in view of the fact that affected defined contribution scheme members retiring at this time will have suffered considerable losses in the value of their pension funds in the past year. The argument was made that in the event of such individuals having to purchase an annuity immediately on retirement these losses would be locked in.

Coupled with more recent falls in interest rates and the likelihood of more interest rate reductions to come, the purchase of an annuity in current market conditions with depleted funds would prove likely to be more costly. It would not provide the same level of guaranteed income as in the recent past. The point was also made to me that the position is even more acute for those who have not yet reached normal retirement age, but who are obliged to retire early due to redundancy. This situation, unfortunately, has been increasingly evident in recent months. This is because the normal shift to a more conservative investment strategy in the years running up to retirement will not have occurred for those individuals as they would not have been planning to retire at this time in the normal course.

In acceding to the request, I was conscious that any decision to defer the requirement for annuity purchase is not a risk-free option for the individuals concerned. As I said in my press statement when I announced this change, in giving individuals the option to purchase the annuity immediately, or within the two year deferral period, there is no guarantee they will get better value if they postpone, for two years, or a later date, the decision to purchase. Those individuals who are retiring now or approaching retirement must take this into account. In this regard, I am happy to note that as part of this initiative, the Pensions Board will publish appropriate risk guidance in this matter in the near future.

I also wish to emphasise that the deferral of annuity purchase announced recently is the result of consultations carried out with the pensions industry and represents what the industry proposed as a means of addressing the immediate issues facing certain individuals coming up to retirement or facing redundancy. In light of the fact that the Revenue Commissioners are facilitating a relaxation of the annuity purchase rules, which largely do what these amendments seek, I do not propose to accept the amendments.

Deputy Bruton asked some wider questions about pension policy in general. He is seeking flexibility for employees to put pensions into an approved retirement fund, ARF, or a personal retirement savings account, PRSA. This is a wider issue to be dealt with in the context of the Green Paper on pensions.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Minister make arrangements to have that broadcast fairly widely? People are in fear and trepidation that what they have saved for is literally gone down the Swanee in terms of the money they put into their investment funds. I hope the Minister will be open-minded enough so that if the current falls in the markets continue for more than two years, as it would seem they may do, he will be flexible. There is an opportunity here for the National Treasury Management Agency, for example, to offer a safe vehicle for an annuity at a low cost. The Minister makes friendly references to the pensions industry. The reality of the pensions industry in Ireland is that, among the pensions industries of the world, it has the highest level of charges. Other jurisdictions seek to limit and cap charges but our Government does not.

I would also like the Minister to address an issue which is very important from an employment point of view, namely, how he, as Minister for Finance, proposes to advise his colleagues about the treatment from an employer's point of view of defined contribution schemes where the current rules are that if the scheme comes into deficit, the deficit must be topped up. If the deficit is not topped up, the scheme technically comes into default. If that issue is not addressed rapidly, that default will become a reason for many companies seeking the protection of receivership if the deficit involved in pensions schemes for which they have a liability becomes excessive. In the time available, I would like the Minister to address his attention to this. It is very important from the point of view of thousands of companies and their continuation through very lean times.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Minister contends I am raising a wider issue; I am not. In two years time, the Minister will be faced with this same issue. As he rightly says, if the market has not recovered he will again force people to buy at low interest rates annuities that will be wholly unsatisfactory. I raise the point that what is good for the self-employed and has applied to the self-employed for a considerable period is just as good for people in defined contribution schemes which are reaching maturity.

If the Minister did want to raise the wider issue, Deputy Burton has raised it, namely, what happens to people in their sixties who have a pension fund. It is the existing pensioners who have priority. Someone very close to retirement age is no more secure than someone aged 20 in the status of a defined benefit pension scheme that is in difficulty. Those are the wider issues we would like to see addressed. However, I am sticking strictly to the context of the forced purchase of annuities.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The deferral arrangements for annuity purchase which I announced recently are by definition temporary. However, as Deputy Burton suggested, if present conditions persist over an extended period, that issue might have to be revisited. Changing the scope of the existing ARF arrangements is one of a range of issues to be addressed in the long-term pensions policy framework being developed by the Government.

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

Some speak of extending the ARF option as though it was a panacea for the problems of the pensions area. It is an important issue but not as simple as it is portrayed. There are arguments for and against extending it to pension arrangements where they are not available at present. The arguments are set out in the Green Paper and relate to the whole question of balance.

I was giving Deputy Burton attention when she asked about the accounting treatment of pension funds at present. As I understand the position, and the Deputy will appreciate it is a prudential issue rather than a revenue issue so I am speaking without the benefit of official advice, there is an EU requirement in regard to the accountancy standards that must be observed.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I move amendment No. 20:

In page 50, between lines 12 and 13, to insert the following:

“16.—Part 30 of the Principal Act shall be amended by inserting a new section:

“(785) A person who reaches retirement under a Defined Contribution Pension Scheme shall from 1 March 2009 not be required to purchase an annuity unless they do not have an income equivalent to the Non-Contributory Old Age Pension prevailing at the time of retirement.”.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 21 in the name of Deputy Morgan is out of order as it entails a potential charge on the State.

Amendment No. 21 not moved.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I move amendment No. 22:

In page 52, to delete lines 1 to 21 and substitute the following:

“20.—Section 26 of the Finance Act 2008 is repealed.”.

The amendment seeks to delete section 26 because this section facilitates tax exemptions for the private health care sector. I would argue it facilitates a road towards the privatisation of the entire health care system in the State, to which I am clearly opposed.

There are many examples of problems having arisen. The Bill deals specifically with enhancing tax relief for hospice facilities. We all want to see and there is a huge need for the provision of additional hospice services throughout the State. Currently, 12 counties have no hospice facilities. Rather than providing those facilities, a trend for 11 years under this Government has been to hand over that section of the health care service lock, stock and barrel to the private health care industry. This is unacceptable.

I do not disagree in principle with certain tax incentive initiatives. Several years ago, for example, we saw derelict parts of towns which attracted exemptions for a short while — some would argue for far too long — which increased activity in that area of the town and renewed activity. While I am not against such initiatives *per se*, I am against them with regard to the health service. For example, to take the issue of nursing home beds, since the huge tax incen-

tives were built into that section of the health service, only a very small number of public beds have been provided. It has got to the stage where people are almost wholly dependent on the private sector for nursing home beds, which is a bad situation.

The National Treatment Purchase Fund has a similar effect with regard to the privatisation of health care. Our Lady's Hospital in Navan, which has been closed since mid-November and will remain closed until mid-January, is the orthopaedic hospital in the region where hip replacements and such treatments occur. The people who would have attended for hip treatments are on the waiting list and will remain there for three months, when they can apply for the National Treatment Purchase Fund scheme. Each of those procedures would cost between €3,500 and €4,500. As the HSE has admitted, the only savings made will be in regard to replacement artificial hips, yet a significant number of these people will be referred through the National Treatment Purchase Fund to private hospitals for that procedure. In that event, the cost of the procedure will be somewhere between €8,000 and €12,000. Clearly, this is not a cost-saving exercise. It is about driving an ideology and driving the privatisation of the health care system, which I totally oppose.

I will give one other example. Although it has not been announced, the ambulance service has recently been subject to significant cutbacks because the operatives are not allowed overtime. Rather than have people working, especially at this time of year when there is increased activity on the roads because of parties, additional home visits etc., the ambulances will be parked. There is a significant increase in the rate of accidents and deaths on the roads at this time of year. The HSE stated its position in the event of someone not being available because overtime could not be facilitated. For example, if an operative is out sick, he or she cannot be replaced by a colleague because overtime would be incurred. In such cases, ambulances from other outlying areas would be required to cover that area. Such an ambulance would require additional time to arrive at the scene of an accident, involving a heart attack victim or whatever the emergency. That is completely unacceptable.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy is straying beyond the realms of the amendment.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: It is analogous, and a consequence of privatisation of the health care service. That is the issue I am addressing.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Are these grounds for the Minister for Finance—

Deputy Arthur Morgan: In addition to being unsafe, it is significantly more costly, because the fallback position is that the HSE will hire private ambulances. Rather than pay some operatives in the local area overtime, it will incur not only the cost of the two operatives in the ambulance, but the cost of the private ambulance itself. It is a substantially increased cost and it makes no sense.

In 2006, the last year for which figures are available, tax exemptions for developers of private hospitals cost the State €10 million. We are all aware of how €10 million could be spent. Such an amount could not be found for the cervical cancer vaccine programme. It was found and then cancelled. However, in this case a preference is given to developers of private hospitals, which is alarming and I am concerned that this is the case.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: We are discussing a scheme for hospices. It was introduced last year at the request of the relevant voluntary groups. Developing hospice care was widely welcomed at the time. Deputy Morgan's amendment proposes that the new scheme of capital allowances for the construction and refurbishment of buildings to be used as specialist palliative care units does not come into effect. I appreciate Deputy Morgan tabled an earlier amendment which

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was ruled out of order, and that he spoke to that. However, the scheme Deputy Morgan seeks to repeal was introduced in Finance Act 2008 but has yet to receive EU Commission approval from a State-aid perspective and be commenced by me. It was introduced in response to identified gaps in the supply of and demand for palliative care facilities throughout the country. The scheme has similar terms, conditions and exclusions to those that apply in the case of qualifying private hospitals and qualifying mental health centres. It aims to encourage private sector investment to fill some of those gaps, but only where proposed developments of facilities are in line with the longer term public health policy objectives in this area. For expenditure to qualify for capital allowances, the development of a facility must have pre-approval from the Health Service Executive, with the consent of the Minister for Health and Children, as being in line with national development plans and needs assessments for palliative care facilities.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Finance Bill contains some amendments that will make the scheme more effective when it comes into operation. Since I was persuaded by the arguments made during the debate on the introduction of this scheme in the Bill that the minimum bed capacity requirement of 20 beds could be a significant hurdle for some palliative care units, I am lowering this requirement to eight beds. I am also allowing capital expenditure under the scheme to qualify for capital allowances from the date of the enactment of the Finance Act 2008, because I do not believe it is reasonable that legitimate capital expenditure on qualifying projects should be excluded from benefiting under the scheme in the period pending EU Commission approval.

Tax incentives for similar schemes have proved to be an effective way of attracting the necessary private investment into areas of the economy where investment is needed. This scheme has the potential to make a real contribution to increasing the provision of much needed palliative care facilities and I am, therefore, unable to accept the amendment. As with similar schemes that have been reviewed in recent years, I will keep this scheme under review to ensure that it meets the requirements I have in mind for it.

Deputy Joan Burton: I am unsure if the Minister understands that the financial world as we knew it has changed. Tax-based capital schemes led his predecessor in office, the Taoiseach, Deputy Brian Cowen, to ruin in respect of the economy. It produced activity which, as it turns out, is unsustainable. The contribution of the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Mary Harney, and her party, the Progressive Democrats, now happily deceased, to health services has been ruinous. It has produced several investments backed by groups of private investors. They have established private hospitals, some of which are independent and some of which are proposed for public hospital lands.

The basis of these schemes is the use of leverage, which is made easier by the availability of generous tax breaks. It involves high net worth individuals or groups of such people, lending or, more likely borrowing, large volumes of capital. The borrowings are then used to fund private health care initiatives which are given tax breaks by the State at the top rate of 41%. That form of leverage is over. As in his dealings with the banks, the Minister does not seem capable of appreciating this fact.

Earlier this year, the Minister introduced the scheme for hospices. Initially, those connected with the hospice movement knew nothing of the scheme. It turned out a party colleague of the Minister prevailed upon an institution in Munster to seek this scheme, presumably to assist in an investment by a select group of investors. These high net worth individuals planned to borrow money for the investment and consequently receive a very handsome tax break at the marginal rate of 41%. This year, the Minister announced an amendment to reduce the number of beds required for the scheme. I do not understand why the amendment was necessary.

However, it was probably on the basis of some kind of representation from some individual investor or private project to which the amended scheme would be more attractive.

Unfortunately, instead of representing fairness and universality of treatment, the health service has been driven into a two-part system by the Government, the better and faster treatment privatised. However, there was the case of Ms Susie Long, who became very ill and died. Her colonoscopy was delayed entirely because she was a public patient. She wrote to Mr. Joe Duffy on “Liveline” using the name Rosie, and referred to a person seeking treatment at the same time as her. It turned out that, luckily, the man had private health insurance and consequently could avail of private treatment. As a result, that person was able to get the test in sufficient time to save his life. In her case this was not possible.

I do not understand why the Minister is so determined to extend these schemes when everyone knows that given the current collapse of the financial markets such schemes are as dead as a doornail. No financial adviser worth his or her salt would advise people to proceed with such a scheme. In any event the money is not available in banks. The banks do not have funds to lend for such schemes. These are the banks to which the Minister proposes to give €10 billion of pensioners’ money. He ought to be deeply ashamed.

The Minister’s proposals are little better than the Ponzi scheme that gentleman in New York used to rip off approximately \$60 billion. This is the Government’s own version of a Ponzi scheme. I do not understand what the Minister is playing at. Members have never been informed who are the precise beneficiaries of this proposal. However, although the Government introduced the original scheme less than 12 months ago, the Minister already seeks to amend it to favour more intensively a group of unknown investors. The Minister ought to share this information with the Dáil.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I must repeat that I accept the need for palliative care beds. As my constituency in particular has one of the highest rates of cancer on the island, which consistently is 12% or 13% above the national average, I accept such a need completely. In a way, I accept that in respect of occupancy, better efficiency is to be gained, for example, from a ten-bed unit than from a 20-bed unit. Consequently, I see some merit in the Minister’s specific amendment to the scheme. From the perspective of the investor, having full occupancy would be efficient.

However, this should not be about investors. People’s health care should be dealt with by the State and they should not be obliged to enter private hospice care. This is the biggest issue in this regard. Another point worth making is that tax breaks cost taxpayers money. They do so for the simple reason that the cash does not come in. However, the Government appears to be in favour of writing off as many schemes for tax breaks as one wishes, which I consider to be a ridiculous concept. This appears to be the prevailing mentality, with both the present Minister and successive Ministers for Finance, for a considerable time and is particularly lamentable.

In conclusion, I am not opposed to hospice care. I see more than enough of it through visits to the small number of hospice beds that are provided. While I recognise the need for them, they should be provided by the State and we should not be moving in this direction.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: In respect of Deputy Morgan’s remarks, the State does not provide hospice services, which are provided on a voluntary basis.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Palliative services.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: As for palliative services, that is the reason for the introduction of this particular tax incentive. I must refute Deputy Burton’s suggestion that this is a sinister plan involving high net worth individuals, who appear to populate her imagination at regular

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intervals. First, high earners, whose income is in excess of €250,000, do not obtain marginal rate relief on incentive investments. This restriction on reliefs was introduced by my predecessor, the current Taoiseach.

Deputy Joan Burton: It is a postponement, not a restriction.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Effectively, it has reduced the rate of reliefs——

Deputy Joan Burton: It is not an abolition.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: —— to the standard rate and early indications——

Deputy Joan Burton: It is a postponement. The Minister's note is wrong.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Early indications from the Revenue Commissioners——

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister's note is wrong.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Can I speak?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please allow the Minister to make a contribution.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister's note is wrong. He is misleading the Dáil.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Am I permitted to finish?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please. The Deputy will allow the Minister to make——

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister is misleading the Dáil.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As the Deputy is aware, she is not allowed to make that charge.

Deputy Joan Burton: On a point of information——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is no such thing as a point of information. I take it the Deputy is rising on a point of order.

Deputy Joan Burton: —— people are restricted for a year. They carry it forward as the officials ought to have written in the note. The Minister does not know his own provisions.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is not a point of order.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: That is not a point of order.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please Deputy. The Minister is in possession.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The crucial point I wished to make, which Deputy Burton did not allow me to complete before interrupting, is that early indications from the Revenue Commissioners suggest the restriction is working as intended, by reducing the effective tax rate to 20% in such cases. The key point is the information I have received from the Revenue Commissioners suggests——

Deputy Joan Burton: It is wrong.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: —— that this particular restriction has worked as intended.

Various other extraneous comments were made about the banking system and alleged arrangements therein. First, had Deputy Burton been responsible as Minister for Finance for the banking system on 30 September last, the banks would have gone over a cliff by now. I certainly will not hazard——

Deputy Joan Burton: They would be reorganised by now, not ruined.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please allow the Minister to respond.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: —— pension fund moneys in investments that are not soundly based for the pension fund concerned.

Question, “That the words proposed to be deleted stand”, put and declared carried.

Amendment declared lost.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Unfortunately, amendment No. 23 in the name of Deputy Bruton is out of order as it poses a potential charge on the State.

Amendment No. 23 not moved.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 24 in the name of Deputy Bruton is out of order for the same reason.

Amendment No. 24 not moved.

Deputy Richard Bruton: On a point of order, on Committee Stage a contention was circulated to all members of the Select Committee on Finance and the Public Service to the effect that this amendment would assist only eight out of 95 of the qualifying types of Seveso investments.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We cannot debate the amendment.

Deputy Richard Bruton: However, the section was not reached on Committee Stage. I tabled an amendment in the expectation that I could speak on the section because there was no opportunity to address the section on Committee Stage. If the Leas-Cheann Comhairle’s order stands, there will be no opportunity at any stage in the debating procedure to address this issue. Consequently, I move:

“That the Bill be recommitted in respect of section 21.”

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is a proposal to recommit. Is that agreed?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Does this pertain to amendment No. 24?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No, amendment No. 24 is out of order.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: In respect of the materials pertaining to the amendment, I am agreeable to recommital.

Bill recommitted in respect of section 21.

Question proposed: “That section 21 stand part of the Bill.”

Deputy Richard Bruton: My understanding is that this section introduces a concession for urban dockland developments where there is a need to move certain activities from such lands

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

to new sites to free the former for wider development. In principle, I can see the merit in a tax relief. However, the Minister will have had sight of the letters sent to the committee in which it has been presented that this provision, as it has been structured, will disadvantage many investors who are already engaged in such activity. There will not be a level playing field because although there are 95 designated Seveso sites, under this proposal only eight would become eligible for some tax support.

The issue is that this provision will create a non-level playing pitch and the proposal must be reconsidered in some way to make it more broadly based. I understand that those who consider themselves to be adversely affected have submitted an amendment — I presume it has reached the Department as I received it by e-mail — that they believe would create a level playing pitch. A genuine concern exists in this regard, which was shared by all sides on Committee Stage. However, Members were frustrated that the guillotine prevented them from reaching this matter.

Deputy Joan Burton: This is another example of lobbies that have the ear of the Minister for Finance, which gives rise to legislation that results in significant tax advantages to a select few. When the Minister's predecessor, Deputy Brian Cowen, was finally persuaded that the structure of capital-based tax breaks he had introduced was dangerously damaging the property market and creating a property bubble, comprehensive studies were conducted by an independent firm of consultants and studies were carried out by the Department of Finance. Unfortunately, the bubble has burst, leaving many construction workers unemployed and the State coffers heavily depleted. The outcome of such studies was a declaration by the Minister that he would row back on the principle of tax breaks for property development and that where he proposed to introduce other tax breaks, a clear cost-benefit case study analysis would be undertaken that would show exactly what was involved, what were the benefits of the suggested action and what were the costs of the suggested action, in respect of tax forgone.

When the Minister announced this in the budget, it was immediately suggested that this measure would particularly advantage certain developments in the Cork docklands area and, potentially, certain developments in or near the Dublin docklands area, and particular developers, whose investments would be significantly enhanced by these developments, were also named in the media, some of them prominent supporters of the Minister's political party.

We, along with other Deputies in this House, received representations from developers and investors in other schemes around the country who suggested that, because the developments or locations named by the Minister on budget day would get a specific advantage, they would be heavily disadvantaged. Clearly, the investors concerned in the Finance Bill would have a very attractive way of reducing their exposure to taxation by investing in the Minister's scheme.

From a public interest point of view, it is really important that the details of this come out. It is, of course, potentially, a state aid to industry and I understand it must be examined by the European Commission with a view to seeing whether it constitutes an unfair illegal state aid to industry to particular groups as opposed to other groups.

There are all around the country dockland areas where, for instance, part of docklands were used to import and hold liquid petroleum gas, oil and other items which give rise to a Seveso-type definition if, subsequently, those sites come to be redeveloped because they are heavily contaminated.

On the additional tax breaks the Minister has put forward for wealthy people to reduce their incidence of taxation, all of the Deputies speaking in this debate have asked for details, for cost-benefit analyses and the identity of the beneficiaries, but we are none the wiser. This is

why the business of tax breaks by his Government and the tent at the Galway races have become such bywords for a kind of political corruption, which has plagued this country and which in the end has been one of the reasons for the severity of the economic decline we are now suffering.

The Minister is proposing another one of these tax incentives. There are profound arguments in their favour but they must be done fairly, openly and honestly. The regime of the Minister's party and Government has been anything but.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: In terms of any tax relief there should be equity. We all received the correspondence from the particular Seveso company and it should be looked at by the Minister in terms of equity.

On the broader issue of docklands development, in the context of my own constituency in Limerick we have a working dock but we would like to see development of the area as an amenity. The Minister needs to look at the overall development of docklands from a sustainability viewpoint and strictly not from the viewpoint of this issue, which is not equitable to all the Seveso sites. In fact, it only applies to eight out of the 95. The Minister might take that on board.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: First, there was an independent cost-benefit analysis prepared in respect of this relief for Cork County Council.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Minister make it available to us?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Yes. I can arrange for that to be done. I really deplore Deputy Burton's suggestions of corruption in respect of developers.

On the section, it is not a tax incentive for property developers. It is a scheme to remove and relocate industrial facilities involved in the regeneration of urban docklands because of health and safety concerns that arise under legislation in the Seveso Directive.

The section only applies to Seveso sites which a local authority wants to remove for urban regeneration purposes. That is important. That is written into the section. It is not a question that any developer, any owner of land or any dockland can trigger this relief. It is under local authority control. There must be a proper regeneration scheme.

On the correspondence received by Deputies which I myself read with great care, it must be borne in mind that written into the section is a provision for the clawback of the benefits in cases where there is any element of undue competition. Indeed, Deputy Bruton raised that question. The clawback provision in the section deals with the danger identified in the correspondence of unfair competition. The clawback provision is essential under the state aid provisions applied by the European Commission.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Bruton sought the recommittal. I am anxious to make progress.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I have not had the chance to study in great detail this clawback provision but I understand that the representatives of those who made the case to the committee that this was discriminatory, had several meetings with officials in advance. The Minister's officials, or the officials of the relevant Department, have not succeeded in convincing the companies concerned that this represents a level playing pitch.

I am very uneasy about accepting at this very late stage an assurance that there is an adequate clawback provision. My reading of the section led me to table amendments seeking to restrict it because I thought it was broadly phrased.

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

I realise we are time constrained, but when the Houses are informed that this is discriminatory and that it will apply to only a limited proportion of the sites that have the problems to which the public policy issue accords, we need a more comprehensive statement from the Minister before we would be asked to give our approval of this.

It is not the Chair's fault, but it is unsatisfactory not to have had a Committee Stage debate on this.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We can have that now. We are in committee.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: On the Minister's comments that the planning here was a matter for the local authorities, I can give him any amount of examples but perhaps the best and most startling example of local authorities' planning being distorted by one means or another is in east Meath, for example, all around Laytown and Bettystown where an area that used be a lovely countryside and seaside area is now coming down with houses. It is a concrete jungle. There is not a proper road in or a proper road out. There is no school in the area. We all could argue that that planning process was conducted under the auspices of Meath County Council but there are issues involved that require explanation. I would merely suggest that that is what is causing suspicion on this side of the House.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: In reply to Deputy Bruton first, there was one meeting at official level with one company on this matter, not a sequence of meetings. The clawback provision is written into the legislation.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Which section?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I will draw the Deputy's attention to it in a minute. The scheme is, of course, subject to EU approval. It is good that the European Commission will have to test the clawback provision for its robustness.

In response to Deputy Morgan, in this instance we are talking about a regeneration programme specifically drawn up by a local authority. It is not a question of planning around the country, although I appreciate his comments.

There is a problem with the regeneration of dockland areas in the State. There are very onerous obligations imposed under the Seveso Directive and it is important that those obligations are complied with. They amount to a substantial disincentive for the regeneration of these areas and the relief is designed to address that issue.

I ask Deputy Bruton to bear with me for a moment.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will come back to the Minister to get that piece of information.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The relevant provisions can be found at section 380V and 380W.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Those sections appear to deal with new machinery. They do not appear to make reference to unfair competition.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I wish to make a point of clarification.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is no such thing but the Deputy can no doubt make a point of order.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: This applies purely to a transfer of a Seveso site in an urban—

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy is not making a point of order but he is perfectly entitled to make an intervention and put a question to the Minister.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for his indulgence.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Deputies will appreciate that I am somewhat slow in responding, as I am not briefed for Committee Stage.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I will make allowances for that. This section deals with Seveso sites in urban dockland areas which are subject to local area plans. It does not provide for Seveso sites which are located in non-urban dockland areas. That strikes me as anti-competitive. If an operation is required to relocate from a Seveso site in an area other than docklands, it should be given the same tax breaks. That is the essential point being put across in the correspondence we are receiving on the matter. I would like to hear the Minister's opinion of this straightforward point.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The purpose of the scheme is urban regeneration. There is no requirement in respect of non-urban regeneration. Section 380W states clearly that where the allowance under the sections has been made to any person in respect of expenditure incurred on the provision of machinery or plant or the construction of a building or structure that was sold by the person without the machinery, building or structure having been used for the purpose of the relevant trade within two years from the date on which it began to be so used, then the allowance under those sections will be withdrawn and all such additional assessments and adjustments will be made.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The restrictions to which the Minister adverts mean that if greater capacity is created than the original or if the plant is not used within two years, the relief will be restricted. However, there is no way in which these provisions could be interpreted as dealing with a concern that some sites are being ring-fenced as qualifying for this relief while other similar sites are not. I do not see how an unfair competition element is built into either of the clauses to which the Minister drew my attention.

Deputy Joan Burton: I ask the Minister about section 380R(6), which provides that the market value of the whole or part of establishment land means the price that whole or part might reasonably be expected to fetch on a sale on the open market if the old installation was removed. In the context of current market values, what exactly does that mean? What values and dates are we considering? Some of these developments changed hands at the height of the property bubble and their value could reasonably be expected to be considerably lower.

Deputy Richard Bruton: On the issue of competition which Deputy Bruton raised, the allowances available under the scheme are limited to the net cost of the removal and relocation. This means the benefits from the sale of the land where the industrial facilities were previously located will be deducted. The allowance granted will also be adjusted in the case of productivity gains which may occur when a company constructs a more efficient facility. That is the reason for the sections to which the Deputy referred.

The additional capital allowances for the purchase of new plant and machinery and buildings will be clawed back if they are sold within the two year period. All that is permitted is the replication of the existing facility without any undue advantage to the person making the relocation. Nothing more than that is permitted under the relief. The reason for these provisions is to ensure there is no prejudice against competing providers. The clawbacks and the provisions to net off the benefits from the sale of the land of the initial site ensures that the scheme will be fair and reasonable in only meeting costs necessitated by the removal and relocation of

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

Seveso listed industrial facilities which are hindering the regeneration of an urban dockland area. That is essential in order to comply with EU requirements. In respect of market value, the adjustment is the actual sale price when sold in this context.

Deputy Joan Burton: What are the relevant dates? Can they be carried back to when the property market was at its height or are these values carried forward? It seems obvious that some of the competition issues discussed earlier would arise in lands which are less valuable because they are not in, for example, Dublin 4 or the south Cork docklands. The enhanced market values would be very important in this case.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The relevant expenses that attract capital allowances include both the removal of the old installation and the set up of its replacement. There are two elements. If one does not have this relief, one does not get relief on either element. The Minister stated that the removal is a necessary additional cost. The logic of what he said is that he would restrict the relief to the removal element and would not therefore be offering a competitive advantage. At least in terms of a level playing field, it would seem that confining the relief to the removal element and not allowing it on the new investment would be a fairer way of proceeding.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Market value is based on the date when the relocation starts but the final adjustment is made by reference to the actual sale price of the lands. It is the actual market price rather than a notion of past market values.

Deputy Joan Burton: I ask the Minister——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister should complete his reply before I call other Deputies.

Deputy Joan Burton: Perhaps the Minister will set out his reply in full.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The date on which the relocation starts is the date for fixing the market value. In other words, a notional value is fixed at the start of the relocation but an adjustment is made by reference to the actual sale price agreed.

Deputy Joan Burton: What I want to learn from the Minister are the exact dates.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Perhaps the Minister will reply to Deputy Bruton's question before Deputy Burton intervenes.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I am still trying to compose a reply to Deputy Bruton's question.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is fine. Let us tease out Deputy Burton's question first.

Deputy Joan Burton: I will make it easier for the Minister. What extent of backdating is included in this provision? How far back does it go in regard to acquisitions? Does it simply provide for future deals and, if so, how are the market values dated and what is the composition of those values?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: On that issue, it is prospective in effect. It is subject to the existence of an urban regeneration plan developed by the relevant local authority. The market values will be determined when the relief is claimed and the relocation is made. The final payment represents the actual market value for the lands in question. Past market values are irrelevant to the measure.

Deputy Joan Burton: Land involved in Seveso type activities may have changed hands several times or a canny developer may have passed it through several companies. It may well be that two years ago the value of this dockland site was potentially very high. Some time later, such as now and into the future, the market value, as I understand it, will have plummeted. How is market value categorised? Is it open market value or fair price at the date or going forward? Is it fair price at arm's length between a willing buyer and seller as determined by an independent arbitrator? Is it a built-up market value? If we go back to market values of some years ago, they would be far higher.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: As Deputy Burton knows, the market value is always what a willing purchaser will give a willing vendor in an open market. This must be determined. In this context it is not a matter of going back to past values. This is a prospective relief and the market value is fixed by reference to what value is attached at the time of the relocation. There is provision for an adjustment where the market price diverges from that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am anxious to let Deputy Bruton in at this stage.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I raise the point that if the Minister was——

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I was going to reply on the matter. It is clear we have restricted the legislation with regard to any suggestion of a productivity gain by the relocating enterprise, any suggestion of an additional benefit from the sale of lands and also in the non-use of the new facilities. We have attempted to deal with those matters.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Before calling the Deputy, I indicate we should make progress on this issue as there are only approximately 35 minutes left to deal with all other amendments. I know Deputies are anxious to make progress.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I will leave it at one point. If we are seeking to provide some assistance to the cost of moving out of an urban dockland, the relief should be confined to the cost of moving from the urban dockland rather than, as this section seeks, include the cost of the establishment in the new location. If the cost of establishing the new location is grant-aided, an uneven playing pitch is being created for others with similar facilities.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I do not understand how one could incentivise the removal without giving the person providing the service the incentive to replace it with a facility that was of no greater advantage to the enterprise than the pre-existing facility.

Question put and declared carried.

Bill reported without amendment.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I move amendment No. 25:

In page 63, line 10, to delete “23 per cent” and substitute “22 per cent”.

The Minister stated very clearly on Committee Stage that he sought to introduce uniformity in the taxation of certain transactions such as capital acquisitions and capital gains. He seemed to lose his way when it came to the treatment of deposit interest retention tax, DIRT, when he applied a 23% rate rather than a 22% rate. I hoped to give him the opportunity on Report Stage to mend this error that he overlooked.

It has been indicated to me that there is an unfair aspect of DIRT in that banks do not provide people with a statement of their deposit interest retention tax, which would give them

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

the opportunity to claim it back. Should there be a legal provision requiring the banks to give a statement? Older people are entirely entitled to claim relief if they are not in a taxable position and such a statement would inform them of the tax they pay in deposit interest and would prompt them with the opportunity to claim it back.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Automatically.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The CGT and CAT rates were increased by 2% and the 1% levy did not apply to deposit interest. The 3% increase as provided for in section 26 was necessitated by general budgetary constraints. I was influenced by the fact that general levels of deposits in banks are very high currently.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Interest rates are very low. Does the Minister care to comment on the point of requiring banks to issue a certificate?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The legislation at present requires that banks issue a certificate if requested. Deputy Bruton is looking for a more positive obligation on the banks.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Yes.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I will certainly raise that question with them.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 26 is out of order.

Amendment No. 26 not moved.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I move amendment No. 27:

In page 76, to delete lines 6 to 20 and substitute the following:

“‘Threshold amount’ means a baseline of zero spending on research and development as and from the start of the tax year 2009;”,

Since we debated this I received comments from the taxation division on the possible costs. This related to research and development going back to a baseline of zero. I am not disposed to withdraw the amendment so may I have clarification from the Minister about his intentions regarding other published or discussed concessions relating to research and development, which we hear is part of the Government's economic recovery strategy? Are these additional concessions and will we have occasion to debate them? Are these the concessions being talked of when the Minister says he will have a research and development package?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The fiscal elements of the package are contained in the Finance Bill before the House currently, other than those regarding intellectual property. I signalled in my budget speech that I intended to bring forward proposals on that next year.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 28 and 29 are out of order.

Amendments Nos. 28 and 29 not moved.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I move amendment No. 30:

In page 100, line 14, after “2008” to insert the following:

“except in the case of disposals arising from compulsory purchase orders, it shall apply to disposals, on which the order was confirmed on or after 15th October”.

This amendment, which we did not have the opportunity to discuss on Committee Stage, deals with the capital gains tax threshold, which has been increased from 20% to 22%. The difficulty arises with regard to lands that were the subject of a compulsory purchase order during the periods in question. With one example in Ballaghaderreen in my constituency, An Bord Pleanála confirmed the compulsory purchase order on 26 September. As a result of the way the legislation is currently written, it will be liable for the higher rate of capital gains tax.

In light of the fact that the Department of Finance must provide the funds in the first place to allow for the higher rate of capital gains tax because the compensation must include the tax element, it makes sense to accept this amendment. In the first instance, this means the Department of Finance pays compensation — and the related tax — at the lower rate. It also means the land owners in question are not liable to the higher rate of tax.

There is no financial benefit in this issue. The amendment facilitates streamlining the proposal for everybody involved. There will be an additional cost on the Department of Finance in furnishing the funds in the first instance before having to recoup them through capital gains tax. There would be net saving to the Exchequer so I ask the Minister to accept the amendment.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The general principle, as has always been the practice, is contained in section 542 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 where the compulsory purchase order was confirmed before 15 October but the local authority had not agreed compensation with the owner of the land or entered on the land by that date. That is the case identified.

The general principle, as set out in section 542 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, has always been clear. The time of disposal of land acquired under a compulsory purchase order is either the date when the compensation is agreed or the time when the local authority enters on the land, whichever is earlier. However, where a disposal of farm land is made under a compulsory purchase order for road building or road widening, the CGT liability will not arise until the year of assessment in which the compensation is received. I do not consider that one can have an exception in the rate of tax applicable to disposal on or after 15 October 2008, notwithstanding the Deputy’s generous suggestion.

Deputy Denis Naughten: The Minister has highlighted another problem in that the CGT liability will be paid at the higher rate for landowners or farmers who are paid subsequent to the date of the legislation’s introduction. Therefore, where CPOs were agreed a considerable time ago, the compensation has also been agreed but because of delays, due sometimes to the incompetency of the National Roads Authority, farmers will be liable to a higher rate of tax even though the compensation was agreed at the lower rate. Will that have to be revised due to cost implications for the Department of Finance? Surely it would make sense for everyone if it kicked in at the lower rate.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Under the arrangement, the landowner who happens to be a farmer is at an advantage in that there is no obligation to pay the CGT when the land is taken. In that sense, there is an extension of a facility to that landowner as against any other class of landowner in the interim period.

Deputy Denis Naughten: But at the higher rate.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: No. It is an entire liability which is deferred under the operation of this section. The fact that the rate increased this year means it is at the higher rate, which can happen in any financial legislation. The fundamental point is that the landowner who happens to be a farmer can defer his liability under this section. I am advised that the rate of tax does not affect the amount of compensation.

Deputy Denis Naughten: The Minister's advisers are not saying that. Prior to going to the Seanad, I ask the Minister to re-examine this issue, which has financial implications for the Exchequer.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 31 and 32 are out of order.

Amendments Nos. 31 and 32 not moved.

Amendment No. 33 not moved.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 34 arises from committee proceedings.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I move amendment No. 34:

In page 116, line 30, to delete "33" and substitute "20".

On Committee Stage, we discussed this amendment which concerns the concession on VRT to people in the rent-a-car industry. The concern is that the Minister is moving rapidly to withdraw a concession that was designed to promote low-cost access for tourism. In the past, it was deemed to be an important element of the attraction package for the tourism sector. The case against it was not well made by the Minister. On Committee Stage, he indicated he felt the provision was being widely abused. I do not know whether the Minister has had occasion to give the section any further thought having no doubt received further representations on the matter from the industry.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I support this amendment on the basis that it would benefit the tourism sector, which I appreciate is a very important one and is most affected by this measure. In addition, many people who do not need to own cars would be happy to hire them if they were more reasonably priced. That would have a major benefit for CO2 emissions. The amendment goes beyond the tourism sector in that regard, so I strongly support it.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The Finance Act 1993 introduced a VRT repayment system for the short-term car hire sector — that is, cars hired on contracts for 35 days or less. The purpose of the scheme was to address shortages in the supply of cars for hire within the tourism industry at that time. The effect of the repayment scheme is that a car is effectively free of VRT for the period it remains in the car hire fleet.

Arising from Revenue audits, especially in 2007 and 2008, there is strong evidence that the sector has manipulated contracts to ensure that cars used for the provision of services, which were not originally envisaged under the scheme, nonetheless benefit from the VRT relief available. In addition, operators have applied the scheme to cars for use outside the tourism area, including enabling corporate clients to provide a pool of cars to visiting executives or to their own staff, and also allowing VRT-free driving by Irish citizens who hire rather than own a car, while their neighbours who own cars have to pay VRT.

The scheme was amended by section 80 of the Finance Act 2008 to try to limit such abuses. However, the sector raised objections and concerns. The scheme, especially following amend-

ment, necessarily imposes a considerable administrative burden on individual firms, and on Revenue, to ensure that the conditions for the VRT refund are being met and that the scheme is not being abused. A number of meetings were held between Revenue and the sector.

It has been complained that the scheme, if operated correctly, is complex to administer. It was also argued that it not only restricts normal competitiveness between firms, but limits the potential to grow the car rental market outside the tourism sector to other longer term rentals. Some operators have made the point that to continue to qualify for the relief on cars actually used in the provision of cars to tourists, as the scheme intends, they would have to maintain two separate vehicle fleets — one for hire to tourists and another for the domestic market — and this would be uneconomical and unworkable in practice.

Easing further the terms of the scheme, while widening its availability, would not cover everyone currently availing of the scheme, legitimately or otherwise, nor would it significantly reduce the growing administrative burdens. It would also effectively remove any distinction between short and long-term car hire.

The cost effectiveness of the relief is now questionable, as rental prices in Ireland are quite low compared to equivalent prices in other EU member states. In addition, the increasing use of the scheme to support a range of business models, which have little to do with tourism, would indicate that the current supply of vehicles required for the tourist industry in the State more than meets current demand and the excess is therefore being put to other non-tourist related uses.

Given that the scheme is prone to abuse, and the considerable necessary administrative burdens imposed on both Revenue and operators to ensure that the conditions for the VRT refund are being met and that the scheme is not being abused, a decision to phase out the scheme has been taken. I see this as a balanced response to the issues of short-term car-hire repayments.

The retention of existing repayment provisions for 2009 recognises the difficulties being experienced by the car sector generally at present. It also affords the sector further time to make considerable savings on VRT liabilities by switching more of the rental fleet to lower CO₂-emitting vehicles in 2009. Abolition of the scheme will remove existing restrictions and allow operators to develop their business models based on the domestic rental market.

While some firms in the sector may resist the phasing out of the scheme, other operators have indicated that they would prefer abolition of the scheme, rather than having its use restricted, as a consequence of which some business models would qualify under the scheme while others would not.

I see no need for an adjustment to the phasing provisions included in the Bill, hence I cannot accept the amendment.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Minister's note is quite persuasive. Does he feel, however, that a longer period than the one proposed should be given to phase out the scheme?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: There is a full three-year period and in the circumstances that is adequate.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment No. 35 not moved.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendment No. 36 arises from committee proceedings. If the question on this amendment is agreed to, amendment No. 37 cannot be moved. Both amendments will be discussed together.

Deputy Joan Burton: I move amendment No. 36:

In page 122, to delete lines 20 to 22.

Deputy Richard Bruton: This amendment deals with the increase in VAT. There is a general sense that this was not the most appropriate move to make at present. It may serve to depress the market, particularly at the present time with Border trade suffering acutely. The gap has widened between the UK's rate, which has decreased to 15%, and the rate that applies in Ireland. It was not the best move in the budget and seems to be causing problems for traders, particularly those on the Border. There appears to be a sharp fall in retail trade, which may be making matters worse.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Increasing the VAT rate in the budget was a disaster and had a considerable psychological blow. It is unfortunate in terms of revenue income that the British sought to reduce their VAT rate by 2.5% effectively at or about the same time. The impact was significant. I will not share any more of the incidents from Newry car parks or precincts with the House because the media had a particular interest in those episodes the last time. We will stick with the VAT issue.

Even a marginal reduction would have had a significant positive impact as opposed to the increase's negative impact. I regard it as ham-fisted and unnecessary. We should be seeking to stimulate the economy and encourage people to get back into spending mode, but the opposite is occurring. Consumption rates are decreasing across all indices.

The increase was wrong because VAT has a disproportionate effect on low income families. For this reason alone, it should not have been increased. Many household goods that those families would seek to purchase have been affected. The additional annual cost to them is approximately €500. Instead of increasing the rate, will the Minister consider reducing it at this late stage?

Deputy Joan Burton: When the Minister sat down at the conclusion of his Budget Statement six weeks ago, the Fianna Fáil, Green Party and Progressive Democrats Members rose to give a standing ovation to a budget that unravelled faster than knitting. Of all the disastrous aspects of the budget, aspects that have not just been unlucky for the Minister, the Government and his party, but also for traders and businesses across the country, the decision to raise the VAT rate by half a point has left unbelievable misfortune in its wake.

The Minister's argument, to which there is some point, is that the vast wedge between prices North and South is being driven by the failure of importers, British multiples and others to pass on the reductions in the value of sterling. Nonetheless, the psychological hammer blow was struck by his foolish decision to increase the VAT rate from an already high 21% to 21.5%.

Currently in the Chamber there are five Members, not including the Leas-Cheann Comhairle, four departmental officials and a number of other officials. I remember the benches opposite being full of people screaming about the budget's wonders. It followed the Minister's call for patriotism. Is there not a Chinese curse to the effect that one should be careful what one wishes for? For a long time, many of us have wanted an all-Ireland economy, following on the patriotic tones of Wolfe Tone and others. We now have that economy, but it is like West Germany after the fall of the wall, in that those in West Germany needed to pay for reintegration.

The Minister has driven shoppers in their tens of thousands north of the Border. Traditionally, people within 20 miles of the Border have shopped on whichever side of it the advantage lay. Perhaps the standing ovation was for this. The Green Party Members would possibly have

disapproved on the grounds that driving trade north would lead to greater emissions, unless people were driving hybrid cars. However, the Fianna Fáil and Green Party backbenchers jumped up and applauded until the Minister's ears rang. It has been the single most disastrous policy in a disastrous budget that also included attacks on the elderly and schools.

A Spanish curse tells people to ask of God what they want, but to then pay. The Minister is paying. It is the 11th hour and only 15 minutes remain until the end of the debate on the Finance Bill. The Minister should withdraw it. While that would not produce a significant immediate change, it would signal that the Government is recovering some element of economic sense. While it would cost the State, it is replaceable by other revenue-raising amendments. The Minister applied a levy that could not be called income tax and he increased VAT so that he could say that he had not increased income tax.

It is a disaster. The Minister has an opportunity in the 11 minutes remaining for an 11th hour convention and to withdraw the measure. I strongly suggest that he do so in the interests of trying to restore some sense of financial rationale to the budget.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The Minister introduced this provision as a revenue collection measure, but I expect that it will have the opposite effect. He introduced it for the month of December, but the increase of 0.5% will drive down the tax yield. Representatives of the small business sector appeared before the Joint Committee on Finance and the Public Service yesterday. The sector is struggling to make ends meet. December has been a rough time for it, as the numbers shopping are decreasing. People are conscious of the extra 0.5% in VAT and are going North. The Minister expects traders to adjust everything in the middle of the November-December VAT period because of 0.5%.

The measure is impractical and will drive down revenue for the month of December. The decision should be reversed. Last Thursday, the Minister assured the Select Committee on Finance and the Public Service and the House that a report on the impact of the VAT changes in the South and the North has been drafted by his officials. While we wish for the North to do well, we must be competitive and consider our businesses and jobs on this side of the Border. The Minister's measure will lead to a reduction in taxes and job losses. These are the practicalities.

When will the report be ready? It will hardly be ready before 7 o'clock so that we can make the changes. This is an impractical measure. It will not deliver any additional taxes and will instead result in job losses.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: On Deputy O'Donnell's question in respect of the inquiry, I have asked the Revenue Commissioners and the Central Statistics Office, CSO, to examine the question of the loss to the Exchequer arising from cross-Border shopping. Officials from Revenue and the CSO met yesterday to consider how best this task can be undertaken. The difficulties involved in trying to accurately estimate the extent of increased cross-Border shopping and the resulting direct cost to the Exchequer from increased levels thereof should not be underestimated. As already stated, there are factors other than taxation differentials at play, most notably the euro-sterling position. The position in respect of the 0.5% is that it is an estimated yield of €227 million in a full year.

Deputy Burton seems to entertain a number of extraordinary economic theories, one of which is that one of my predecessors as Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevy, is singularly responsible for the collapse in world stock prices.

Deputy Joan Burton: He assisted a great deal in that regard.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Equally, the Deputy suggested that I caused a flight of shoppers across the Border.

Deputy Joan Burton: That is correct.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The widening differential between sterling and the euro is the fundamental reason people are travelling to shop in Northern Ireland. I never appealed to people's sense of patriotism in order to encourage them to shop at home. However, I have stated that if they shop at home, they will support their local economy and tax base. I have never made any secret of that. The euro-sterling differential is the major factor responsible for the shopping crusade to Northern Ireland. A second factor, which Deputy Burton acknowledged, is the variable pricing policies employed by the UK multiples.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: If the Government is seeking increased revenues, it would have been far more practical for it to ensure that the depreciation relating to sterling was passed on. This would have brought in additional VAT receipts to the Exchequer and assisted in the retention of jobs. Instead, the Minister has introduced a measure which is driving people north of the Border. When will the report to which the Minister refers be produced?

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I was not particularly upset by Government backbenchers applauding the Minister on budget day. The response of the backbenchers opposite reminded me of what used to happen on Hughie Green's programme "Opportunity Knocks" — which the Minister may be too young to remember — when someone at the front of the audience would hold up a sign proclaiming "Clap now", "Cry now" or "Laugh now". I did not find the response of the Government backbenchers on budget day at all enthusiastic.

I am of the view that it would be more patriotic to develop good public policy in order to assist families on lower incomes and those who need help most. While substantial numbers of shoppers continue to travel north, traditional traders in the North are not really enjoying the benefits of what is happening because their regular customers cannot get to their shops as a result of the traffic from the South. I am sure the major British retailers are enjoying what is happening because it is they who are really benefiting.

The Minister estimated that the loss to the Exchequer will be of the order of €227 million in a full year. I am of the view that this figure understates the position. The Department of Finance has not been entirely accurate in the context of projections it has made in recent times. We must, before it is too late, consider what happened. There is still time to turn matters around, particularly for those low income families who can least afford to be affected. Perhaps the Minister will reconsider the position.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I expect to receive the report of the Revenue Commissioners and the CSO in respect of this matter by the end of February.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Why will it take so long?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: As a result of the detailed assessment that must take place in order to arrive at a figure which will be informative.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: So it will take three months to produce the report.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Yes, that is what the Revenue Commissioners have advised.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Perhaps the Minister might ensure that it could be produced earlier.

Question, “That the words proposed to be deleted stand”, put and declared carried.

Amendment declared lost.

Amendments Nos. 37 to 41, inclusive, not moved.

Deputy Joan Burton: I move amendment No. 42:

In page 136, between lines 24 and 25, to insert the following:

“92.—The annual charge for the bank guarantee shall be brought within the scope of published exchequer accounts and budget forecasts and shall be earmarked as a contingency fund for 2010.”.

The annual charge for the bank guarantee is €1 billion — calculated at €100 million per annum for ten years — and payable in instalments over a two-year period. The amendment suggests that this should come within the scope of published Exchequer accounts because it will otherwise be floated out as a fund until 2010. If it is not called upon, it will then revert to the Exchequer. While I do not want to attribute any bad intentions to the Minister, if the fund comes to the benefit of the Exchequer after 2010, it would make a nice pot of money for distribution as we move towards a general election at that time. We may, of course, have a general election before then.

Events have shown that, in respect of the fund, the banks got off extraordinarily lightly. The fund is simply payable by way of the provision of monetary amounts and there is no provision for an additional gain to the taxpayer for this extraordinary guarantee which, in the case of some banks, may need to be called upon. Subsequent to the publication of the scheme, the Minister altered the terms in order that the banks will not be obliged to support each other in the first instance. The calls will be on the State guarantee provided on the basis of taxpayers' money. The amendment will clarify the position in respect of the fund, which could otherwise be used to gain a political advantage by the parties in government.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: In light of our current fiscal and budgetary position, it would be useful to have this sum at my disposal. I am not sure it would be any more useful to have it at my disposal at the end of 2010. The position is that the sums are credited to a designated account maintained by the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland as a reserve for any payments to be made under the scheme. The sum remaining in the account on 30 September 2010 will then be paid to the Exchequer. In the financial year of 2010, it will become a benefit to the Exchequer. I am not sure there is any great difference, in fiscal terms, in allocating approximately €500 million to the Central Fund in 2009 and a similar or slightly greater sum in 2010 or paying it in one lump sum.

The previous Dáil was dissolved in 2007. In the normal course of events, I would not anticipate a dissolution of this Dáil until 2012. In such circumstances, I fail to see the relevance of the amendment.

Deputy Burton made a serious point with regard to the guarantee being called upon. There has been no suggestion that the guarantee will be called upon. The only circumstances in which it could be called upon would be where there was a run of deposits on Irish financial institutions. There has been no evidence whatever of the latter since the guarantee was provided. With the important task of capitalisation under way, the guarantee has given us time to assess the actual deficiencies in the loan books of the banks. The figure identified by the Government

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

in respect of that capitalisation will give us the opportunity to reduce the exposure of the State on foot of the guarantee by ensuring that the capital base of the financial institutions is sound.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As it is now 7 p.m., I am required to put the following question in accordance with an order of the Dáil of this day: “That Fourth Stage of the Bill is hereby completed and that the Bill is hereby passed.”

Deputy Brian Lenihan: On a point of order, I am obliged to read a note into the record before Fifth Stage of the Bill is taken. There is a closure motion before the House. Perhaps the Leas-Cheann Comhairle could provide guidance on the procedure in this regard.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have no guidance on the matter. Perhaps the Minister would read his note, following which the position may be clearer.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I was instructed to read this note prior to Fifth Stage. It relates to an amendment to be made on page 93, line 9 requiring that “or” be replaced with “for”. I understand I must request the Leas-Cheann Comhairle to instruct the Clerk to make the necessary correction.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: With the agreement of the House, I instruct the Clerk to correct the clerical error. Is that agreed? Agreed. I again put the question: “That Fourth Stage of the Bill is hereby completed and that the Bill is hereby passed.”

Question put.

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 66.

Tá

Ahern, Dermot.
 Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Andrews, Chris.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Aylward, Bobby.
 Behan, Joe.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Áine.
 Brady, Cyprian.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Browne, John.
 Byrne, Thomas.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Pat.
 Collins, Niall.
 Conlon, Margaret.
 Connick, Seán.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cregan, John.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Cullen, Martin.
 Curran, John.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Fahey, Frank.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Michael.
 Fleming, Seán.

Flynn, Beverley.
 Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Gormley, John.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Harney, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Healy-Rae, Jackie.
 Hoctor, Máire.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Kenneally, Brendan.
 Kennedy, Michael.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Michael P.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 Lowry, Michael.
 Mansergh, Martin.
 Martin, Micheál.
 McEllistram, Thomas.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M.J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 O’Brien, Darragh.
 O’Connor, Charlie.
 O’Dea, Willie.

Tá—continued

O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keefe, Batt.
 O'Keefe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 O'Sullivan, Christy.
 Power, Peter.
 Power, Seán.
 Roche, Dick.

Ryan, Eamon.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Scanlon, Eamon.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Mary.
 White, Mary Alexandra.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
 Bannon, James.
 Barrett, Seán.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burke, Ulick.
 Burton, Joan.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Clune, Deirdre.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Crawford, Seymour.
 D'Arcy, Michael.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Enright, Olwyn.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Higgins, Michael D.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 McCormack, Pádraic.

McEntee, Shane.
 McGinley, Dinny.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McManus, Liz.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Morgan, Arthur.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Keefe, Jim.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Quinn, Ruairí.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Ring, Michael.
 Shatter, Alan.
 Sheahan, Tom.
 Sheehan, P.J.
 Sherlock, Seán.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Upton, Mary.
 Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pat Carey and John Cregan; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg.

Question declared carried.

An Ceann Comhairle: This Bill, which is certified to be a Money Bill in accordance with Article 22.2.1^o of the Constitution, will be sent to the Seanad.

Message from Seanad.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Michael Woods): Seanad Éireann has passed the Motor Vehicles (Duties and Licences) (No. 2) Bill 2008, without amendment.

Private Members' Business.**Housing: Motion (Resumed).**

The following motion was moved by Deputy Ciarán Lynch on Tuesday, 16 December 2008:

“That Dáil Éireann:

expressing its serious concern at:

- the huge increase in the numbers on social housing lists which have jumped from 43,700 to nearly 60,000, an increase of more than 30% in just three years;
- the continuing problem of homelessness, with an estimated 5,000 experiencing homelessness at any one time;
- the worrying increase in the number of repossession orders for family homes being sought in the courts;
- the need for the proper implementation of an inspection regime regarding housing standards in the rental sector;
- the ongoing difficulties faced by many residents in both apartments and housing estates as a result of the unregulated operation of management companies; and
- the failure of the Government to honour the commitment contained in the programme for Government to expand delivery of social and affordable housing options to meet the needs of 90,000 households;

calls on the Government to:

- take steps to ensure that, where possible, existing, unsold housing units are secured for purposes of social housing;
- approve the construction of an additional 10,000 social housing units each year for the next three years;
- make rent supplement (RS) more employment friendly by bringing means assessment into line with differential rent schemes;
- enhance families' access to the rental accommodation scheme;
- adequately resource and fully implement, “The Way Home”, a strategy to address adult homelessness;
- negotiate a new code of practice with the financial institutions providing for a moratorium on repossession orders for family homes during the current recession;
- amend the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to provide for the creation of a national inspection regime regarding housing standards in the rental sector, along with the establishment of effective and efficient timeframes in which disputes should be resolved;
- publish as a matter of urgency a Bill, based on the draft provided by the Law Reform Commission, aimed at reforming the law on multi-unit developments including apartment developments;
- strengthen the powers of local authorities to deal with anti-social behaviour; and
- broaden the terms of the current tenant purchase scheme along with allowing local authority tenants the right to buy their apartments.”

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

“welcomes:

- the comprehensive and ambitious modern housing policy framework set out in *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, and the continuing substantial progress made in implementing its programme of policy reforms and improvements in housing services and their delivery, to be underpinned by the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2008;
- the achievement of the 9,000 social housing ‘starts’ target under *Towards 2016* in 2007 and the continued high level of activity which will deliver in excess of 9,000 social housing completions in 2008;
- the significant overall progress made in 2007 when the needs of a record 18,300 households were met through the range of housing programmes in place, a very credible first step towards achieving the National Development Plan target of meeting the needs of an average of 20,000 households per annum over the seven year period of the plan;
- the substantial increase in the delivery of affordable housing to over 3,500 units in 2007, with an output of over 4,000 anticipated for 2008, and proposed new options for the more efficient and equitable delivery of affordable housing announced in the context of budget 2009;
- the publication of an ambitious new homeless strategy, *The Way Home*, which, building on strong progress made under previous strategies, sets out a vision for addressing adult homelessness over the next five years, and reflects the Government’s commitment to addressing homelessness in a comprehensive and coordinated manner;
- the introduction of a revised suite of housing adaptation grants for older people and people with a disability to provide a more targeted and integrated response to their housing needs;
- the progress made in implementing the second round of local authority traveller accommodation programmes, with some 1156 traveller families accommodated under the programmes up to end 2007;
- the recently approved range of measures which significantly improve the standards for rented accommodation, the doubling of funding for inspections by local authorities between 2005 and 2007 and the achievement of a 42% increase in the number of inspections carried out in 2007 compared with 2006;
- the significant changes made to means testing under rent supplement to provide greater incentives for recipients to take up employment; and
- the clear and focused response of the Government to unprecedented conditions in the financial and housing markets by developing the new Home Choice loan to assist prospective first time buyers affected by the credit crunch, the provision of improved mortgage interest relief arrangements for first time buyers, and the availability of effective supports for existing home owners having difficulties in meeting mortgage repayments;

notes the outcome of the Financial Regulator’s examination of procedures for handling mortgage arrears and repossessions across credit institutions and other mortgage lenders,

including the findings that lenders generally have procedures in place which clearly state that the repossession of a residential property is a last resort, borne out by the limited numbers of repossessions secured through court orders, and the issuing, by the Regulator, of best practice guidance prepared on foot of its examination; and

welcoming the Government's clear prioritisation of housing through the provision of almost €1.66 billion in funding for 2009 across the range of social and affordable housing programmes and the strong focus in prioritising the needs of the most disadvantaged households within the overall allocation, supports the Government's key objectives for 2009 to:

- continue the strong momentum towards meeting our commitments in Towards 2016 and our longer-term goals under the national development plan, including meeting social housing needs through long-term leasing of available private accommodation and through a substantial expansion of the number of households transferring to the rental accommodation scheme;
- complete the implementation plan for the new homeless strategy and roll out a comprehensive implementation agenda, supported by funding which is being increased by 5% in 2009;
- complete and publish a national housing policy for people with a disability;
- ensure the adoption of new five year traveller accommodation programmes by all local authorities;
- roll out a programme of Towards Carbon Neutral demonstration projects, commence a house condition survey of the local authority rented stock and progress a number of pilot retrofitting projects as part of an overall strategy for modernising the building and energy standards of the public housing stock;
- complete the passage of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2008 through the Oireachtas, including the introduction of provisions in relation to the prevention and reduction of anti-social behaviour in the local authority housing stock, and the extension of the tenant purchase scheme to local authority flats;
- complete the implementation of the new standards regime for rented accommodation and continue the programme of strengthening the local authority enforcement regime; extend the range of supports for home ownership through commencement of the home choice loan scheme on 1 January 2009, introduction of revised arrangements for affordable home purchases and the roll-out of the incremental purchase scheme;
- bring forward legislative proposals in response to the Law Reform Commission's report on multi-unit developments; and
- keep the mortgage market under review, having regard to the information available from the Financial Regulator and the banking sector, to ensure that households in difficulty with mortgage repayments receive fair treatment by mortgage lenders and can continue to avail of financial assistance under the supplementary welfare allowance system, where necessary."

—(Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Michael Finneran).

Deputy James Bannon: I thank the Labour Party and Sinn Féin for bringing this important motion before the House, which Fine Gael supports.

Homelessness in 21st century Ireland has taken on a whole new meaning and reality for a broad-based spectrum of people who are falling victim to the current economic crisis. We are seeing a new threat of homelessness generated by house repossessions. The social wreckage that has been caused by the giving of loans to people who cannot afford to repay them is impacting on the rapidly rising homeless figures.

According to the Financial Regulator almost 14,000 mortgages were more than three months in arrears at the end of June this year. That figure represents 1.4% of residential mortgages and is up from the end of December 2006, when 11,252 mortgages or 1.2% of all mortgages were in arrears. Figures for repossessions by court order show that there was a total of 128 repossessions between January 2005 and June 2008.

The Labour Party is calling for a new code of practice for financial institutions to provide for a moratorium on repossession orders for family homes during the current recession. I support such a move. I called on the Government in an Adjournment motion last month to introduce mortgage rescue schemes similar to those already in operation in many European Union countries.

The rising number of homeless people will impact adversely on the inadequate Government provision of social housing, with the numbers on the waiting lists rising from 43,000 in 2005 to in excess of 56,000 at the end of March this year. It is disturbing to think there are also 5,000 plus people experiencing homelessness in this country currently, of which a shockingly high proportion are children. Within a quarter of a mile of the Houses of the Oireachtas one can see homeless people sleeping in doorways and alleys. That is a grave indictment of the Government's housing policy and an indication of the imperative need to address the problem.

The situation arises at a time when the traditional support systems are under severe financial pressure, due to the economic downturn and Government cutbacks. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which has been the bedrock of aid and support, has said this week that several of its branches, particularly in urban areas, are running out of money.

The Simon Community has warned that its services are operating at full capacity and that it urgently needs more support as homelessness is due to rise. Origins of home ownership in Ireland date back to the rural land reforms of the early 20th century and the policy of tenant purchase of local authority housing, which emerged from reform precedents and led to a long tradition of grant giving. Fiscal supports for owner occupation have also played an important role in the development of housing policy. Housing rights, as defined at UN level, include the right to affordable housing, but personal or household costs should not threaten or compromise the attainment or satisfaction of other basic needs.

Rights to adequate housing should be in tandem with a location which allows access to employment, health care, schools, child care and other social facilities. The Council of Europe is creating a precise definition of affordable housing rights in accordance with Article 31 of the revised social charter — although the Government has refused to ratify this article. We are, unfortunately, dealing with a Government that lacks credibility, whose policies have failed to deliver for those most in need — and its housing policy has been high on aspiration and spin, with no delivery. A Government that cannot provide housing for its citizens, which is the most basic of human needs and rights, looks to others to do it. The social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, endorsed the principles set out in *Building Sustainable Communities*. It envisaged that through the provision of social and affordable housing, the housing needs of 60,000 households would be met between 2007-09, according to the Irish Council for Social Housing. This is just another useless aspiration, an empty promise from the Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government, and the way it has behaved since the last general election is scandalous. It promised plenty and has delivered little.

[Deputy James Bannon.]

Due to the last housing boom, developers had a free hand, literally, throwing up houses wherever they could without providing the necessary facilities, which of course were promised but never delivered. There are currently 300 recorded unfinished estates in the country, which are long past their completion dates and by no means up to taking-in-charge standards.

The Minister of State has failed to address the excessive enforcement period, which under section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides for a seven year check to ensure developers have completed an estate to the required standard. This is totally ridiculous, working as it does in the interest of the developer, against the owner occupiers.

The Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement published guidelines on management companies today, but unfortunately it does not offer much in the way of positive help to apartment holders who fall victim to such companies. What is needed is legislation to copy-perfasten suggestions as outlined in these guidelines, but where is it? My colleague, Deputy Terence Flanagan, has asked on numerous occasions when such legislation will come before the House. On each occasion he was assured it was being drafted, but it is still no further on, today. Unless it is being produced to the standard of a work of art or Celtic treasure, surely the Minister of State will agree that the drafting process is going on for an unduly long time. The losers are the apartment owners who are being ripped off by both the Government and the management companies, which are being allowed to get away with blatant extortion. The Minister of State should end the delay and bring the property services regulatory authority Bill before the House directly after the Christmas recess. That is why I believe we should come back one week earlier to introduce this and other pending legislation. The long break in the month of January is scandalous when the country is in crisis and on its knees.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: The Deputy took a long summer break.

Deputy James Bannon: An alternative viewpoint to the emphasis on home ownership asserts that by taking a comprehensive view of the rental as well as the ownership occupation markets, a strong case could be made for new affordable housing initiatives being directed in equal measure and perhaps even primarily at the rental sector. I would also support the acceleration of social and affordable housing, although this as such was axed by the Minister for Finance in the 2009 budget and lumped into the Government equity initiative about which we have heard absolutely nothing further — fine words but no follow-on, as usual. This has been the policy of the Government over the past 12 months — negligence to our community.

The association of affordability and the rental sector needs to be examined and plans made to open up the concept to other interpretations, to offer some hope for those seeking access to realistic accommodation. We must look to the rental option, which despite the historical emphasis on ownership, may be the answer to the local authority lists, which are growing in every county as we speak.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I wish to share time, with the permission of the House, with Deputies John Curran, Ciarán Cuffe, Áine Brady and Charlie O'Connor.

I find it somewhat ironic that this Private Members' motion is being tabled by the Labour Party, in particular. From my experience of the local authority in Fingal, which encompasses my constituency, Dublin North, over the last five years the Labour Party with six out of 24 councillors has consistently opposed numerous social housing schemes as well as successive development plans — voting against housing projects that included the full quota of 15% affordable housing. Perhaps Deputy Ciarán Lynch might pass on to the leader of the Labour Party——

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: The quota is actually 20%, not 15%, if the Deputy had checked.

Deputy John Curran: It is at the discretion of the local authority.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: That is not the case in Fingal. Deputy Lynch might pass to the leader of the Labour Party that he should, perhaps, exert some control over his councillors so that they actually practise what Labour is preaching here in the Dáil.

Several Deputies have referred during the course of the debate to the need to regulate apartment management agents and mediate between agents and apartment owners.

As set out in the counter motion tabled by the Minister of State with responsibility for housing, the Government is committed to bringing forward legislative proposals in response to the Law Reform Commission's report on multi-unit developments. The Government's legislation programme for the current Dáil session, published in September, listed two important items of legislation for regulating this area. The property services regulatory authority Bill will establish a regulatory authority on a statutory basis. Its primary task will be to operate a licensing system for auctioneers, estate agents and property management agents and to improve standards in the provision of property services by licensees.

The authority will specify and enforce qualification requirements for licences, including levels of education, training and experience and other requirements such as minimum levels of professional indemnity insurance. The authority will establish and operate a system for investigating and adjudicating on complaints against property service providers. In this context, the legislation will refer to the possibility of resolving disputes by mediation between the parties concerned. With a view to improving client protection and ensuring clarity with regard to the services being provided by a licensee, the legislation will require that property services agreements be entered into between service providers and their clients. Such agreements will specify the services to be provided, fees payable by the client, details of redress procedures etc.

In the planning area, the Law Reform Commission made a number of recommendations in its consultation paper issued in late 2006. It recommended a review by planning authorities and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government of planning and housing policy relating to multi-unit developments. It identified issues relating to the physical nature of such developments, such as their size, configuration, facilities and location. In particular, the commission considered that in the past far too many multi-unit developments had not been built to suit families, which was undesirable in terms of sustainability. The commission also recommended that guidelines should be issued on the taking in charge of estates.

I am aware that in its final report the commission commended the progress made by the Minister and his Department on these matters, noting that in the period since the publication of the consultation paper, the Minister has published a suite of planning guidelines focused on planning and a sustainable built environment. These include, in particular, Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Design Standards for New Apartments, published in September 2007. These promote successful apartment living for individuals and families, by responding to people's reasonable demand for well-designed apartments, particularly in terms of better internal space standards, including storage areas.

I understand also that the Minister has finalised and will shortly publish Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, which is accompanied by a best practice urban design manual. These guidelines will promote high quality living standards in new residential developments, encourage higher density developments at appropriate locations, such as those with access to public transport, and emphasise that new residential development must be integrated with facilities and services for the new community and promote energy efficiency. In addition, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and

[Deputy Darragh O'Brien.]

Local Government published comprehensive guidance on the taking in charge of residential developments and management arrangements in February 2008.

In its final report the commission stated that it considered these guidelines to planning authorities should have the status of policy directives. While I understand that the Minister does not agree that directives are appropriate, as guidelines of their nature allow a degree of latitude and discretion in their application, consideration will be given to including a provision in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill to replace the current requirement that planning authorities should “have regard to” ministerial guidelines with a stronger provision which would require them to adhere to or substantially comply with such guidelines. This amendment will have the effect of substantially implementing the commission’s recommendation.

In its final report the commission also recommended that the wording of section 180(6) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, which allows occupiers as well as unit owners to vote on the question of taking in charge of a multi-unit development, be reconsidered in light of the practical difficulties pertaining to the current wording. I welcome the fact that such an amendment is being considered in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill, and also welcome the full range of actions being taken by Government in this important area.

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): I welcome the opportunity to contribute on this debate. There are many aspects of the housing issue on which we could focus, but I would like to refer to the area of private rented accommodation.

My area, the South Dublin County Council area, was one of the areas used to pilot the rental accommodation scheme, RAS, which has proven very successful. I meet constituents with housing requirements on a regular basis and the scheme is proving popular with them. When the scheme was launched initially, there was much scepticism as to how effective it would be. However, the beneficiaries of the scheme hold it in high regard and it has proved an effective means of providing residential accommodation.

One of the issues raised last night concerned the standard and inspections of rental accommodation. Last night many Deputies called on the Government to enforce and improve standards in the private rented sector, but many of the comments made were inaccurate. I would like to set the record straight on some of those issues.

In the partnership agreement, Towards 2016, the Government committed to updating and effectively enforcing minimum standards regulations for rented housing. Updating these standards is a core component of the housing policy statement, Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities, and the Government recently delivered on this commitment by approving a package of measures to update the standards regulations.

It is important that these regulations reflect the requirements of the modern rental sector and general quality-of-life improvements over the past number of years. With this in mind, and as part of the overall package of measures approved by Government, new regulations entitled the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, under section 18 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992 were made recently. These will come into effect on 1 February next year, with certain provisions not coming into effect until 2013.

All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with the standards regulations. Responsibility for enforcing the regulations rests with the relevant local authority, supported by a dedicated stream of funding allocated by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The resources allocated by the Department to

assist local authorities in their statutory functions in enforcing standards are significant. Over €9 million has been provided to local authorities for this purpose since 2004.

Funding for inspections, which is paid from the proceeds of tenancy registration fees, has more than doubled since 2005 when €1.5 million was disbursed. In the current year, 2008, some €4 million has been allocated for this purpose. Increasingly this funding is being related to inspection performance, effectively rewarding those authorities that are most vigorous in their approach to inspections, and the trend towards performance-related funding will continue.

However, it is not just a matter of increasing funding and hoping that, of itself, will solve the problem. The increased funding is having a significant impact on the number of inspections carried out by local authorities. For example, in 2005 local authorities carried out a total of 6,800 inspections. The following year, 2006, that figure rose to 9,800, an increase of 44%. In 2007, over 14,000 inspections of rental accommodation were carried out by local authorities, an increase of 42% on the figure for the previous year.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: If the Minister of State would allow me make a point of information, I could correct those figures for him. The figures he has given are incorrect. If the Minister of State went to the departmental website, he would find the correct figures.

Deputy John Curran: In 2005, local authorities carried out 6,800 inspections, in 2006 they carried out 9,800 inspections and in 2007 they carried out over 14,000 inspections of rental accommodation. Each year there was a 40% plus increase since the previous year. Clearly, the enforcement regime stepped up to the plate in terms of co-ordination and effectiveness.

This will continue to be the case once the new regulations have commenced. There is no doubt that effective enforcement of the new regulations will be the key to their success. I welcome the fact that local authorities will be encouraged to focus their inspection efforts on properties most likely not to be in compliance with the minimum standards, rather than inspecting new properties that are less likely to be in breach of the regulations, focusing the glare of the inspection regime where it is needed most. This is important.

I gave the figures, but Deputy Lynch disputes them.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government disputes them. If the Minister of State visits the departmental website he will get the correct figures.

Deputy John Curran: I have read the figures into the record. The point I want to make —

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: The Minister of State should visit the Department website and get the proper figures.

Deputy John Curran: The point I want to make more specifically is that it is not just a question of the total number of inspections. The inspections must be appropriately targeted.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: Some 60% of the total number of——.

Acting Chairman: The Deputy should allow the Minister of State continue, or we will have to impose a penalty on him.

Deputy John Curran: The inspections must be appropriately targeted, and I make that point specifically. With regard to non-compliance——

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: The Minister of State should speak through the Chair rather than to me.

Deputy John Curran: Sorry for looking at the Deputy. It is important to point out that standards are already improving in this context. We should be heartened to note that the rate of non-compliance with the existing regulations among those properties targeted for inspection has decreased. Whether we agree or disagree on the figures the rate of inspections has risen substantially and it is important to note that with regard to those properties targeted for inspection for non-compliance, the rate of non-compliance has decreased significantly, to 16% of the properties inspected in 2007, compared to over 30% for non-compliance two years earlier in 2005. The rate of inspection has increased substantially and the rate of non-compliance has halved during the period. I will conclude as my time is up.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: I welcome the motion tabled by the Labour Party. It is important to bring attention to the challenges that face us with regard to housing.

The motion points out, rightly, that there are important issues to address in respect of housing policy in Ireland. The broad range of changes we have seen in housing, social housing and policy over the past ten years have been, in general, positive. By way of circular letter and changes in legislation, we have seen a move away from the very large local authority housing estates that characterised housing policy in the 1970s, up to the late 1980s and early 1990s. There has been a move away from the very strong segregation of private and public housing. I look back on some of the schemes that were built over the past ten or 15 years and see that there has been a quantum change and improvement in the quality of housing on offer. When one considers that, and puts it together with the improvements in building performance in respect of energy performance brought in by my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy John Gormley, we can see the bar is set much higher today than it was in years past. In housing provision the emphasis must be on quality as well as quantity.

It is important to applaud the successes of the voluntary housing agencies that have been at work. They moved in to play a central role in the provision of housing construction and management. In many respects that is a positive situation. One can look at the record of local authorities, particularly one such as Dublin City Council over the years. It has been one of the largest, if not the largest, landlords in the State. It has had a chequered record in management and maintenance of its own housing stock. The addition of the voluntary and social housing agencies that play a very valuable role has been an important one. That role is set to continue.

In my area of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, I note very significant new housing developments that will be under the control of the National Association of Building Co-operatives and other agencies involved in housing construction. This is a positive role.

The targets were set quite high in the national development plan but we are not far off them. Last year, in Towards 2016, we had a record 9,000 social housing starts. That is not bad. We could do a lot better but it is a step in the right direction.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: A lot done, more to do.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: I am trying very hard not to use certain phrases that perhaps have been used *ad nauseam* over the years.

I note that the Labour Party motion states that we should build an additional 10,000 social housing units a year. We would all love to do that.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Fill the empty ones.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: We would also love if there were to be an endless stream of funding available from the Exchequer to double, treble or quadruple the housing output. That is not the case. Ireland Inc. is in difficulty at the moment.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: The Deputy said it when he was on this side of the House.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: The belief that this Government could simply pull rabbits or housing units out of a hat and deliver them on a plate——

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: The houses are there.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: ——overnight to every household in need of housing makes a mockery of the financial process that Ireland Inc. must go through. It makes a mockery of the need to balance the books at the end of the day. My view is that we should increase housing output. Many people on the Deputy's side of the House have pointed out the number of people joining the live register who have come from the construction sector.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: The Deputy is a member of the Government that caused that. He supports the party that caused it.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: We cannot simply snap our fingers and suddenly produce jobs in the State housing sector for these areas.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: There is no plan.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: We have a plan. We not only have a plan to tackle homelessness, but we have a plan to improve both local authority and affordable housing and the other range of options that exists.

Looking at the plan for homelessness, I would prefer if there were a lot more detail in it. However, I believe it is a step in the right direction. I am somewhat disturbed by Deputy Bannon's remarks that all we need to do is provide houses. Most informed people in the House recognise that homelessness is tied into a range of issues relating to——

Deputy Arthur Morgan: They never had an opportunity.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: ——alcohol abuse, drug abuse and psychiatric issues.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Government abuse.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: We must provide for all those needs in addition to providing a roof over people's heads. There has been considerable progress in the provision of wet hostels and in the provision by many agencies of emergency accommodation and long-term accommodation to meet those needs. I wish there were time to have a very informed debate in the House——

Deputy Arthur Morgan: We are all concerned.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: ——as to the role of the homelessness agency and the more recent remarks by the Lord Mayor of Dublin expressing concern. She has significant direct experience in dealing with homelessness.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: We need action.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: We must have a debate on that. There has been steady progress and we must ensure that progress continues.

Deputy Áine Brady: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate and I support the Government amendment regarding our housing policy.

Let us consider homelessness. The Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, clearly showed the extent to which the Government has demonstrated its commitment to tackling homelessness. It set itself a target of ending long-term occupation of emergency accommodation and the need to sleep rough. This commitment is clearly shown by the fact that, despite the most difficult budgetary situation in decades, we are increasing the funding for homeless accommodation by 5% to over €62 million in 2009.

Some Opposition Deputies claimed that 5,000 people will be on the streets this winter. This is wrong and I do not know whose interest they are trying to serve by exaggerating the figures for homelessness. The 2008 housing needs assessment, the most reliable and accurate means by which national housing need is measured, identified 1,394 homeless households that had applied for, and been considered eligible, for social housing support. That is a decrease of 30% on the last assessment in 2005.

The needs assessment does not capture all homeless people, only those who have applied for social housing. The Count It In report launched by the Minister last Monday provides a very comprehensive method of measuring general homelessness. It indicates that homelessness in Dublin has not changed significantly since 2005. There has been a small decrease relative to population growth. This did not stop Deputy Ó Snodaigh from coming out with his gem, namely, that the number of homeless people is growing by 1,800 every year or that there are 2,300 people on the streets of Dublin.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: That is right.

Deputy Áine Brady: This emotive reference to people on the streets is misleading and disingenuous. The Count It In survey in Dublin——

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: There are 5,000 on the homeless list now.

Deputy Áine Brady: ——provides a very refined and comprehensive method of measuring homelessness. It indicates there were 110 sleeping rough, down 40% on the figure for 2005, and less than 5% of the figure used by Deputy Lynch. Of course, this is 110 persons too many. That is why Departments and agencies are working to eliminate the need to sleep rough and long-term homelessness. Those are the key aims of the strategy on homelessness. This blatant twisting of statistics does nothing to advance these aims.

With regard to the overall net need figure published for the 2008 housing needs assessment, it is unclear how Deputies have managed to concoct the charge that we massaged figures when an increase of 30% in the number of households in need was reported. Surely massaging the figures would have yielded a better result.

As usual, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin, rather than engaging in a serious discussion on the issue, went straight to wild accusation. Had the Deputy actually read the needs assessment guidelines given to local authorities——

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Everything is backed up by fact.

Deputy Áine Brady: ——which I understand were given to him on foot of a parliamentary question in October, he could not have made such an error. In summary, those guidelines make clear that it is true that households that apply to a local authority for housing support which are already in local authority housing, are not included in the assessment. These cases are

called transfers. The exception is those who apply for reasons of overcrowding or unfit accommodation.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: The Deputy cannot distort the figures.

Deputy Áine Brady: With regard to those in private rented sector, the Deputy will find that the guidelines also set out instructions for local authorities to pay particular attention to the long-term housing needs of this group in their assessment. The Deputy will also find an instruction to authorities to pay particular attention to capturing the housing needs of older people and those with a disability.

It is in nobody's interest, least of all that of the Government, to misrepresent the number of households in need of housing support. An accurate picture of need is our key tool in prioritising the very substantial resources the Government is making available. The Minister of State has been very clear in identifying the challenges that lie ahead for housing and the broad range of measures he is putting in place to meet these challenges. Once again this demonstrates the Government's commitment to meeting housing need. It is to be hoped that in future debate on this issue of great importance to the Government the Opposition might offer more constructive participation, rather than making unsubstantiated and factually incorrect accusations.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: They are well substantiated.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: I preface my remarks by passing on my good wishes for Christmas to all my colleagues, the staff and the media.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: Without mentioning Tallaght.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: Colleagues on the Opposition benches will know I am a quiet, sensitive soul from Tallaght so I was hoping they might take it easy with the heckling and let me get my message through, because I cannot handle it like everybody else. Just to calm him down, I compliment Deputy Ciarán Lynch on his work in this regard, which I appreciate. It gives us an opportunity to discuss the issue of housing, about which I have much to say. If Members want to follow me around Tallaght, Firhouse, Greenhills, Templeogue, Brittas or Bohernabreena any week—

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: They might learn something.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: —they will see that of all the issues I try to deal with, and I do my best, housing is one of the biggest. As someone who was a member of the local authority from 1991, was chairman of the council in 1999 and is a proud Dáil Deputy for the area since 2002, I will not be afraid to bravely say from the Government benches that we must continue to do that. I am pleased the Labour Party leader has come into the House especially to hear my contribution. Deputy Gilmore is very welcome.

As my party colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, pointed out yesterday, the doomsday scenario being painted for mortgage holders is inaccurate and irresponsible when all logic suggests that early contact between a distressed lender — we all know them — and a borrower is the best way to avoid the trauma of repossession. There are those who continue to raise the spectre of mass repossession, encouraging people to keep their heads in the sand and avoid the very engagement that could ease their troubles. I sincerely hope that mortgage holders facing difficulties with their repayments pay less heed to that loose talk and take heart from the findings of the Financial Regulator on arrears and repossessions.

[Deputy Charlie O'Connor.]

I wish to put on record some of the facts on home repossessions. Following a new examination of procedures for handling arrears and repossessions of properties, the Financial Regulator has confirmed that repossession is a very last resort for lenders, which should be welcomed across the House. The study did find that in line with the requirements of the Irish Banking Federation code of practice on mortgage arrears, which is mandatory for the covered institutions benefiting from the State guarantees, lenders accept revised payment arrangements when a person is in financial difficulty and is willing to repay a mortgage. The consumer director in the Office of the Financial Regulator has urged people to contact their mortgage providers as soon as they become aware they will experience difficulty in meeting their mortgage repayments, as if they do so it is unlikely the question of repossession will arise.

The Financial Regulator has carried out research which bears out the effectiveness of arrangements adopted by mainstream lenders for dealing with mortgage arrears. Out of a total of almost 1 million mortgage accounts, a total of 128 residential properties were repossessed in the three years to June last and of these 19 were investment properties. Comparing 2007 to 2008 to date, there is no indication that the trend has accelerated significantly.

Statistics from the Financial Regulator illustrate an increase in the number of people falling into arrears, which reflects the deterioration in economic and financial conditions. Once again, however, the picture emerging from the regulator's research — that is, the one based on actual evidence — is that this is not the epidemic of loan difficulties some would have us believe exists. According to the research, the number of mortgage accounts in arrears represents less than 1.5% of total residential mortgages. Nevertheless, for the households experiencing those difficulties, this is evidently a traumatic time. It is essential that we maintain our strong performance in this area and ensure best practice procedures are in place for dealing with mortgage arrears governing the activities of all lenders.

As a Dublin-based Deputy, I welcome the fact the Minister of State responsible for housing has acted so promptly, meeting both the Financial Regulator and the Irish Banking Federation earlier this week to examine how the code of practice could be extended to the whole of the mortgage lending sector. Progress on this is expected, I am told, in the new year. This is a further demonstration which I am sure will be accepted across the House of the Government's close attention to and proactive engagement with this important issue. Safeguarding the interests of households that experience difficulties in meeting their mortgage repayments owing to circumstances beyond their control can make a significant contribution to supporting confidence in the economy and its future prospects.

I also wish to refer to the issue of homelessness. Deputy Ciarán Lynch spoke well and sincerely about the issue yesterday. I will not stand here and deny there is a problem. Those who know me know I am a proud Dubliner from these parts, although they might not know it from my accent. Like everybody else, it upsets me to walk the streets, not only in my home town but in the centre of the city also — I hope the city-based Deputies do not mind. We have gone through a time of economic growth and we are now in very difficult times but I always made the point, standing by my social inclusion principles, that at a time when all boats are rising, we must remember the little boats, and shame on anybody who does not do so. At a time of difficulty, we must help the little boats.

There is a range of issues and all Members are having many issues brought to their attention each day. It is sad that one can walk these streets and find people who are homeless. I will take Members out to Tallaght, where I live——

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: What bus?

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: It upsets me that people who are homeless in my town must take the bus into the city centre to access services. In that regard, I want to put on record——

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Deputy had ten years to do something about it and he did nothing.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: I am trying to do something about it. I am not afraid to talk about it. I will take the heckling some other day. I am too busy now.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Deputy should not be such a hypocrite.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: It is important.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Deputy is a hypocrite. He should vote against the amendment.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Ciarán Cuffe): Deputy O'Connor should conclude.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: I do not feel a bit threatened by the heckling from the Labour Whip.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Deputy should vote against the amendment.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: I am going to do my duty.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Deputy can vote against the amendment or be a hypocrite.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: The Deputy is the hypocrite in saying that. Private Members' time is just play-acting. It is what the Opposition Deputies do every Tuesday and Wednesday but they do nothing about the issue. When you were in Government, you did nothing about it either. Have a look at the record.

Acting Chairman: The Deputy should conclude.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: In that case, I again applaud the work of the various agencies which sincerely look after——

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Which are starved of the money the Government will not give them.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: Unlike the leading Labour Party heckler, they do something about it. They do not just roar and shout about it. In that regard, the Tallaght homeless advice unit does a superb job, for which I compliment it.

I again wish the Labour Party a happy Christmas, including Deputy Stagg.

Deputy Joe Costello: I wish to share time with Deputies Sherlock, Wall and Morgan.

Acting Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: What about Deputy Finian McGrath?

Deputy Joe Costello: That is the Deputy's prerogative. We are delighted to have the opportunity to allow Deputy Charlie O'Connor to stand by his socialist principles tonight. We will look to see which way he walks.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: The Deputy knows what way I will walk.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Walk the walk.

Deputy Joe Costello: I compliment Deputy Ciarán Lynch for tabling this motion, which is extremely relevant in terms of the times we are in and the fact we are coming close to Christmas. The opening sentence of the motion sums it up where it refers to “the huge increase in the numbers on social housing lists which have jumped from 43,700 to nearly 60,000, an increase of more than 30% in just three years”. That is an increase in the social housing lists in three of the supposed best years ever in the history of the State. While the private residential construction sector was literally going through the roof, on the other side of the coin local authority housing construction was spiralling downwards. That was the contradiction of the Celtic tiger.

A huge surplus overhang of private construction which nobody wants or can afford to buy is lying idle at present or in various stages of part completion. It is frozen in time and I am sure this year will be remembered as the great recession of 2008. Meanwhile, 60,000 households who are desperately in need of social housing have no new homes to go to. The Government put pressure on local authorities to provide social housing through the public private partnerships, giving their developer friends a share in the rich bank of prime location social housing sites and dressing it up as “social regeneration”. Residents were promised long overdue social and community facilities and new modern homes to replace much neglected and poorly maintained flats. The Government parties told these residents it would be a win-win, that the developer was taking the risks and that there was no risk to the local authority. There was supposed to be no risk to the tenants. However, we saw what occurred on 26 May. Five public private partnership projects worth in the region of €2 billion collapsed, four of which were in my constituency. It was not the developer who took the risk and paid the penalty but the tenants who had worked hard with the developer, the local authority and the Government and who had waited years for the regeneration of their communities. In my constituency last week another public private partnership regeneration project went belly up and the hopes of a further 100 tenants have been dashed.

I note the Minister of State with responsibility for housing, Deputy Finneran, is present. The Government’s policy of forcing local authorities to fund projects through PPPs and under Part V of the housing Act was clearly aimed at helping developers to profit from public lands in good times. The Government facilitated such people at the time, but washed its hands of responsibility when the going got tough. That is what is taking place.

The budget for 2009 provides further evidence, as if it were needed, that the Government is looking after the developer at the expense of social housing provision. The new home choice scheme was not produced by a benevolent Government wishing to provide housing for first-time buyers. Rather, it was a rescue package for developers to continue to sell houses at inflated prices. While local authorities are starved of funding to provide for those on housing waiting lists, the State is paying a small fortune to private landlords in rent allowances. In the meantime the recipients of rent allowance are not allowed to work and, therefore, forced into a poverty trap. If they could access local authority housing, they would be in a position to find a job and thus improve their circumstances and those of their family.

The right to a home is one of the most basic civil and human rights. For more than 11 years the Government had unlimited funds to put together a comprehensive housing programme. The figures speak for themselves. The developer and landlord led approach to the provision of social housing by the Government is a complete and utter failure. The Labour Party motion proposes a new way forward which, if adopted, could resolve the failures of the current social housing policy.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: There is a local authority housing development in Mitchelstown, north County Cork. The houses are some of the finest I have ever seen and there is a mixture

of social and affordable housing. However, many of the affordable houses are empty because they cannot be sold. The empty houses have given rise to anti-social behaviour, as a consequence of which they have been vandalised. The estate is wonderful and the residents are very proud of where they live. They have organised residents' associations. However, they are very concerned that some of the empty affordable houses will not be sold, as they have been on the market for almost two years. I have a list as long as one's arm of people in the Mitchelstown area who would gladly take one of these houses if they were transferred to social housing status.

Officials in the northern division of Cork County Council told me that because of certain funding and resource stipulations put in place during the preparation of the affordable housing scheme, the status of these houses cannot be changed from affordable to social housing. I am certain that is not the only such estate in the country. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government should allow some flexibility. In cases where the social housing waiting list is of a certain size, it could show some degree of flexibility to ensure such houses are occupied. In this way the problems of anti-social behaviour can be offset. We need a common-sense approach to the use of empty houses under the auspices of local authorities.

I refer to the tenant purchase scheme. I have encountered many people who have paid rent to local authorities and invested thousands of euro in their house during the years. As a result of restrictions on the tenant purchase scheme, they are prevented from purchasing their house. If there was greater flexibility and the discounting system was more extensive, many older local authority residents who have invested much money in their house and made it their own could purchase it. It would realise a certain amount for the State and allow it, in turn, to embark on a further housing programme. I realise that my colleague, Deputy Lynch, has done a lot of work in this area, which I acknowledge. The State must find imaginative solutions to this problem and should examine the possibility of introducing such schemes. The Acting Chairman, Deputy Cuffe, stated in his contribution to the debate that some progress had been made. However, a good deal more could be made and many imaginative solutions implemented. We may propose such solutions through motions and the work of Deputy Lynch who is the Labour Party spokesperson on the issue. Such solutions must be taken on board. We seek to work positively to address the issue.

Many rural dwellers do not wish to be shepherded into large urban areas to be facilitated in social housing. The State must make provision for such persons and allow them, if eligible for social housing, to be housed within their communities. The vibrancy of any community depends on a housing mix in which that demographic is also catered for.

Deputy Jack Wall: I congratulate Deputy Lynch on tabling the motion and Deputy Costello for sharing time.

I reject the comments made on the homeless in Dublin. The first citizen of Dublin stated homeless services were as chaotic as the lives of some of the people for which they were in place to help. One should listen to such statements because the first citizen is a member of Fianna Fáil. I understand from reading the newspapers that she works hard to help people on this issue. Her assertion contradicts the statement by the Minister distributed to previous speakers which, in turn, rejected the statements of Deputy Lynch on the matter. She merely states a fact, as will be evident when the Lord Mayor's dinner which will be attended by several thousand takes place. It has not been derived from a civil servant writing a speech for someone to deliver in the House, the contents of which may try to reject statements made on the Opposition side of the House. The problem of homelessness has been articulated by someone who is knowledgeable and has worked in the area for many years.

[Deputy Jack Wall.]

I refer to rented accommodation. During the debate on the Social Welfare Bill I raised a matter of some disgrace for the Government. There was a decision by the Minister of Social and Family Affairs to give €7 to senior citizens, single parents and others in rented accommodation. However, the value of that rise was removed in one fell swoop by the Minister through a claw-back measure and given to owners in the rental accommodation sector — friends of Fianna Fáil.

In many cases, such unfortunate people are obliged to live in hovels because of the downturn in the economy. The owners of such buildings lease them to try to lower the cost factor in respect of the mortgages that have caused so many problems for the banks lately. However, no inspection system exists to assess the hovels into which senior citizens and single parents are being put and that is a downright disgrace. The Green Party is as responsible as Fianna Fáil in this regard as the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is in charge but has done nothing to counteract this.

Perhaps the Government's financial position is in such a state that it must claw back €4 from the senior citizens and single parents who live in such hovels. Every Member is familiar with the conditions to which I refer. During the general election campaign, one would know whether one was approaching rented accommodation because the door would be hanging off, the windows would be bad etc. However, were the occupant to seek help to do something, it would transpire that the landlord had an agent through whom one spoke and no work ever got done. This is the position we face in respect of rented accommodation. I refer to those who are in need of houses that are not being provided by either the Government or the local authorities that seek funding from the former for such housing.

The Minister, Deputy Gormley, and the Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, both are present in the Chamber this evening and I ask them to put in place an inspection system in respect of rented accommodations to benefit those who suffer and who in many cases are afraid to make a complaint to the local authority because the hawks who are in charge of such places threaten to evict their tenants if they report them. This is a fact of which all Members are aware, because everyone encountered such scenes during the election campaign. When debating the fair deal scheme, Members may argue that one's home is one's castle. Although the people to whom I refer are far from living in a castle, absolutely nothing is being done about it. If anything is to emerge from this debate, it is that the Minister should give an undertaking to the House that he will provide an inspection system that will offer some assurance as 2009 approaches.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: That was spot on.

Acting Chairman: Deputy Morgan has 15 minutes. Does he intend to share his time?

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I wish to share time with Deputy Finian McGrath, if Deputy Costello agrees.

Deputy Joe Costello: I must think about that.

Acting Chairman: Will the Deputy's time be divided into slots of ten minutes and five minutes?

Deputy Arthur Morgan: The slots will be 12 minutes and three minutes. We must keep Deputy McGrath in his place and not allow him to get away with it.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Deputy Morgan is more generous than Deputy Stagg.

Acting Chairman: We would have given Deputy McGrath more time.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Behind the headlines of the banking crisis, bank guarantees and proposals for recapitalisation lies a human story. The credit crunch and subsequent recession is not only putting developers out of business and constructions workers out of jobs, it also is putting people out of their homes. According to Threshold, every week an increasing number of people are having their homes repossessed because of difficulties in paying their mortgages or are being threatened with illegal eviction as some landlords attempt to hike up rents. This of course is against the general trend in respect of rental rates at present and approximately ten families a week experience such threats. Earlier this year, Threshold estimated that at least seven families were having their homes repossessed by the banks every week and as many as ten families in the private rented sector were being threatened with, or actually evicted from, their homes.

Moreover, yesterday's newspapers reported that according to the Financial Regulator, almost 14,000 people were unable to meet their monthly repayments on home loans. The same report indicated that 1,000 people have run up mortgage arrears with sub-prime lenders. According to yesterday's edition of the *Irish Independent*:

Figures gathered from 24 mortgage lenders by the Financial Regulator show that 13,931 mortgage accounts were three months in arrears by June this summer. This was up from 11,252 at the end of December 2006, a rise of 24pc over that period.

However, the scale of the crisis is probably worse, as a significant number of cases of voluntary surrenders never make the headlines. While it has been suggested by certain mortgage experts that there may be a substantial number of voluntary repossessions, the exact number may not come into the public domain as the banks will try to keep a lid on it. John Monaghan of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul spoke recently of personally knowing of 16 cases of voluntary surrender, one of which involved a sub-prime lender.

When responding yesterday to the crisis facing families with mortgage and rent payments, the Minister of State spoke with breathtaking arrogance and again demonstrated that Ministers are on a different planet. He accused Members of "foaming-at-the-mouth scaremongering" and "wide-of-the-mark claims" but the facts to which they have referred have been taken from reports such as that produced by Threshold, as well as the number of cases of repossessions that come before the High Court on a weekly basis. Last Monday, almost one third of cases listed before the weekly chancery summonses resulted in an order for possession. This is simple fact, not scaremongering.

It is clear to everyone but the Minister of State that this is a crisis and it beggars belief that his only response is to give people "sound advice on what action to take" and to "warmly welcome the publication by the Financial Regulator of best practice guidance". Despite all the reports of the rising numbers of people who are in default of their mortgage repayments, the Minister of State did not come up with a single new initiative to deal with this emergency. There is no doubt that repossession orders, evictions and defaults in mortgage repayments are tied to rising unemployment. More than 100,000 people have been laid off in the past 12 months and the unemployment rate could rise to 10% by the end of 2009. Due to the Government's mishandling of the economy and the public finances over the past 11 years, take home pay rose at a far greater rate than did unemployment benefit. There is a substantial difference between people's average pay and unemployment benefit. This means that workers who now face unemployment and are on welfare will take a significant cut in their income. As Ireland has the highest mortgages and rent payments in Europe, this obviously has placed the homes of hundreds of thousands of people in jeopardy.

[Deputy Arthur Morgan.]

The problem is further compounded by the reported delays of up to 12 weeks in processing applications for jobseeker's allowance. If job losses rise as expected over the next 12 months, the delays in processing jobseeker's allowance can only increase. In addition to the economic impact, the real human costs are almost unquantifiable. Repossessions and illegal evictions significantly increase people's level of housing need and increase their risk of homelessness. As with social housing and homelessness, the Government is failing to address this specific level of need and all indications suggest the problems are going to get much worse.

Nevertheless, many things could be done, if the political will to do them existed. The Government could intervene to halt repossessions and illegal evictions. It could use its political and financial influence with both banks and wayward landlords. The Government could introduce a two-year moratorium on repossessions, while requiring lenders to conclude an affordable mortgage and debt payment arrangement, which would protect a minimally adequate standard of living. The Government also could increase the resources allocated to the money advice and budgeting services, MABS, to ensure that debtors are guaranteed access to MABS personnel when they are negotiating the affordable mortgage and debt payment arrangements. The lending institutions who, together with the Government are responsible for this crisis, should be compelled to suspend interest and other charges and penalties, as these only exacerbate a family's financial distress.

Furthermore, introducing a court protocol to require lenders seeking a repossession on secured debt to be forced to show they have explored all possible alternatives through the above debt settlement mechanism is another option that should be explored. Repossession should always be the last resort and mortgage lenders must be compelled to carry their responsibility for lending recklessly, which has caused the nightmare for many unfortunate families in the first place. To help people who are now unemployed, the Government should increase awareness of, and access to, mortgage interest supplement to assist those mortgage holders experiencing temporary financial difficulties. This would require a reversal of the cuts made in the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill which will limit the payment of mortgage interest supplement.

The Government must engage in a similar process with private sector landlords and their lenders, securing a protocol on repayments by developers to their banks; a moratorium on evictions; greater access to MABS for those in financial hardship; and a significant increase in the resources of the Private Residential Tenancies Board to deal with those threatened with illegal eviction.

Repossessions and illegal evictions are bad for families, bad for communities and even bad for the economy. The Government must intervene now and take the necessary steps to reduce the burden on those currently experiencing such housing need, and to halt the growth of families being placed in financial hardship and at risk of homelessness by lenders and by some landlords.

The proposed recapitalisation scheme may provide a golden opportunity to tackle the impending housing crisis that faces us. While speaking to an Oireachtas committee on 14 October last, Mr. Patrick Neary, CEO of the Irish Financial Service Regulatory Authority, told us that such speculative lending to the construction and property sectors in the State amounted to €39.1 billion and that he anticipated "losses on property-related loans". He also stated that "increased provisions and write-offs will be necessary".

Mr. Neary also revealed that a PWC audit of the six largest Irish banks had found that €15 billion of the lending was secured on those properties alone. Can we learn anything from the Swedish experience in the early 1990s, where a similar case of ill-advised commercial lending

in a property boom led to a collapse in its banking system? As part of the Swedish bailout, its government forced banks to write down losses and sell off the distressed assets. In the Irish case, some of the assets in question are the land banks amassed by speculators, unfinished housing estates and commercial retail ventures that should be sold off as bad debts.

The Swedish Government formed a new agency to supervise institutions that needed recapitalisation and another that sold off the assets, mainly property, that the banks held as collateral. In Ireland, we have a unique opportunity to return control of the planning process and commercial development to local government by breaking up the property cartels that have been holding Dublin city and many other towns across this land to their own development strategy, wilfully thwarting local council development plans. As property prices fall and these assets are sold, local government could provide a unique route to dealing with the growing housing crisis and the taxpayer could be given a better return for the investment in the banks, rather than let cash-strapped developers sit on these assets now only to make a significant profit on them in the decades to come. I hope the Minister will heed some of these suggestions.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I thank Deputy Morgan and Sinn Féin for allowing me the opportunity to share its speaking time. I also thank the Acting Chairman, Deputy Cuffe, for the opportunity to speak on this Private Members' motion on housing, and particularly social housing and homelessness.

I speak as a former full-time voluntary worker and also as a former soup runner for Simon Ireland, the homelessness charity. I worked in the night shelters and in the housing projects, and I also worked on the streets assisting the homeless. It deeply saddens me that this debate is still going on and that we are still here pushing the housing issue and the urgent need for action on this matter.

It is time to ask serious questions about what is going on in the State when there are still 60,000 on social housing waiting lists and an estimated 5,000 people experiencing homelessness at any one time. Coming up to Christmas, this is all the more relevant when one thinks of the families and the young children involved. It is important to remind ourselves, those of us who have a home, of the families and the young children who do not have a home.

Why is there always a problem or a big deal about funding issues such as the medical card for the elderly, retention of class sizes, cervical cancer services and tonight's issue of homelessness? There is never an issue about assisting the banks or the meat industry. I supported the action needed on these issues, but what about families and young children without a home? This is a question we all and the Government must ask ourselves. The Government can get €180 million to support an industry and come up with €10 billion to support the financial services and the banking industry, and although I accept we have an economic problem, how come we can never find the few millions of euro required to fund homelessness services, cervical cancer services or education and class size issues? It is important that we ask these questions in the debate tonight.

Why are these always at the bottom of the priority list? Tonight's motion, which I strongly support, attempts to bring them to the top of the list. Where I come from, health disability, education and housing should always be top of any priority list. These are the kinds of tough decisions that I would like to see people in this House make, and they should be made in the interests of the weaker sections of society.

There is nothing tough or macho about cutting services. It is a hell of a lot tougher to tell people straight that we are increasing taxation in order to develop public services or housing projects for the homeless. That is the reality we should face as well.

[Deputy Finian McGrath.]

If we approve an additional 10,000 social housing units each year for the next three years, one should think of those from the construction sector who are on the dole at present coming into the industry and then paying their taxes. That would make a massive contribution to the economy. These are the tough decisions that I would like made, in the interests of the people, in this debate.

I also strongly support the part of the motion dealing with the code of practice on the financial institutions providing for a moratorium on repossession orders for family homes during the current recession. This is a sensible proposal and is one of the other reasons I am supporting it. In the current climate, that is sensible and we all should agree that is a solution for many families.

I also strongly support the section which calls for the resourcing and funding of The Way Home, a clear strategy to address adult homelessness. These all are sensible proposals which should be backed by every Member of the House.

The motion refers to anti-social behaviour. Most Deputies deal with this matter on a regular basis at clinics in their constituencies. This is a significant problem and it only surfaces when somebody is actually killed. Most people do not even bother reporting anti-social behaviour to the Garda and others are so intimidated by fear that they regularly contact their Deputies and councillors rather than contact the Garda. Fear and intimidation are widespread in our communities and some of these people from hell are destroying private and local authority houses while 60,000 good people wait for a home. It is not acceptable.

Acting Chairman: The Deputy's time has concluded.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The Garda must deal with this kind of bullying in our community, but it is also up to the community to deal with it.

I urge all Deputies to support the motion tonight. There are a number of key proposals to resolve the housing issue. They are good for the housing sector, good for the workers and, above all, they are good for those on the housing lists and the homeless.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I thank the Opposition parties for giving us the opportunity to reflect on an area in which we continue to be highly innovative, highly effective and unstinting in our efforts to ensure that we have a coherent housing policy framework that can cater for housing needs as comprehensively as possible.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Without success.

Deputy John Gormley: In short, it is a housing policy that sets out a vision to guide the transformation of the housing sector over the medium term by delivering more and better quality housing responses, and by doing this in a more strategic way, focussed on the building of sustainable communities. It is a housing policy that has, at its heart, a range of flexible and graduated housing supports to meet the full diversity of need. It is a housing policy that delivers real and tangible outcomes for households in need, with over 13,000 social and affordable housing units delivered in 2007 and the needs of almost 18,300 households met across the housing spectrum.

Regarding the policy statement, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, a housing policy which I suggest both parties read,—

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: I suggest the Minister should implement it.

Deputy John Gormley: —my colleague, the Minister of State with responsibility for housing, has already gone into detail on our solid record of achievement. There is no need for me to dwell further on that.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: Thank God.

Deputy John Gormley: Fortunately, the Opposition motion also gives us the opportunity to compare our ambitious agenda for further reform to the Opposition's fairly bare cupboard. For example, while its motion seems to suggest that it has no future plans to cater for the needs of older people and people with a disability, we are committed to completing and publishing a national housing strategy for people with disability, carrying out a review of the operation of the housing adaptation grant schemes for older people and people with a disability, and implementing recommendations and developing an approach to the delivery of sheltered housing for older people to feed into the Government's national positive aging strategy.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: There is no money for disability grants.

Deputy John Gormley: Opposition Deputies neglected to mention climate change. Perhaps they have found a solution to the greatest challenge humanity faces but, if so, they are keeping it to themselves. However, they have given us an opportunity to outline the leadership we are showing in ensuring that the residential sector plays its part in meeting our emissions reduction targets.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Does your arrogance know any bounds?

Deputy John Gormley: Some in the Opposition made interesting comments regarding the extent to which the Government's housing policies are developer led.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: He is only reading a script.

Deputy John Gormley: In the next breath, they went on to suggest that we should continue to purchase properties developers are unable to sell. That inconsistency appears to have been lost on many Opposition Deputies—

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: What are you going to do?

Deputy John Gormley: —as does the fact that a significant proportion of the output under the main programme has for several years come from turnkey acquisitions and Part V agreements. We will encourage local authorities to continue sourcing newly built properties, particularly given the greater value to be achieved in the housing market.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Is that why 60,000 people are on the housing lists?

Deputy John Gormley: Second-hand acquisitions and leasing arrangements are also important because they can open up urban areas that have traditionally experienced housing needs and a shortage of accommodation.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: It is a disgrace.

Deputy John Gormley: The importance of maintaining a complementary relationship between social and economic objectives may be new to some of the parties opposite but it is not new to the Government.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: He is arrogant.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: How quickly they forget.

Deputy John Gormley: They have allowed us an opportunity to outline the steps being taken across several Departments to bring forward legislative proposals in response to the Law Reform Commission's report on multi-unit developments. These will ensure the difficulties that arise in regard to the management of these developments and the operations of property management companies are fully addressed.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: When will the legislation be introduced? It was promised five years ago.

Deputy John Gormley: The Green Party is in Government and it will be delivered.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: It has not been delivered yet.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: It has been two and a half years.

Acting Chairman: The Minister without interruptions.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: He is looking for interruptions.

Deputy John Gormley: My colleague, the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government with responsibility for housing, Deputy Finneran, is also ensuring the implementation of these measures. I remind my colleagues in the Labour Party who constantly interrupt——

Deputy Emmet Stagg: We do not see the Minister often enough to interrupt.

Deputy John Gormley: I am glad I do not see them often given how frequently they interrupt.

Acting Chairman: I ask Deputy Stagg to reduce the quantity of his heckling.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: A letter will be written to *The Irish Times* stating that the Minister was here.

Deputy John Gormley: Deputy Wall spoke about substandard accommodation. When we made announcements about accommodation standards, getting rid of beds——

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: The Government is not even enforcing the current legislation.

Deputy John Gormley: ——and ensuring that the exterior of rented accommodation would be improved, the Members opposite rejected our proposals.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Get a few inspectors to inspect what is currently being rented.

Deputy John Gormley: They said we would cause rents to increase.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Enforce the existing law.

Deputy John Gormley: A positive measure was once again rejected by the Labour Party.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: It took four years to get rid of bed-sits.

Deputy John Gormley: When the Labour Party was in Government it did nothing about the matter. We are in Government and we are doing something.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: Thousands of bed-sits still have outside toilets.

Acting Chairman: The Minister should conclude.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: His time is up. He should come here more often.

Deputy John Gormley: In regard to Deputy Finian McGrath's contribution, I worked in the homelessness sector during the late 1970s. Along with the Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, I have made it a priority to increase funding for the homelessness sector notwithstanding the severe economic recession. We have spent €100 million, which represents an increase of 5%. That is a decision of which we can be proud and we will continue to provide for the most vulnerable in society.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I wish to share time with Deputy Gilmore.

Ar son Sinn Féin ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le gach duine a ghlac páirt sa díospóireacht seo agus le Pháirtí an Lucht Oibre as an rún seo a chur os comhair na Dála in éineacht le Sinn Féin. On behalf of Sinn Féin I thank those who have participated in this debate and especially those who have exposed their outrageous dispositions to these glaring social needs. Ranked not least among these is the Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, whose efforts last night regarding turkeys and stuffing was an absolute disgrace. I thank the Labour Party for joining Sinn Féin in putting forward this motion on the crisis in housing and homelessness in our country.

All I can say in response to the Minister's remarks on inconsistency is "wow" because he should know a great deal about that subject from his time in Government. I will rehearse a statement with which I very much agree:

the Government congratulates itself on the tremendous level of activity which is in progress, while overlooking the misery, injustice and division which it is creating for generations to come. There is no planning. There is no environmental or social thinking and ultimately that will be a cost to our economy.

These words are not mine. They are the words of the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Eamon Ryan, when he spoke on behalf of the Green Party in November 2003 in support of a Sinn Féin Bill that would enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution. He was describing the disastrous lack of policy on housing in successive Fianna Fáil-led Governments over the past decade. That approach to housing was developer driven and greed based. It was fuelled not by the housing needs of the people but by the profit motive of developers and the avarice of banks and other lending institutions. We can see the consequences in the virtual collapse of the Irish financial system and the deepening recession in the economy.

Ironically, after a decade of madly spiralling house prices, over-dependence on construction for employment, reckless lending, massive mortgage debt and the construction of unprecedented numbers of private dwellings, we still have a housing crisis because tens of thousands of our people do not have adequate homes. More than 60,000 people are on the local authority waiting lists for housing, a jump of more than 30% in the three years during which the Green Party has been a shareholder in this coalition arrangement. At the same time the phenomenon has arisen of empty houses and apartments in unfinished estates around the country, especially in the commuter belt surrounding the greater Dublin area. This is a mess of the Government's own making.

I was shocked and greatly disappointed by the remarks made by the Minister of State. I have seldom heard such an insulting speech as the one he delivered. His juvenile jibes at the Labour

[Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.]

Party and Sinn Féin for bringing forward this considered and substantive motion are beneath contempt but they will be especially felt by the homeless and those who languish on housing lists throughout the State, including in his own constituency of Roscommon-South Leitrim. His contribution will not be forgotten by the people who have been languishing for years without their needs being addressed.

More than 40,000 households in the private rental sector are in receipt of rent supplement. These households are more likely to live in dwellings which do not meet the Government's existing standards. Many tenants are on low incomes and are more at risk of living in sub-standard units.

The capacity of local authorities to enforce standards needs to be increased. This critical area has not been sufficiently addressed. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government must ensure that local authorities take a proactive approach to their responsibilities for inspecting rented accommodation as part of the first line of defence for those who are in need of support and who cannot be expected to indefinitely occupy inadequate or inappropriate housing.

I urge all Deputies to support this motion and to reject the Government's amendment. We do not have to walk far from the gates of this institution to see the reality of the 5,000 people who are homeless on the streets of our major towns and cities at any given time. That is an absolute disgrace and it cries out for the Government to face up to its responsibilities. The contributions we have heard last night and again tonight are another exercise in hand wringing with no commitment and clearly no strategy. The Minister and his team of colleagues in Government, at either Minister or junior Minister level, must pull their act together or the next Government will have to pick up on the failures the current Government has presided over.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I thank Deputy Ciarán Lynch for proposing this motion, Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh for seconding it and the Sinn Féin Deputies for co-signing the motion with the Labour Party. I thank all the Deputies who have contributed to the debate this evening and yesterday.

A couple of nights ago I watched on my television the appalling sight of children in Zimbabwe suffering and dying from cholera. President Mugabe then appeared on the screen to tell us this was all some kind of Western conspiracy, there was no cholera in Zimbabwe and anybody who had the disease had been cured.

I do not want to accuse our Government or imply it has gone quite as far as President Mugabe but there are parallels in the kind of delusion that people in power for too long tend to suffer. The contribution last night of the Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, and to some extent that of the Minister, Deputy Gormley, tonight is evidence of that kind of delusion.

Deputy Michael Finneran: What about the Deputy's own delusion on the Order of Business?

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: That is unfair; the Minister's script is written for him.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is the kind of thing one sees happening to emperors at the end of an empire. The Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, stated the motion before the House is ill-judged and accused the Labour Party, and myself in particular, of being hysterical, scare-mongering and causing panic and unease. The point of the motion is to address the panic, unease, fear and in some cases hysteria among people who are now afraid of losing their home.

In the High Court last week there were 37 cases for repossession of homes and we know cases are being queued for house repossessions. We have heard of something in the order of

over 7,000 people who are now in receipt of mortgage subsidy, many experiencing the pleasures of social assistance for the first time. Some 14,000 people are now behind in their mortgage payments by a minimum of three months. There are many people who are worried about losing their home, and as more people lose their jobs and businesses, that is likely to increase.

It does not have to be like that. There is a way in which people can be reassured that they can continue to live in their own home. It is possible to devise arrangements whereby for the period of the recession — we may be talking about a period of two to four years — people can at least be reassured that they will not be put out of their home. That is a practical proposal which can be achieved through arrangements with the banks, for which the Government is acting as guarantor. Apparently the Government will recapitalise the banks by putting at least €4 billion from the pension reserves into them in some form or other.

In any event, if people have their homes repossessed, the Government will have to pay rent allowance or provide social housing or some kind of shelter for people losing their homes. It makes sense for those arrangements to be recast so that people will know if they lose their job because of bad times for a couple of years, at least they can continue to live in their own home.

If the Government did this, far from creating panic, fear and all the other things we are accused of, much of the fear among people about their future and where they will be for the next couple of years would be reduced. If the Government could do that much in that kind of climate, new possibilities would be opened for the direction of the economy. Confidence would be increased and the kind of reassurance would be provided for people to enable other necessary actions through social partnership over the next year or two. It is a practical proposal.

What is the Government's response to this? It rejects the proposal.

Deputy Michael Finneran: I did not reject it. I have already acted, and I did not wait for the Labour Party to tell me about it.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Government indicated it would keep the mortgage market under review, having regard to the information available from the Financial Regulator and banking sector. Is this the same Financial Regulator and banking sector that provided the Government with information on the state of the banks over the past year? This is hardly comfort to people worried about losing their jobs.

We can consider the position the Government has led us into. This country has had a number of years of record housing output. Over the past three years we produced 90,000, 80,000 and 75,000 housing units respectively. In that period, the Government managed to bring about a 30% increase in the number of people on council housing waiting lists. There are 60,000 families——

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: More.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: ——and more on the list because the figures have been doctored. Sticking with the official figure, even the 60,000 on the council waiting list is the highest number of people applying for council housing since 1964. That was a time which caused people to rise in Dublin and march on the streets and led to the establishment of the housing action committee.

We have proposed a very simple solution. We have indicated there is a housing overhang but the Minister, Deputy Gormley, came in here and thought it outrageous that we should suggest that surplus houses built in the private sector might be made available to address a public housing need.

Deputy John Gormley: I did not say that. That is a total misrepresentation.

Deputy Michael Finneran: We did not wait for the Labour Party to tell us about that either.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: He thinks this is some kind of assistance for developers. He has a blinkered view of it. This is not difficult. There are empty houses.

Deputy John Gormley: I have just said we are doing what the Deputy proposes.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: They are all over the country and cannot be sold.

Deputy John Gormley: As I said, we are doing what the Deputy proposes.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: He is not.

Deputy John Gormley: It should not be developer-led.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I am delighted to see the Minister here this evening because we do not often see him.

Deputy John Gormley: I have been in the Seanad.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is a real pleasure.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: He could be there for longer than he thinks.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: He may soon be in the Seanad for a lot longer than he wants to be.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: He is bought and will stay bought.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: If the Minister is doing it, why do we have the highest number of people on the housing list since almost the time the Minister was born? It is at the same level as 1964.

Deputy John Gormley: I was not born in 1964.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: That year saw the highest number of people waiting on council houses. With regard to the multi-purpose legislation, the Labour Party has been asking the Government to introduce legislation to address problems with management companies, fees and the running of these apartment blocks for years. We are still waiting for it.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: There is no sign of it.

Deputy John Gormley: The Deputy will get it.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Minister will not get it in coalition with Fianna Fáil.

Deputy John Gormley: The Deputies will get it.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Frankly——

Deputy Michael Finneran: We will support the Minister.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Government regularly accuses the Opposition of not putting forward positive suggestions. We have a number of positive suggestions in this motion that will deal with the housing problems people are experiencing today. We have not said anything unduly critical of the Government in the motion and yet a blinkered, arrogant and out of touch Government has decided to amend it from existence and put in some kind of self-serving——

Deputy Paul Connaughton: Rubbish.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: —back-clapping amendment that is worthless to the people in need of housing but will somehow provide some kind of political comfort rag to the Government in its dying days.

Amendment put.

The Dáil divided by electronic means.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: As a teller, under Standing Order 69 I demand that the vote be taken by other than electronic means, given the importance of the issue.

An Ceann Comhairle: As Deputy Stagg is a Whip, the vote will now proceed.

Amendment again put.

The Dáil divided: Tá, 79; Níl, 68.

Tá

Ahern, Dermot.
 Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Andrews, Chris.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Aylward, Bobby.
 Behan, Joe.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Áine.
 Brady, Cyprian.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Browne, John.
 Byrne, Thomas.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Pat.
 Collins, Niall.
 Conlon, Margaret.
 Connick, Seán.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cregan, John.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Cullen, Martin.
 Curran, John.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Fahey, Frank.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Michael.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Flynn, Beverley.
 Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Gormley, John.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Harney, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Healy-Rae, Jackie.
 Hoctor, Máire.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Kenneally, Brendan.
 Kennedy, Michael.
 Kirk, Seamus.

Kitt, Michael P.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 Lowry, Michael.
 Mansergh, Martin.
 Martin, Micheál.
 McEllistrim, Thomas.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M. J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 O'Brien, Darragh.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keefe, Batt.
 O'Keefe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 O'Sullivan, Christy.
 Power, Peter.
 Power, Seán.
 Roche, Dick.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Scanlon, Eamon.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 White, Mary Alexandra.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
 Bannon, James.
 Barrett, Seán.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burke, Ulick.
 Burton, Joan.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Clune, Deirdre.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Crawford, Seymour.
 Creed, Michael.
 Creighton, Lucinda.
 D'Arcy, Michael.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Enright, Olwyn.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Higgins, Michael D.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kenny, Enda.
 Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.

McCormack, Pádraic.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McGinley, Dinny.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McManus, Liz.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Morgan, Arthur.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Keeffe, Jim.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Quinn, Ruairí.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Ring, Michael.
 Shatter, Alan.
 Sheahan, Tom.
 Sheehan, P. J.
 Sherlock, Seán.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Upton, Mary.
 Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pat Carey and John Cregan; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Emmet Stagg.

Amendment declared carried.

Motion, as amended, put and declared carried.

Adjournment Debate.

Hospital Services.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: In raising this matter, I am seeking to highlight the fact that, in the view of the 100 plus GPs who refer people to it, Mallow General Hospital is a centre of excellence. It is also a secondary care facility that caters for the needs of a population base of well over 100,000. If the national service plan, as envisaged, is implemented, the accident and emergency department at Mallow General Hospital will be downgraded to a minor injuries unit. The GPs from whom I have received representations and the people who live in the area want to know what will be the future of the accident and emergency department. There is a concern that if it is downgraded to the status of a minor injuries unit, many GPs in the area will bypass Mallow General Hospital and refer

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people instead to Cork University Hospital, CUH. Given an expected population base of 4.53 million in 2009, it is vital hospitals such as Mallow General Hospital maintain some coherence in terms of accident and emergency services. Reducing or diminishing it to a minor injuries clinic will result in more people being put into the narrow funnel that is Cork University Hospital, which is not the way to go.

I have taken advice on the matter from general practitioners who refer stroke patients and people with heart complaints to this hospital. Many of these interventions can be dealt with by the accident and emergency department. Downgrading the hospital to a minor injuries unit will have an adverse effect on outcomes for patients.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I concur with what Deputy Sherlock said. A Teamwork report completed in the mid-west more than a year ago has not yet been published. There are all sorts of rumours going around about accident and emergency services at hospitals in Nenagh, Ennis and Limerick being reduced. There is no evidence whatsoever that capacity in the Mid-west Regional Hospital in Limerick will be increased to cater for extra patients. People living in places like west Clare will be a considerable distance from the central hospital in Limerick should this downgrading go ahead. We are hearing rumours to the effect that this will happen in March 2009.

I have repeatedly called for the publication of the Teamwork Management Services report and have received conflicting answers, some of which indicate the report has not yet been submitted to the board of the HSE and others from the Minister and Professor Drumm who indicated in committee that they do not want to publish it because it may give rise to opposition. This is no way to democratically address the issue of how we run our hospital services in this country.

It is important to state on the record that secondary hospitals have an important role to play. They are much more cost effective in dealing with certain matters than are tertiary hospitals. We need to have a proper debate and evaluation of the role of secondary hospitals before they are downgraded in some type of secret operation, with no publication of a plan and only a vague generalised reference to reconfiguration as set out in the HSE plan launched yesterday.

While a copy of the Teamwork report is floating around in the mid-west it has not yet been published. In effect, patients, the public and public representatives are being denied an opportunity to participate in a debate on this issue and to ensure we maintain a level of service in secondary hospitals in the mid-west, south, north-east and in various other parts of the country that is appropriate to what a secondary hospital can do. An excellent service is being provided by these hospitals in a cost effective manner in comparison with larger hospitals.

It is appalling that this is happening in a type of secretive manner without any public discussion. I urge the Minister to genuinely address the issues of concern in these areas because people do not know what is happening. I have spoken about the issue to people in Clare, north Tipperary and Limerick. They are hearing rumours about what is proposed for their hospitals but there is no public announcement in this regard. It is almost as if this is being done behind closed doors with only particular people being brought on board and senior rather than regular staff at the hospitals being told about it.

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I am responding to the Deputies on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Mary Harney.

The Government is committed to ensuring the delivery of best possible quality health services in an effective and efficient way. Patient safety is of paramount importance in ensuring people have confidence in the services and that the best possible patient outcomes are achieved.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

It is essential that patient safety and quality are prioritised and that services are organised and managed accordingly.

The six hospitals in the mid-western region providing acute services have a complement of 828 in-patient beds and 124 day beds. Between them, the hospitals have a total operating annual budget of €275 million, with a staffing complement of 3,248. The activity profile for the service consists of 47,000 in-patients, 34,000 day cases, 180,000 out-patient attendances and 110,000 accident and emergency presentations per annum. The maternity hospital deals with 5,500 births per annum. These figures underline the importance of the work done by the hospitals in the mid-west area and the contribution they make to the health services of the region.

Mallow General Hospital provides a valuable range of in-patient, out-patient and day case services. It is, and will continue to be, an important health care facility. In the past years, there has been a considerable level of investment in equipment and infrastructure at the hospital. A capital sum of €1.5 million was provided for the provision of CT scanning services at Mallow General Hospital on a five-day week basis. The support staff has been put in place and the CT scanner has been operational since September of this year. A refurbishment programme has also commenced at the hospital. Work on the upgrading of the emergency department has been completed and work on the extension of the regional laboratory system is about to commence. A sum of €260,000 was allocated in the current year for ward and other minor equipment, upgrading of toilets and compliance with hygiene and decontamination standards.

The HSE has commissioned a number of strategic reviews of the configuration of acute hospital services including in the mid-west and the south. In each case, the first priority is patient safety. The challenge in the years ahead will be to organise, manage and deliver high quality services that are focused in the first instance on the safety of patients. Horwath Consultants in association with Teamwork Management Services were commissioned by the HSE to work on the strategic reviews in the mid-west and southern regions. The reviews focus on identifying the best configuration of acute hospital services in the regions, including arrangements for accident and emergency, critical care, acute medicine and surgery, together with diagnostic services so that the highest quality of care can be delivered to the population of the regions concerned.

The HSE reviews will act as inputs to decisions on how best to reconfigure acute services in the regions concerned. The Government and the Executive are committed to ensuring that the approach to reorganisation of services is carried out in consultation with the key stakeholders and that each element is progressed incrementally.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: What about the public? Are they not key stakeholders?

An Ceann Comhairle: Please allow the Minister to continue without interruption.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Minister believes it is important to work with health professionals and other interested parties to secure an increasing set of improvements over time. This approach will, she is confident, produce the best outcome for patients. Patient safety will determine how services in the mid-west and the south are configured in the future.

A detailed planning process is currently underway in each network to ensure that secondary care services are assigned to each hospital in the network in an appropriate manner, which takes account of their ability to manage complex care safely and to the highest standard. The Government is committed to ensuring high quality acute services throughout the country.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: Gobbledygook.

Departmental Funding.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Throughout the local development sector there is grave concern at the savage cutbacks that have been imposed on Pobal and its staff with resulting negative impacts on local development companies and partnerships.

The establishment of the ADM company under the partnership process was a significant step in delivering necessary centralised and efficient back-up to hundreds of local development projects across Ireland, with which the Minister and I are familiar. The evolution of ADM into Pobal under the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs was a milestone in creating an accountable and more effective local voluntary and social economy sector. The organisation has received a great deal more work in terms of invigilation and an increased accounting role as a result of the recent changes introduced in the management of such companies.

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has, under budget 2009, imposed a savage 33% cut in the administration and support costs of social inclusion programmes which are managed by Pobal, with a clear indication that even more severe cuts of up to 50% will apply in 2010. As I understand it, the result will be the loss of almost 100 jobs in Pobal.

I am informed by Pobal staff representatives that 74 redundancies are now being sought from a workforce of 250. I am aware also of course that 90 Pobal workers have less than two year's service and that their work has developed as a result of recent changes introduced in the organisation. Clearly, these extraordinary cuts in a relatively small organisation seem totally disproportionate, even in the context of the overall severe budgetary cuts being imposed for 2009. The Department's justification is to enable the maintenance of frontline services but the key liaison support and development functions performed by Pobal with local agencies will clearly be damaged by these cutbacks. The result will be major cuts at local level in supports for effective and transparent delivery of funds to communities. Cuts will also affect specialist support staff in employment, community development, and educational disadvantage, including disadvantaged groups, Travellers, lone parents, prisoners and citizens recovering from addiction.

Similarly, cuts will affect the connection between Departments and beneficiaries at local level, in addition to their impact on evaluation and research capacities, the production of strategy guides and good proactive tool kits, and in necessary networking meetings of partnership staff, and other cross-learning events.

The local development social inclusion, LDSIP, programme supports local agencies such as partnerships to address complex problems of inequality, poverty and social inclusion. The Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív, and the Department of Finance value for money review of the LDSIP clearly identified the need for ongoing "sophisticated" evaluation and ongoing guidance and technical support for local groups. However, the Department has said it is employing the Centre for Effective Services, CES, to design a successor programme to the LDSIP. I understand that the CES received funding from Atlantic Philanthropies in addition to funding from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Why could the work not have been carried out by Pobal? There does not appear to have been any tendering process for the work that will now be carried out by the Centre for Effective Services. I am further informed that Pobal was not given a chance to tender for the project, which seems central to its statutory remit and for a task in which it has built up 16 years of valuable experience. The VFM to which I referred identified areas for improvement in Pobal but it did not question the fundamental capacity, integrity or efficiency of the organisation.

[Deputy Thomas P. Broughan.]

How can its vital public support and invigilation role in local development be effectively delivered with the massive cut of 100 jobs?

Ireland is plunging into a severe recession, partly due to gross errors by the Government since 1997. Unemployment may rise to in excess of 10%. The impact may be most severe in disadvantaged and low income communities. It seems crazy therefore to impose this level of cutbacks in Pobal that will have a knock-on effect on important local employment and enterprise programmes across the country that are served by Pobal.

The Ceann Comhairle is aware that I have long experience as a community activist with local development projects. I am a long-time director of Coolock Development Council and of the Northside Partnership and a number of its related companies. As a community director, it is always reassuring to know that Pobal exists and that high standards of invigilation and audit are being maintained. The new light touch invigilation proposed by the Minister, including an end to quarterly reports that must be presented to and invigilated by Pobal, will result in weakening the system of accountability, which may have disastrous consequences. I am also a member of the Committee of Public Accounts, which is currently invigilating a major State agency where it appears lapses occurred.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I fully concur with the Deputy on the need to keep an eye on money and to make sure it is spent where it should be spent. Pobal is a private company. It is not a statutory company or agency and it is important that one would understand that.

What is proposed is a 33% cut in funding for 2009, as referred to by Deputy Broughan, relating to administration and overhead funding. It is not commensurate with overall funding for programme delivery for 2009. The reduction in the administration funding available to Pobal reflects an emphasis on the prioritisation of front-line services over intermediary and ancillary supports.

As the Deputy is probably aware, Pobal administers a range of programmes and schemes on behalf of my Department, namely, the local development social inclusion programme, LDSIP, to which Deputy Broughan referred, and the dormant accounts fund, DAF, which will give rise to less activity next year because it has less money. It is inevitable that this would happen over time. We are considering the structure of the community services programme, CSP, in order to streamline it. Other programmes include the RAPID programme, the rural social scheme, RSS, and grant schemes to community and voluntary organisations. The overall provision in the Abridged Estimates for 2009 for these programmes is just under €175 million.

As previously indicated to the House, my primary concern is to make every effort to ensure that the front-line services provided by, or supported through, my Department — especially those focused on the needs of the most socially deprived communities — are protected. That is being achieved by requiring significant administrative savings in my Department and public bodies within its ambit, through the cessation of the use of intermediary bodies, such as community development support agencies and by reducing administrative overheads across bodies such as Pobal. In that way, the wide range of services my Department provides, including services under its social inclusion programmes, can be broadly maintained.

It is appreciated that Pobal has had a key role in the delivery of successful local development services and programmes for many years for several Departments. The Government has acknowledged the work and commitment of board members past and present, both individually and collectively in contributing to the many achievements of the company. It is those achievements and commitment that gives confidence that the board of Pobal will support the Department in prioritising the restricted resources that will be available in the coming years in the interests of the programme beneficiaries. Intensive discussions are ongoing with Pobal in regard

to how the administrative costs and overheads can be reduced while maintaining service delivery at 2008 levels.

The situation amazes me but it is inevitable in politics. We are told there are too many overheads and too many administrators. We hear that every day from the Opposition. I have been trying to rationalise this sector for a long time, as it was all over the place with community partnerships, area partnerships, Leader companies and Leader partnerships. There was a significant amount of companies. I have streamlined all of that and I will keep streamlining it.

Deputy Broughan might disagree with me but my absolute obligation is to get the money on to the ground. We have to look after the money but that does not have to be done through the creation of endless reports that do not determine the value for money on the ground. I am determined to protect front-line services for people who need them and if that means cutting administrative overheads then so be it. I look every day at ways of cutting the administrative overheads right across all of the agencies under my Department. I am right to do that. I have been doing it for a long time.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The Minister should not damage the services.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Let us compare the relative overheads of the community services programme and the rural social scheme, one we inherited from another agency to which the Deputy referred as being before the Committee of Public Accounts. The rural social scheme was conceived by me and operated by my Department. One can ask the people on the ground which one is working better. If we ask Deputy Bannon which scheme works better, he will tell us.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Do not drag Deputy Bannon into it.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is the one with the slim overheads, the get out and do it scheme. That is the one Deputy Bannon would say delivers on the ground. I will stick by that approach. I know one thing; I will have the support of the main Opposition party in what I am doing.

Schools Building Projects.

Deputy James Bannon: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me to raise this matter on the Adjournment. It is an important issue in my area given the urgent need for the Minister for Education and Science to provide funding for a new school building for St. Mary's national school, Edgeworthstown, County Longford. I seek an update on the loss of essential teaching staff at the school despite rising roll numbers.

The reality for St. Mary's is that it needs a new 16-classroom school at the cost of €3.6 million, as compared to the shameful waste of €1.1 million from 2002 to date on temporary accommodation. Just in case basic maths is a problem for the Minister, the new school has already reached a cost of €4.7 million and that is without including fees of €120,000 paid to consultants or the €40,000 for ESB for the temporary prefabs and the rising cost associated with the delay in the commencement of works.

If the new school building were to be deferred for another few years, which is beyond contemplation, the cost of building it would have been totally thrown away on temporary accommodation, which would still be temporary and by then in urgent need of replacement or restoration. That is madness. As I have continually said, the Government is penny wise and pound foolish. It makes no economic sense to continue to throw away money on temporary accommodation that would be better utilised on permanent buildings, particularly as one third of the final cost has already been spent on temporary structures.

[Deputy James Bannon.]

St. Mary's currently has 20 teachers and their pupils in prefabs. The school which is expecting to have 120 plus EAL pupils in September 2009, is losing three language support teachers. It currently has five language teachers for 99 EAL pupils, which again if you will forgive me for drawing attention to the basic maths, does not add up, and the children will suffer as a result. The general allocation for learning support will have to absorb the balance, encroaching on the already overburdened learning support teachers. The school is also to lose one class teacher. In September 2008, enrolment was five pupils above the appointment-retention figure of 367 and with the increase in class size it is now three short of the 375 appointment-retention figure. To retain the teacher, enrolment will have to increase by 25 pupils to achieve developing school status. St Mary's is a vibrant school which serves the community under the excellent care of the principal, Ms Helen O'Gorman. It provides a first class education for a rapidly increasing primary school-going population in Edgeworthstown and surrounding areas. It does so despite the limitations imposed by the Government, but the built environment is becoming more and more of an issue for teachers, pupils and parents. The population has grown by 68.4% in the five years from 2001-06 and enrolment has grown accordingly, but EAL has remained static. The school should be included in the Department of Education and Science's development area units.

I am asking the Minister to stop throwing good money after bad. Instead of ploughing more money on top of the third of the cost of the new building already spent into temporary accommodation which is totally unsuited for the purpose and facing rising costs, building must be permitted to go ahead at this school. I hope that in the Minister's reply, there will be a Christmas box for students, teachers and parents in the Edgeworthstown area. I should very much appreciate a favourable response to this important motion for this area of my constituency.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter as it provides me with an opportunity to outline to the House the position with regard to the proposed building project for St. Mary's national school in Edgeworthstown, County Longford and the position in relation to the allocation of teaching resources for the new school year.

St. Mary's national school was formed as a result of an amalgamation of St. Mary's boys' and St. Elizabeth's girls' national schools in September 2001. The St. Mary's boys' national school building was deemed suitable to act as a host for the school and it is operating from these premises at present. However, in the intervening years, enrolments have increased by over 60% at the school and the Department of Education and Science has provided temporary accommodation to meet this growing need for pupil places, including three new prefabs for the current school year. It accepts, however, that a new building is needed to provide adequately for the school.

A project to provide this new building is currently at stage 2 of the Department's architectural planning process, which is the initial sketch scheme stage. A revised stage 2 submission in this regard has been received from the school authority and this is currently being examined by the Department's professional and technical staff. While the Department is not in a position to say when the project will be allowed to proceed further after the stage 2 submission has been approved due to the level of demand on its capital budget, the Minister for Education and Science is committed to delivering the project as soon as the necessary funding is available. With regard to teaching resources, when the country was able to afford it, the Government reduced the basis on which primary teachers are allocated to schools from being based on an average number of pupils per teacher from 35 down to the current level of 27.

The change to a new average of 28 pupils per teacher has to be viewed in that context. Significant additional support went into schools, particularly in the area of special education. The Government also reduced class sizes for the most disadvantaged in our DEIS schools to an average of one teacher for every 20 pupils in junior classes and an average of one for every 24 pupils in senior classes and these will not be changing in 2009. When all the teachers in the system are added up, there is one for every 16 pupils in our primary schools.

It will be necessary in the more testing economic climate ahead for us to continue to target and prioritise our resources to maximum effect for everyone. While teacher numbers are important, numerous influential reports have highlighted the fact that teacher quality is the single most important factor, far above anything else, in improving educational outcomes for children. Ensuring high quality teaching and learning is a challenge and dealing with factors that inhibit this represents a challenge for the Government, the Department, school management and indeed the teacher unions.

The Department will be advising individual schools in the normal way in relation to staffing allocations. The preparatory work for this has commenced with the processing of enrolment data that has been received from schools. The staffing allocation processes, including notification to schools, will commence early in the new year. The allocation process includes appellate mechanisms under which schools can appeal against the allocation due to them under the staffing schedules. In addition to the mainstream classroom teachers the Department also allocates teaching resources to schools for special needs and language support. The final allocation to a school is also a function of the operation of the redeployment panels which provide for the retention of a teacher in an existing school if a new post is not available within the agreed terms of the scheme.

The Minister for Education and Science has no difficulty in setting out for this House or for the public generally the overall changes on aggregate teacher numbers to schools for the 2009-10 school year. The Minister will do this when the allocation processes have been completed. Furthermore, the staffing schedule will be published and it is a transparent and clear way of ensuring that schools are treated consistently and fairly and know where they stand.

At this time the priority for the Department within the resources available to it is to carry out those processes in a timely manner. Diverting resources in order to create staffing profiles for the school requested by the Deputy, information which at this time would only be speculative, could not be justified and would in fact impede the process.

The Minister for Education and Science is confident that as the global economy improves, it will be possible to build again on the significant achievements of recent years and do so in a manner consistent with overall prudent management of the economy. As the full extent of the global crisis seeps into public consciousness, the Minister believes there will be general acceptance that taking difficult decisions now in order to secure future economic prosperity and secure employment is the first imperative of Government.

Again, I thank the Deputy for raising the issue.

Coláistí Samhraidh.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Ar dtús by mhaith liom buíochas a thabhairt don Ceann Comhairle as an deis an cheist thábhachtach seo a thógáil. Is ceist tábhachtach é seo ní amháin don Ghaeilge, ach do oideachas na tíre agus don Ghaeltacht. Táim cinnte go n-aontófaidh an tAire liom go bhfuil stair fhada glórmhar ag na coláistí Gaeilge sa tír a théann siar breis agus céad bliain ó bunaíodh an chéad coláiste Gaeilge i mBéal Átha an Ghaorthaidh, i gContae Chorcaigh, Coláiste na Mumhan.

[Deputy Dinny McGinley.]

Bliain nó dhó ina dhaidh sin bunaíodh an dara coláiste Gaeilge i mo cheantar féin, i nGort ‘a Choirce, Coláiste Uladh. Coláistí iad seo a raibh freastal ag mór laochra agus pearsain mhór i staire réabhlóide na tíre seo orthu. Mar shampla, i gColáiste Uladh bhí daoine móra cosúil le Ruairí Mac Easmainn, an Piarasach fhéin agus ar ndóigh daoine ó Tuaisceart Éireann a bhain leis an aicme eile, an aicme dílseoirí.

Ainm amháin a thagann chun mo chuimhne ná Róis Ní Ógáin, Rose Young, sean-aintín leis an Tiarna Brookeborough, a tháinig go rialta chuig Gort ‘a Choirce agus a d’foghlaím a cuid Gaeilge agus a chuir an *Duanaire Gaeilge* ar fail. Taispeánann sé sin an fiúntas, an feabhas agus an mhaitheas a rinne na coláistí Gaeilge ó bunaíodh iad breis is céad bliain ó shin. Tá áthas orm go dtí an lá inniu go bhfuil na coláistí sin ag gníomhú go héifeachtach ar fud na tíre.

’Sé an tAire féin a dúirt go raibh freastal do 6,020 daltaí ins na coláistí Gaeilge i seachtan amháin i mbliana. Dúirt an tAire sa ráiteas sin gur fiú €50 milliún do cheantair Gaeltachta na tíre seo tionscal na gcoláistí Gaeilge. Ní hamháin go mbíonn na daltaí ag freastal ar na coláistí, ach bíonn a gcuid tuismitheoirí agus a gcuid gaolta agus daoine eile ag tabhairt cuairteanna orthu i rith an tsamhraidh. Ar ndóigh, dúinne a bhfuil cónaí orainn sa Ghaeltacht, bíonn na coláistí Gaeilge agus teacht na ndaltaí cosúil le teacht na bhfáinleog sa samhradh, faoi mar a bhí ag an Phiarsach sa scéal sin Eoghainín na nÉan. Táim cinnte go bhfuil eolas ag an Aire ar an scéal sin.

Bhí trí fhoinsé d’ioncaim ag na coláistí Gaeilge i gcónaí, an táille a dhíol na tuismitheoirí féin as na daltaí a chur chun na Gaeltachta, an táille a dhíol Roinn an Aire a chuaigh go dtí na mna tí agus an deontas caipitíochta a thug an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta le haghaidh gach dalta. Cuireadh ionadh an tsaoil orm nuair a tarraingíodh siar go huile agus go hiomlán san cháinainnéis an deontas caipitíochta sin. Tá mé cinnte go n-aontaíonn sibh gur buille mór sin dos na coláistí Gaeilge a chuireann ar chumas daoine óga, ní amháin dul agus an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim ach eolas a chur ar chultúr agus traidisiún na tuaithe agus na Gaeltachta agus an cheantair sin den tír. An méid atá á tarraingt siar le ciorrú an deontais seo ná €1.25 milliún, amach as €9.5 milliún, an caiteachas ar fad don Roinn. Suim an-bheag í don Roinn, ach is suim an-mhór í dos na coláistí Gaeilge.

Beidh roinnt de na coláistí Gaeilge ábalta é seo a sheasamh ar feadh bliana nó dhó. Sin iad na coláistí atá sean-bhunaithe a bhfuil airgead cruinnithe acu agus nead déanta acu mar go raibh siad ag cruinniú fá choinne na coise tinne. Ach ba mhaith liomsa go gcuimhneodh muid ar na coláistí atá ag na comharchumainn, na coláistí atá ag eagraíochtaí cosúil le Gael Linn, a threoraíonn an t-airgead agus an phroifid a dhéanann sé bliain in aghaidh bliana isteach sna comhludair agus na ceantair ina bhfuil siad lonnaithe.

B’fhiú smaointiú freisin ar choláistí nach bhfuil ach i ndiaidh tosnú. I mo cheantar féin tá coláiste úr i mBun an Inbhir, a bhí ann don chéad uair ann athrú anuraidh. Is beag achmhainní atá ag an gcoláiste sin go fóill. Tá siad ag tógáil chomh maith agus is féidir leo agus ag iarraidh níos mó daltaí a fháil. Cuirfidh an tarraingt siar den deontas seo isteach go mór ar na haicmí sin.

Iarraim ar an Aire, cé go bhfuil a fhios agam nach eisean atá i gceannas na Roinne Oideachais agus Eolaíochta — ach tá sé i gceannas ar An Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta agus tuigeann sé an cás agus cé chomh trom agus a bheid an buille seo ar an chuid is mó de na coláistí — dul chuig a chomhghleacaithe agus an Rialtas agus iarradh orthu athmhacnamh a dhéanamh ar tharraingt siar an deontais seo agus é a thabhairt do na coláistí i mbliana. Níl i gceist ach €1.25 milliún, suim bheag i gcomhthéacs caiteachas na tíre seo, ach suim mhór chomh fada agus a bhaineann sí leis na coláistí.

Tá an Aire in ann agus san áit cheart le bronntanas breá Nollag a thabhairt dos na 633 teaghlach, de réir a fhocail féin, a dheineann freastal ar na daltaí seo i rith an tsamhraidh sna ceantair Gaeltachta. Go raibh maith agat.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghlacadh leis an Teachta as ucht an cheist seo a ardú anseo anocht. Táim anseo thar cionn an Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta mar go mbaineann an scéal leis an Roinn sin.

Go deimhin, bhí spéis agam sa mhéid a bhí le rá ag an Teachta maidir le bunú na gcoláistí Gaeilge. Mar a tharlaíonn sé, sa bhliain 1903, bhí cruinniú i gCorcaigh, agus ag an cruinniú sin, mhol mo sheanathair, Seán Ó Cuív, go mbunófaí coláiste Gaeilge. Ag éirí as sin, bunaíodh coláiste Gaeilge Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh. Aisteach go leor, bhí an seanathair eile ag an gcomóradh a rinneadh in 1966 ar bhunú an choláiste agus bhí mise, mar Aire na Gaeltachta, ag an gcomóradh a rinneadh ar bhunadh an choláiste sin 100 bliain i ndiaidh a bhunaithe. Mar sin, tá ceangal fada ag mo mhuintir leis na coláistí Gaeilge. Go deimhin, d'fhreastal mé féin ar an gcoláiste i mBéal Átha an Ghaorthaidh ar feadh trí bliana, agus uair amháin sa Spidéal. Mar is eol don Teachta, caithfidh go ndeachaigh an Spidéal go mór i gcion orm, mar phós mé bean as an Spidéal ina dhiaidh sin.

Aithníonn an tAire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta ról tábhachtach na gcoláistí samhraidh Gaeltachta agus molann sé obair na gcoláistí as ucht Iíofacht a chothú i measc na mac léinn a dhéanann freastal orthu. Is ábhar dóchais é go leanann líon suntasach mac léinn orthu ag freastal ar na coláistí seo sa Ghaeltacht. Aithním chomh maith go mbíonn tionchar nach beag ag na coláistí ar eacnamaíocht na gceantar Gaeltachta in a bhfuil siad lonnaithe.

Ni raibh aon dul as, afach, ach roghanna deacra a dhéanamh thar gach réimse de chaiteachas poiblí i mbuiséad 2009. Rinneadh na cinntí seo chun srian a chur le caiteachas poiblí agus marthanacht a áirithiú sa fad-téarma. Ina leith seo, níorbh fhéidir an t-oideachas a sparáil ina iomláine cé gur cosnaíodh é níos mó ná formór na reimsí eile den chaiteachas poiblí.

Níor mhor roinnt bearta a chur i gcrích in earnáil an oideachais chun cabhrú le costais na hearnála poiblí a shrianadh agus soláthar a dhéanamh ag an am céanna d'athruithe deimeagrafacha agus eile. In ainneoin an mhéadaithe de €302 milliún sa bhuiséad oideachais do 2009, éacht nach beag agus an eacnamaíocht mar ata sí, ní raibh aon dul as ach roinnt cinntí crua, deacra a dhéanamh.

Léiríodh na cinntí seo i measc na bhfógairtí lá an bhuiséid, agus ina measc bhí cealú an deontais a bhí á íoc ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta do na coláistí samhraidh Gaeilge. B'é ráta an chúnamh deontais seo, a cuireadh ar fail i 2008, ná tuairim is €53 in aghaidh gach mhic léinn a bhí rollaithe ar chúrsa trí seachtaine, méid ab ionann is cuid bheag go leor den chostas foriomlán a ghabn le freastal ar an gcúrsa. Cuireadh an chabhair a soláthraíodh in aghaidh an mhic léinn ar fail ar bhonn an lín fhoriomláin a bhí rollaithe ins na cursaí samhraidh, is cuma faoi acmhainní na dtuismitheoirí.

Leanfar le tacaíocht an Stáit do mhic léinn a fhreastalaíonn ar na coláistí samhraidh Gaeltachta i bhfoirm na bhfóirdheontas a íoctar le teaghlaigh a chuireann cóiríocht ar fáil do na mic léinn. Ina theannta sin, leanfar leis an maoiniú a dhéantar ar fhreastal ábhar oidí ar na coláistí samhraidh sa Ghaeltacht agus leis na socrúithe maidir le saoire phearsanta bhreise a cheadú do mhúinteoirí bun scoile a mhúineann ins na coláistí samhraidh.

Tuigeann an tAire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta an tábhacht chultúrtha agus socheolaíoch a bhaineann leis na limistéir Gaeltachta d'fhoghlaimoirí na teanga agus leanfaidh an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta le tacaíochtaí Stáit a thabhairt de réir mar is féidir sin leis na hacmhainní mar atá siad ins na toscaí deacra eacnamaíochta atá ann faoi láthair.

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Cuireann an Roinn raon bearta ar fáil chun tacú le múineadh agus foghlaim na Gaeilge agus le foghlaim trí Ghaeilge. Orthu seo tá: tacaíochtaí breisithe múinteoireachta agus maoinithe do Ghaelscoileanna; forbairt ghairmiúil do mhúinteoirí ag an leibhéal bunscoile agus iarbhunscoile tríd an gcIár tacaíochta don churaclam bunscoile agus tríd an tseirbhís tacaíochta dara leibhéal, faoina gcuirtear 34 oiliúnóir lánaimseartha ar fáil; cláir mhodúlacha do mhúinteoirí tríd an nGréasán lárionad oideachais; agus soláthar téacsanna, ábhar agus acmhainní i nGaeilge trí fhorbairt Shéideán Sí agus obair na Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta.

Tá mórán athruithe tarlaithe sa bhliain a chuaigh thart agus is í an chéad aidhm atá ag an Rialtas ná an t-airgeadas poiblí a chosaint. Is é seo an t-aon bhealach inar féidir linn gnó-thachain a choimeád agus cur ar ar gcumas féin feabhsúchain a dhéanamh amach anseo. Táimid ag déileáil, áfach, le staid eacnamaíochta a bhfuil deacracht gan fasach ag baint leis. Tá sé de dhualgas ar an Rialtas aghaidh a thabhairt ar seo agus cinntí fíor-dheacra a dhéanamh ar mhaithe leis an náisiún. Agus sin á dheanamh againn, tá iarracht déanta againn foscadh éigin a thabhairt don earnáil oideachais, ach i bhfianaise scála an chaiteachais phoiblí ar an oideachas, ní féidir cinntí crua a sheachaint.

Cabhróidh bearta an bhuiséid lena chinntiú go mbíonn Éire suite go maith chun tairbhe a bhaint as nuair a thioctfaidh feabhas ar an eacnamaíocht domhanda agus nuair a bheidh ar ár gcumas tógáil arís ar éachta móra na mblianta deireanacha agus déanamh amhlaidh i slí a bheidh i gcomhréir le bainistíocht chríonna eacnamaíochta na hÉireann ina iomláine.

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil arís eile leis an Teachta as ucht dels a thabhairt dom an fhreagra seo a thabhairt ar son mo chomhgleacaí, an tAire Batt O’Keeffe, agus an scéal a mhíniú ar a shon maidir leis na coláistí samhraidh Gaeilge agus a Roinn.

The Dáil adjourned at 10 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 18 December 2008.

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 19, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 20 to 58, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 59 to 68, inclusive, answered orally.

Departmental Accommodation.

69. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Transport the plans he has to improve the accommodation within his Department in view of the significant level of dissatisfaction with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46453/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department was established in 2002 and since then it has experienced significant functional and staffing change that has contributed to the present situation whereby the Department's staffing complement of approximately 450 Dublin-based staff is dispersed in six locations.

This level of dispersal has posed considerable operational difficulties in the delivery of a satisfactory standard of accommodation in all cases. A more cohesive accommodation structure is therefore considered essential to address these difficulties. For this reason my Department, in conjunction with the Office of Public Works, has devised detailed plans to consolidate and reduce the number of buildings it currently occupies in Dublin from six to three.

These plans are at an advanced stage and it is envisaged that this consolidation will be achieved by the end of 2009. With a fewer number of buildings to manage, my Department will also be able to take a more focused and cost effective approach to the delivery of maintenance and improvement works in the future.

In addition to progressing the rationalisation of the Department's accommodation portfolio, my Department has in the past year carried out a number of miscellaneous office improvement schemes such as office layout. It is planned to deliver a series of other improvements in the coming years with the assistance of the OPW. The basic objective of these schemes is to ensure that working conditions are to an acceptable standard.

Customer Service Surveys.

70. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Transport the reason his Department has not published its findings from customer surveys; if he will provide these findings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46462/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The results of the Customer Surveys for 2003 and 2005/2006 are accessible under the 'Other Information' link on my Department's website. We are currently updating our Customer Charter and Action Plan, which will apply for the period 2009-2011. A customer service survey will be carried out early in 2009 as part of this exercise and the results will be published.

While the 2003 Customer Service Survey was published on 14th November 2003, due to an oversight the 2005-2006 Customer Service Survey was not published on the website but was made available internally on the Staff intranet.

Road Safety.

71. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport when compulsory testing of alcohol testing will be introduced for all those involved in road traffic accidents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46492/08]

121. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Transport when he will introduce measures to facilitate the mandatory testing of all drivers involved in serious road collisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46361/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 71 and 121 together.

The current position regarding the testing of drivers for alcohol at the scene of a collision is that a member of An Garda Síochána may require a driver involved in a collision to provide a preliminary breath specimen. This discretion is provided in acknowledgement of the fact that urgent medical attention may be required for seriously injured victims and must take precedence over breath testing.

In addition, a Garda may request a blood or urine sample from a driver who is in hospital following a vehicle incident, where the Garda believes that person was intoxicated.

Advice has been received from the Attorney General on possible amendments to legislation to provide for mandatory alcohol testing at the scene of a collision which continues to take overriding medical circumstances into account. The issue is included in the Road Traffic and Transport Bill, which is currently being drafted. It is expected that the Bill will be published early next year.

Public Transport.

72. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Transport the percentage of public transport buses in County Cork which are wheelchair accessible; the number of wheelchair buses being used for County Cork public bus services; his plans to support the expansion of wheelchair accessible buses in town and rural services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46402/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Bus services in Co Cork are provided largely by Bus Éireann. The company has a fleet of 164 buses in Co Cork. Of these, 116 are wheelchair accessible which represents over 70% of the fleet and, as older buses are replaced, all new

urban buses are required to be wheelchair accessible. In fact, all bus services in Cork city are operated with low floor buses.

My Department's Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act 2005, titled 'Transport Access for All', contains time bound targets for the progressive realisation of accessible transport in Ireland. To achieve these targets some statutory measures have been adopted and others are planned. The Plan provides that by 2015 practically all vehicles used for bus and coach services will be accessible. The Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 requires public transport service contracts to provide, inter alia, for accessibility standards for services. I intend to include a similar measure for areas outside the Greater Dublin Area as part of proposals that I am developing to modernise the 1932 Road Transport Act. I also intend that the Authority may impose minimum accessibility standards on licences for commercial bus services operated by both public and private operators.

In addition, the system for tendering and procurement of services under my Department's Rural Transport Programme (RTP) has been reviewed to ensure that incentives and weightings are applied to encourage compliance with accessibility goals. Also, community owned vehicles are either already accessible or are being adapted to ensure that they meet accessibility requirements.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 68.

Departmental Staff.

74. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport the reason his Department lacks the capacity to plan and deliver the information and communication technology service that his Department needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46458/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I have confidence in the technical ability and competence of my officials in the information and communications technology area to deliver quality service to my Department. However, I agree with the findings of the recently published Organisation Review Programme Report (ORP) that long-term unfilled vacancies together with increased workload consequent, inter alia, on the acquisition of new maritime functions have limited the capacity of the Information Services Division to deliver the full range of services.

My Department's current ICT Strategy envisaged a significant increase in staffing in our Information Services Division. However, difficulties arose in filling the vacancies in question. Accordingly, the Division has taken steps to increase its capacity to deliver the necessary services, primarily through outsourcing work.

Looking to the future, the simple solution to these challenges cannot always be the allocation of extra staffing. While the Department wants a radical increase in the deployment of ICT, prevailing external factors place constraints on our ability to fully resource the development of the IT function. Difficult choices will have to be made in reviewing ICT priorities in light of the new constraints on budgets. My Department will also seek support from our agencies and other Departments with relevant ICT expertise to further our priorities.

In this context, my officials will focus in 2009 on the development of those new systems that can have the most direct and immediate impact on the efficiency of the Department on the basis of agreed priorities.

Cycling Strategy.

75. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Transport when he will publish the National Cycling Strategy; the reason the deadline for the publication of this strategy by the second

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quarter of 2008 has been missed; the measures that will be contained in the cycling strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46355/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): It is my intention to publish a national cycling policy as early as possible in 2009 following the publication of the Sustainable Travel and Transport Action Plan. This is in line with the commitments that I made earlier in the year and which never included a target of the second quarter 2008 for publication.

The final approved policy will set out the detail of the measures which will range from cycling infrastructure and traffic management to issues such as training and awareness. I intend that the National Cycling Policy will be not only a comprehensive response to current difficulties faced by the cycling community in terms of road priority and safety issues, but will also prove to be a springboard to creating a culture of cycling in Ireland. In this respect I have indicated that the proposed policy should aim to increase modal share of cycling from 2 to 10% by 2020.

Public Transport.

76. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport when he will publish the report on CIÉ (details supplied); if legislation will be necessary arising from this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46350/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I expect to receive shortly the cost and efficiency review of both Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann and I will arrange to have it published on my Department's website in due course. When I have considered the Report I will be in a position to determine if any amendments to legislation are required.

Transport Infrastructure Projects.

77. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Transport his views on the planning of a post Transport 21 programme in view of projected population increases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46449/08]

83. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Transport the way the 7% cut in the public transport investment programme will affect the roll out of public transport infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46375/08]

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport the degree to which the original objectives set out in Transport 21 remain achievable in full within the projected time-frame; if the progress to date is in accord with projections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46396/08]

120. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Transport the commencement and completion dates for each public transport infrastructure project in Transport 21; if he will list each project that has been delayed or deferred indefinitely and provide a reason for each delay; if Transport 21 will be fully implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46347/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77, 83, 88 and 120 together.

At the launch of Transport 21, the Government identified the projects in the national roads, public transport and regional airports sectors that it wishes to see prioritised for development in the ten-year period from 2006 to 2015 and provided indicative completion dates for the major projects contained.

Significant progress has been made on Transport 21 in its first three years and a number of projects have been completed and others are well advanced in planning terms.

A very extensive construction programme is also currently underway and a number of additional projects were approved recently to go to construction, including the N18 Gort to Crusheen, the Citywest Luas extension and Phase 1 of the Navan rail line.

The adjustment in the capital allocation for Transport 21 in 2009 has brought about a re-examination of the priorities in the investment programme. My priorities for investment in national roads are the completion of the major interurban network by 2010 and the progressive development of the Atlantic Road Corridor. I understand from the NRA that it is currently in the process of drawing up its programme of works for 2009 based on its funding allocation for the year.

On the public transport side, the provision of increased capacity will be a key consideration in determining investment priorities. Given their potential to greatly increase capacity of the public transport network in the Greater Dublin Area, Metro North and the DART Underground are key priorities. Investment in increased bus capacity, subject to the outcome of the cost and efficiency review of the CIE bus companies, and bus priority are also investment priorities.

The adjustment in capital funding in 2009 will not have a significant effect on the roll out of the Transport 21 public transport programme and will not result in the postponement of the start of construction of any public transport project.

The planning of the major transport capital projects identified in Transport 21 is continuing and these will be released for construction as soon as they are through statutory procedures and the available financial resources permit and consistent with the priorities I have outlined.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to commence the preparation of a successor to Transport 21 in 2011. This work will take account of the updated CSO population projections.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

78. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Transport the progress made to date in reducing transport emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46447/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Meaningful progress towards reducing transport greenhouse gas emissions will only be achieved through undertaking a comprehensive set of measures over an extended period.

The present National Climate Change Strategy contains a number of measures to reduce transport emissions, including technology improvements, excise relief for biofuels, traffic measures in the Greater Dublin Area, rebalancing of motor taxes, fuel economy labelling, modal shift through Transport 21, alignment of spatial planning and transport investment and efficient driving awareness. Notwithstanding these measures, the benefits of which have yet to be fully realised, emissions from the transport sector have continued to grow very much in line with economic growth, a trend that is normal in other developed countries.

It is clear to me that more needs to be done if the transport sector is to play its part in reducing emissions generally. I signalled that when I launched a public consultation process on sustainable transport in February of this year. The detailed issues I raised and the public's response are available on www.sustainabletravel.ie.

Following on from that consultation process, it is my intention to publish the Sustainable Travel and Transport Action Plan, which will detail the measures that need to be taken not

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only to reduce emissions but also to enhance competitiveness, reduce congestion, deliver dividends in relation to public health and social inclusion and improve quality of life, as early as possible in 2009.

Departmental Staff.

79. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Transport the reason eight staff vacancies in his Department's information and communications technology unit remain unfilled for two years thus affecting the capacity of his Department to plan and deliver the ICT service that his Department needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46464/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): As part of an overall review of my Department's staffing requirements and following a review of ICT strategy, 8 additional posts were allocated to Information Services Division during 2007.

While a number of these vacancies were filled, a number of other staff left the Division due to, for example, promotions, staff rotations and the need to release staff under the Decentralisation programme. There were also difficulties in filling some of the remaining vacancies due to the specialized nature of these posts. As a result the overall complement of ICT staff was not reached.

The requirement on the Department to reduce overall staff numbers means that a number of the vacancies have had to be suppressed.

As part of the Action Plan prepared in response to the findings in the Organisational Review Programme (ORP), my Department will review the allocation of resources required for delivery of our strategies, including delivery of the ICT Strategy. The Department will also seek support from our agencies and other Departments with relevant expertise to assist us in furthering ICT priorities.

Public Transport.

80. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Transport if he will reinstate the public transport fuel rebate; his views on measures to replace the public transport fuel rebate which includes school transport services and public and private transport operators in view of the difficulties that the transport and tourism sectors are experiencing at the moment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46352/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): As already stated in my answer to question numbers 28 and 33 on 1 October last and to eight subsequent questions in the House, the Finance Act 2008 provided for the removal of excise duty reliefs in the bus sector with effect from 1 November 2008. Since this is in line with our EU obligations, there is no power to restore the scheme.

The position in regard to school transport is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Education and Science.

Port Development.

81. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Transport if he is reviewing the governance arrangements in place for Dublin Port; his views on the position of members of the board of the Port of Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46368/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): The corporate governance arrangements for Dublin Port Company are laid out in the Companies Acts, the Harbours Act 1996 and the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

The structure of the port company boards is outlined in section 30 of the Act. In the case of Dublin Port Company, there are three local authority directors, two employee directors and one CEO director. The remaining six directors are Ministerial appointees.

The Harbours (Amendment) Bill 2008, which is currently at Committee Stage in the Seanad, proposes changes to the structure of port company boards. The Bill proposes to remove the statutory right for local authorities to elect three directors, and to reduce the number of employee directors in the larger port companies from two to one. This will reduce the size of the boards from the current twelve to eight.

82. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Transport if he has received representations in relation to a link-up or merger of Dublin Port Company and Drogheda Port Company leading to a joint development for large scale port traffic at Bremore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46372/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): I am not aware of any representations received in my Department relating to a link-up or merger of Dublin Port Company and Drogheda Port Company leading to a joint development for large-scale port traffic at Bremore.

Drogheda Port Company has for some time been developing a proposal for a new port facility at Bremore in the context of a proposed joint venture arrangement. This proposal is consistent with established ports policy and the company is continuing to progress its plans.

Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 77.

School Travel Patterns.

84. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to tackle the school run; if he has had recent contact with the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in advancing the green schools pilot project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46491/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): School travel patterns are influenced by a wide range of factors including distance of residence from the school, availability of choice in relation to transportation, existence of safe routes to schools, standards of roads and footpaths in the vicinity of schools and personal choice. The Sustainable Travel and Transport Action Plan, which I intend to publish early in 2009 and which benefited from consultation with relevant Departments, including the Department of Education and Science, will refer to this aspect of travel in some detail.

My Department is well aware of An Taisce's Green-Schools Travel Module and I intend to continue, in 2009, to provide significant financial support to the Module, through the Dublin Transportation Office. The Module is planned to encompass 534 schools next year.

Light Rail Projects.

85. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Transport if the LUAS line BX/D and phases 2 and 3 of the western rail corridor and the Dublin rail interconnector have been deferred or rescheduled; the estimated completion date of each of these projects; if Metro West and the Lucan LUAS have been abandoned; when the railway safety programme will be fully completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46344/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The provision of increased capacity will be a key consideration in determining investment priorities in the coming years. Earlier this year,

[Deputy Noel Dempsey.]

I mandated the Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) to proceed with planning the delivery of Line BX/D, based on the Agency's preferred route for Line BX and the use of the Old Broadstone railway alignment for Line D.

It will not be possible to fully construct Luas Line BX at the same time as construction of Metro North because of the traffic management implications which would arise in the city centre. The RPA is developing a construction strategy for Luas Line BX, in close co-operation with Dublin City Council (DCC), which includes use of Metro North construction sites and recognises the traffic management requirements of the city centre. The RPA is also engaging with DCC on the basis of the contemporaneous delivery of Lines BX and D. In this regard it is the intention of the RPA to make a single railway order application for the combined Line BX/D to An Bord Pleanála in the latter part of next year.

The emerging preferred route for Metro West was announced by the RPA in July 2007. The selected route alignment will connect Tallaght, Clondalkin, Liffey Valley and Blanchardstown and also connect with Metro North at Metro Park, close to Dublin Airport. It will provide for integration with the Luas Red Line, the Kildare and Maynooth suburban rail lines and the Lucan Luas line.

A further round of consultation is now underway to provide greater definition to the route after which the RPA will proceed with the preparation of a railway order application. The RPA plans to apply for a railway order in 2009.

The RPA announced the emerging preferred route corridor for the proposed Lucan-city centre Luas Line in October this year. The selected route is based on route options that were originally presented to the public in September 2007. Having selected the route corridor, RPA will begin the next phase of consultation focused on design. This consultation will confirm the specific location of the alignment, Luas stops, Park and Ride and a depot.

The second Railway Safety Programme commenced in 2004 and will be completed, as scheduled, at the end of 2008. The programme involved a €444 million investment in renewing the Iarnród Eireann fixed infrastructure (including track, fencing, signalling, level-crossings, bridges, cuttings and embankments etc.) in order to bring it up to an acceptable safety standard. A further €68 million was invested in enhancing the safety culture and safety management systems in Iarnród Eireann, through measures such as safety training, development of standards, safety auditing and the development of tools such as the Risk Model and the Infrastructure Asset Management database. Discussions on the composition of the third Railway Safety Programme are ongoing.

The Interconnector, which is now known as DART Underground, is planned to be completed in 2015. Further funding for this vital project was approved by my Department in November 2008 and I understand that an application for a railway order will be made in September 2009.

The first phase of the Western Rail Corridor will be completed by mid-2009. I understand that further studies are planned for 2009 to determine up to date costings of phases 2 and 3 of the Western Rail Corridor.

The start and completion dates of Transport 21 projects, which have not yet commenced, will be determined by the funding allocation available during the current difficult economic climate. The commencement dates for these projects will also be influenced by the time taken for public consultation, the relevant statutory process and the procurement and contract award processes.

Rural Transport Services.

86. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Transport the policies being adopted to sustain and develop the rural transport programme. [46377/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Government's continued commitment to the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) is reflected in Towards 2016 which includes phased increases in the annual RTP allocation over time.

Euro 9 million was provided for the RTP in 2007 which led to an increase in the frequency of a number of existing services, extended area coverage, and additional groups of passengers accessing rural transport. Euro 10 million was provided for the Rural Transport Programme in 2008 and the 2009 allocation is Euro 11 million.

The RTP is being expanded on a phased basis in consultation with individual rural community transport groups, with a goal of achieving nation-wide coverage in due course in line with Government policy.

Road Safety.

87. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for Transport the outcome of his recent meeting with transport Ministers regarding the cross border enforcement of traffic laws in all 27 EU Member States; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46496/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): I attended a meeting of EU Transport Ministers on 9 December and the draft Directive on Enforcement in the Field of Road Safety was one of the items on the agenda. In this context, a progress report on the draft Directive, presented by the French Presidency was noted. The draft Directive does not relate to the cross-border enforcement of all traffic laws, but specifically to the offences of drink driving, speeding, failure to wear seat belts, and failure to stop at a red light.

The draft Directive will now be a matter for the incoming Czech Presidency.

Question No. 88 answered with Question No. 77.

Air Services.

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport the scale, scope and extent of discussions he, his Department or other Government Departments or representatives thereof have had with companies (details supplied) in the context of the recent takeover bid for Aer Lingus; if an improved or enhanced offer or offers in respect of Government shareholdings has been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46397/08]

288. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Transport if he or his officials have held discussions with Aer Lingus regarding a Shannon/Heathrow service in view of the strategic importance of this route for the mid west region; if he will report on these discussions; if his attention has been drawn to plans to reinstate the route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47110/08]

295. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport his preferred options for the future development of air passenger transport to and from Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47226/08]

296. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport the discussions he has had with management or agents of a company (details supplied) in the context of speculation on the future of Aer Lingus; if the reinstatement of Aer Lingus flights from Shannon is part of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47227/08]

297. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport the number of meetings or contacts he has had with representatives of airlines in the context of the future development and structure of Aer Lingus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47228/08]

298. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport the number and nature of meetings he has had with persons, groups, bodies or agencies involved in a possible takeover or purchase of share options in Aer Lingus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47229/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89, 288 and 295 to 298, inclusive, together.

I refer the Deputies to my response to a priority PQ answered today, Dáil Question No. 60.

On 3 December, I accepted a request from the CEO of Ryanair, as a courtesy, for an informal meeting at which the CEO outlined, in general terms, the main features of their proposed cash offer for all shares in Aer Lingus.

On 11 December I agreed to meet with the CEO and Chairman of Aer Lingus who wished to convey to me their opposition to the Ryanair offer.

I did not indicate to either Ryanair or Aer Lingus any policy position in relation to the proposed takeover. The Deputy will be aware that both companies made public statements following the meetings.

As regards the reinstatement of the Aer Lingus Shannon Heathrow service I have taken every opportunity I could since August of last year to make it clear to Aer Lingus Management and Board Members with whom I had contact to stress the importance Government attaches to the resumption of a Shannon Heathrow service. I will continue to do so in the future.

Criminal Prosecutions.

90. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Minister for Transport if he has taken cases against road hauliers for breaching regulations since 2006; if so the number that have resulted in successful prosecutions since 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46498/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Gardai are responsible for prosecutions of all offences under the Road Traffic Acts. In addition, the Road Safety Authority since its establishment in 2006, is responsible for the enforcement of legislation in relation to licensing, breaches of drivers hours and tachograph rules, the roadworthiness of vehicles and safety standards and the prosecution of related offences.

My Department has not taken any cases against road hauliers since 2006.

Light Rail Projects.

91. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for Transport his views on the development of light rail systems for Cork, Limerick and Galway; if he will publish the feasibility studies for each of the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46349/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): In the 2007 Programme for Government, we made a commitment to carry out feasibility studies into Luas-style Light Rail Transport (LRT) systems in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford within two years. I have since asked the local authorities undertaking the studies to include consideration of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).

I expect these studies to be completed within the original timeframe and to be published.

Road Safety.

92. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Transport when he will place the Road

Safety Authority operated scheme for approved driving instructors on a statutory setting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46473/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): The Road Safety Authority has submitted proposals for the registration and regulation of driving instructors to my Department. Consideration of these proposals is at an advanced stage, and I expect to be in a position to make the necessary regulations shortly.

Public Transport.

93. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Transport when he will introduce legislation to replace the 1932 bus licensing law; what the heads of the Bill will be; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46351/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Proposals for a new bus licensing regime will be contained a forthcoming Public Transport Regulation Bill which is currently being drafted. The Bill will deal with the replacement of the Road Transport Act 1932 and the provisions of the Transport Act 1958 that relate to the provision of bus services by the State bus companies. It will also encompass provisions relating to the subvented bus market outside the Greater Dublin Area in a manner consistent with EU Regulation No. 1370/2007 on public service obligations and similar to the contractual framework used in the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008.

It is my intention to seek Government approval to a General Scheme of the Bill shortly with a view to publication next year.

Departmental Staff.

94. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Transport the reason some Department staff who are underutilised are not moved to areas of greatest need as recommended in the report of the organisational review programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46466/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): There have been considerable fluctuations in the functions of my Department since its inception in 2002 including taking on responsibility for maritime matters in 2006 and for regional and local roads and the management of the National Vehicle and Driver File in January 2008. The net effect has been a significant increase in both the policy and service delivery functions of the Department and a great degree of change for staff. The frequent churn and change and the fact that the Department is evidently stretched, as acknowledged by the Organisational Review Programme (ORP) has militated against rapid re-deployment of staff to areas of greatest need in recent years. In response to the findings of the ORP my Department has prepared an action plan which includes the implementation of a structured approach to the assignment, development and promotion of staff. The structure of the Department is being re-aligned to focus on updated priorities and a resource capacity study will be conducted during 2009 to review the capacity of the reducing staff quota to deliver on the Department's agenda and how available resources might be deployed more efficiently.

Ferry Services.

95. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport his views on the re-establishment of the Cork-Swansea ferry as a link to facilitate the development of tourism in the south west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40980/08]

128. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport his views on whether the suspension of the Cork-Swansea ferry in 2007 has had a detrimental effect on tourism in the south west; if attempts have been made to quantify these adverse effects; and if his attention has been drawn to the efforts to re-establish that tourist link. [40981/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 95 and 128 together.

The Cork Swansea Ferry Company suspended its service in 2007. I can appreciate the concerns that have been expressed in the region in response to this development. My colleague, Minister for Transport Noel Dempsey, T.D., recently met with representatives from county councils in Cork and Kerry who outlined to him the detrimental effects this suspension has had in the South West.

Quantification of adverse effects on tourism in the region would be a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Arts, Sports and Tourism, Mr. Martin Cullen, T.D.

The Port of Cork Company is continuing to engage in discussions with a number of interested parties and stakeholders with a view to the latter commencing a new passenger and freight service on the Cork-Swansea route. The Port of Cork Company also completed a feasibility study on the route and this indicated that a service, subject to procuring a suitable vessel, could be feasible for an operator for year round passenger and freight operations. The Port of Cork Company will continue to do what it can to facilitate resumption of a service.

As Minister of State for Transport, I feel it is important that the market offers a diverse range of viable maritime links in and out of the State. This is vital to facilitate trade and tourism. I certainly hope that the current efforts show that the service is commercially viable and that it can be resumed as soon as possible.

State Airports.

96. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Transport the status of the proposed separation of Dublin, Cork and Shannon airports; if he will repeal the State Airports Act 2004; if he will revise the debt allocation arrangements that are in place for the three airports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46343/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The State Airports Act, 2004 provides the framework for the establishment of Shannon and Cork as independent airports. As part of the airport restructuring process the boards of Cork and Shannon airport are required to prepare business plans for eventual separation.

All three airport business plans have to be coordinated by the Dublin Airport Authority for eventual approval by myself and the Minister for Finance. Among the requirements to be satisfied in advance of separation is the need to ensure the financial sustainability of all three state airports.

I have now received business plans from each of the state airports and I have been in consultation with the three Airport Authorities concerning the approach to the separation of Cork and Shannon having regard to the current economic climate and trends in the aviation market generally. I hope to announce the outcome of those consultations shortly.

I should add that the repeal of the State Airports Act, 2004 does not arise.

International Agreements.

97. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport if he will provide a full report on the recent intergovernmental agreement on full US pre-clearance facilities for Shannon and

Dublin airports; if this new agreement will require extra information sharing between the Irish and US authorities for Irish passengers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46342/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I was very pleased to sign an Inter-Governmental Agreement for the provision of Pre-Clearance services at Irish airports with Secretary Chertoff of the US Department of Homeland Security in Washington last month. The agreement provides for the pre-clearance of passengers in respect of U.S. customs, immigration and agricultural matters prior to boarding of aircraft in Ireland for U.S. destinations.

I anticipate that the agreement will bring major benefits to Ireland such as under it aircraft will be able land at less congested and less expensive domestic terminals in international airports or at domestic airports in the U.S. This will facilitate onward connections for passengers to other parts of the U.S. Passengers will also benefit from uninterrupted passage through US airports on arrival.

Under the agreement pre-clearance officers of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Service will be authorised, under Irish law, to carry out certain functions at designated pre-clearance areas of Irish airports in relation to passengers and aircraft bound for the U.S. that would otherwise be carried out on arrival in the U.S.

There is no provision in the agreement for the sharing of additional information between the Irish and the U.S. authorities.

Pre-clearance will require new legislation and Departmental officials have commenced the preparation of a general scheme of a Pre-clearance Bill with a view to having the legislation in place for pre-clearance to be operational in Shannon in the Summer of 2009.

Departmental Properties.

98. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Transport if he will improve the maintenance of his Department's buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46451/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department, in conjunction with the Office of Public Works, has agreed a multi-annual maintenance programme which is designed to ensure that the Department's building stock is retained in good condition. This programme consists of a variety of maintenance measures that will progressively improve and upgrade the standard of accommodation.

My Department is also engaged in a consolidation of its current locations with the aim of reducing the number of its locations in Dublin from six buildings to three by the end of 2009. It is envisaged that this consolidation will permit a more focused and cost-effective approach to maintenance works.

Road Safety.

99. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Transport the progress that has been made with his opposite numbers in Northern Ireland or in the UK regarding a common structure for penalty points; the problems with same; when a united approach will be achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40242/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): The enforcement on foreign registered drivers of penalties for road traffic offences is a complex legal and administrative matter for many States, and my Department is pursuing this question at European, British/Irish and North/South levels.

[Deputy Noel Ahern.]

We are working with the authorities of the United Kingdom on the mutual recognition of penalty points, but a recent feasibility study carried out by the UK Department for Transport has underlined complex legal issues and the probable need for new primary legislation both here and in the United Kingdom in due course.

It is expected it will be some time before the mutual recognition of penalty points is in place.

Departmental Programmes.

100. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport when he will publish the Sustainable Travel and Transport Plan; the reason this national policy document has been delayed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46354/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): While I had previously indicated my intention to publish the Sustainable Travel and Transport Action Plan by end 2008, it is now my intention to publish it as early as possible in 2009.

Road Network.

101. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Transport if the Dublin outer orbital road remains his policy; and if so, when he expects construction to begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46484/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): As the Deputy will be aware, as Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in respect of the national roads programme element of Transport 21. The implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Act 1993 in conjunction with the relevant local authorities.

Neither Transport 21 nor the National Development Plan provides any funding for a Leinster Orbital Route to be constructed in the period to 2015. The Government has already made it clear, under Transport 21, that priorities for the roads investment programme after the completion of the major interurban network in 2010, will be the Atlantic Road Corridor as well as the improvement of other key national primary routes and the targeted improvement of certain national secondary routes.

The Leinster Orbital Route proposal remains an important potential element of our longer-term infrastructure development. My Department will continue to liaise with the roads and planning authorities concerned to ensure that route options are preserved free of impediment for this potential project.

Road Safety.

102. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport if he is reviewing road traffic legislation; if he has made recommendations to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on updating road safety legislation in view of the large number of motorists who have had speeding offences thrown out of court because of legal loopholes; if he has had contacts with the Road Safety Authority in terms of a more comprehensive review of road safety legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46360/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): I take it the Deputy is referring to the recent speeding cases struck out by a District Court, and questions as to whether there was a requirement to publish a notice in *Iris Oifigiúil* of the making of special

speed limit bye-laws by local authorities. There are no such requirements under the Road Traffic Act 2004 or in the guidelines made under it relating to the making of such bye-laws.

The enforcement and prosecution of speeding offences and any further action in relation to these particular cases is a matter for An Garda Síochána and the DPP.

The Road Traffic Acts are kept under review and amended from time to time, and my Department is in regular contact with all the agencies involved in road safety and traffic, including my colleague the Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform, An Garda Síochána and the Road Safety Authority. A Road Traffic Bill is currently being drafted for publication early next year.

Rail Services.

103. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport the reason he gave a 10% increase in fares to Iarnród Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46457/08]

106. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Transport if he has placed conditions on the 10% fare rises for Irish Rail; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46454/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 106 together.

An average 10% fares increase was recently approved for Irish Rail, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann to cover cost increases in fuel earlier this year, labour, other general costs and also taking into account the overall financial position of the CIE companies.

The fares increase was granted subject to the implementation of a package of customer focused/performance based measures to promote the greater use of public transport through, *inter alia*,

- the early implementation of the recommendations of the forthcoming cost and efficiency review of Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann currently being undertaken and a plan in that regard;
- promotion of the greater use of smartcard ticketing and the preparation of a specific action plan in that regard;
- the introduction next year, on a pilot basis, of mobile phone and web-based real-time passenger information for bus services in the Dublin area.

Park and Ride Facilities.

104. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Transport if he will review the nationwide provisions in place for commuter park and ride facilities in view of the need to encourage a modal shift to public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46362/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department supports park and ride as having a role to play in encouraging commuters to switch to public transport. The provision of dedicated park and ride facilities at railway stations is a matter for Irish Rail, and at Luas and proposed Metro sites it is a matter for the RPA. Local authorities also have a role in providing commuter park and ride facilities.

In the Greater Dublin Area, the TAS consultancy Report for the DTO indicated that overall bus-based park and ride has a limited role to play because of the population size and distances involved. However, the Report indicated that there is some potential for satellite park and ride facilities. The local authorities in the hinterland area of the Greater Dublin Area have been

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examining the potential of such satellite park and ride facilities, and while funding has been made available by my Department no proposals have been submitted by local authorities as yet. In at least one case, this is due to planning difficulties.

In Cork, one very successful park & ride has been developed on the southern side of the City. A proposal for a second park and ride is currently being actively developed by Cork City Council on the western side of the city. In Galway, Limerick, and Waterford the local authorities are continuing to examine the feasibility of permanent park & ride while a temporary Christmas park & ride is currently being operated by Galway City Council.

My Department makes funding available to local authorities for the development of park and ride facilities both in the Greater Dublin Area and in the regional cities and is prepared to provide capital support for such facilities on the basis of sound business plans from proposers for the projects.

I have no plans at this time for a review of park and ride provisions nationwide.

Light Rail Project.

105. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Transport if he expects Metro West to be completed by 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46475/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Provision will be made in the 2009 grant allocations to facilitate significant progress in the planning and design of Metro West. The RPA intends to submit an application for a railway order for the project by the end of 2009.

The start and completion dates of Transport 21 projects, which have not yet commenced, will be determined by the outcome of the statutory approval and procurement processes and the funding allocation available during the current difficult economic climate.

Question No. 106 answered with Question No. 103.

Public Transport.

107. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Transport his plans in response to CIE claims of its major budget deficit in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46480/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Priority Dáil Question No. 62, which I answered earlier today.

Proposed Legislation.

108. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Transport his views on amendments to the Harbours Bill 2008; if he will ensure that the level of employee director and county councillor representation on the board of the six national ports is maintained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46369/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): The Harbours (Amendment) Bill 2008 was published in July 2008 and is currently at Committee Stage in Seanad Éireann. The primary purpose of the Bill is to give effect to certain aspects of the Government's Ports Policy Statement, launched in 2005.

A total of 17 amendments were proposed for consideration at Seanad Committee Stage, including an amendment in relation to the proposed removal of the statutory representation of local authority directors on port company boards.

The various amendments remain the subject of debate and consideration in the Seanad and I look forward to continuing that debate in the stages that remain in the both the Seanad and the Dáil.

Road Safety.

109. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Transport the number of times he is briefed by the Medical Bureau of Road Safety; his views on recent submissions by the MBRS to increase the funding of programmes to monitor and detect drug drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46364/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): I have visited the Bureau on two occasions this year, most recently at the official opening of their state of the art facilities at UCD Belfield, and my officials are in regular contact with management and staff on a range of issues. My Department is represented on the Board of the Bureau and this mechanism also facilitates good communication between both organisations.

It is a function of the Bureau to undertake research on drink and drug driving and to keep abreast of international developments in these areas, and the Bureau provides information and advice on these matters to my Department.

Funding of €4.4 million was provided for the Bureau this year, and my Department will endeavour, in these challenging times, to ensure a reasonable level of funding for the Bureau for 2009.

110. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to reform the penalty points system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46383/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): Penalty points were first applied in October 2002 to the offence of speeding and have been rolled out in stages between then and September 2006 in respect of a total of 36 offences. The focus of the roll-out of the penalty points system to date has been on road safety critical offences that relate primarily to the behaviour of drivers.

The progressive extension of the penalty point system will continue to be pursued and the system is being kept under review.

Light Rail Projects.

111. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for Transport if he will report on progress on the big dig infrastructure works necessary in Dublin city centre to facilitate the construction of metro north, the LUAS link-up and the Dublin rail interconnector; if adjustments have been made to the contingency plans of the big dig in view of the reports on the deferral of the LUAS Line BX; the stakeholders involved in planning for the big dig; when he will start a public information and awareness campaign on the big dig; the major traffic changes that will be made in April 2009 or later in 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46348/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) lodged their application for a railway order for Metro North with An Bord Pleanála on 18th September last. Subject to the grant of an enforceable railway order, preparatory works such as utility diversions will commence in 2009. Good progress is also being made in planning work for the DART underground (Interconnector) and Irish Rail has set itself a target of making a railway order application in 2009.

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Pending the establishment of the Dublin Transport Authority, the Dublin City Manager chairs the Dublin Transport 21 Implementation Group which co-ordinates and oversees the investment programme in Dublin. The Group comprises the chief executives of the principal implementing agencies, an Assistant Secretary from my Department, the Fingal County Manager, the Director of Traffic and representatives of the Garda Síochána and business associations.

Two sub-groups have been established and the business community is represented on both:

- The Contingency Planning Group is overseeing the preparation by Dublin City Council of a traffic management strategy for the Transport 21 construction phase, focussed particularly on the city centre. This strategy will take account of other construction activity by local authorities, public bodies and private developers.
- The Communications Group is preparing a co-ordinated communications strategy for the construction period of major Transport 21 projects, such as Metro North and the Interconnector. The theme of this strategy will be “Dublin is open for business”.

In addition, Dublin City Council is holding focus meetings with the city centre business community while the RPA continues to meet individual businesses and residents’ organisations along the Metro North preferred alignment to inform them of its plans and to address issues of concern. I understand that in early in 2009 a multi-agency joint strategy, including a public information and awareness campaign, will be rolled out.

It will not be possible to fully construct Luas Line BX at the same time as construction of Metro North because of the traffic management implications which would arise in the city centre. The RPA is developing a construction strategy for Luas Line BX, in close co-operation with Dublin City Council, which includes use of Metro North construction sites and recognises the traffic management requirements of the city centre. The RPA is engaging with Dublin City Council on the basis of the contemporaneous delivery of Lines BX and D (City Centre — Liffey Junction). It is the intention of the RPA to make a single railway order application for the combined Line BX/D to An Bord Pleanála in the latter part of next year.

I hold regular quarterly meetings with the Transport 21 implementing agencies, An Garda Síochána and business organisations in Dublin to identify the principal concerns of the business community and to review progress on traffic planning for the construction phase of Transport 21 projects. I last met with the Dublin City Centre Stakeholders Group on 29 September 2008. It was agreed at that meeting that the next meeting of the Stakeholders Group will be in January 2009.

Departmental Agencies.

112. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Transport when the new Dublin Transport Authority will be fully operational. [46376/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): It is my intention to establish the Dublin Transport Authority as early as possible in 2009 once I am satisfied that it has the financial and staffing resources necessary to enable it discharge effectively the functions assigned to it by the Oireachtas under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008.

Discussions are currently taking place between my Department and the Department of Finance on the financing and staffing of the Authority against the background of the difficult position faced by the Exchequer as outlined in the recent Budget.

Taxi Regulations.

113. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport if he has received and reviewed the recent legal opinion (details supplied) prepared for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport on the taxi sector and the possibility of introducing a cap or moratorium on the issuing of taxi licences; his views on the legal opinion; the deadline for the submission of the report by the Taxi Regulator on the taxi industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46339/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Under the Taxi Regulation Act 2003, the Commission for Taxi Regulation is the independent public body responsible for the development and maintenance of the regulatory framework for the control and operation, including licensing, of taxis, hackneys, limousines and their drivers. However, the Commission does not have any remit or statutory power under the Taxi Regulation Act in relation to the control of the number of licences issued.

My Department has received a copy of the opinion of the Senior Counsel on taxi deregulation referred to by the Deputy. In response I wish to say that I have no proposals to introduce quantitative restrictions on entry to the taxi market. I do support, however, the application of standards of a qualitative nature, which are determined by the Commission. The proposed new standards for the taxi industry were published in November 2007 and I understand they will be introduced on a phased basis from next month and will be fully rolled out by 2012.

In addition, the Commission has appointed consultants to undertake an extensive economic review of the small public service vehicle sector. I understand that the review will be completed early in the New Year.

Port Development.

114. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Transport his views on the progress to date in implementing the recommendations of the 2003 high level review of commercial ports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46444/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): The High Level Review of the State Commercial Ports, carried out by Raymond Burke Consulting in association with Posford Haskoning Consulting Engineers and Farrell Grant Sparks, was published in May 2003. This was the first such review of the port companies established under the terms of the Harbours Act 1996.

Subsequently, the Review was the subject of an extensive public consultation process on its findings and recommendations. The work undertaken as part of the Review, and the earlier statutory Performance Audit of the State Port Companies in 2001 carried out by Jonathan Packer, together with the submissions and observations received during these processes, fed into and informed the development of the Ports Policy Statement in 2005. The development of a ports policy statement was one of the recommendations of the Review itself.

A key focus of both the High Level Review and the Ports Policy Statement was the need to further enhance the commercial ethos conferred upon the port companies by the Harbours Act 1996. To that end, important recommendations were made *inter alia* regarding board size and composition.

The Harbours (Amendment) Bill 2008 is intended to give a legislative basis to these recommendations by reducing the number of directors on port company boards from 12 to 8, removing statutory local authority representation, ending the practice of appointing port users to boards and standardising the number of employee directors at one per port company.

[Deputy Noel Ahern.]

The Bill also contains other amendments to support the recommendations contained in the Review and Ports Policy Statement designed to enhance the commercial ethos of the State port companies. These proposals include allowing port companies to invest in commercial opportunities outside their harbour limits and introducing a greater degree of flexibility regarding borrowing by port companies, which will aid their continued development and progress.

The High Level Review also specified the desirability of recognising the integral role of the ports sector in the overall transport chain by transferring responsibility for the ports from the then Department of Communications, Marine, Energy and Natural Resources to the Department of Transport. This transfer took place in January 2006.

The High Level Review and the subsequent development of the Ports Policy Statement provided a clear framework for the development of the commercial ports sector in the State. The Harbours (Amendment) Bill 2008, when enacted, will considerably supplement the progress made since the High Level Review was published in 2003.

115. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport when the report on the future of Dublin Port will be published; if the report will recommend changes to the future location and size of Dublin Port; if he will publish new legislation to accompany the report; if measures in the report will require new legislation; his views on the proposed reclamation of 21 hectares at Dublin Port; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46370/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): Indecon International Economic Consultants have been commissioned to undertake a comprehensive review of the role of Dublin Port as provided for under the National Development Plan 2007 — 2013.

This study will examine the feasibility of various scenarios relating to Dublin Port, including:

- Existing port activities continuing to expand with demand,
- Relocating all or part of Dublin Port's existing activities to an alternative location(s),
- Port activities continuing at current levels with growth being catered for at alternative locations.

Work on the Dublin Port study is progressing and I expect a final report for my consideration in the early part of 2009. I will consider the report's findings upon receipt and take appropriate action.

I am aware that Dublin Port Company has lodged a planning application with An Bord Pleanála under the Planning and Development (Strategic Development) Act 2006 to reclaim and develop 21 hectares of foreshore within the port area.

As a "prescribed body" under that Act, I was formally notified of the application and my Department has written to An Bord Pleanála with an update on the progress of the Dublin Port study.

Aer Lingus Outsourcing.

116. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the position the three Government appointed board of directors at Aer Lingus took on proposals for the outsourcing of key ground and cabin crew jobs at the airline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46341/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The State's nominated directors on the Board of Aer Lingus are mandated to ensure that all future decisions of the company that have significant implications for wider Government, aviation or regional development policies are considered at Board level. The mandate specifically states that the possible decisions concerned would include decisions on proposals with significant local or national economic implications including a direct impact on employment.

It is a matter for the directors concerned to respect the mandate in the context of their overriding fiduciary duties under the Companies Acts to act in the best interests of the company and shareholders generally.

I am pleased to note that the Unions and management at Aer Lingus have found a mutually acceptable way forward at a very challenging time for the aviation industry generally.

Question No. 117 answered with Question No. 68.

Proposed Legislation.

118. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Transport if he is planning to change the blood alcohol level for drivers; if so, when he will introduce the necessary legislation; the level to which he plans to reduce the blood alcohol concentration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46363/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): The Government recently gave its approval to the drafting of a Road Traffic and Transport Bill, which inter alia proposes a reduction in the legal Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) level for drivers. It is hoped to have the Bill published early next year.

Employment Rights.

119. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport the number of inspectors monitoring the wages and conditions of maritime workers on vessels in Irish ports; the number of random inspections carried out each year from 2005 to 2008; if he will strengthen the monitoring of wages and conditions of mariners in Irish ports and water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46371/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): The terms and conditions of employment on board vessels are a matter primarily for the State in which the ship is registered.

A comprehensive body of Irish employment rights legislation governs the conditions of employment of workers on board vessels under the Irish flag. This includes legislation dealing with minimum wages.

If the vessel is not registered in Ireland, then the port state control inspections cover the International Maritime Organisation's various Safety and Environment Protection Conventions as well as the International Labour Organisation Conventions. The inspection of the latter includes the welfare of the crew (food, accommodation, hours of work etc) but would exclude rates of pay.

The number of marine surveyors, who carry out a range of duties, employed by my Department currently stands at 22.

The figures for port state control inspections under the Paris Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on foreign flag merchant ships visiting Irish ports in 2005 to 2007 were 422, 440, and 410 respectively. Inspections to date in 2008 are just over 400.

[Deputy Noel Ahern.]

In addition to the Port State Control Inspections, safety inspections on ro-ro passenger ferries and high-speed passenger craft operating on scheduled international routes to/from Ireland are conducted. The figures for these inspections are 24 each year for 2005 and 2006 with 31 last year and 28 to date in 2008.

Ireland has consistently supported the International Labour Organisation in its efforts to promote global labour standards for seafarers. A new consolidated Maritime Labour Convention was adopted in February 2006 at the 94th International Labour Conference in Geneva. Ireland was represented at the Conference by a tripartite delegation consisting of Government officials, nominees of the employers (IBEC) and of the workers (ICTU). The new Convention sets out clear principles and rights for seafarers. EU member states are committed to ratifying the new Convention by 31 December 2010 and it is expected to come into force internationally in 2011.

Question No. 120 answered with Question No. 77.

Question No. 121 answered with Question No. 71.

Public Transport.

122. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport when the integrated ticketing project will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46384/08]

123. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Transport the position regarding the integrated ticketing project; the final completion date for the full integrated ticketing scheme; the estimated costs for developing and implementing integrated ticketing; if Bus Éireann will be fully incorporated into the integrated ticketing scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46374/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 122 and 123 together.

A smart card for public transport services in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) is available on Luas services. In recent months all buses in the Dublin Bus fleet have been fitted with smart card validators and smart cards are now in use on these buses in respect of a number of ticket products such as annual and monthly bus tickets, annual and monthly integrated bus and rail tickets and 5-day rambler tickets.

Irish Rail will launch its own interim smart card scheme from next summer. These smart card schemes will enable both users and operators to familiarise themselves with the use and flexibilities of smart card systems in advance of the introduction of the single smart card scheme.

From late next year, a single smart card will be introduced for ticket products on Dublin Bus and Luas services. This smart card will also have an electronic purse capability for use on both services.

This single smart card system will then be extended to Irish Rail DART and commuter rail services within a further 12 months. The new gating systems at Irish Rail stations in the GDA have been designed to handle the new smart card.

In relation to Bus Éireann, the smart card will be introduced on a pilot basis on a number of its commuter routes in late 2010. It is also envisaged that private bus operators will join the scheme over this timeframe.

The overall capital budget for the project is €55.4 million.

Marine Safety.

124. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Transport if he will introduce new regulations on the issue of overloading of private leisure boats; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46483/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): My Department's approach to maritime safety involves an appropriate combination of statutory regulation, safety awareness promotion and enforcement. The balance to be struck between regulation and safety awareness promotion has a particular significance in relation to recreational craft, which are intended for leisure and sporting purposes. It is the responsibility of owners and operators of recreational craft to ensure that a vessel is properly operated, equipped and maintained.

To assist them my Department developed and published in 2006, the Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft following a public consultation process. The Code sets out in a user-friendly way, the legislative requirements and standards relating to recreational craft and guidance on best practice. It includes information on legal requirements on voyage planning relating to amongst other things, the capability of the boat, pre-departure safety checks and safety equipment.

The Code also outlines the requirements of the Recreational Craft Directive (RCD) which has been transposed into Irish law. The RCD provides that recreational craft placed on the market since June 1998 must comply with specified safety requirements. These requirements include being appropriately marked with the number of persons recommended by the manufacturer for which the boat is designed to carry when underway and the manufacturer's maximum recommended load for which the boat is designed.

The Code of Practice gives advice to members of the public on the purchasing of recreational craft having regard to the requirements of the Recreational Craft Directive.

I consider that the legislation in place together with the Code of Practice is an appropriate and proportional response to addressing the issue of overloading on recreational craft. If observed they can save lives. There is an onus on all of us to take personal responsibility for our safety whether on the roads or on the water.

Road Network.

125. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Transport the final costs for the construction of the Dublin Port Tunnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46367/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in respect of the national roads programme element of Transport 21. The implementation of individual national road projects, including the Dublin Port Tunnel, as well as the responsibility to secure the provision of a safe and efficient network of national roads, are matters for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Act, 1993 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

The construction of the Dublin Port Tunnel project was procured by Dublin City Council and funded through the NRA. In relation to cost matters, discussions between the contractor and Dublin City Council concerning the finalisation of outstanding cost issues are continuing, utilising the relevant mechanisms set out in the contract between the parties, and I understand that good progress has been made in this area.

Parking Regulations.

126. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport if he is reviewing and updating legislation in relation to parking; his policy in relation to the growing problem of larger vehicles parking in residential areas; the measures he will take to combat this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46373/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations 1997 to 2006 are currently being reviewed and updated in my Department.

Road authorities have power under the 1997 regulations to prohibit the parking of large vehicles on a public road, at either a particular location on a public road or in a particular zone.

The road authority parking regulations can be enforced by the Garda Síochána and traffic wardens and authorised persons (vehicle clamping operators).

End-of-Life Vehicles.

127. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Transport when he will publish the results of the investigation led by his Department into the presence of Irish and foreign registered car write-offs on Irish roads; the measures he will introduce to address the problem of car write-offs on Irish roads; if that includes a system for the compulsory reporting of car write-offs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46365/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): With the assistance of data made available voluntarily by the insurance industry the Department, following analysis against the 2.5 million active vehicles on the National Vehicle and Driver File (NVDF) has written to the registered owners of 1,117 vehicles which the records indicate may still be in use on public roads. All of the data provided by insurers has now been analysed and follow up action has been taken where warranted. This exercise has now been concluded satisfactorily.

As I indicated in responses to previous similar questions voluntary arrangements with insurers have also been put in place whereby the NVDF now receives regular notifications of write off instances. These arrangements enable the NVDF to have current write off data and are operating well.

Provision of write-off data in relation imported used vehicles at the time of registration is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners.

Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 95.

Road Safety.

129. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Transport when he will publish the National Pedestrian Safety Strategy; the reason the deadline for the publication of this strategy by the third quarter of 2008 has been missed; the measures that will be contained in the pedestrian safety strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46356/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No 477 of 2006) this is a matter for the Road Safety Authority.

130. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport when he will publish legislation to facilitate the introduction of the full graduated driver licence scheme; the reason this legislation has been delayed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46358/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): The Road Safety Strategy 2007 — 2012 outlines a range of measures to be considered in relation to a Graduated Driver Licensing System. The driver licensing regulations, which were made in October 2007, providing for the introduction of a learner permit to replace the provisional licence and some other measures, were the first step in the introduction of a Graduated Driver Licensing System.

A progressive roll-out of appropriate measures is envisaged as the most practical approach for implementing the Graduated Driver Licensing System.

The Road Safety Authority is currently preparing a consultation paper on the issue, and I will consider in due course the proposals which emerge from that process.

Labour Force Statistics.

131. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Taoiseach the estimate he has made of the number and percentage of the workforce who will be over the age of 65 years in 2013, 2018, 2023 and 2028; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46654/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Pat Carey): The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the following table. The data are taken from the Population and Labour Force Projections published in April 2008.

Because of the uncertainty involved, the labour force projections are only given for the period to 2021, while the years distinguished are 2011, 2016 and 2021.

Three migration scenarios are given: M1 assumes average annual net immigration of 50,000 in the period 2006-2021, M2 36,700, while M0 assumes zero net migration.

Projected Labour Force aged 65 and over, and as a percentage of the total labour force, 2011, 2016 and 2021

		M0	M2	M1
2011	Labour force 65+ (000s)	51.1	51.5	51.6
	As a percentage of total	2.3	2.2	2.1
2016	Labour force 65+ (000s)	72.8	73.9	74.2
	As a percentage of total	3.2	2.9	2.8
2021	Labour force 65+ (000s)	96.3	98.4	99.0
	As a percentage of total	4.2	3.6	3.5

Departmental Expenditure.

132. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Taoiseach the amount of money paid by the Office of the Attorney General in respect of official business abroad by the holders of positions (details supplied) for each year since 2000 to date in 2008. [46751/08]

133. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Taoiseach the amount of money paid by the Office of the Attorney General in respect of official business abroad by each lawyer at the equivalent grade of assistant secretary level for each year since 2000 to date in 2008. [46763/08]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 and 133 together.

The Information requested by the Deputy in these questions is being compiled by the Office of the Attorney General and will be forwarded to him as soon as possible.

Departmental Staff.

134. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Taoiseach if the contract drafters hired between 1996 and 2008 from outside the EU received training in European Communities law in the Office of the Attorney General before transposing European directives and regulations. [46767/08]

135. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Taoiseach if the contract drafters hired between 1996 and 2008 received training in Irish law in the Office of the Attorney General before drafting Irish legislation. [46768/08]

140. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Taoiseach if he will furnish the written instructions given to contract drafters on being hired to ensure uniformity of style. [46773/08]

141. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Taoiseach if knowledge of Irish law and European Communities law is a requirement before being hired as a contract drafter of Irish legislation in the Office of the Attorney General. [46774/08]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 134, 135, 140 and 141 together.

I am advised by the Attorney General that when seeking contract drafters the Office of the Attorney General requires candidates to possess very high levels of skill and experience in common-law jurisdiction. Many have formerly been heads of Offices in their own jurisdictions and all come with the highest recommendations. Where it is necessary, the Office arranges appropriate training to ensure that such staff are fully competent to perform any particular task they are assigned. This is in accordance with Office practice as training is available to all Office staff as necessary.

Contract drafters are given any necessary guidance in relation to relevant issues including Irish Constitutional Law, Administrative Law, European Law and the European Convention on Human Rights. It is not a requirement that contract drafters have a prior knowledge of Irish and European Community Law on their engagement as this expertise already exists in the Office. Contract drafters are assigned to Groups within the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government. These Groups are headed by permanent Parliamentary Counsel at Assistant Secretary and higher level who provide the necessary expertise where required, including in Constitutional, Irish and European law. These Parliamentary Counsel monitor and guide the work of the contract drafters and deal with issues on drafting files as appropriate. Additionally, as with all drafting staff, contract staff work closely with Advisory Counsel in the AGO who are specialists in their legal field. Contract drafters are supplied with the Office's Drafting Manuals and this assists in ensuring a standard approach. Finally, of course, like all drafters, contract drafters work in close liaison with the Departments sponsoring the Bills and statutory instruments that they are drafting.

There are procedures within the Office for quality assurance of all drafting files prior to the transmission of final drafts of legislation to client Departments. Furthermore, where legal issues arise on drafting files, requests for advice are made to Advisory Counsel and in some cases submissions are made by the Advisory Counsel to the Attorney General in relation to these issues.

It should also be noted that contact drafters have, allied to their extensive drafting skills, and experience, brought other insights and expertise into the Office. Their advice in respect of Bill management at Government level and their knowledge of other jurisdictions' steps to improve the clarity of legislation have been of much assistance to the Office in developing its views and

know-how on these matters. This is an important contribution to the continuous development of skills and expertise in the Office. The Office also utilises the skills and experience of the contract staff in the training of its own permanent staff.

136. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Taoiseach the number of permanent drafters who left their positions in the Office of the Attorney General each year from 2003 to 2008 to take up other positions in the public service. [46769/08]

The Taoiseach: The figures sought by the Deputy are as follows:

Year	Number
2003	None
2004	None
2005	2, of whom one left on secondment for a position in the Irish Public Service and one left on career break for a position with the OECD
2006	None
2007	1 left for a position in the Irish Public Service
2008	1 left for a position in the Irish Public Service

137. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Taoiseach the number of contract drafters employed by the Office of the Attorney General on 1 January in each year from 1996 to 2008. [46770/08]

The Taoiseach: The figures sought by the Deputy are as follows:

Year	Number
1996	3
1997	2
1998	2
1999	4
2000	2
2001	4
2002	4
2003	5
2004	6
2005	5
2006	7
2007	6
2008	5

138. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Taoiseach the number of entry level advisory counsel who entered the Office of the Attorney General each year from 2000 to 2008. [46771/08]

The Taoiseach: The figures sought by the Deputy are given below. Entry level advisory counsel entering in 2006, 2007 and 2008 were largely recruited for secondment as legal advisers to other Government Departments and Offices.

[The Taoiseach.]

Year	Number
2000	None
2001	8
2002	2
2003	3
2004	1
2005	None
2006	6
2007	7
2008	4

139. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Taoiseach the number of entry level drafters who entered the Office of the Attorney General each year from 2000 to 2008. [46772/08]

The Taoiseach: The figures sought by the Deputy are as follows:

Year	Number
2000	None
2001	3
2002	2
2003	None
2004	2
2005	None
2006	2
2007	None
2008	3

Questions Nos. 140 and 141 answered with Question No. 134.

Departmental Property.

142. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Taoiseach the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46671/08]

The Taoiseach: No equipment or data has been reported lost or stolen from my Department in the past 12 months.

Departmental Expenditure.

143. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Taoiseach the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46686/08]

The Taoiseach: The amount spent on hotel accommodation from my Department's Vote and each State agency under the aegis of this Department from 2004 to end of November 2008 is detailed in the table below.

Department: Hotel Expenditure (includes Foreign & Domestic)

Year	Amount
	€
2004	246,431
2005	190,447
2006	220,392
2007	136,493
2008 (to end November)	211,508

These figures include Programme spend in respect of the bodies operating under the aegis of my Department, other than those referenced out separately below.

Expenditure by NESDO (which was established on a statutory basis from 1 January 2007) is detailed in the following table for 2007 & 2008.

National Economic & Social Development Office (NESDO): Hotel Expenditure (includes Foreign & Domestic)

Year	Amount
	€
2007	23,613
2008 (to end November)	23,646

Expenditure by the Central Statistics Office is detailed in the following table from 2004 to 2008 inclusive.

Central Statistics Office: Hotel Expenditure (includes Foreign & Domestic)

Year	Amount
	€
2004	2,116
2005	3,407
2006	2,945
2007	8,995
2008 (to end November)	4,628

In general, CSO staff travelling on official business make hotel bookings themselves and pay directly for their accommodation so an overall figure for hotel costs is not available. As a decentralised Office, the CSO occasionally pays directly for hotel accommodation in Ireland, for a small number of meetings involving staff from the Dublin and Cork offices.

144. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Taoiseach the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[46701/08]

The Taoiseach: My Department has a travel policy which is based on the guidelines laid down by the Department of Finance. It is applicable to all staff and sets out the policy regarding appropriate hotel accommodation to be used. The aims of the travel policy are to minimise

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official travel costs and to achieve value for money for expenditure necessarily incurred, consistent with the effective discharge of official duties.

Hotel bookings in relation to my official foreign travel are made by the Department of Foreign Affairs in consultation with the host Government and the local Irish Embassy. In regard to procurement arrangements for sourcing hotel accommodation, the central contract for travel booking services for government officials includes provision for making hotel reservations. This contract is currently held by Club Travel Limited and was awarded following an EU-level advertised procurement process conducted under the lead of the Department of Finance earlier this year.

With regard to Departmental staff, in most instances, hotel bookings are centrally coordinated by my Department's Finance Unit which ensures that the travel policy and Department of Finance guidelines are complied with. A designated Travel Officer has responsibility for making bookings on the basis of a decision by the Department of the options put forward by Club Travel. Where exceptionally, Department officials book their own hotel accommodation, they are required to adhere to the Department's Travel Policy.

The procurement arrangements in NESDO are to select a hotel which is convenient to the location of the official business and which is competitively priced. With regard to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the normal civil service rules for travel and subsistence expenses apply to staff of the CSO travelling on official business. Staff claim travel and overnight expenses in accordance with the rules and rates appropriate to the relevant destination. In general, staff travelling on official business make hotel bookings themselves and pay directly for their accommodation.

As a decentralised Office, the CSO occasionally pays directly for hotel accommodation in Ireland, for a small number of meetings involving staff from the Dublin and Cork offices. When the CSO sources accommodation for official purposes (e.g. meetings, interview rooms, overnight accommodation) the Office follows national procurement guidelines. All bookings are made on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender.

Departmental Property.

145. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Taoiseach the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46716/08]

The Taoiseach: My Department owns and operates 52 servers across two separate networks. These servers are configured so as to provide resilience and failover in case of equipment failure. The table below outlines the actual capacity, in gigabytes, of each server, some of which hold a 'mirror' of the data on other critical servers.

Server No.	Capacity (GB)	Server No.	Capacity (GB)	Server No.	Capacity (GB)	Server No.	Capacity (GB)
1	18	14	25	27	73	40	140
2	18	15	36	28	73	41	140
3	18	16	36	29	73	42	140
4	18	17	36	30	73	43	140
5	18	18	36	31	73	44	150
6	18	19	36	32	73	45	205
7	18	20	36	33	80	46	205
8	18	21	40	34	80	47	205
9	18	22	70	35	80	48	210

Server No.	Capacity (GB)	Server No.	Capacity (GB)	Server No.	Capacity (GB)	Server No.	Capacity (GB)
10	18	23	70	36	100	49	270
11	18	24	70	37	135	50	560
12	18	25	73	38	140	51	650
13	20	26	73	39	140	52	720

The following section details the servers owned or leased by the state agencies under the aegis of my Department

NESDO

Server No	Capacity (GB)
1	145
2	217
3	277
4	277
5	68
6	72

Forum on Europe

Server No	Capacity (GB)
1	270

CSO

The CSO has 104 computer servers with an average capacity of 150 gigabytes per server: and three Storage Area Networks (SANs) with a total capacity of 65 terabytes.

Departmental Staff.

146. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46992/08]

The Taoiseach: The estimated cost of incremental pay increases for staff in this Department and the agencies under its aegis in 2008 and 2009 is detailed in the table below. Cost of increments is not identified as a separate cost in the budget process and consequently is not readily available for the years 2002 to 2006. I do not consider it an efficient use of administrative time to provide comparative details for 2002 to 2006 as this would necessitate an inordinate amount of time and cost in my Department.

Department/Agencies	Estimated cost 2008	Estimated Cost 2009
	€	€
Department of the Taoiseach	202,000.00	201,000.00
Central Statistics Office	420,000	440,000
National Economic Social Council Office (NESDO)	17,248.00	14,570.00

Decentralisation Programme.

147. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47007/08]

The Taoiseach: To date, 23 former members of staff from my Department have already been assigned to decentralised posts. There are no proposals to decentralise my Department or any of the bodies under its aegis. It is a matter for those Departments to which staff from my Department have decentralised to assign such staff to locations outside of Dublin.

Departmental Staff.

148. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47022/08]

149. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47037/08]

150. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the number of locations in which civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47052/08]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 148 to 150, inclusive, together.

The number of whole time equivalent civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of my Department for each year from 2002 to 2008 is set out in the table below.

Year	No. of staff in Dept	NESDO	Central Statistics Office
2002	222.0	21.5	753.0
2003	220.2	22.5	686.3
2004	215.5	21.5	684.3
2005	213.3	20.8	776.0
2006	215.0	22.6	877.6
2007	220.0	23.4	787.9
2008	214.0	24.0	773.2

NESDO (National Economic and Social Development Office) first operated on a non statutory basis from its inception in April 2002 until the entry into force of the National Economic and Social Development Act 2006 on 1 January 2007. Details in relation to NESDO comprise staff serving in all its constituent bodies, i.e.the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), the National Economic and Social Council (NESF) and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPF).

All staff in my Department and the National Economic & Social Development Office are based in Dublin. The Central Statistics Office has staff in both Dublin and Cork. Details are provided in the table below.

Staff by location and grade (W.T.E — whole time equivalent)

	Cork	Dublin	Field Staff
Director General/Assistant Director General/Director	5.00	2.00	0.00
Senior Statistician/P.O.	15.00	13.00	0.00
Statistician	50.40	43.80	0.00
A.P.	17.35	5.50	0.00
H.E.O.	49.60	27.40	0.00
E.O.	106.30	47.20	0.00
S.O.	11.70	4.40	12.00
C.O.	218.30	48.20	78.05
Other	12.00	6.00	0.00
Total	485.65	197.50	90.05

Notes:

1. "Other" category above includes Service Officers, Service Attendants, Implant Operators, Accountant, Technical Officer and Telephonists.
2. Field Staff are employed throughout the country and work from home. Therefore, it is not possible to provide more detail by location for these grade. Field staff grades of Coordinator and Interviewer are equivalent to S.O. and C.O. as reflected in the table above.

The breakdown of the salaries of staff in my Department in the format requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below. It should be noted that the details refer to actual staff rather than whole time equivalents.

€	No. of persons
> 100,001	28
90,001 – 100,000	7
80,001 – 90,000	10
70,001 – 80,000	13
60,001 – 70,000	6
50,001 – 60,000	37
< 50,000	135

Departmental Agencies.

151. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the Budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47067/08]

The Taoiseach: There are no agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of my Department scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the Budget 2009.

Departmental Expenditure.

152. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Taoiseach the amount of taxpayers' money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon Referendum. [47105/08]

The Taoiseach: The Department of the Taoiseach does not provide any direct funding to the Institute of International and European Affairs, other than payment of a yearly membership fee for the Department. The membership fee for the Department of the Taoiseach for 2008 is €6,000.

Health and Safety Regulations.

153. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if her attention has been drawn to EU Directive 2002/44/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of workers from risks to their health and safety arising or likely to arise from exposure to mechanical vibration, and its transposition deadline of no later than 6 July 2005 and its provision of a transitional period of five years in relation to Section 5 (3) where work equipment is used which was given to workers before 6 July 2007. [46934/08]

154. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if her attention has been drawn to EU Directive 2002/44/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of workers from risks to their health and safety arising or likely to arise from exposure to mechanical vibration, its transposition deadline of no later than 6 July 2005 and its provision of a transitional period of five years in relation to Section 5(3) where work equipment is used which was given to workers before 6 July 2007. [47069/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Billy Kelleher): I propose to take Questions Nos. 153 and 154 together.

Directive 2002/44/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2002 on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks arising from physical agents (vibration) was originally transposed into Irish law through the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Control of Vibration at Work) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 370 of 2006). These Regulations were subsequently revoked by and reincorporated in the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 (S.I. No. 299 of 2007) in an exercise of consolidation and simplification of regulatory provisions in the area of occupational safety and health.

Specifically, Chapter 2 of Part 5, Regulations 133 to 142, and Schedule 6 of the 2007 General Application Regulations retransposed Directive 2002/44/EC into Irish law.

This Chapter sets out requirements relating to the control of vibration at work including exposure limit values and action values, determination and assessment of risks, provisions aimed at avoiding or reducing exposure, employee information and training, health surveillance, records and effects and exemptions. Regulation 134, inter alia, provides that Regulation 139, relating to the application of exposure limit values, applies on and after 6 July 2010, but not until then, where work equipment is used which was first provided to employees before 6 July 2007 by an employer, and does not permit compliance with the exposure limit values.

Departmental Expenditure.

155. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if she will expand on Parliamentary Question No. 138 of 9 December 2008 to include the duration and dates of the visits made by her or other Ministers in her Department

to FÁS events abroad since 2000 to date in 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46518/08]

The information below sets out details in relation to visits made by Ministers of this Department to FÁS events abroad since 2000. The exact dates in relation to a number of the trips made in 2000 and 2001 are not readily available and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Minister	Trip	Date
Minister Martin	Science Challenge Florida	10–14 July 2005*
Minister Killeen	FÁS Jobs Fair New York	18-22 October 2006
	Science Challenge Houston	23-27 October 2005
Minister Ahern	Science Challenge Houston	24-28 April 2006
Minister Harney	Science Challenge Florida	7-12 July 2004
	FÁS Jobs Fair S/Africa	25-27 November 2000
	FÁS Jobs Fair London	13 May 2000
Minister Kitt	FÁS Jobs Fair NY	2001
	FÁS Jobs Fair Moscow	2001
	FÁS Jobs Fair Berlin	2001
Minister Treacy	FÁS Jobs Fair Newfoundland	2000

*Included events hosted by IDA.

Departmental Property.

156. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from her Department in the past 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46664/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department's records indicate that in the past 12 months one laptop has been reported stolen, one laptop reported missing and one BlackBerry device reported stolen. None has been recovered or found. There have been no other computers or data devices reported lost, missing or stolen during this period.

It is my Department's policy to invoke the facility to remotely erase all data from a BlackBerry device as soon as it is reported missing, and immediately cancel the subscription with the service provider. In the case of the stolen BlackBerry it was not possible to do this locally and the device was disabled by the service provider at my Department's request.

It is also the policy in my Department to encrypt all new laptops before they are issued. A project to encrypt all laptops already issued to officers of my Department is currently underway and should be completed by year-end. The two missing laptops were not encrypted but they were reported not to contain any sensitive or private data at the time of their loss.

Departmental Expenditure.

157. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by her Department and each State agency under the aegis of her Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if she will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46679/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan):

As a general rule, staff of my Department who are necessarily detained away from home or headquarters on official business in Ireland on an overnight basis are responsible for the payment of their own accommodation expenses. In accordance with Department of Finance travel and subsistence regulations, staff are usually paid a flat rate allowance in such circumstances to cover their combined accommodation and subsistence costs. My Department does not generally receive or record details of their hotel costs.

Occasionally, my Department organises meetings in hotels which necessarily require accommodation for some staff of the Department. The accommodation costs in such cases usually form part of a wider package of conference facilities and are paid as part of a total invoice. The accommodation costs are not recorded separately on my Department's accounting systems in such instances.

Where an officer avails of hotel accommodation while engaged on official business abroad, he/she may be reimbursed expenses by way of: (a) a flat-rate allowance to cover combined accommodation and subsistence costs, or (b) vouched accommodation costs, with a reduced subsistence allowance.

Any hotel accommodation costs reimbursed by my Department in these situations are aggregated with associated subsistence costs on my Department's accounting systems and are not recorded separately.

Similar procedures also apply in relation to hotel accommodation costs for myself and my Ministers of State. In accordance with Department of Finance travel and subsistence regulations, Ministers and Ministers of State are reimbursed vouched accommodation costs and receive a reduced subsistence allowance for overnight absences on official business, whether in Ireland or abroad. However, the accommodation costs are not recorded separately on my Department's accounting systems.

It is not feasible, therefore, to identify separately the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by my Department, as this exercise would require every expenses claim and a number of individual invoices processed by my Department to be reviewed. My Department processes several thousand expenses claims each year.

Expenditure on hotel accommodation by the State agencies under the aegis of my Department is an administrative matter for the agencies concerned and my Department does not have direct access to those details.

158. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the procurement arrangements in place in her Department and each State agency under the aegis of her Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for her, for her Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46694/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan):

As a general rule, staff of my Department who are necessarily detained away from home or headquarters on official business on an overnight basis in Ireland are responsible for selecting their own accommodation. This arrangement also applies to myself and my Ministers of State.

In accordance with Department of Finance travel and subsistence regulations, officials are usually paid a flat rate allowance in such circumstances to cover their combined accommodation and subsistence costs. Ministers and Ministers of State are reimbursed vouched accommodation costs and receive a reduced subsistence allowance.

Occasionally, my Department organises meetings in hotels which necessarily require accommodation for some staff of the Department. The accommodation costs in such cases usually form part of a wider package of conference facilities and are paid as part of a total invoice. Public Procurement procedures apply in organising such meetings.

With regard to the sourcing of hotel accommodation for official business abroad, my Department, together with a number of other Government Departments, has engaged the services of a travel management company to process flight and hotel bookings. The contract for these services was awarded following a public tendering process managed by the Department of Finance. The service provided by the travel management company allows my Department to access competitive hotel rates abroad, often at short notice and in times of peak demand.

In some situations, hotel accommodation for Ministerial visits abroad is organised through the Department of Foreign Affairs or by agencies such as IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland. My Department does not have any role in the selection of hotels in these instances.

The procurement of hotel accommodation by the State agencies under my Department's remit is an administrative matter for the agencies concerned and my Department does not have direct access to the details of their procurement arrangements.

Departmental Property.

159. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by her Department and each State agency under the aegis of her Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46709/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Server specifications for servers owned by the agencies under the aegis of this Department are day-to-day operational matters for the agencies involved and not ones in which I have any function.

My Department's records include details of servers with relevant storage capacity, owned or leased by the Department or its Offices and which are on the Department's network. These details are set out in tabular format as follows:

Server Identity	Owned / Leased	Capacity (Gigabytes)
1	Owned	625
2	Owned	625
3	Owned	489
4	Owned	2,800
5	Owned	2,800
6	Owned	2,300
7	Owned	2,300
8	Owned	68
9	Owned	66
10	Owned	66
11	Owned	407
12	Owned	60
13	Owned	34
14	Owned	407
15	Owned	40
16	Owned	37

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Server Identity	Owned / Leased	Capacity (Gigabytes)
17	Owned	78
18	Owned	534
19	Owned	534
20	Owned	534
21	Owned	534
22	Owned	540
23	Owned	540
24	Owned	101
25	Owned	366
26	Owned	272
27	Owned	476
28	Owned	340
29	Owned	476
30	Owned	68
31	Owned	510
32	Owned	272
33	Owned	34
34	Owned	283.9
35	Owned	156
36	Owned	863.9
37	Owned	7.75
38	Owned	34
39	Owned	12
40	Owned	863
41	Owned	272
42	Owned	68
43	Owned	67
44	Owned	340
45	Owned	68
46	Owned	396.26
47	Owned	396
48	Owned	337.7
49	Owned	68
50	Owned	170
51	Owned	166
52	Owned	170
53	Owned	82
54	Owned	37.2
55	Owned	67.7
56	Owned	597
57	Owned	880
58	Owned	880
59	Owned	880
60	Owned	262
61	Owned	208
62	Owned	477
63	Owned	390.53

Server Identity	Owned / Leased	Capacity (Gigabytes)
64	Owned	312
65	Owned	148.4
66	Owned	68
67	Owned	68
68	Owned	168
69	Owned	65
70	Owned	270
71	Owned	73
72	Owned	231
73	Owned	219.1
74	Owned	1
75	Owned	160
76	Owned	79
77	Owned	85
78	Owned	216.9
79	Owned	170
80	Owned	170
81	Owned	296
82	Owned	340.1
83	Owned	160
84	Owned	701
85	Owned	270.6
86	Owned	160
87	Owned	221.6
88	Owned	204.95
89	Owned	155.73
90	Owned	399.63
91	Owned	289.8
92	Owned	70
93	Owned	29
94	Owned	283.9
95	Owned	316.6
96	Owned	315.9
97	Owned	170.2
98	Owned	170.2
99	Owned	68
100	Owned	68
101	Owned	340.1
102	Owned	270
103	Owned	32
104	Owned	47
105	Owned	387.6
106	Owned	880
107	Owned	340.1
108	Owned	477
109	Owned	67.7
110	Owned	205
111	Owned	498.12

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Server Identity	Owned / Leased	Capacity (Gigabytes)
112	Owned	61
113	Owned	136
114	Owned	17
115	Owned	168
116	Owned	169
117	Owned	171
118	Owned	171
119	Owned	137
120	Owned	160
121	Owned	477
122	Owned	160
123	Owned	440.35
124	Owned	112
125	Owned	136
126	Owned	136
127	Owned	136
128	Owned	136
129	Owned	136
130	Owned	58
131	Owned	477
132	Owned	67.7
133	Owned	68
134	Owned	107
135	Owned	29
136	Owned	33.7
137	Owned	101.4
138	Owned	136
139	Owned	101.95
140	Owned	56
141	Owned	136
142	Owned	17
143	Owned	101.51
144	Owned	73
145	Owned	360
146	Owned	17
147	Owned	160
148	Owned	160
149	Owned	160
150	Owned	135
151	Owned	160
152	Owned	160
153	Owned	160
154	Owned	135

Departmental Bodies.

160. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and

Employment the advisory committees, boards, quangos, taskforces, fora or any other *ad hoc* bodies which were created by her or her Department in 2008; the purpose of the body in each case; the reason such a body such a body was required in each case; the membership of each body; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46781/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department established five such groups in 2008. The specific details requested by the Deputy for each are as follows:

Advisory Group on Media Mergers

- (a) Purpose of the Group — To review the legislative framework in relation to the public interest aspects of media mergers and to make recommendations as appropriate
- (b) Reason the Group was established — To assist in the overall review of the Competition Act 2002
- (c) Membership of the Group:
 - Paul Sreenan Senior Counsel (Chair),
 - Marc Coleman, Author, Broadcaster and Writer,
 - Professor Colum Kenny, Dublin City University,
 - Michael O' Keeffe, Broadcasting Commission of Ireland,
 - John Herlihy, Chief Executive, Google Ireland,
 - Olive Braiden, Arts Council,
 - Peter Cassells, National Centre for Partnership & Performance.

Sales Law Review Group

- (a) Purpose of the Group — To conduct a review of the legislation governing the sale of goods and supply of services, and to provide analysis and evaluation of the proposed EU Consumer Contractual Rights Directive and to make recommendations as to how the Directive and Irish contract and sales law can be integrated
- (b) Reason the Group was established — The area to be covered by the review is heavily legalistic, complex and technical, particularly in the general sales law field.
- (c) Membership of the Group:
 - Professor Robert Clark, UCD (Chair);
 - Tony Burke, nominee of Irish Exporters' Association;
 - Caterina Gardiner LL.B, LL.M, NUI Galway;
 - Michael Kilcoyne, Vice-Chairman Consumers' Assoc of Ireland;
 - Roderick Maguire LL.B, LL.M, BL, Honorary Secretary of the Bar Council of Ireland;

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- Sean Murphy, Legal Advisor NCA;
- Richard Nesbitt S.C. nominee of IBEC;
- Kevin O'Higgins, Solicitor nominee of Incorporated Law Society;
- Nathan Reilly LL.B, LL.M, Barrister;
- Fidelma White LL.B, LL.M, UCC.

Interim Advisory Board to the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA)

- (a) Purpose of the Board — To advise the Director of NERA on matters relating to compliance with, and enforcement of, employment legislation.
- (b) Reason the Board was established — To enable representatives of employers and employees to advise the Director of NERA on matters relating to compliance with and enforcement of employment legislation having regard to Sections 19-21 of the Employment Law Compliance Bill, 2008.
- (c) Membership of the Board:
- John Dennehy (Chair), former public representative,
 - John Walsh, former Assistant Secretary, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment,
 - Stella Skowronska, Language Course Co-ordinator and Teacher,
 - James Somers, former General President, SIPTU and Executive Member & Treasurer ICTU,
 - Linda Tanham, Assistant General Secretary, Mandate,
 - Patricia King, National Officer, SIPTU,
 - Owen Wills, General Secretary, TEEU,
 - Mary Cryan, HR Director, Brown Thomas Group,
 - John Flanagan, Head of Branches and IT, EBS,
 - Eddie Keenan, Director of IR, Employment and Manpower Services, CIF.

Enterprise Feedback Group

- (a) Purpose of the Group — To provide feedback from business and industry on the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) and advice on the commercialisation of research outcomes from the Government's substantial investment in research and development
- (b) Reason the Group was established — Feedback from Group will inform the continuing development of policy for the achievement of the SSTI's targets.
- (c) Membership of the Group:

- Lionel Alexander (Chair) Vice President and General Manager, Hewlett Packard Irl
- Sean Baker, IT Consultant
- William Carty, Finance Director, Abbott Ireland
- Dr. Gabriel Dennison, NTR plc
- Aidan Fitzsimons, Commercial Director, Dairygold Cooperative Society
- Michael Gallagher, Managing Director, Swan Net-Gundry Ltd
- Eleanor Garvey, General Manager, Pfizer Ireland Pharmaceuticals
- Tony Golden, Managing Director, Citi Ireland
- Cathy Kearney, Managing Director, Apple Computer International
- Henry McGarvey, Managing Director, Pramerica Systems Ireland Ltd
- Sean McGrath, Chief Technical Officer, Propylon Ltd
- Martin McVicker, Managing Director, Combilift Ltd
- Julie O'Neill, General Manager, Gilead Sciences Ltd

Steering Committee for the Review and Assessment of the EQUAL Community Initiative 2000-2006

- (a) Purpose of the Committee — The EQUAL Community Initiative, an ESF co-financed programme that addressed issues around inequality and discrimination in the labour market under the 2000-2006 Structural Funds is being wound up at the moment. The purpose of Steering Committee is to oversee a review, by external consultants, of the learning from the activities and pilots carried out under EQUAL.
- (b) Reason the Committee was established — The Steering Committee was set up to oversee the review, by external consultants, of the learning from EQUAL and ensure it is carried out and implemented in a correct manner. It is expected the review will provide recommendations / advice on how best to implement the lessons in labour market policy and programmes to the Department.
- (c) Membership of the Committee:
- Vincent Landers, Head of ESF in Ireland (Chairperson)
 - Catherine Curran, Head of the EQUAL Authority in Ireland
 - Carol Baxter, Equality Authority,
 - Margaret Barry, FÁS,
 - Niall Monks, Labour Market Policy Section of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment,
 - Finola McDonnell, IBEC,

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- Willie McIntosh , Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013 OP, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment,
- Frank Vaughan, ICTU,
- Tony Tyrrell, WRC,
- Jim Deane, Department of Finance.

Consultancy Contracts.

161. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the external consultants hired by her Department in 2007 and 2008; the work carried out and the cost of such work in each case; the reason it was not possible to carry out such work internally within her Department or an agency of her Department in each case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46782/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information requested by the Deputy insofar as my Department is concerned is set out in the tabular statement below.

The figures provided relate to consultancies as defined in the Department of Finance December 2006 “Guidelines for the Engagement of Consultants and Other External Support by the Civil Service”.

My Department continues to seek greater efficiencies, effectiveness and value for money in the administration of its financial resources. My Department’s requirements for consultancy only arise where appropriate skills, knowledge or expertise are not available within the Department, or where a particular need arises that cannot be addressed within the resources available. When it becomes necessary to engage consultants, Government tendering procedures are followed, which ensures that contracts are awarded to the most suitable and cost effective tenderer. Where possible, my Department utilises the expertise available in other Government Departments and Offices, such as obtaining legal advice from the Chief State Solicitors Office in preference to engaging external consultants.

A feature of the Department’s procedures for approving funding for consultancies under the Consultancy Subhead (Subhead A07) or, indeed, the Research Subhead (Subhead U), is that before any funding is approved by the Management Board of my Department, the Line Section requesting such funding must make a strong business case, outlining the anticipated benefits, the value-added nature of the consultancy, and the argument for engaging outside consultants in preference to undertaking the work using the internal resources of the Section.

I would point out to the Deputy that, even on occasions where consultants are engaged, significant skills transfers occur. Additionally, training and development resources are allocated to encourage participation in appropriate third level and postgraduate courses, designed to meet the business goals of the Department. During the period in question (i.e. 2007 & 2008), thirty-one staff participated in courses designed to enhance their competencies in the areas of policy analysis, economic policy studies and project management. This training will contribute towards reducing dependency on consultants in future years. Furthermore, a number of officers in my Department have undertaken training courses provided through the Department of Finance’s Expenditure Reviewers Network, to provide them with the appropriate skills sets and techniques to undertake work which may otherwise have needed to be undertaken by

external consultants. Although the input of consultants is still sometimes required in some expenditure reviews, the level of input and the associated expenditure is considerably reduced.

In light of the need to pursue greater efficiencies and value for money, my Department will continue to endeavour to ensure that any funding provided for consultancies is necessary, and results in the optimal use of the Department's financial and human resources.

2007

Name of Consultants	Purpose	Cost
Leo Burnett	Advertising increase in National Minimum Wage	€ 50,163
Corporate Risk Strategies Ltd (CRS)	Prepare a Health and Safety report on each of the Department's buildings together with the appropriate Safety Statements.	24,200
ESRI	National Survey on Workplace Bullying	84,232
Tom Walsh	To provide advice to the Department on the development of occupational health and safety policy and legislation	81,493
Arup Consulting Engineers	To support the Department in its review of Review of Dangerous Substances legislation	28,814
Indecon Economic Consultants	To prepare a report on the EU Emissions Trading Scheme.	30,000
Indecon Consultants	Prepare a Report — Value for Money Review of Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)	111,244
The Media Group	To devise, implement and manage a national promotion and advertising campaign across a range of media for the ICT Audits Programme for Small Business in Ireland	135,000
Noel J. Travers BL	Drafted a legal instrument.	8,440
RITS	To prepare a series of reports re IT Security	118,928
Version 1	To prepare a report on the Insolvency Payments Section BPR (Business Process Re-engineering)	7,187
Work Research Co-operative Social & Economic Consultants	Acquired Disability and Job retention report	26,632
Goodbody Economic Consultants	Review of Wage Subsidy Scheme	23,595
Farrell Grant Sparks	Ex-ante evaluation of the Human Capital Investment OP 2007-2013	66,671
Indecon Economic Consultants	Study of efficiency and Effectiveness of Vocational Training Services	5,087
DHR Communications	Dissemination of information etc, on the SEF co-funded "EQUAL" Community Initiative (CI)	28,305
Tom Ferris	To carry out six case studies investigating the administrative burdens arising due to regulation and to prepare a report	2,997
Dan Flinter	To facilitate two business workshops, examining the burdens of regulation on business, and make recommendations	8,643

Name of Consultants	Purpose	Cost
Nathan Reilly	Review of consumer legislation	€ 7,053
Keating and Associates	Communications Strategy for the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE)	32,670
Millward Brown IMS	Market Research for ODCE	44,790
Cyril O'Neill	Legal Costs Assessment for ODCE	13,273
Connolly Lowe	Legal Costs Assessment for ODCE	2,588
Carr Communications	Effective communications with Companies Registration Office (CRO) clients	45,372
Millward Browne	Carry out market research for the CRO	27,062
Grant Thornton	Consultancy on Public Procurement and Business Solutions	57,521
O' Mara, Geraghty, Mc Court	Provision of legal services and advices	35,086
Q4	Public relations services/advise	18,150
Owens DDB	Advice on advertising and placing of same in various media	128,566
DKM Economic Consultants	Research on multi-unit developments	1,210
RPS Consultants	Research on energy policy	9,575
Vision Consulting Ltd	Consultants were engaged to carry out a review of the operation of the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) Information Services and to make recommendations on the structures, processes and systems that should operate in the Unit in order to achieve the highest possible standard of excellence in terms of meeting customer needs.	95,711
Keating and Associates	To provide NERA with PR Consultancy Services	46,462
Mason Hayes & Curran	NERA legal costs	16,611
Ellard Browne	NERA Management Information Framework work	7,550
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	NERA Management Consultancy	30,189
Vision Consulting	NERA Communications Strategy	186,334
Cawley Nea Ltd	NERA Advertising Media	181,335
Design Tactics	NERA Advertising Media	6,285
McCann Fitzgerald	Provision of legal advice under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts for the CRO	18,184
Millward Browne	Market Research for CRO	42,144

2007 — continued

Name of Consultants	Purpose	Cost
DNM Technology	VMWare advice on the use of software to run virtual PCs	€ 4,840
S.F.Hughes & Co	Legal Services/advice	938
James W. Houlihan	Legal Services/advice	1,210
James Dwyer	Legal Services/advice	1,815
John Hennessy BL	Legal advice	126,324
Matthias Kelly QC	Legal advice	162,742
Form Creative Ltd	Advertising campaign for Work Life Balance Day 2007	52,398
Form Creative Ltd	Advertising for Panel of Consultants 2007	8,673
Helm Corporation Ltd	Consultancy Service Oracle Review –Finance Unit	8,146
European Commission	Engagement of consultants to carry out National Evaluation of the impact of the European Employment Strategy in Ireland	4,973
Mazars	Engagement of a consultant to undertake 2 audits from the Department's 2006 Audit Plan (Finance Unit and Personnel Unit) (continued from 2006)	10,482

2008

Name of Consultants	Purpose	Cost
DHR Communications	Dissemination of information on the ESF co-funded "EQUAL" Community Initiative (CI)	€ 9,547
Social and Market Research	Conduct an "EQUAL" Survey	23,850
Farrell Grant Sparks	Ex-ante evaluation of the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013	7,025
Work Research Co-operative WRC	Job Retention and return to work	26,632
Keating Consulting Ltd	NERA PR	63,189
Ellard Browne Ltd	NERA Advertising	605
Cawley Nea Ltd	NERA Advertising	27,410

Name of Consultants	Purpose	Cost
Tom Walsh	To provide advice to the Department on the development of occupational health and safety policy and legislation	€ 63,422
Arup Consulting Engineers	To support the Department in its review of Review of Dangerous Substances legislation	35,930
Kilroy Solicitors	Legal Advice	16,263
Version 1	To prepare a report on the Insolvency Payments Section Business Process Re-engineering (BPR)	13,177
RITS	Security Advice	38,535
IQ Content Ltd	Review of Department's Website	20,604
Goodbody Economic Consultants	Review of the Wage Subsidy Scheme	23,595
IPA	Quality Assessment of Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Value for Money Review	3,630
Carr Communications	Communications Advice for the Companies Registration Office (CRO)	25,593
Open Interface	Website accessibility advice for the CRO	3,993
Grant Thornton	Procurement and business solution advice for the CRO	71,874
Millward Brown/IMS	Market Research for ODCCE	15,898
Mathias Kelly QC	Legal advice	167,171
Expertian Ireland	Provision of statistical analysis of returns to the CRO	182
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Media Research for the Advisory Group on Media Mergers	26,965
Emily Gibson BL	Legal Services for the Advisory Group on Media Mergers	5,596
Form Creative Ltd	Advertising campaign for Work Life Balance Day 2008	€4,994
Form Creative Ltd	Advertising campaign for Work Life Balance Day 2008	120,000
Arthur Cox	Prioritising Information Obligations in Company Law Legislation	2,226
Scannell Solutions	Prioritising Health and Safety Obligations — Additional Review	605
IQ Content Ltd	Review of Department's Website	41,261
Indecon Economic Consultants	Value for Money Review of SFI	74,163

Name of Consultants	Purpose	Cost
Tom Walsh	To provide technical & research support to the Department in relation to certain aspects of occupational health and safety and chemicals policy	€ 8,000
Arup Consulting Engineers	To support the Department in its review of Review of Dangerous Substances legislation	79,327
Cawley Nea	Advertising consultants	27,101
Keatings	PR consultants	22,458
Achilles Procurement Services Ltd	Consultancy on the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) case management system	602
Gordon Green	Consultancy on NERA enforcement database	1,268
KPMG	Assessment of a restructuring plan	273,460
RITS	Information Security Services	17,669
Trigraph Professional Services	Review of ICT Unit Project Management Procedures & Practices	2,995
Mason, Hayes & Curran	Procurement Legal Advice	8,534
Computer Associates	Review of ICT Backup Systems	13,310
Dermot McCarthy SC	Legal Advice	9,100
Brian Murray	Fees to Counsel	1,724
Douglas Clarke	Fees to Counsel	41,029
Remy Farrell	Fees to Counsel	7,719
Work Research Co-operative WRC	Carry out work by providing Technical Support for the Department on the co-funded ESF EQUAL Community Initiative.	100,672
Ernst & Young	Audit of “DAWN” under the ESF co-funded EQUAL Community Initiative	25,090
PA Consulting	Review and Assessment of the EFS co-funded EQUAL Community Initiative 2000-2006	14,898
WRC	Carry out work by providing Technical Support for the Department on the co-funded ESF EQUAL Community Initiative.	38,514
Goodbody Economic Consultants	Review of the Wage Subsidy Scheme	23,595
Indecon Economic Consultants	To carry out work relating to the Leonardo Da Vinci Programme	2,000

Redundancy Statistics.

162. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of redundancies reported to her Department for County Kildare in each of the past five years; the areas of the county in which the redundancies occurred; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46792/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Billy Kelleher): The numbers of redundancies occurring in County Kildare in each of the past five years are shown on the table attached. The figures for 2003/2004 show the number of redundancies notified to my Department in those years, while those figures from 2005 onwards represent the number of actual redundancies occurring in County Kildare. Information on redundancies is maintained on a county basis and is not available separately for areas within a county.

Actual Redundancies County Kildare 2005 — 30th November 2008

	2003*	2004*	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Kildare	721	706	745	796	1,147	1,773	5,888

*Notified Redundancies by Area 2003-2004.

Unemployment Levels.

163. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the plans or investigative mechanisms that she is planning to address the major increase in unemployment figures in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46823/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Unemployment is increasing across the country due to the downturn in the economy and this has impacted on Kildare also. This situation is unwelcome and is an indication of the challenges that are now facing the labour market and that are within the economy as a whole.

The Government is taking specific measures to address this challenge and to ensure that job losses are minimised as much as possible and for as short a time as possible. The enterprise development agencies, along with FÁS the employment and training authority, are actively engaged in facilitating job opportunities in Kildare.

At present there are 25 IDA Ireland supported companies in Kildare employing approximately 10,356 people. Kildare has in recent years attracted some world class manufacturing companies including Wyeth Medica, Braun Oral B, Intel and Hewlett Packard. The Millennium Park in Naas has three modern 40,000 sq.ft. advance office buildings which are now available for marketing to inward investors, with all the necessary infrastructure, including ducting for broadband.

New indigenous companies have also been established and have created new employment in the county. The major €22.6 million expansion investment, supported by Enterprise Ireland, is underway and on target in Green Isle Foods. It is expected to lead to the creation of 130 new jobs in the area. A major investment of €28million also is underway in Dawn Farm Foods Ltd. Overall 100 new jobs will be created.

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FÁS is providing a number of training and employment programmes in Kildare and has, with the Local Employment Services, geared up its Employment Services further to provide increased capacity for increased referrals from the Live Register.

Departmental Agencies.

164. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if there are itineraries planned by any of the State agencies under her remit to visit Kildare south in the next six months; if the contacts made by her or her Department created or met on any of the trade missions that she led or was part of since she came into her Ministry, are part of any of the itineraries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46824/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): IDA Ireland is the agency with statutory responsibility for the attraction of foreign direct investment to Ireland and its regions. The marketing of individual areas, including Kildare, 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 Acts from giving directives regarding individual undertakings or from giving preference to one area over others.

I travel abroad on missions organised by IDA Ireland to assist the Agency in the attraction of foreign direct investment to this country. These visits are targeted at specific sectors and do result, in some cases, in follow up visits by foreign companies to this country. The arrangement of such itineraries, is a day to day operational matter for the Agency and not one in which I have a function. In the final analysis, it is the investing company, who decides where to invest and where to visit. However I have been informed by IDA Ireland that there have been 2 IDA sponsored itineraries to Kildare during 2008.

I also travel on trade missions abroad that are organised by Enterprise Ireland. The aim of these visits is to promote the exports of goods and services produced in this country into foreign markets and to thereby to grow indigenous Irish firms.

165. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if progress has been made or if meetings have taken place between the Industrial Development Authority and Kildare County Council in relation to the sale or leasing of the vacant IDA lands in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46825/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The management of IDA Ireland's industrial property portfolio is a day-to-day operational matter for the Agency, as part of the statutory responsibility assigned to it by the Oireachtas and it is not a matter in which the Minister of the day has any involvement.

I am informed by IDA Ireland that, at present, the Agency has approximately 2.27 hectares remaining available in Monasterevin, approximately 1.77 hectares remaining available in Athy, (Woodstock), and approximately 1.53 hectares remaining available in Castledermot. I understand that the Board of IDA approved the sale of all these lands to Kildare County Council at its Board meeting on April 9th 2003. However, this transaction was never finalised due to a failure in negotiations.

The Agency also has approximately 1.72 hectares available in Tipper Road Naas

IDA is currently reviewing the future use of all these lands. As part of this review, in November 2008 IDA had meetings with Kildare County Council to determine their interest in the acquisition of these lands. At present these discussions are ongoing pending a review of the current land prices.

Employment Rights.

166. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the action she has taken regarding employment law (details supplied); if no action has been taken to date, when action will be taken; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46907/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Billy Kelleher): I understand that the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA), which is responsible for monitoring compliance with employment rights legislation, is aware of, and has commenced enquiries in relation to, the company referred to by the Deputy. NERA advise me that appropriate action will be taken in the event of breaches of employment legislation by that Company being discovered.

Consultancy Contracts.

167. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when this Deputy will receive a full reply to Parliamentary Question No. 159 of 18 November 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46908/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information covering the last nine years, requested by the Deputy in his earlier Parliamentary Question, took longer than I or my Department had anticipated to finalise. Nonetheless, the information has issued to the Deputy this week.

Work Permits.

168. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when a work permit will issue to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46922/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Billy Kelleher): A work permit has now issued in this case.

Pricing Policy.

169. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the steps she has taken and each of the measures she has introduced in the past three months to ensure that retail outlets and other businesses importing products priced in sterling are passing on to consumers to the fullest extent possible the benefits of the weaker sterling exchange rate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46943/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I have previously advised the House of the Government's concerns in relation to the importance of retailers passing on to consumers the benefits of the Euro's appreciation in value against Sterling. Given widespread concerns that consumers were not enjoying these benefits in terms of the prices that they pay for goods, particularly goods sourced in the UK, I initiated an

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engagement with the retail sector in June of this year as to the reasons why the benefits of the Euro's appreciation were not being passed on to consumers. In the course of that engagement I met with IBEC and leading members of Retail Ireland, and also wrote to major individual retailers to express the Government's concern on this matter.

By way of response, retailers advised that while the retail price of goods imported from the UK had lagged exchange rate movements due to factors such as the forward purchase of goods and currency, there had already been reductions in the price of some goods and further reductions were in the pipeline. In this regard, I would acknowledge that since my initial engagement with the sector in June, there has been some reduction in prices and the Deputy will be aware of the price campaigns of the various retailers, which has helped to some degree in the ongoing reduction in the annual inflation figure.

Notwithstanding these welcome price reductions, concerns still remain in relation to the differential in prices between the north and south. Retailers have contended that one of the main reasons for this price differential is that the cost of doing business in Ireland is significantly higher than that in the UK. To that end, in September of this year, I requested Forfás to carry out an analysis of the relative cost of doing business in a number of locations in the Republic, Northern Ireland and the UK. I expect to receive Forfás' analysis of its findings on this matter very shortly. I recently met again with the retail sector to discuss some of Forfás' preliminary findings and to reiterate the Government's concerns in relation to the level of the differential in prices between the north and the south.

It is my strong view that where there are significant differentials in consumer prices and retailers have a duty to their customers and to the economies in which they operate to explain why there are such differentials. It is my intention to continue to pursue this matter with the retail sector.

Departmental Staff.

170. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the budgeted cost to her Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of her Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46985/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The year to year costs of incremental pay increases are normally offset by corresponding reductions in costs associated with retirements and other movements by staff on higher points on the incremental scales and their replacement by staff on lower points. Incremental increases are not therefore individually costed and there is no separate provision for incremental increases in my Department's estimates. Therefore it is not possible to provide the Deputy with the information requested for the years 2002 to 2008 or for 2009.

The cost of incremental pay increases awarded to existing staff in the agencies under the remit of my Department is a day to day matter for the agencies concerned. My Department has no role or function in this process.

Decentralisation Programme.

171. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each cate-

gory who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47000/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department has been making good progress in the relocation of the required 250 posts to Carlow under the Government's Decentralisation Programme.

Officials of my Department, in consultation with the Department of Finance and the OPW, as well as decentralising staff and Business Units, opened an advance office in Carlow on July 30th 2007. The number of staff in this decentralised advance office is 98. This number is expected to increase to 103 in 2009 with the balance of staff decentralised in 2010. Of the 98 staff in place in Carlow, 60 have decentralised from Dublin and 38 from outside Dublin.

Health and Safety Authority

Under the decentralisation programme, 110 staff of the Health and Safety Authority were assigned to decentralise to Thomastown, Co Kilkenny. In anticipation of the move to Thomastown, the Authority established an interim office in Kilkenny city in August 2006.

The Authority currently has 33 staff based in its interim office in Kilkenny. Of these, 7 staff have relocated from its Dublin Office and the remaining 26 staff have been assigned to Kilkenny on recruitment to the Authority.

Significant further progress on decentralisation within the Authority awaits the review of decentralisation to be completed in 2011.

FÁS

There are currently 25 posts in Birr and all of these posts have been transferred from Head Office, Dublin.

FÁS will continue to seek to accommodate 15 additional posts for transfer to Birr, as the vacancies arise.

Departmental Staff.

172. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of people working in her Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47015/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): There are a total of 1,151 people employed in my Department. The table below sets out the number of staff in each staff category and in each income band.

This figures does not take into account the various worksharing patterns.

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Grade	Below €50,000 per annum	Between €50,001 and €60,000	Between €60,001 and €70,000	Between €70,001 and €80,000	Between €80,001 and €90,000	Between €90,001 and €100,000	Over €100,000
Secretary General							1
Assistant Secretary							7
Asst. Secretary Equivalent							5
Principal Officer					10	7	42
Principal Officer Equivalent							2
Assistant Principal	1		11	27	59	3	
Administrative Officer	4	6					
Higher Executive Officer	26	122	24				
Executive Officer	255	51					
Staff Officer	46						
Clerical Officer	373						
Service Staff	48						
Auditor		2					
Solicitor		2					
Examiner			3		1		
Economist			1				
Professional Accountant Grade 1				3	8		
Controller of Patents							1

173. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of her Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47030/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): It has not been possible in the time available to compile the information as requested by the Deputy. My officials are working on preparing the material and I will communicate with the Deputy as soon as the information is available.

174. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of her Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47045/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): It has not been possible in the time available to compile the information as requested by the Deputy. My officials are working on preparing the material and I will communicate with the Deputy as soon as the information is available. In general, where an overnight stay is required, the staff of my Department and agencies are paid a fixed sum which covers overnight expenses i.e. the cost of accommodation, three meals and a small amount for incidentals. However, to take account of the wide variation in circumstances that can arise with foreign travel, in some cases, instead of an overall subsistence rate, the cost of the accommodation can be separately claimed by the official. In such cases, the rate of subsistence is reduced. There are different rates for different locations. Accommodation is generally arranged by the officers themselves.

From time to time the Revenue Commissioners books hotels for conferences, seminars etc. Given the geographic spread of Revenue staff, it will be appreciated that such events may include overnight accommodation. To ensure optimum value for money, the accommodation costs for staff can be included as part of the overall package agreed with the hotel, with corresponding reductions in subsistence payments. Procurement for this type of accommodation is carried out in accordance with EU and National guidelines.

When I travel abroad on official business the relevant Embassy advises on the most suitable accommodation. The location of the accommodation would usually take into account the cost; the distance from the airport/meeting venues etc.

Departmental Agencies.

175. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of her Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47060/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): In so far as the rationalisation of state bodies under the aegis of my Department is concerned, the recent budget statement included an announcement in relation to the merging of the National Consumer Agency and the Competition Authority. Since the budget announcement my Department has been working in conjunction with both bodies to bring about a smooth transition to a unified single body to oversee the area of competition and consumer protection.

As both the National Consumer Agency and the Competition Authority were established under statute, it will be necessary to give effect to the newly merged body by way of primary legislation. It is my intention to bring forward the necessary legislation to give effect to this merger as soon as possible. In so far as cost savings are concerned, whilst it is expected that the synergies arising from the merger of the two bodies will result in savings to the exchequer, particularly in areas such as shared services, it is not possible to precisely quantify the amount of savings involved at this stage.

Departmental Expenditure.

176. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the amount of taxpayers' money given to the Institute of International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon referendum. [47099/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): No monies were given to the Institute for International and European Affairs by my Department in connection with the Lisbon Treaty Referendum. My Department holds corporate membership of the Institute for which an annual fee of €6,000 is payable.

Small and Medium Enterprises.

177. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment her plans to increase the number of business mentors available to small and medium enterprises outside of the current schemes in operation by the State agencies under the aegis of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47178/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Enterprise Ireland runs a range of training programmes, including, inter alia, the Enterprise Ireland Mentor Network, to help Irish businesses develop business leadership, increase skills and enhance management capabilities within companies both large and small.

Under the Mentor Network Programme, new mentors are recruited on a client needs basis. The Network currently has over 170 active mentors. I am informed that the number of new mentors to be added in 2009 will be determined by client demand.

The Enterprise Ireland Mentor Network was set up in 1988, and has provided thousands of Irish companies across the sectors with tailored advice, guidance and support, helping them accelerate growth and build management capability. Enterprise Ireland has published a Best Practice Guide which incorporates elements of International Best Practice and ensures the Mentor service is delivered to a consistently high standard across the Network.

The Mentor Network carries out approximately 300 assignments a year for Enterprise Ireland clients and also for clients of the County Enterprise Boards. Mentors on the Enterprise Ireland Network are successful senior executives, entrepreneurs or owner managers who volunteer to advise clients based on their own business experience.

Each year the service develops in order to be able to assist Irish companies to meet the challenges and opportunities they face. In 2009 the services of the Mentor Network will be expanded to:

- First Time Exporter clients of the County Enterprise Boards and Enterprise Ireland under the First Flight programme.
- Mentors with significant experience of diverse economic conditions that can advise companies throughout 2009.
- Mentors with experience in the high growth markets where new opportunities exist, e.g. Brazil, China, India, Russia and the Gulf States.
- Enterprise Ireland is also leveraging the deep experience that exists within the mentor network through utilising the mentors as advisers on the International Selling Programme that will have between 75 and 90 companies participating next year.
- Enterprise Ireland also has a number of senior executives in international markets that mentor and advise our client companies.

The County and City Enterprise Boards are the principal government agencies at local level with responsibility for enterprise promotion and micro business development. The key objectives of the Boards are to stimulate and promote local enterprise culture and entrepreneurship and to assist new business start ups and the expansion and growth of existing small business. The Enterprise Boards pursue these objectives by providing a number of crucial management and capability development or soft support services to businesses and individuals across a diverse range of sectors, including a business information service, business mentoring, business consultancy, business training programmes and various business networking opportunities. Over 143,000 people have participated on the various Management Development and Mentoring Programmes available from the CEBs since their inception in 1993 to end 2007.

178. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if she will introduce a new health check scheme for small and medium enterprises similar to that recently introduced in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47179/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy John McGuinness): The State development agencies under the aegis of my Department such as Enterprise Ireland, the County and City Enterprise Boards and FÁS provide financial and non-financial assistance to small and medium enterprises to assist in their development and growth. Business advice, mentoring and management capability and development programmes are provided as part of this assistance.

The UK health check system referred to by the Deputy is an on-line web based facility which enterprises may use to assist them to identify key areas of potential weakness in their businesses. Where such weaknesses are identified, individuals are generally directed to obtain specific advice and assistance. The UK facility is similar to the European Commission's "Vaccinate Your Business Against Bad Times" available to SMEs in all Member States, including Ireland, through the Commission's "European Portal for SMEs".

In view of the assistance already provided by the State development agencies, I have no plans to introduce a specific on-line web based facility similar to the UK. The agencies are already responding to the challenges presented by the current economic difficulties. The type of assistance from these agencies is kept under review and will be modified to reflect changing needs of enterprise.

EU Funding.

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the amount of EU funding received by her Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under her aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47243/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Ireland has qualified for Structural Funds since we joined the EU in 1973 and my Department, and its predecessor the Department of Labour, has been the National Authority for the European Social Fund (ESF) since that time. As National Authority for the ESF, my Department receives all ESF monies paid to Ireland by the European Commission. The ESF received by Ireland is used for the implementation of agreed Programmes or Initiatives, which are implemented by a range of Government Departments and States Agencies, and my Department transfers ESF payments to the Departments and Agencies concerned.

For the 2007 to 2013 round of funding the European Commission has allocated a total of €375.36 million of assistance to Ireland from the ESF. A total of €18.768 has been received to date.

Under the 2000 to 2006 round of funding a total of €1,030.05 million has been received to date by Ireland through the ESF. That assistance was delivered through five Operational Programmes operated by various Departments and Agencies. Total ESF allocated to each of the 5 programmes of the 2000 to 2006 round of funding is as follows:

Programme	Funding
	€
Employment & Human Resource Development OP	892,087,000
Southern & Eastern Regional (S&E) OP	87,337,000
Border, Western and Midlands (BMW) OP	37,063,000
Peace II OP	45,859,983
EQUAL Community Initiative	34,498,648
Total	1,096,845,631

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Under the 1994 to 1999 round of EU funding, over 2,181 million was received by Ireland from the ESF. That assistance was delivered through 6 individual Operational Programmes (OPs) and a further 9 distinct Community Initiatives (CIs), and Innovatory Actions as follows:

Programme	Funding
	€
Tourism	107.224
HRD	1,633.79
Ind OP	130.391
Agric	64.133
Adapt	26.402
Fisheries	6.616
Employment CI	79.91
LURD	69.968
SME Initiative	1.614
Leader II	8.559
Peace	30.062
Interreg	7.937
RETEX	1.85
Pesca	0.678
Urban	8.522
Innovatory Actions	4.108
Total	2,181.764

The ESF figures for the years 1973 to 1993 from Table 11 of the “Budgetary and Economic Statistics” which was published by the Department of Finance in 2007 are provided below. It is not feasible to give a further breakdown by programme of ESF payments for this Department for these earlier years.

Year	European Social Fund (million)
	€
1973	0.0
1974	4.6
1975	5.1
1976	5.8
1977	10.4
1978	24.5
1979	36.6
1980	59.3
1981	57.5
1982	92.9
1983	117.7
1984	107.0
1985	179.4
1986	161.8
1987	245.7
1988	161.0

Year	European Social Fund (million)
	€
1989	176.0
1990	163.2
1991	470.7
1992	352.1
1993	395.7
Total	2,827.0

In addition, my Department would also have received some direct funding outside of the Structural Funds in support of specific activities in areas such as Consumer Affairs, or as a participant in the “BRITE” Project, administered by the European Business Register (EBR), for example.

The Department would also have been involved in European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) co-funded projects since Ireland’s accession to the EU, however, ERDF receipts would have been paid directly to the central Exchequer by the European Commission and not channelled through individual Departments.

Finally, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment would also have co-ordinated a number of EU Programmes over the years under which European funding was awarded on the basis of competitive “Calls for Proposals” issued by the European Commission. However, the funding successfully accessed by many different applicants would have been paid directly to the successful applicants and not channelled through the Department.

International Monetary Fund.

180. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recently announced International Monetary Fund rescue package for Latvia; the full details of same, and the response to the crisis which the European Union has made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46613/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The IMF has not announced a Balance of Payment assistance package for Latvia. However, the IMF has indicated that Latvia is experiencing a sharp downturn in output growth and external funding pressures and that accordingly the Latvian authorities have asked the Fund, together with the EU, to provide technical and financial support.

Under Council Regulation 332/2002, the EU can grant medium-term financial assistance to Member States outside the Euro area. This arises from Article 119 of the Treaty, which says assistance can be provided to a member “in difficulties or seriously threatened with difficulties as regards its balance of payments either as a result of an overall disequilibrium in its balance of payments or as a result of the type of currency at its disposal”. The Council Presidency and the Commission are in close consultations with the Latvian authorities and the International Monetary Fund with a view to developing a joint response to the economic and financial situation in Latvia. It is expected that an agreed funding package will be decided on shortly.

Counterfeit Currency.

181. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Finance the number of counterfeit €5, €10, €20, €50, €100, €200 and €500 notes that were removed from circulation for each of the years 2003 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information in tabular readable form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46643/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Information on euro banknote counterfeiting is published biannually by the European Central Bank (ECB) in January and July. The following table published by the ECB on 10 July 2008, indicates the half-yearly trend in the number of counterfeits recovered:

Period	2003/2	2004/1	2004/2	2005/1	2005/2	2006/1	2006/2	2007/1	2007/2	2008/1
1000s	312	307	287	293	286	300	265	265	296	312

Number of Counterfeits

The table shows that the quantity has not varied greatly over recent years. When these figures are compared with the number of genuine euro banknotes in circulation — on average 11.5 billion notes — the quantity of counterfeits is very small. The breakdown of counterfeits by denomination is as follows:

	€5	€10	€20	€50	€100	€200	€500
Breakdown by denomination (in %)	0.5	2	33	36	21.5	6.5	0.5

It can be seen that the three mid-range denominations (€20, €50 and €100) together account for about 90% of all counterfeits. As can be seen from the following table, the level of counterfeits discovered in Ireland is broadly in line with the overall figures for the Eurosystem.

Denomination	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008 to mid-December
5	11	21	23	61	73	55
10	765	2,174	1,586	848	386	417
20	3,674	3,830	3,158	2,009	992	800
50	10,749	7,485	12,126	8,026	10,351	12,029
100	365	1,648	512	883	465	586
200	35	174	338	50	406	794
500	1	1	5	4	0	2
	15,600	15,333	17,748	11,881	12,673	14,683

Euro banknotes are produced to the highest standards and contain security features which are hard to counterfeit. However, The Central Bank advises the public to be alert and to check the authenticity of the banknotes they receive, particularly at busy times such as the Christmas trading period. Anyone who suspects they may have received a counterfeit should contact the Garda Síochána, giving as many details as possible about the banknote's origin. Further information on the banknote security features is available on the Central Bank's website: www.centralbank.ie.

Road Traffic Offences.

182. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the penalty for people having number plates on vehicles that are not up to standard or unclear; the number of people who have been summonsed for such an offence in each county to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46916/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that Section 131(6)(a) of the Finance Act 1992 provides that the identifying mark (i.e. the

registration number) assigned to a vehicle, once registered in the State, must be displayed in the format prescribed by the Revenue Commissioners.

Under section 139 of the Finance Act 1992 (as amended), the display of an identification mark (number plate) in contravention of section 131(6)(a) carries a penalty of €5,000 on summary conviction.

The Deputy may wish to note that Revenue enforcement officials, who are based at numerous locations around the country, carry out regular and on-going checks to identify breaches of VRT legislation. Instances of non-compliance with registration plate regulations are initially dealt with by means of verbal or written warnings and subsequently followed up by officials to confirm that the position has been regularised.

In the course of such checks, sixty-nine formal warnings issued for non-compliance with VRT number plate regulations in 2008. Follow-up assurance checks have confirmed compliance with the regulations, following the issue of warnings. Accordingly, no summonses were issued to date in 2008 for contravention of the VRT number plate regulations.

The Deputy will be aware that An Garda Síochána also has a role to play in policing number plate legislation.

Tax Code.

183. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Finance if the income levy to be introduced in January 2009 applies to gross income which includes the contributory State pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46521/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The position is that the income levy will apply to gross income but this excludes social welfare payments and the contributory and non-contributory State pensions.

Flood Relief.

184. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 64 of 6 November 2008 the position regarding this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46562/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): It is expected that a meeting with the relevant stakeholders will take place early in the New Year to discuss the proposed pilot project to remove silt from the Shannon Cut.

Departmental Property.

185. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Finance the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46666/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Following is the information requested by the Deputy.

Year	Device Type	Reported lost/ missing/stolen	Recovered
2008	USB Memory Stick	1	0

To date in 2008, one memory stick has been reported stolen and has not been recovered. I understand that no sensitive or private data was compromised with the loss of this device.

Departmental Expenditure.

186. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46681/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In general civil servants whose work requires them to stay overnight at a location distant from their home or headquarters are paid a fixed sum which is designed to cover the cost of accommodation, three meals and a small amount for incidentals. There are different rates for different locations. Accommodation is generally arranged by the officers themselves and in most cases my department is not informed whether the officer has stayed in a hotel or in other accommodation. In this situation it is not possible to separate out accommodation costs from other costs.

The amounts listed below show the total amount paid out in overnight expenses by my Department for official travel.

Year	Subsistence Expenditure
	€
2004	342,402
2005	268,828
2006	332,367
2007	382,908
2008	291,942

In relation to the bodies under the aegis of my Department the figures are currently being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy directly when this process has been completed.

187. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Finance the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46696/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In general, where an overnight stay is required, the staff of my Department and agencies are paid a fixed sum which covers overnight expenses i.e. the cost of accommodation, three meals and a small amount for incidentals. However, to take account of the wide variation in circumstances that can arise with foreign travel, in some cases, instead of an overall subsistence rate, the cost of the accommodation can be separately claimed by the official. In such cases, the rate of subsistence is reduced. There are different rates for different locations. Accommodation is generally arranged by the officers themselves.

From time to time the Revenue Commissioners books hotels for conferences, seminars etc. Given the geographic spread of Revenue staff, it will be appreciated that such events may include overnight accommodation. To ensure optimum value for money, the accommodation costs for staff can be included as part of the overall package agreed with the hotel, with corresponding reductions in subsistence payments. Procurement for this type of accommodation is carried out in accordance with EU and National guidelines.

When I travel abroad on official business the relevant Embassy advises on the most suitable accommodation. The location of the accommodation would usually take into account the cost; the distance from the airport/meeting venues etc.

Departmental Property.

188. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Finance the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46711/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the following table. No servers are leased by my Department and I have been informed that this is the case in relation to the bodies under the aegis of my Department.

Number of Servers	Capacity — Gigabytes
Department of Finance	
29	1 – 100
20	101 – 200
18	201 – 300
5	301 – 400
9	401 – 500
2	501 – 600
6	601 – 700
1	801 – 900
3	901 – 1000
3	1101 – 1200
1	1301 – 1400
Commission for Public Service Appointments	
2	135
1	82
1	36
Public service Appointments Service	
110	7,400 (Total capacity)
Office of the Ombudsman	
4	280
2	200
3	130
Valuation Office	
1	900
2	280
2	270
1	236
1	136
1	100
5	68
2	34
1	26
State Laboratory	
21	35-80
Office of Public Works	
98	19-545
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	
463	These range across high spec, medium spec to low end capacity

Surrender of Salary.

189. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Finance the grades of all individuals who have voluntarily surrendered pay; the value of the pay surrender to the State in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46795/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The main groups that have made a surrender of salary are Members of the Government, Ministers of State, Secretaries General and holders of posts at an equivalent level in the civil service. Other groups that have made a surrender of salary include certain members of the Oireachtas and a number of individual senior public servants. As the gifts are personal and voluntary it would not be appropriate to disclose the grades of those individuals. In the last category mentioned above, citing the grade/position held would allow identification of the persons concerned in most instances.

The approximate values of the amounts surrendered are as follows:

	2008	2009
	€	€
Members of the Government and Ministers of State	114,000	670,000
Secretaries General and equivalent posts	127,000	690,000
Other Groups	51,000	323,000

Tax Clearance Certificates.

190. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the number of working days it takes to have a tax clearance certificate issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46910/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a tax clearance certificate will normally be issued within six working days to a person whose tax affairs are up to date. This means that at the time of the application, the person:

- has made all of the required returns to Revenue, and
- has paid all tax known to be due or agreed a payment schedule in respect of such tax debts.

Where an applicant for tax clearance does not meet the criteria mentioned, a formal notification of refusal setting out the basis for the refusal, is issued by Revenue. If the applicant subsequently satisfactorily resolves the issues that have been notified to him/her, Revenue will then issue a tax clearance certificate.

191. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance when a person (details supplied) will get a tax clearance certificate issued to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46911/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a tax clearance certificate issued to the person concerned dated 12th December 2008.

Banking Sector.

192. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the relevant information which has been put at his disposal with regard to the availability of credit to small businesses here; if he

has been provided, and if so if he will make available, monthly or other regular statistics analysing these credit flows; if he has in recent months instructed the Central Bank, the Financial Regulator or other appropriate authorities to step up monitoring of such credit flows; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46942/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Nobody wants a situation where viable businesses fail because banks will not lend them money. At my meetings with certain financial institutions over the last two weeks, I asked those institutions covered by the Government's guarantee Scheme to consider the contribution that they can make to the economy through appropriate credit initiatives in relation to small and medium sized businesses and otherwise. I have, therefore, welcomed the fact that certain institutions have announced initiatives in this regard.

The Deputy may also wish to be aware that I recently met Mr Plutarchos Sakellaris, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank, which recently announced that it was providing additional funding through its lending facility for SMEs in the European Union. Mr Sakellaris confirmed that the Bank has been in discussion with a number of Irish financial institutions about participating in this facility for SMEs and that the EIB hopes that agreements to provide such loan facilities can be finalised as soon as possible. I have urged Irish banks to utilise the facility to the maximum extent possible with a view to making the additional funding available to SMEs as soon as possible. It is therefore pleasing to note that a number of banks have announced their intention to do so. Additionally, with my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, I have been in regular contact with the banks regarding the flow of lending to small business.

The Central Bank's October Monthly Statistics showed that lending to the Irish economy was essentially flat in October and this is a matter of concern. However, we should be cautious about drawing strong conclusions from one month's data. Forfás/Enterprise Ireland are surveying 200 clients or County Enterprise Boards and Enterprise Ireland in order to gather more detailed information.

Tax Yield.

193. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will set out for each tax credit and tax relief available to individual taxpayers, including but not confined to tax relief on mortgage interest, tuition fees, BES, service charges, rent payable in private tenancies, trade union expenses, health and medical expenses, the cost to the Exchequer in terms of tax foregone for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; the budgeted cost for 2009; the number of taxpayers availing of the tax relief; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46944/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the total identifiable costs to the Exchequer of all income tax credits and reliefs available to individuals are set out in the following table for the income tax years 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005, the most recent year for which the necessary detailed information is available except where otherwise stated. Relevant notes relating to items in the table are also set out below.

Projections for income tax receipts are based on assumed movements in macro-economic parameters and not by reference to the costs of individual tax reliefs. Accordingly, I am not in a position to provide the data requested by the Deputy for the years 2006 to 2009 in relation to the above mentioned reliefs.

The numbers availing represent income earners who were in a position to absorb at least some of the tax relief and thereby give rise to an Exchequer cost. They do not include the numbers of potential claimants whose entitlements to other tax reliefs were sufficient to reduce

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their liability to tax to nil without reference to the specific relief. The numbers availing are rounded to the nearest hundred as appropriate.

A married couple who has elected or has been deemed to have elected for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit.

Cost of Income Tax Credits, Allowances and Reliefs for 2002, 2003 2004 and 2005

Tax Relief Provision	2002		2003		2004		2005	
	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers
<i>Exemption limits:</i>								
General Exemption (2)	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Child Addition (2)	1.0	2,900	1.3	2,800	0.3	900	0.3	1,000
Age Exemption (2)	21.9	31,700	49.2	48,500	58.6	53,500	61.5	49,600
Married Person's Credit (3)	1805.1	629,400	1,820.6	631,000	2,015.5	698,200	2,268.9	756,500
Single Person's Credit (3)	1552.8	1,169,600	1,612.4	1,209,800	1,655.1	1,228,300	1,854.3	1,330,100
Widowed Person's Credit (3)	122.3	72,950	125.3	73,800	125.7	73,400	132.2	71,500
Additional Credit to Widowed Person in Year of Bereavement	6.1	4,000	4.9	4,000	4.9	4,000	4.7	4,000
Additional Bereavement Credit to Widowed Parent	5.6	3,500	5.2	3,300	4.0	2,500	4.3	2,400
Additional Personal Credit for Lone Parent	137.8	102,700	149.3	109,200	150.8	101,700	194.1	124,900
Homecarer Credit	73.7	100,800	72.6	99,200	75.1	103,600	63.9	87,900
Additional Credit for Incapacitated Child	4.4	8,800	4.6	9,000	5.0	9,800	10.3	10,400
Employee (PAYE) Credit	917.2	1,257,800	1,141.5	1,311,900	1,512.7	1,372,400	2,030.8	1,493,300
Dependent Relative Credit	1.1	16,600	1.1	16,000	1.05	15,650	1.02	15,200
Person Taking Care of Incapacitated Taxpayer	0.6	600	0.9	1,000	1.3	870	1.8	660
Age Credit	19.3	68,100	18.3	64,500	19.4	65,100	20.6	68,800
Blind Person's Credit	0.7	850	0.7	850	0.7	830	0.8	890
Medical Insurance Premiums (4)	161.7	859,000	190.6	909,700	218.2	941,300	229.6	1,073,400
Health Expenses	63.2	143,850	81.9	172,700	109.6	218,100	134.0	260,700
Contributions Under Permanent Health Benefit Schemes, after Deduction of Tax on Benefits Received (5)	1.7	20,000	2.0	20,300	2.5	21,300	3.2	21,600

Tax Relief Provision	2002		2003		2004		2005	
	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers
INCOME TAX								
Employees' Contributions To Approved Superannuation Schemes (6)							430.0	569,200
Employers' Contributions To Approved Superannuation Schemes (6)							90.0	296,700
Exemption of Investment Income and Gains of Approved Superannuation Funds (7)* (12)							1,050.0	N/A
Exemption of employers' contributions from employee BIK (6)							370.0	296,700
Tax Relief on "tax free" lump sums (6)							120.0	N/A
Retirement Annuity Premiums	250.9	110,600	264.0	109,500	318.9	115,000	357.7	121,200
Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (8)	N/A	N/A	6.0	2,440	13.7	6,300	42.2	32,900
<i>Interest paid:</i>								
Loans relating to Principal Private Residence	192.8	430,000	220.7	443,800	231.5	477,400	279.0	587,800
Other (9)	15.6	5,260	19.5	5,100	19.6	5,500	22.2	4,800
Rent Paid in Private Tenancies	26.4	97,400	28.1	102,400	33.0	118,500	48.07	144,500
Expenses Allowable to Employees under Schedule E	153.8	866,420	111.5	866,600	122.1	867,300	65.0	908,800
Third Level Education Fees	6.9	17,500	8.6	21,900	11.1	26,600	14.3	29,900
Exemption of Certain Earnings of Writers, Composers and Artists	23.9	1,600	22.5	1,700	32.1	1,970	34.8	2,220
Dispositions (Including Maintenance Payments made to Separated Spouses)	12.8	5,900	15.0	6,000	17.1	6,000	18.9	6,100
Exemption of Interest on Savings Certificates, National Instalment Savings & Index Linked Savings Bonds	108.8	N/A	140.1	N/A	150.1	N/A	129.5	N/A
Rent a Room	1.8	1,440	2.6	2,000	2.7	2,330	3.3	2,820
Exemption of Income of Charities, Colleges, Hospitals, Schools, Friendly Societies, etc. (10)	23.4	N/A	19.9	N/A	19.3	N/A	19.8	N/A
Donations to Approved Bodies	16.3	25,600	28.6	38,450	25.9	42,900	34.0	63,800
Donations to Sports Bodies (11)	0.1	140	0.3	300	0.2	380	0.2	430

Tax Relief Provision	2002		2003		2004		2005	
	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers
INCOME TAX								
Retirement Relief for certain Sports Persons (11)	N/A	N/A	0.1	17	0.2	41	0.25	42
Exemption of Irish Government Securities where owner not ordinarily resident in Ireland (12) *	130.1	N/A	142.8	N/A	199.7	N/A	169.3	N/A
Exemption of Statutory Redundancy Payments	25.1	25,100	42.5	25,800	76.9	25,300	72.8	22,000
Service Charges	5.2	124,900	8.2	169,300	12.7	229,600	17.2	304,700
Top Slicing Relief — Reduced Tax Rate for Payments in Excess of Exemption Amounts Made as Compensation for Loss of Office	5.7	1,300	0.1	1,500	12.2	1,420	11.1	1,480
Revenue Job Assist allowance	0.9	1,700	0.6	900	0.4	550	0.4	550
Allowance for seafarers	0.2	120	0.3	150	0.4	230	0.4	200
Trade Union Subscriptions	11.0	229,600	6.5	232,100	10.7	248,300	11.8	272,100
<i>Exemption From Tax of Certain Social Welfare Payments:</i>								
Child benefit *	266.4	336,300	327.3	337,100	404.9	344,200	366.6	373,500
Maternity allowance *	8.4	9,600	9.4	10,600	9.7	10,400	9.6	10,800
Exemption of Pensions, Benefits or Gratuities Payable to Veterans of the War of Independence, their Widows or Dependents	0.09	1,400	0.08	1,200	0.08	1,000	0.08	900
Approved Profit Sharing Schemes *	42.0	55,100	29.9	49,900	43.5	47,400	55.7	53,000
Savings-Related Share Option Schemes*	0.09	N/A	7.3	N/A	1.7	N/A	6.2	N/A
Approved Share Option Schemes*	N/A	N/A	Neg.	31	0.03	91	0.4	464
Employee Share Ownership Trusts* (Income Tax only)	1.5	17,800	0.9	7,900	0.1	234	1.2	6,500
Investment in Corporate Trades (BES)	20.2	2,300	16.7	2,100	21.1	2,600	16.1	1,650
Investment in Seed Capital	1.4	72	2.3	89	2.7	106	1.3	42
Stock Relief *	1.9	N/A	1.9	N/A	1.9	N/A	2.0	N/A
Relief for expenditure on significant buildings and gardens	3.7	54	2.1	70	2.5	66	3.3	84

Cost of Income Tax Credits, Allowances and Reliefs for 2002, 2003 2004 and 2005 — continued

Tax Relief Provision	2002		2003		2004		2005	
	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers	Estimated cost ¹ €m	Numbers
INCOME TAX								
Donation of Heritage items	4.2	5	5.8	8	5.2	3	5.8	7
Special Savings Incentive Scheme	433.0	1,143,400	531.9	1,113,900	548.0	1,094,300	597.4	1,083,600
Total Capital Allowances: (Income Tax only) (14)	546.9	N/A	560.4	245,549	663.6	260,781	734.4	249,379
Rented Residential Relief — Section 23 *(15)	N/A	N/A	69.4	1,952	182.2	3,578	239.7	4,126
Double Taxation Relief (Income Tax only)	49.7	8,680	56.2	10,010	29.1	10,800	30.7	12,740
Investment in Films*	21.6	2,240	24.6	2,400	19.5	1,900	15.7	1,500

NOTES ON TABLE

- (1) Figures accompanied by an asterisk * are particularly tentative and subject to a considerable margin of error.
- (2) The cost figures for the exemption limits are based on the excess of the exemption limits over the basic personal tax credits. They include the cost of marginal relief for taxpayers whose incomes are not greatly in excess of the exemption limits.
- (3) The figures shown for the basic personal tax credits (married, single and widowed) are the costs of these tax credits as if all other tax credits and the exemption limits did not apply. They do not include individuals who are not on Revenue records because their incomes are below the income tax thresholds.
- (4) Arising from the change over to Tax Relief at Source the figures relate to the number of policies issued. These include policies where subscriptions were paid by businesses on behalf of their employees.
- (5) Part of the cost of contributions to Permanent Health Benefit Schemes is not identifiable as a result of the move to a “net pay” basis for contributions by PAYE taxpayers from 6 April 2001.
- (6) See the following table “Green Paper on Pensions” for background commentary and cost figures for 2006.
- (7) Arising from the work on the “Green Paper on Pensions” (2007) the basis for costing this item has been changed and is not directly comparable with the figures for earlier years. See also the following table “Green Paper on Pensions” for more recent figures.
- (8) The figures shown for Personal Retirement Savings Accounts for 2004 are derived from personal tax returns and are understated because they do not include contributions made by employers or by employees through their employers. See 2005 and the following table “Green Paper on Pensions” for more complete figures.
- (9) “Other” relates to borrowings for purposes such as acquiring an interest in a company or partnership or to pay death duties.
- (10) The cost of exempting the income of charities, colleges, hospitals, schools, friendly societies, etc. from income tax includes the sums repaid in respect of tax credits and income tax deducted at source (certain dividends, other investment income and payments received under covenant), donations made by the PAYE sector to approved bodies but does not include income tax relief in respect of donations made by the self-employed. It also includes the cost of exempting certain bodies from the deduction on income arising from government securities. Information is not available about other income received gross.
- (11) The cost figures for relief for donations to Approved Sports Bodies and for certain Sports Persons are based on self assessment returns.
- (12) In the absence of other information, tax has been assumed at the standard rate of income tax even though a different rate might be appropriate in many cases.
- (13) The cost shown for capital allowances does not include any cost associated with “unused capital allowances”, that is, capital allowances which are not absorbed by a company in the accounting period in which they arise because they exceed the amount of the company’s profits of that accounting period which are available for offset. Unused capital allowances can be offset as losses against taxable profits arising in the previous accounting period and against certain profits arising in future accounting periods and can be offset against the profits of another company in the same group of companies. It is estimated that €3500 million of unused capital allowances were claimed in respect of 2005 accounting periods but as the proportion of this item which is included in previous years losses and in group relief is not separately identifiable a reliable estimate of the cost of the capital allowance element cannot be provided.
- (14) The tax cost shown for section 23 type relief is the estimated ultimate tax cost relating to the total allowable expenditure in respect of claims made in 2004 and 2005 tax returns for the first time. The cost shown is for income tax cases only.

Green Paper on Pensions — updated estimates of cost for 2006

As part of the work on the Green Paper on Pensions, a review was carried out of the current regime of incentives for supplementary pension provision with a view to developing more comprehensive and reliable estimates of the cost of reliefs in this area. The review examined, among other things, the current reliefs and incentives for investment in supplementary pensions and the data available on which to base reliable estimates of the costs in revenue foregone to the Exchequer.

The review drew on newly available 2006 aggregate data on contributions to pension schemes by employers and employees arising from a P35 initiative introduced on foot of provisions that were included in Finance Act 2004 with a view to improving data quality. Arising from the review, estimates of the cost of tax for private pension provision for 2006 have been made. As similar data sources would not be available for previous years, it is not possible to provide costings on a similar basis for those years except in the case of 2005 for which tentative estimates have been compiled.

Estimate of the cost of tax and PRSI reliefs for private pension provision 2006

	Estimated costs	Numbers*
	€million	
Employees' Contributions to approved Superannuation Schemes	540	680,000
Employers' Contributions to approved Superannuation Schemes	120	362,000**
Estimated cost of exemption of employers' contributions from employee BIK	510	362,000
Exemption of investment income and gains of approved Superannuation Funds	1,200	Not available
Retirement Annuity Contracts (RACs)	380	Not available for 2006
Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs)	120	71,500
Estimated cost of tax relief on "tax-free" lump sum payments	130	
Estimated cost of PRSI and Health Levy relief on employee and employer contributions	220	Not available
Gross cost of tax relief	3,220	
Estimated tax yield from payment of pension benefits	320	
Net cost of tax relief	2,900	

*Numbers as included in P35 returns from employers to Revenue for 2006. Figures are as verified to date but may be understated and subject to revision.

**This is numbers of employees for whom employers are contributing to occupational pension funds as included in P35 returns to Revenue for 2006. Figures are as verified to date but may be understated and subject to revision.

The breakdown and make-up of these estimated costs of reliefs differ from presentations of costs in this area for previous years in a number of respects and are not directly comparable. For further details on the cost of tax and other reliefs and the changes in the methodology, refer to pages 106 and 107 of the Green Paper on Pensions which is available at www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie.

194. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will set out for each tax credit and tax relief available to businesses the cost to the Exchequer in terms of tax foregone for each year from 2002 to date and the budgeted cost for 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46945/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the information requested in relation to the main tax credits and reliefs available to businesses under the Income Tax Acts for which estimates of cost can be provided is as set out in the following table. The information provided covers the period from 2002 to 2006, the latest year for which most of the necessary detailed data is available. Data is not yet available for 2007 as the tax returns for that year are currently being processed. Tax returns for 2008 are not due until next year. Projections for income tax receipts are based on assumed movements in macro-economic parameters and not by reference to the costs of individual tax reliefs. Accordingly, I am not in a position to provide the information requested by the Deputy for 2009 in relation to these reliefs.

A number of tax reliefs, credits and deductions (for example, personal credits, pension contributions, BES, Film relief and property based tax incentives), which are also available to self-employed and PAYE taxpayers, are not exclusively available for business reasons and have not been included in the table.

Main tax credits and reliefs available to businesses

Title of Relief/ Credit	2002		2003		2004		2005		2006	
	No's	Cost €m	No's	Cost €m	No's	Cost €m	No's	Cost €m	No's	Cost €m
Capital Allowances (1)	N/Av	1595.0	250,000	1580.3	272,300	1683.6	266,200	1877.5	N/Av	N/Av
Effective Rate of 10% for Manufacturing and Certain Other Activities (2)	4,720	1174.1	3770	525.7	3,361	354.1	3,034	396.0	2,831	384.1 (provisional)
Group Relief	1,290	166.8	1,400	150.7	1,472	207.6	1,578	421.6	1,592	255.6 (provisional)
Research & Development Tax Credit (3)	N/Av	N/Av	N/Av	N/Av	73	70.5	135	65.2	141	74.7 (provisional)
Exemption for patent income	N/Av	N/Av	N/Av	N/Av	849	62.8	1030	75.6	1120	83.8 (provisional)
Relief for Management Expenses	645	54.0	640	64.7	592	47.8	627	51.9	731	53.7 (provisional)
Stock Relief (4)	N/Av	1.9	N/Av	1.9	N/Av	1.9	N/Av	2.0	N/Av	N/Av

(1) The cost shown for capital allowances does not include any cost associated with “unused capital allowances”, that is, capital allowances which are not absorbed by a company in the accounting period in which they arise because they exceed the amount of the company's profits of that accounting period which are available for offset. Unused capital allowances can be offset as losses against taxable profits arising in the previous accounting period and against certain profits arising in future accounting periods and can be offset against the profits of another company in the same group of companies. As an example, it is estimated that €3500 million of unused capital allowances were claimed in respect of 2005 accounting periods but as the proportion of this item which is included in previous years losses and in group relief is not separately identifiable a reliable estimate of the cost of the capital allowance element cannot be provided. The figures shown for 2002 are an estimate.

(2) The cost does not include any notional cost associated with IFSC companies. The International Financial Services activity in Ireland represents new business which has developed as a result of, among other things, the concessionary tax rate. This means that as the cost of the concessionary rate is not just the difference between the concessionary tax rate and the full tax rate, it is therefore not quantifiable. In regard to the cost shown for the effective rate of 10 per cent for manufacturing and certain other activities, no account is taken of the fact that without these incentives, many enterprises may not have set up here. To the extent that profits earned by such enterprises would not have been available for Irish tax purposes, part of the cost figure shown might be regarded as notional.

(3) The cost shown for R&D is for claims for R&D on corporation tax returns for accounting periods ending in years 2004 (when the scheme commenced), 2005 and 2006. However, the cost includes the cost associated with claims where the company was entitled to the credit but was unable to absorb it in that accounting year.

(4) Tentative estimate.

Budget 2009.

195. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that the budgetary framework of revenues and expenditures set out by him in Budget 2009 remains viable in view of recent forecasts in the decline in economic activity for the year of up to 4% and in view of the most recent live register figures that indicate the average rate of unemployment for 2009 as forecast on Budget 2009 day has already been surpassed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46946/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As I stated in my replies to oral questions last week, all indications are that economic activity in 2009 will contract by significantly more than the forecast in the recent Budget with an overall contraction of perhaps somewhere in the region of 3 to 4 per cent.

At Budget time, I identified that there were significant risks to the economic and fiscal forecasts for 2008 and for 2009. The further deterioration in tax receipts in 2008, as seen by the end-November Exchequer Returns, the continuing weakening of consumer and investor confidence, adverse currency movements, continued difficulty in the international financial markets and depressed economic conditions, are all evidence of those risks materialising. The drop in the 2008 revenue take alone would push the 2009 General Government Deficit up by about €1.5 billion to $7\frac{1}{4}$ per cent of GDP. In addition, each 1 per cent decline in economic activity in 2009 beyond the contraction of 1 per cent already forecast would increase the General Government Deficit by about $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

The Budget day forecast for unemployment next year was based on the assumption that while employment would decline, reflecting the contraction in activity, there would be some easing in the growth of labour supply, brought about by lower participation rates and lower rates of migration. Clearly if, as I have already indicated, the economy is now likely to contract significantly more than previously expected, this will have an impact on the outlook for the labour market.

Upon receipt of the end-year fiscal data and the latest economic data, including the third quarter national income data and December Live Register figures, a revised economic and fiscal assessment will be prepared by my Department in early January and brought forward for Government consideration. This assessment will reflect the dramatically changed environment now being faced.

In light of the further deterioration in the economic and budgetary situation, the Government is continuing to identify measures to ensure the sustainability of the public finances, while also focusing on areas that can expand the productive capacity of the economy. In this regard, the Taoiseach will shortly publish a programme for the renewal of the economy. The stabilisation of the public finances is the central immediate element of this framework.

Departmental Bodies.

196. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance when the special group on public service numbers and expenditure programmes is due to report; if elements of its recommendations will be reported, considered and implemented in advance of the group's final report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46947/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Group will report to me every two months and will submit a final report to me by the end of June 2009. The Special Group's analysis and recommendations will assist me and my Government colleagues to identify economies which can be made on the scale necessary to ensure that the public finances are brought under control

in a short and economically prudent timeframe. The Group's conclusions will accordingly be considered on an ongoing basis in the context of preparing the Estimates of Expenditure for 2010 and later years, and publication or otherwise will be decided on in that context.

197. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will set out the remuneration arrangements for the members of the special group on public service numbers and expenditure programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46948/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The remuneration arrangements, insofar as any apply, for members of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes are expected to be finalised in the New Year.

198. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if, with respect to the special group on public service numbers and expenditure programmes, the Exchequer cost of tax incentives, credits or reliefs in terms of tax revenue forgone comes under the remit of the group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46949/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Special Group's primary focus is on examining all programmes funded through public expenditure and to identify options for savings in the context of the Government's fiscal objectives as set out in Budget 2009. As such, tax incentives, credits or reliefs do not come under the remit of the group.

Departmental Staff.

199. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of people working in his Department; the number of qualified economists, having a masters degrees in economics, PhD's in economics, and the number of qualified accountants working at his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46950/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): There are currently 614 people (whole time equivalents) employed in my Department. There are currently 57 officers who hold degrees in Economics and related disciplines, 44 who hold a Masters qualification in Economics and related disciplines, and 1 officer who holds a PhD. Some officers will, of course, be included in more than 1 of these categories. There are 7 officers with professional accountancy qualifications. In addition, a further 10 staff have degrees in Accounting or accounting related disciplines.

Public Private Partnerships.

200. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if, with respect to each PPP project under development with Exchequer financing, at the planning or construction stage, the increased cost of debt financing has rendered the project financially unviable or has increased the cost of the project to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46951/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Deputy will be aware that my Department has put in place the overall PPP investment framework, including the framework for the appraisal, assessment, procurement and evaluation of projects. Individual Departments are responsible for the projects and programme in their areas, within that overall framework. The extent to which current market developments affect PPPs is a matter for each Department suitably advised by the National Development Finance Agency, who are monitoring the situation.

Air Services.

201. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his position on the possible takeover of Aer Lingus (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46952/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Deputy will understand that there are constraints on any comments I can make about this matter at this stage because of the strict rules of disclosure which apply under the Irish Takeover Panel takeover code. I can say that Ryanair released its formal offer document on 15 December and, as the Deputy is aware from recent comments from the Minister for Transport, the Government will evaluate the offer from the perspective of the Government as a shareholder and having regard to a range of issues including Ireland's aviation policy.

Sovereign Debt.

202. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the increases in credit default swap prices on sovereign Irish debt since 30 September 2008; the way this increase relates to the benchmark of German sovereign debt over the same period; his views on these developments; if this evolution in relative CDS prices relates to the introduction of the bank guarantee scheme; and if so, the extent; his views on whether Ireland's sovereign rating could be downgraded from its current AAA rating at some point during 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46956/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The National Treasury Management Agency have advised me that the current aversion to risk in global markets has led to an increase in the cost of insuring exposure to all counterparties, and the associated increase in credit spreads has more to do with the general sentiment in the credit markets than the financial position of individual issuers. Irish government debt has not been immune to this trend. However, while the Government's bank guarantee scheme is certainly a contributory factor to the increase, the market for Irish government credit default swaps is small and prices quoted are volatile. Also, it should be noted that such spreads represent a cost to the investor and do not directly affect the cost of debt to the Exchequer.

The following table sets out CDS prices for Irish and German Government bonds on the 29th and 30th of September and at close of business yesterday.

	29/09/08	30/09/08	16/12/08
Ireland 5 year CDS	32.9	60.4	189.7
German 5 year CDS	8.8	12.3	47.5

Ireland has the top AAA rating from all the major rating agencies. In assessing overall credit worthiness, consideration has to be given to the overall level of government debt. The government debt ratio was forecast in Budget 2009 to be around 36% of GDP at end-2008. This ratio does not take into the account the assets of the National Pensions Reserve Fund or the significant cash balances that the NTMA has built up for the Exchequer. When the assets of the NPRF are netted off, the projected net indebtedness position for end-2008, as set out in Budget 2009, is in the region of 25% of GDP. The projected EU average for end 2008 is around 60% of GDP. However, given the continuous deterioration in the public finances, as evidenced in the end-November Exchequer returns, and the downside risks to growth next year, it is inevitable that our borrowing will rise in the years ahead. The Government is concerned at such a development and is giving priority to stabilising and restoring the public finances to a sus-

tainable position, particularly by bringing the current budget back to balance as soon as possible.

Credit Institutions Support Scheme.

203. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if the charging scheme of the bank guarantee scheme foresees a mechanism for a reappraisal of the overall gross charge in view of developments in the pricing of Irish long term sovereign debt when this change in pricing arises either directly or indirectly from the introduction of the bank guarantee scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46957/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The thinking behind the Charging Model is set out in some detail in the Annexe to the Scheme. However, the main principle is that the Minister for Finance estimates an aggregate cost that the State will bear as a consequence of the guarantee and each covered institution will pay its share in accordance with its risk profile and the guarantee charging model, subject to the estimated cost to the Exchequer being fully recouped. In case the actual cost for the State is higher, the charge will be adapted accordingly.

The Deputy will be aware that a cost of €1 billion over two years was the original estimate for recouping the cost to the State of extra borrowing. Nothing has yet arisen to suggest that this estimate was inaccurate. The cost of public borrowing constantly changes in the financial markets in response to many different influences, and there is no reason to suggest that these changes are all driven by the guarantee scheme.

Tax Code.

204. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer, in terms of tax revenue foregone, of tax relief for investors in the private housing market for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; the budgeted cost of such reliefs for 2009; the number of individual taxpayers who avail of such reliefs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46958/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the relevant information available on the cost to the Exchequer of income tax relief for individual investors in private housing is based on personal income tax returns filed by non-PAYE taxpayers for the years 2003 to 2006 inclusive, the latest year for which this information is available, indicating the amount of interest on borrowings claimed as a deduction against rental income assessable under Case V, Schedule D. The estimated costs are set out as follows.

Year	Estimated Tax Forgone	Numbers of individual claimants
	€m	
2003	222	39,800
2004	284	50,800
2005	393	60,600
2006 (provisional)	572	63,700

The estimates are based on assuming that tax relief was allowed at the top income tax rate of 42% and the figures provided could therefore be regarded as the maximum Exchequer cost in respect of those taxpayers.

Corresponding suitable data is not available for the year 2002. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that data for the tax year 2007 is not yet available as the appropriate income tax returns for that year which were recently due for filing are currently being processed. It should be noted that any corresponding data returned by PAYE taxpayers in the income tax

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

return form 12 is not captured in the Revenue computer system. However, any PAYE taxpayer with non-PAYE income greater than €3,174 is required to complete an income tax return form 11. This return is the source of the figures provided in this reply.

Projections for income tax receipts are based on assumed movements in macroeconomic parameters and not by reference to the costs of individual tax reliefs. Accordingly, I am not in a position to provide the data requested by the Deputy for the years 2007 to 2009 in relation to this relief.

Income tax relief is also claimed by individuals who have invested in private residential property under the various property based tax incentive schemes in the categories of urban renewal, town renewal, seaside resort, rural renewal, living over the shop, park and ride, student accommodation, holiday cottages and housing for the elderly and infirm. Based on information that has been received and collated to date for the tax years 2004, 2005 and 2006, the position in terms of estimated tax relief allowed in respect of these schemes is set out in the following table.

No specific Revenue information on the cost of these schemes is available for the tax year 2003 or previous years and I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that data for the tax year 2007 is not yet available as the appropriate income tax returns for that year have only recently been filed and have not yet been processed. For the same reason, I am not in a position to provide the data requested by the Deputy for the years 2008 and 2009.

Property based tax incentive schemes

Residential property	2004		2005		2006	
	No. of Investors	Tax relief allowed €m	No. of Investors	Tax relief allowed €m	No. of Investors	Tax relief allowed €m
Urban renewal, town renewal, seaside resort, rural renewal, living over the shop, park and ride, student accommodation, holiday cottages and housing for the elderly and infirm.	3,123	69	5,372	192	6,269	213

205. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the cost, in terms of tax revenue foregone, of the remittance tax regime for foreign business executives for each year of its operation from 2002 to date in 2008, including the forecast cost of the proposed revamped scheme, as set out in the Finance Bill (No. 2) 2008 for 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46959/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, prior to 31 December 2005, a non-domiciled individual could avail of the remittance basis of taxation in respect of the income from a non-Irish sourced employment. This applied, not only to non-domiciled business executives, but to all non-domiciled individuals working in the State. As the Deputy is aware, that type of remittance basis gave rise to a number of abuses and, as a result, it was curtailed in the Finance Act 2006.

With effect from 1 January 2006, the remittance basis of taxation no longer applies to the income of a non-Irish sourced employment attributable to the performance in the State of the duties of that employment. Section 13 of the Finance (No. 2) Bill 2008 as recently amended by the Select Committee on Finance and the Public Service proposes to introduce a new type of remittance basis of taxation to the income of a non-Irish sourced employment attributable to

the performance in the State of the duties of that employment which was debated at some length at Committee Stage of the Bill.

As to potential loss to the Exchequer, individuals chargeable on the remittance basis are obliged to declare only so much of the foreign income received in, or remitted to, the State. Accordingly, details of un-remitted employment income under foreign contracts, in respect of which Irish tax was forgone, either by business executives or other occupations, are not available.

Budget of 2006 stated that the Exchequer yield from discontinuing the remittance basis with effect from 1 January 2006 was estimated at over €50 million in 2006, €75 million in 2007 and €100 million in subsequent full years. These estimates were arrived at on the basis of the evidence of the promotion of the use of the remittance basis which the changes in the Finance Act 2006 were designed to eliminate.

As regards the proposed scheme as outlined in the present Finance Bill, as I stated at the Committee Stage of the Bill, it is difficult to estimate but I believe it could cost about €10 million per annum.

National Parks.

206. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if the buses run by the Office of Public Works in the Phoenix Park could be eco-friendly buses; if the OPW has examined this possibility; his views on this as a positive development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46960/08]

207. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of passengers who have used the bus services provided in the Phoenix Park; the cost to the Exchequer on an annual basis since the services commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46961/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 and 207 together.

The buses used for the shuttle service are powered by liquid petroleum gas and were the most ecologically friendly vehicles available on the market at the time of tender 2007 / 2008. These buses offer significant environmental benefits over diesel, including 96% lower emissions of nitrous oxide, zero particulate emissions and much lower noise levels.

The total number of passengers carried on the service between 4 May 2008 and 26 October 2008 was 17,345. The total cost of providing the service between the beginning of May to the end of October was €183,934.00. The business plan for the service envisaged a build-up of passengers on a progressive basis from a small start-up base. Given the take-up on the service to date however, its continued operation at its present level is being reviewed.

State Property.

208. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the purpose the Steward's House at Farmleigh is used for; if it is used by An Taoiseach; if An Taoiseach has stayed there overnight; if so, the number of occasions; the annual cost to the Exchequer of maintaining this residence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46962/08]

209. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the purpose for which An Taoiseach's State residence is being used for; the annual cost to the Exchequer of maintaining this residence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46963/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208 and 209 together.

[Deputy Martin Mansergh.]

The Steward's House is an integral part of the Farmleigh Estate, and it was included as part of the purchase of Farmleigh by the State in 1999. The Steward's House was refurbished to provide additional guest accommodation as part of the overall Farmleigh complex, but separate from the main house.

As part of the Farmleigh Estate, it is available for official use. Since it became available for use, one group of 3 guests, the EU Commissioner for Agriculture and two others, were accommodated in the Steward's House for 2 days and 2 nights. It has been used by the Taoiseach for a small number of informal meetings over recent weeks. The Taoiseach has also stayed overnight on 5 occasions when official duties prevented his return to his residence. The question of the basis on which such use might arise in the future is currently under consideration.

Since the Steward's House has only recently been refurbished and renovated, the annual maintenance costs for the House are minimal.

210. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of times the Farmleigh estate has been used for each of the years 2006, 2007 and to date in 2008; the number of nights the residence has been occupied by foreign dignitaries or other individuals for each of the years 2006, 2007 and to date in 2008; the annual cost to the Exchequer of maintaining this residence for each of the years 2006, 2007 and to date in 2008; the budgeted cost for 2008 and 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46964/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The information sought by the Deputy in relation to usage of Farmleigh and the annual running costs of Farmleigh in each of the years 2006, 2007 and 2008 is given in the following tables. In addition to the cost of running Farmleigh as the premier guest facility for visiting Heads of State, the expenditure in each year supported significant other activity at Farmleigh in relation to its use as a venue for high level meetings, and also the very successful public access and event programme. Details of these other activities are given in the following tables also.

Annual OPW Expenditure on Farmleigh Running Costs

	2009 Budget Prelim.	2008 Budget	2008 to date	2007	2006
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Operating/Running costs	3.130	3.226	3.020	3.204	3.359

Usage Patterns: RESIDENTIAL

Summary of Residential Visits in recent years

Year	No. of Guests	No. of Bednights	Duration of overnight stays	Main State Visits/Guests (Heads of State) (Overnights)
2006	170	340	1-4	Croatia, Australia, Norway, New Zealand, Egypt,
2007	108	283	1-4	Poland, USA, Slovakia, Belgium, Finland
2008 provisional figures	60	130	1-4	Comm.Walstrom, Vietnam, Estonian President and EU Commission President

EVENTS

Summary of High Level Events held at Farmleigh

Year	No. of Events	Nos Attending
2006	96	4350
2007	113	4625
2008 provisional figures	86	4740

PUBLIC ACCESS PROGRAMME

Summary of Public Events Programme

Year	Total No. of Visitors	Total No. of Public Events
2006	277,005	54
2007	177,161	65
2008 provisional figures	190,000	79

Public Access Days: 146.

Tax Code.

211. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if property developers who build houses and rent out rather than sell them can claw-back VAT paid on construction costs; if there have been changes to this element of the VAT regime during 2008 or if there are such changes planned for 2009; the rationale for such changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46973/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, in common with any trader engaged in taxable activities, property developers engaged in the building and selling of houses are entitled to deduct VAT incurred on their input costs. The position regarding property developers who, having deducted VAT incurred on the development of residential property, subsequently rent rather than sell completed houses is set out below.

Where a house is completed before 1 July 2008 and rented on or after that date, there is a full claw-back of the VAT deducted by the developer. This claw-back is triggered by section 4C(3) to the Value-Added Tax Act 1972, as amended, and is effected at the time the letting of the residential property is created.

The Finance Act 2008 introduced a new VAT on property regime from 1 July 2008. The new regime includes a capital goods scheme (CGS) that regulates VAT deductibility in relation to property by reference to the taxable and exempt use of the property over the “life” of the property, which in most cases is 20 years. Where a house is completed on or after 1 July 2008, and rented on or after 1 July 2008 (an exempt activity), no immediate claw-back of the VAT occurs. Instead, the developer is required to adjust the VAT deductibility at the end of the second CGS interval and each subsequent interval until the property is sold. In effect, therefore, VAT deducted by the developer is clawed back proportionately by reference to the length of the letting over the 20 year “life” of the property. Full details on the CGS are available under Chapter 6 of the VAT on Property Guide, which is available on the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie.

I would add, however, that the subsequent sale by a developer of a residential property that he has rented out remains fully taxable.

Financial Services Regulation.

212. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if, in respect of the reported levying of a fine by the Financial Regulator on the chairperson of a leading insurance company and the publication of a limited amount of information in relation to the matters giving rise to that fine, he has requested detailed briefing from the Regulator in relation to the matters involved in the case pertaining to an insurance company and to a bank which is covered by the State bank guarantee scheme; if he has requested special examinations, audits or reviews to be carried out in respect of both of the relevant financial institutions; the rationale for such changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46974/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In my role as the Minister for Finance I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. The day-to-day responsibility for the supervision of financial institutions is a matter for the Financial Regulator, which is statutorily independent in the exercise of its regulatory functions. The Financial Regulator is also obliged to treat as confidential the information it holds on regulated entities. Consequently the Settlement Agreement entered into with the insurance company in question is strictly a matter between the parties.

The Deputy will be aware that in light of the ongoing turmoil in financial markets, the Financial Regulator is continuing to intensify its on-site and off-site supervision of financial institutions. In this respect the Financial Regulator has advised me that on the basis of the latest figures available, all insurers meet the statutory solvency margin requirements. On the banking side, I have met with the Governor of the Central Bank and the Financial Regulator to discuss the report on the financial position of the major financial institutions participating in the Government Guarantee Scheme. This report which cannot be disclosed because of its confidential and commercially sensitive nature presents an analysis of the institutions having regard to their loan books. The report confirmed that the capital position of each of the institutions reviewed is in excess of regulatory requirements as at 30 September 2008. The report also concludes that even in certain stress scenarios the capital levels in the financial institutions will remain within regulatory requirements in the period to 2011.

213. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that the requirement to notify to the Stock Exchange of significant shareholdings in quoted shares, and banks in particular, via the office of the Financial Regulator is being carried out; if he is satisfied himself that a company (details supplied) has been fully notified to the Stock Exchange as apparently required; if persons involved in the acquisition of shares, or an interest in shares via contracts for difference, are obliged to notify these interests; if they are not obliged to notify these interests, his views on whether this is a gap in the regulatory mechanism; his further views on asking the Regulator to make or strengthen regulations to this effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46975/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): A person is required to make a notification to the issuer and to the Irish Stock Exchange where their shareholding in that issuer, which is admitted to trading on a regulated market, reaches or passes certain percentage thresholds, expressed as a percentage of total voting rights in the capital of the issuer. The relevant threshold for Irish issuers is 3% and each 1% thereafter up to 100%. The notification requirement only applies to shares with voting rights attached. The notification requirements also apply to a person who holds, directly or indirectly, financial instruments which result in an entitlement to acquire, on such holder's own initiative alone, under a formal agreement, shares to which voting rights are attached, already issued, of an issuer.

A person making a notification to an issuer shall at the same time file a copy of such notification with the Irish Stock Exchange by e-mail. Upon receipt of the notification the issuer must make public all the information contained in the notification.

In the case of a bank, any person proposing to acquire 10% or more of its shares or voting rights must notify the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland in advance and receives its approval for an such acquisition. The Financial Regulator has raised with my Department the question of extending disclosure requirements to other types of financial instruments, such as contracts for difference, and proposals are expected shortly.

Credit Institutions Support Scheme.

214. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he has had with private equity interests, hedge funds, or groups or consortia including private equity or hedge funds proposing to take a stake in any of the banks covered by the guarantee; the consortia that have made approaches in this regard; the number of occasions; if he has met representatives of any of the listed groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46976/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Government's Guarantee Scheme has been successful in safeguarding the stability of the Irish banking sector and in restoring its liquidity position. However, international capital market expectations in relation to capital levels in the banking sector have altered.

In my statement on 28 November, I indicated that it would be appropriate for the State in certain circumstances, through the National Pensions Reserve Fund or otherwise, to consider supplementing private investment with State participation. Following on from this, the Government announced on 14 December its intention to support, alongside existing shareholders and private investors, a recapitalisation programme for credit institutions in Ireland of up to E10 billion. In that regard, the State is open to supporting proposals from potential investors that would add value to the security and stability of the financial system and would enhance its ability to contribute in a positive way to economic development.

I have met in recent weeks with a number of banks and investment businesses. I have indicated that it is a matter for the Board of each financial institution concerned to develop further their own plans for raising capital where appropriate. Following the Government's announcement of 14 December, relevant credit institutions are expected to develop detailed proposals and these institutions have been asked to submit their proposals by early January.

Any parties with serious propositions for investment in an institution are of course referred to the institutions concerned. Any proposals involving State participation or investment would be considered only following advice from the NTMA and from financial and legal advisors as appropriate.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on any specific proposals or specific meetings with interested parties, as the details of any discussions are potentially market sensitive.

215. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on extending the bank guarantee scheme; if he has received representations or requests from any of the covered institutions for such extension; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that many of the institutions covered are suggesting that they may have difficulties in raising finance beyond the duration of the guarantee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46977/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I have had no formal requests from any of the covered institutions to extend the Guarantee Scheme. However, I have been asked, in various discussions, as to the Government's intentions in this regard. The Guarantee Scheme

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is less than three months old and will run for two years. The operation of the Scheme will be kept under constant review.

216. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he had further audit or other examination in respect of the institutions covered by the bank guarantee scheme with a view to examining their loan books, particularly in respect to bad debts incurred by the covered institutions from exposure to the property and construction sectors; if he has been advised of the appropriate levels of write-downs in the covered institutions; if he has requested any of the covered institutions to make appropriate write-downs in respect of losses that may be incurred from their loan books; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46978/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Financial Regulator recently received reports, prepared by Price Waterhouse Coopers, on the financial and capital position of the institutions receiving support under the Credit Institutions (Financial Support) Scheme. These reports indicated that the capital position of each of the institutions reviewed was in excess of regulatory requirements as at 30 September 2008 and also concluded that, even in certain stress scenarios, the capital level will remain within regulatory requirements in the period to 2011.

As the Deputy would expect, continued vigilance is appropriate during the period of the Government guarantee and further work continues on the review of covered institutions' loan books. The outcome of this work will be considered by the Financial Regulator as part of the ongoing supervision of the covered institutions under the Scheme and more generally.

While the Price Waterhouse Coopers reports have provided an assurance on the capital position of the covered institutions, I also recognise that market expectations on appropriate capitalisation levels have changed and that it is also necessary to ensure that the banks are in a position to lend to business and personal customers in a sound financial position. It is for this reason that I announced a programme of capitalisation for credit institutions in Ireland.

The extent to which impaired loans have been provided for is a matter for each institution and its auditors to report on, in accordance with supervisory and accounting requirements, as the institutions publish results for the appropriate periods. The Financial Regulator will be in ongoing contact with the covered institutions on this matter having regard to the continuing work of Price Waterhouse Coopers and other information obtained within the regulatory framework.

Departmental Staff.

217. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46987/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As indicated in PQ reply of 23 October 2008 (No.84) to Deputy Leo Varadkar, the estimated cost of increments awarded to staff in my Department in 2008 was €227,000, and is expected to be of the order of €171,000 in 2009. These amounts do not include the cost of long service increments which are only payable after satisfactory service of 3 and 6 years at the highest points on incremental scales.

It should be noted that since the introduction of the revised Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) in the civil service, the payment of all increments since 2007 is dependant on staff receiving a satisfactory rating.

No dedicated annual provision is made for the payment of increments in my Department. Expenditure may vary from year to year depending on the number of staff who are on points

below the maximum of their scale and the number of staff who have reached the maximum of the scale. Retirements and replacement of promoted staff by persons at lower scale points of their former grade also impact on costs from year to year.

It is not possible in the time available to give a complete statement of the actual cost of increments in any given year. In the normal course, the annual cost in my Department and in bodies under the aegis of my Department would not exceed 1% of payroll.

Decentralisation Programme.

218. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47002/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The following is the information requested by the Deputy in tabular form for my Department and the bodies under the aegis of my Department.

Department of Finance

Location	Number Decentralised to date	Total who will have decentralised by end 2009	Relocated from Dublin	Relocated from elsewhere
Tullamore	128*	130	90	24
Kildare	0	Approx 30**	n/a	n/a

* Includes 14 staff recruited for Tullamore

**As all staff have not been recruited for Kildare it is not possible at this stage to state how many of the 30 posts will be filled by Dublin based staff.

Office of the Revenue Commissioners

Location	Number Decentralised to date	Total who will have decentralised by end 2009	Relocated from Dublin	Relocated from elsewhere
Newcastle West	45	53	2	43
Kilrush	57	57	5	52
Listowel	52	52	8	44
Athy	73	75	62	11
Navan	99	99	78	21

Office of Public Works

Location	Number Decentralised to date	Total who will have decentralised by end 2009	Relocated from Dublin	Relocated from elsewhere
Trim	32	249	179	70
Claremorris	31	31	5	26

Departmental Staff.

219. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47017/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The number of people currently working in my Department is 655.

The following is the number of people in each salary band:

Salary band	No. in band	Breakdown by grade
Under €50,000	302	10 Asst Principal level 30 Administrative Officer level 29 Higher Executive Officer level 51 Executive Officer level 32 Staff Officer level 124 Clerical Officer level 26 Services Officer/Services Attendant level
€50,001 – €60,000	84	1 Principal level 2 Assistant Principal level 10 Administrative Officer level 62 Higher Executive Officer level 8 Executive Officer level 1 Teacher
€60,001 – €70,000	37	1 Principal level 6 Assistant Principal level 13 Administrative Officer level 17 Higher Executive Officer level
€70,001 – €80,000	30	30 Principal level
€80,001 – €90,000	88	4 Principal level 84 Assistant Principal level
€90,001 – €100,000	41	4 Principal level 37 Assistant Principal level
Over €100,000	73	2 Secretary General level 3 Second Secretary level 1 Deputy Secretary level 11 Assistant Secretary level 56 Principal level

220. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47032/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The following tables list the information requested by the Deputy in respect of my Department and agencies under the aegis of my Department.

Department of Finance

Year	Number of Staff (full-time equivalents)
31/12/2002	622.52
31/12/2003	600.81
31/12/2004	587.39
31/12/2005	587.09
31/12/2006	622.43
31/12/2007	628.70
30/11/2008	613.91

Revenue Commissioners

Year	Staff Numbers (Full Time Equivalents)
2002	6,463
2003	6,440
2004	6,444
2005	6,445
2006	6,442
2007	6,574
2008	6,592

The staff numbers are as published in the Revised Estimates Volumes, except for 2008 which is the figure as at 10 December 2008.

Office of Public Works

The number of civil servants and state industrial employees in the Office of Public Works at the end of 2006 and 2007 and at the end of November 2008 are shown in the following table. Excluded from the figures are students, apprentices, seasonal/casual and on-call personnel. The information in respect of 2002-2005 is not readily accessible and will be sent directly to the Deputy by the Office of Public Works. It might be noted that the numbers employed rise substantially during the summer season when temporary staff are engaged, for example, as guide/information officers at heritage sites.

Year	Number of Staff (full-time equivalents)
2006	1,925.5
2007	1,972.1
2008 to end of November	2,007.4

Public Appointments Service

Year	Staff Numbers (Full Time Equivalents)
2004*	146.75
2005	140.30
2006	144.95
2007	147.35
2008	142.86

*(Formerly Civil Service Commission until Nov 04).

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Commission for Public Service Appointments

Year	Staff Numbers (Full Time Equivalents)
2004*	6
2005	8
2006	8
2007	9
2008	12

*(Formerly Civil Service Commission until Nov 04).

State Laboratory

Year	Staff Numbers (Full Time Equivalents)
2002	
2003	89.00
2004	90.40
2005	91.30
2006	94.20
2007	91.20
2008	92.05

Valuation Office

Year	Staff Numbers (Full Time Equivalents)
2002	
2003	130.00
2004	147.90
2005	149.60
2006	148.00
2007	156.33
2008	158.23

Comptroller and Auditor General

Year	Staff Numbers (Full Time Equivalents)
2002	
2003	152.00
2004	160.00
2005	163.00
2006	150.50
2007	159.50
2008	154.60

Office of the Ombudsman

Year	Staff Numbers (Full Time Equivalents)
2002	76.90
2003	76.60
2004	75.20
2005	75.86
2006	76.09
2007	85.29
2008	91.52

Remaining information in relation to 2002 will be provided directly to the Deputy when available.

221. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47047/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The following tables list the information requested by the Deputy in respect of my Department and agencies under the aegis of my Department.

Department of Finance

My Department currently has offices in Dublin and Tullamore, details as follows:

Grade	Dublin	Tullamore	Total
Secretary General	1.00		1.00
Secretary General PSMD	1.00		1.00
Second Secretary	3.00		3.00
Assistant Secretary	14.00		14.00
Principal	50.50	6.00	56.50
Assistant Principal	136.15	25.00	161.15
Administrative Officer	47.60	2.00	49.60
Higher Executive Officer	75.64	23.50	99.14
Executive Officer	40.20	13.60	53.80
Staff Officer	20.00	9.00	29.00
Clerical Officer	70.66	37.10	107.76
Services Officer	19.00	5.00	24.00
Services Attendant	2.00		2.00
CMO & staff	7.00		7.00
Teacher	4.96		4.96
Grand Total	492.71	121.20	613.91

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Revenue Commissioners

The number (full time equivalents) and category of Revenue staff, including details of the locations (45) in which they are currently posted, are set out in the table below:

Department of Finance

My Department currently has offices in Dublin and Tullamore, details as follows:

Grade	Dublin	Tullamore	Total
Secretary General	1.00		1.00
Secretary General PSMD	1.00		1.00
Second Secretary	3.00		3.00
Assistant Secretary	14.00		14.00
Principal	50.50	6.00	56.50
Assistant Principal	136.15	25.00	161.15
Administrative Officer	47.60	2.00	49.60
Higher Executive Officer	75.64	23.50	99.14
Executive Officer	40.20	13.60	53.80
Staff Officer	20.00	9.00	29.00
Clerical Officer	70.66	37.10	107.76
Services Officer	19.00	5.00	24.00
Services Attendant	2.00		2.00
CMO & staff	7.00		7.00
Teacher	4.96		4.96
Grand Total	492.71	121.20	613.91

Revenue Commissioners

The number (full time equivalents) and category of Revenue staff, including details of the locations (450) in which they are currently posted, are set out in the table below:

Location	Grade	Total
Arklow	HEO	1.0
	EO	1.0
Arklow Total		2.0
Athlone	PO	1.0
	AP	5.0
	HEO	14.1
	EO	28.9
	CO	34.7
	Other	2.0
	Service Attendant	1.0
	Service Officer	1.0
Athlone Total		87.7

Location	Grade	Total
Athy	PO	1.0
	AP	1.0
	HEO	12.5
	EO	19.2
	SO	1.0
	CO	29.5
Athy Total		64.2
Bantry	SO	1.0
	CO	1.0
Bantry Total		2.0
Bridgend	AP	2.0
	HEO	5.0
	EO	8.0
	SO	2.0
	CO	12.5
	Other	1.0
Bridgend Total		30.5
Carlow	HEO	1.0
	EO	2.7
	CO	1.0
Carlow Total		4.7
Carrick-on-Shannon	EO	2.0
Carrick-on-Shannon Total		2.0
Castlebar	PO	1.0
	AP	5.0
	HEO	20.3

Public Appointments Service (all Dublin based)

Grade	Number
Chief Executive Officer	1.00
Principal	3.00
Principal Psychologist	1.00
Senior Psychologist	1.00
Assistant Principal	5.50
Professional Accountant (shared with State Lab)	1.00
Higher Executive Officer	19.63
Translator	1.00
Psychologist	3.60
Executive Officer	25.20
Staff Officer	12.30
Clerical Officer	64.63
Services Officer	4.00
Cleaner	2.00
Total	144.86

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Office of the Ombudsman (all Dublin based)

Grade	Number
Director General	1.00
Senior Investigator/Principal	9.00
Investigator/Assistant Principal	31.83
Higher Executive Officer	9.8.
Executive Officer	11.73
Staff Officer	1.00
Clerical Officer	24.16
Services Officer	2.00
Total	93.52

Information relating to the Office of Public Works, State Laboratory, Valuation Office, Commission for Public Service Appointments and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General will be provided directly to the Deputy once received.

Departmental Agencies.

222. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in Budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47062/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In response to the Deputy's question, there are no organisations or agencies under the remit of my Department which have been amalgamated or eliminated due to recent budgetary measures.

Banking Sector Regulation.

223. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether banks should be required to provide people with an annual statement of DIRT deducted in order that they can check their exact tax liability. [47081/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Section 262 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 already provides that a financial institution must, following a depositor's request, provide a statement to the depositor showing the gross amount of any relevant interest paid or credited to the depositor, the DIRT deducted, the net payment and the date of that payment. I have no plans to amend this legislative provision at this time.

Section 34 of the Finance Act 2007 introduced a new scheme to allow the operation of DIRT exempt savings accounts subject to two conditions: (1) the account holder must be aged 65 years of age or over or be permanently incapacitated; and (2) the account holder's total income must not exceed the relevant exemption threshold, i.e. €19,000 (for an individual) or €38,000 (for a married couple).

In 2007, Revenue widely publicised these changes. An Information Leaflet (DE1) giving comprehensive information for qualifying taxpayers on how to have interest credited to their savings accounts without deduction of DIRT was made available at Revenue offices. Information on DIRT exemption was also included on the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie.

Application forms and information leaflets were also made available at most financial institutions. Revenue also arranged for an information leaflet to be issued to social welfare customers in receipt of state and other pensions.

Programmes for Government.

224. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the elements of the Programme for Government that will not be implemented and delivered on due to the changed financial situation nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47186/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As a result of the very different international economic environment that we now face, it is clear that the short term prospects for economic activity are considerably less favourable than that envisaged when the Programme for Government was set out. We now face a position where tax revenues are back to 2005 levels while spending by 2009 is estimated to have increased by 35%. Clearly we have a substantial gap.

The Government's priority is the restoration of a balanced current budget over the medium term. Achieving this will inevitably mean that it will be difficult to deliver on the priorities outlined in the Programme for Government given the level of resources available.

That said the Government is also continuing to commit substantial funding to public investment to secure the future growth potential of the economy, thereby maintaining employment and competitiveness and enhancing the productive capacity of the economy.

Finally, as I have said in response to previous PQs on this issue the Programme for Government is a five year programme which must be judged over the full five years of the Government.

EU Funding.

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of EU funding received by his Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under his aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47245/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Since Ireland joined the EU in 1973, approximately €20bn has been allocated in EU Structural and Cohesion Funds. The Structural Funds comprise the: European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); European Social Fund (ESF); Fishery Funds — Financial Instruments for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) and European Fisheries Fund (EFF); and Agriculture Funds — European Agriculture Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF), guidance element and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

My Department is responsible for, amongst other things, overall policy in relation to Ireland's EU Structural and Cohesion Funds. It is responsible for drawing down the European Regional Development and Cohesion Funds which are paid into the Central Fund as a capital receipt. It also plays a central role in the development and monitoring of the programmes/projects through which the Funds are drawn down.

Ireland has qualified for Structural Funds since we joined the EU in 1973 and for the Cohesion Fund from 1993 when it was established. However, due to the economic progress the country has made, Ireland no longer qualifies for Cohesion Funding since 2004.

Details of receipts Ireland has received from the EU Budget under the various funds since we joined the EU in 1973 can be obtained from Table 11 of the document "Budgetary and Economic Statistics" published by my Department in September. The document is available on my Department's website at the following address:

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/documents/publications/other/BES2008.pdf>

Child Care Services.

226. **Deputy Niall Blaney** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position in regard to an application to Pobal by a committee (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46517/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): As the Deputy will be aware, I have responsibility for the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006 -2010 (NCIP), which will invest €575 million over 5 years, with €358 million of this in capital grant aid for childcare services.

I understand that the service in question was initially approved capital grant funding under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000 — 2006 in November 2005. This grant was decommitted and transferred to the NCIP as the applicant could not proceed to contract at that time. As the applicant could not secure a lease agreement in the time required under the NCIP, the funding was decommitted again in August 2008. This decision was appealed however, given that the applicant had not secured a lease for the project, the original decision to decommit funding was deemed appropriate.

I also understand that Greencastle Community Childcare Centre has submitted a further capital grant application for €680,821 and that this application is currently in the appraisal process. A decision on this application will be made in due course following which the applicant will be notified of the outcome.

Inter-Country Adoptions.

227. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will give an assurance that she will fully support the renewal of the bilateral agreement with Vietnam for the adoption of Vietnamese children by Irish couples; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47366/08]

253. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on the concerns raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46926/08]

265. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Health and Children whether a provision is being made to extend the agreement between Ireland and Vietnam regarding the adoption of children beyond the expiry date of May 2009; if a new agreement is being put in place before the expiry date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47169/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227, 253 and 265 together.

My Office will shortly be publishing the Adoption Bill, 2008 which will ratify the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. Under the new legislation, prospective adoptive parents will be able to adopt from countries which have also ratified the Hague Convention, and countries with which Ireland has a bilateral agreement which meets Hague standards.

While it is true to say that our current Agreement with Vietnam is based on Hague principles, as part of the preparations for our new legislation we need to ensure that our Agreement reflects the Hague Convention as comprehensively as possible. A new Agreement allows the opportunity to elaborate and strengthen some existing provisions to meet the standards which it is anticipated will be set in draft legislation. There have been considerable developments in intercountry adoption in Vietnam since the Agreement was signed 5 years ago. This progress also needs to be reflected in any new Agreement.

There is a clause in the current Agreement which states that the Agreement will be automatically extended for another 5 year term unless one State notifies the other State to the contrary. Because of the changes to our adoption legislation, the Agreement cannot 'roll over' in its present form for another 5 years. As a result, the Irish Government was obliged to formally notify Vietnam that there can be no automatic renewal of the Agreement when the five year term expires on 1 May, 2009.

I am aware of the concerns of those parents who have already adopted and those who hope to adopt from Vietnam in the future. I would like to assure the Deputy that officials from my Office and the Adoption Board have been continuously monitoring the situation and liaising closely with colleagues in the Department of Foreign Affairs and our embassy in Hanoi over recent months. In November, a senior official from my Office led a delegation to Vietnam accompanied by the Chairman and CEO of the Adoption Board. While the purpose of this visit was to commence discussions with the Vietnamese Authorities on the possible renegotiation of the Agreement, the delegation also availed of the opportunity to meet with officials from various embassies and with UNICEF to discuss their views on intercountry adoption from Vietnam.

The Irish Government has issued a formal request to the Vietnamese Authorities stating that we wish to enter into discussions immediately for the purpose of negotiating a new Agreement to follow on from the existing Agreement. We are currently awaiting the response of the Vietnamese authorities.

Health Services.

228. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cuts in home help services in County Louth in 2009. [46548/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hackett): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

229. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a child (details supplied) in County Dublin aged 13 having been assessed by the Health Service Executive orthodontic service for Dublin north as in need of treatment will have to wait two years for this treatment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46553/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

230. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children when she expects a site to be finalised for the sexual assault treatment unit in Galway; the progress made in regard to such a unit in Mullingar, County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46561/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Mary Wallace): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Nursing Homes Repayment Scheme.

231. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application by a person (details supplied) in County Cork under the nursing home charges repayment scheme. [46607/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Nursing Home Subventions.

232. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average cost of a public long-stay nursing home bed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46627/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hackett): The Department estimates that the average cost of a public long stay nursing home bed for 2008 is in the region of €1,300 per week.

Hospitals Building Programme.

233. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Health and Children the refurbishment and extension works planned for Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal; when these will commence; when the project is expected to be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46637/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Staff.

234. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of consultant doctors by speciality who are employed by or have fees paid by the State for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; and if she will provide the information in tabular readable form. [46647/08]

235. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of money paid in fees or salaries to consultant doctors by the State for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; and if she will provide the information in tabular readable form. [46648/08]

236. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount paid in fees or salaries per speciality for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; and if she will provide the information in tabular readable form. [46649/08]

237. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of consultant doctors by speciality who were paid fees or salaries by the State (details supplied); if she will provide the information for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; and if she will provide the information in tabular readable form. [46650/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 234 to 237, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Staff.

238. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the plans she or her Department has to publish data on an annual basis regarding the salaries or fees paid to consultant doctors, similar to that of the publication of GMS payments, in the interest of openness and transparency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46651/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Medical consultants working in the public health service are remunerated by way of salary. Their salary scales are included in the Consolidated Salary Scale Reports which are periodically produced by my Department and published on the Department's website at www.dohc.ie/publications.

Departmental Property.

239. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from her Department in the past 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46668/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Since December 2007, three Blackberries have been reported lost or stolen from members of staff in separate incidents. I understand that no sensitive or private data were contained on these devices.

Departmental Expenditure.

240. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by her Department and each State agency under the aegis of her Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if she will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46683/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to my Department is contained in the table below. My Department has also requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Health Service Executive to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy on this matter. The information in relation to the other state agencies under the aegis of my Department is not readily available and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible .

Hotels Costs 2004 to 2008

	EU/Non-EU	Home
	€	€
2004	101,030	4,291
2005	81,606	7,267
2006	82,100	1,837
2007	86,851	2,450
2008*	80,000	4,148
	431,587	19,993

*Figures for 2008 up to 30 November.

241. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the procurement arrangements in place in her Department and each State agency under the aegis of her Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for her, for her Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46698/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department has strict policies and procedures in place to ensure compliance with Department of Finance Guidelines on travel and subsistence. Along with most other Departments, it uses the services of a travel agent who was awarded a contract following a selection process co-ordinated by the Department of Finance. As part of its remit, this agent provides a hotel booking service at discounted rates to ensure best value for money. With respect to sourcing hotel accommodation abroad for myself and officials travelling with me, the relevant Irish Embassy or Consulate General provides my office with a number of options following which a selection is made based on convenience and cost.

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Each Agency established under the Aegis of my Department is responsible for sourcing or procuring its own hotel accommodation for agency staff when required. Each Agency is obliged to comply with the Department of Finance circulars on travel and subsistence and compliance is monitored by the internal audit function. Where hotel accommodation is being procured, Agencies must comply with relevant public service guidelines on procurement as set out in this Department’s Framework for Corporate and Financial Governance, 2006, for Agencies funded by this Department.

Departmental Property.

242. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by her Department and each State agency under the aegis of her Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46713/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The following table lists the operational servers run directly by my Department, categorised as small, medium and large by their disk capacities in Gigabytes.

Capacity	Number of Servers
Less than 100GB	38
Between 100GB and 500GB	27
Greater than 500GB	8

In relation to information on computer servers used by the HSE this is a service matter and it has been referred to HSE for a direct reply.

In relation to other health agencies which are directly funded through my Department, arrangements are being made to have the required details collated. The information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as this exercise is completed.

Health Services.

243. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of persons in receipt of home help allowances in Kildare/ west Wicklow in each of the past five years; the number of new applications in each of the past five years; the total hours allocated to the home help system in each of the past five years; the number of home helps employed in the same period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46783/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hocht): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

244. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the assessment of travel allowance payments for home helps in the Kildare/ west Wicklow has been completed; if so, the payments that have been made to each person; the cost of the payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46784/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services.

245. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No 221 of 8 May 2008, if the Health Service Executive has completed a cost benefit analysis under the capital appraisal guidelines in relation to the re-development of the Central Mental Hospital facility. [46785/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The cost benefit analysis has been completed and is currently under consideration by the HSE.

Medical Inquiries.

246. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the result of an inquiry into practices at hospitals (details supplied) in County Tipperary. [46787/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The Mental Health Commission inquiry into practices at the St. Michael's Unit, South Tipperary General Hospital and St. Luke's Hospital, Clonmel, is nearing conclusion and it is expected that the report will be finalised early in the New Year.

Health Services.

247. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of home care packages funded in the Kildare West Wicklow areas of the HSE for each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46793/08]

248. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of home care packages issued in the Kildare west Wicklow areas of the Health Service Executive in each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46794/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 247 and 248 together.

As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

249. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of elderly persons in County Roscommon and County Leitrim who have been approved by the Health Service Executive for home help, only to be placed on a waiting list until funding becomes available; the plans she and the Health Service Executive are putting in place to ensure home help will be made available to these qualified persons before they are forced to go into care. [46813/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Infectious Diseases.

250. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of cases of an infection (details supplied) that were recorded in 2007 and to date in 2008; the number of cases identified in each hospital in the country; the number of claims that have been taken against the Health Service Executive in this regard; the claims that have been settled; and the amount that has been paid out in compensation to date. [46821/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Tackling all Health Care Associated Infections (HCAIs), including MRSA, continues to be a priority for the Government and the Health Service Executive (HSE). HCAIs are not a new phenomenon and have always been a potential complication of medical treatment, especially in hospitals. This is the case worldwide.

It should be noted that if a patient is diagnosed with a bloodstream infection at a given hospital, it does not indicate that the infection was acquired at that hospital. Many bloodstream infections are acquired in the community, but only diagnosed upon admission to hospital. Or, a patient may have acquired the infection in one hospital, but the infection may be diagnosed on transfer to another hospital.

A new National Surveillance System has been established by the HSE to collect data and provide information on a quarterly basis to monitor HCAIs in our health system. This data has been compiled and published for 2006, 2007 and the first 2 quarters of 2008. I attach in table format an extract of the relevant information for the Deputy, taken from the recent reports of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre. The table gives the number of MRSA bloodstream isolates by acute public hospital for 2007 and the first 6 months of 2008. Most of the variation in reported numbers of *S. aureus* bloodstream infections between hospitals can be explained by differences in hospital size, activity and patient populations. At present there is no way to adjust the data to allow for these differences and hence direct comparisons between hospitals are not possible.

The State Claims Agency handles all MRSA claims against individual hospitals in the public sector, the HSE and/or the Minister for Health and Children. There are currently 98 alleged healthcare associated infection claims and to date one case has been settled. It will be appreciated that each case has its own complexities and there are issues involved beyond MRSA. It is policy not to divulge either the details or amounts concerned in individual cases.

Data on Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) bloodstream isolates by acute public hospital for 2007 and Quarter 1 and 2 of 2008

Acute Public Hospital	Total number of isolates of MRSA 2007	Total number of isolates of MRSA Q1 & Q2 2008 ¹
Adelaide, Meath and National Children's Hospital, Tallaght, Dublin	18	13
Bantry General Hospital	8	1
Beaumont Hospital (including St. Joseph's Hospital, Raheny), Dublin	50	25
Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital, Dublin	0	0
Cavan General Hospital	9	1
Children's University Hospital, Temple Street, Dublin	0	0
Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown, Dublin	14	2
Coombe Women's Hospital, Dublin	2	0
Cork University Hospital ^a	39	9
Galway University Hospitals ^c	N/A	23
Erinville Hospital, Cork ^d	N/A	
Kerry General Hospital, Tralee	16	10
Letterkenny General Hospital, Donegal	13	10
Lourdes Orthopaedic Hospital, Kilcreene	0	0
Louth County Hospital, Dundalk	1	3
Mallow General Hospital, Co. Cork	4	5
Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Dublin	40	16
Mayo General Hospital, Castlebar	20	5

Acute Public Hospital	Total number of isolates of MRSA 2007	Total number of isolates of MRSA Q1 & Q2 2008 ¹
Mercy University Hospital, Cork	15	9
Merlin Park Regional Hospital, Galway ^c	7	N/A
Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar	5	3
Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise	3	0
Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore	13	1
Mid-western Regional Hospital, Ennis	3	1
Mid-western Regional Hospital, Nenagh	10	1
Mid-western Regional Hospital, Dooradoyle, Limerick	16	11
Mid-western Regional Maternity Hospital, Limerick	0	0
Mid-western Regional Orthopaedic Hospital, Limerick	0	0
Monaghan General Hospital	3	0
Naas General Hospital	11	4
National Maternity Hospital, Holles St., Dublin	0	0
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda	*	2
Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children, Crumlin,	4	1
Our Lady's Hospital, Cashel ^b	N/A	
Our Lady's Hospital, Navan	6	1
Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe	3	3
Roscommon County Hospital	3	1
Rotunda Hospital, Dublin	0	0
Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin	0	0
Sligo General Hospital	13	7
South Infirmary — Victoria University Hospital, Cork	4	3
South Tipperary General Hospital, Clonmel	1	4
St. Colmcille's Hospital, Loughlinstown	8	*
St. Finbarr's Hospital, Cork ^a	3	
St. James's Hospital, Dublin	61	22
St. John's Hospital, Limerick	2	0
St. Luke's General Hospital, Kilkenny	10	1
St. Luke's Hospital, Dublin	2	1
St. Mary's Orthopaedic Hospital, Gurranebraher, Cork	0	0
St. Michael's Hospital, Dun Laoghaire	2	0
St. Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin	28	18
University College Hospital, Galway ^c	30	
Waterford Regional Hospital	26	12
Wexford General Hospital	0	4

*No data received;

N/A, Not applicable;

¹ 2008 data for Quarter 1 and 2 is provisional

^a In 2007, maternity services at Erinville Hospital and St. Finbarr's Hospital, Cork transferred to Cork University Maternity Hospital, which together with Cork University Hospital (CUH) composed CUH group. All data for CUH group in 2007 are presented under CUH;

^b In 2007, acute services at Our Lady's Hospital, Cashel transferred to South Tipperary General Hospital, Clonmel.

^c As of January 2008, data for University College Hospital, Galway and Merlin Park University Hospital, Galway are combined under Galway University Hospitals.

Medical Cards.

251. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of persons

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from the retired professions with State pensions who will lose the medical card as a result of recently passed legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46912/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Following the Government decision to withdraw automatic entitlement to a medical card for persons aged 70 and over and to raise the means assessment threshold for persons in that age cohort, it is estimated that approximately 5% (20,000) of the current medical card holders aged 70 and over will no longer qualify for a medical card.

The estimated 5% figure of persons aged 70 and over, who will lose automatic entitlement to a medical card, was based on the best available information from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the EU wide survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), which is conducted by the CSO to obtain information on the income and living conditions of different types of households. These EU-SILC tables have been made available to Opposition parties.

Medical Cards.

252. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a medical card will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46923/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 253 answered with Question No. 227.

Vaccination Programme.

254. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the BCG vaccines have ceased in Maynooth, Naas and Athy in County Kildare in which the Health Service Executive has closed three BCG clinics and parents are concerned at this lack of service for infants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46928/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospitals Building Programme.

255. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if, with respect to the proposed co-located hospital on the site of Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown, recent increases in the cost of debt financing may impact on either the financial viability of the project or on the cost to the Exchequer; if she will confirm that Mount Carmel Medical is the only group which has tendered for the project; if she has set a deadline for the completion of the tendering process for the project; when construction of the co-located hospital will begin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46954/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The aim of the acute hospital co-location initiative is to make available approximately 1,000 additional public acute hospital beds for public patients by transferring private activity, with some limited exceptions, from public acute hospitals to co-located private hospitals.

Significant progress has been made on the implementation of the co-location initiative. The Board of the HSE has approved preferred bidder status for the development of co-located

hospitals on six sites. Project Agreements for four of these have been signed and preparatory work for the remaining two is proceeding. Planning permission was granted for one project last month and two other projects are under consideration by An Bord Pleanála.

A tender in respect of Connolly Hospital has been received by the Health Service Executive and is under consideration.

Each co-location project is required to demonstrate value for money for the State, taking into account its comprehensive benefits, as well as the cost of tax allowances and private bed revenue currently accruing to public hospitals. The scheme of tax allowances under the Finance Act 2001 means that, for each €100 million of qualifying capital expenditure, the cost of tax relief to investors (assuming a marginal tax rate of 41% for those investors) will be some €41 million in gross terms, spread over 7 years. The on-going revenue cost to the public hospitals will be minimal. This is because the beds in public hospitals to be freed up for public patients are already staffed and the back-up services and facilities required to support them are in place. The only staffing cost envisaged is the appointment of additional consultants which is being pursued in the light of the agreement on the new consultants' contract. Additional revenues will accrue to the Exchequer from the extra activity generated by the construction of the hospitals, the employment arising and the related services provided on which taxes will be paid.

It is a matter for each of the successful bidders to arrange to finance the projects in accordance with the terms of the relevant Project Agreement. Although it is certainly the case that the funding environment has changed radically in the last six months, in relation to both public and private sectors, the co-location initiative like other major projects has to deal with this. The successful bidders are working on the details of contractual terms with banks and other arrangers of finance in the very difficult and changed credit environment. The HSE is continuing to work with them to ensure that the co-located hospitals can be built and brought into operation as soon as possible, and that the goal of achieving new public acute bed capacity at value for money to the State is achieved.

My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the detailed operational matters raised by the Deputy in respect of the Connolly co-location project investigated and a reply issued directly to her.

Departmental Staff.

256. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the budgeted cost to her Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of her Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46989/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department does not receive any additional funding for incremental progression. Therefore, there is no specific budget provided in any year for the payment of increments, as my Department is expected to meet such costs, if any, from within its overall pay allocation. The costs, if any, arising in relation to this matter will vary based upon the length of service of existing staff and replacement of those retiring or resigning by new entrants at the lowest point of the salary scale. The Department manages all of these issues within the overall pay allocation. A similar situation applies in health agencies with no additional funding made available for such costs and agencies required to address the issue from within their existing pay allocation.

Decentralisation Programme.

257. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of civil

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servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47004/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As the Deputy will be aware my Department is not one of the Departments scheduled for decentralisation under the Government's Decentralisation Programme. To date fifty-five civil servants have transferred to decentralising Departments from my Department. Further details in respect of the transfer of these officers are available from the decentralising Departments.

Departmental Staff.

258. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of people working in her Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47019/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The following table outlines the number of staff (wholetime equivalent), broken down by grade and PRSI class (i.e. Class A Full, Class B Modified), employed in my Department as at 30th November 2008. The figures are based on the monthly returns made to the Department of Finance and include staff seconded in to my Department.

Grade	Wholetime equivalent
Secretary General	1
Assistant Secretary (Modified)	8
Principal Officer (Modified)	35.8
Principal Officer (Full)	1
Assistant Principal (Modified)	92.6
Assistant Principal (Full)	6.8
Higher Executive Officer (Modified)	71.1634
Higher Executive Officer (Full)	23.3
Administrative Officer (Modified)	2
Administrative Officer (Full)	11.5
Executive Officer (Modified)	42.8
Executive Officer (Full)	50.8
Staff Officer (Modified)	8.8
Staff Officer (Full)	1.6
Clerical Officer (Modified)	30.4317
Clerical Officer (Full)	72.03
Advisory Counsel	2
Appeals Officer	1.4
Civilian Driver	6
Deputy Chief Medical Officer (Modified)	2.6
Deputy Chief Medical Officer (Full)	2.8

Grade	Wholetime equivalent
Personal Assistant	6
Personal Secretary	4
Porter	2
Probation/Welfare Officer	6.35
Service Officer (Modified)	6.8
Service Officer (Full)	4
Special Advisor	3
Statistician	4
Others	18.1317
TOTAL	528.71

Current rates of pay effective from 1st September 2008, are available from the Department of Finance's website at:

[http://www.finance.gov.ie/documents/circulars/circulars 2008/paysept2008.pdf](http://www.finance.gov.ie/documents/circulars/circulars%2008/paysept2008.pdf)

259. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of her Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47034/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I wish to advise that the numbers employed, in the public health service (excluding State-sponsored bodies under the aegis of my Department), for the years 2002 to September 2008 are as follows:

Numbers (in wholetime equivalent terms) employed in the public health service from 2002 to 2008 (source: Health Service Personnel Census)

Dec 2002	Dec 2003	Dec 2004	Dec 2005	Dec 2006	Dec 2007	Sept 2008
95,679	96,501	98,723	101,978	106,273	111,505	110,819

Notes: (1) excludes home helps and (2) student nurses are included in the 2007 and 2008 employment ceilings on the basis of 3.5 students equating to 1 wholetime equivalent. The employment levels adjusted for student nurses on the above basis are 110,664 WTEs (Dec 07) and 110,767 WTEs (Sept 08).

The number of civil servants working in my Department for each year from 2002 to 30th November 2008 is detailed in the following table:

Numbers (in wholetime equivalent terms) employed in the Department of Health and Children

Dec 2002	Dec 2003	Dec 2004	Dec 2005	Dec 2006	Dec 2007	Nov 2008
645.18	649.06	625.52	602.54	595.99	566.42	497.11

The above figures reflect Department of Health & Children numbers and do not include staff of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children or seconded staff.

The numbers employed in the State-sponsored bodies under the aegis of my Department are currently being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as they are available.

260. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of her Department are located;

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the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47049/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I wish to advise that the services and functions of the public health service are located at numerous locations throughout the country. The numbers employed in the public health service (excluding State-sponsored bodies under the aegis of my Department), by HSE region and grade category, are set out in the following table:

Numbers (in wholetime equivalent terms) employed in the public health service, by region and grade category, as at September 2008 (source: Health Service Personnel Census)

	Dublin/ Mid- Leinster	Dublin/ North-East	National	South	West	Total
Medical/Dental	2,520.76	1,926.99	31.22	1,758.46	1,865.85	8,103.28
Nursing	10,888.48	8,240.12	13.66	9,143.29	9,611.95	37,897.5
Health & Social Care Professionals	5,314.38	3,750.58	12.3	3,298.67	3,372.35	15,748.28
Management/Admin.	5,021.65	3,878.48	808.97	3,712.84	4,506.32	17,928.26
General Support Staff	3,448.05	2,806.29	54.72	3,673.22	2,817.51	12,799.79
Other Patient & Client Care	5,898.23	3,580.41	1	3,641.73	5,220.57	18,341.94
Total	33,091.55	24,182.87	921.87	25,228.21	27,394.55	110,819.05

Notes: (1) excludes home helps and (2) student nurses are included in the 2008 employment ceiling on the basis of 3.5 students equating to 1 wholetime equivalent. The employment level adjusted for student nurses on the above basis is 110,767 WTEs.

All staff in my Department are currently located in Dublin, the majority being based at my Department's headquarters in Hawkins House.

A small percentage (approximately 7%) of the Department's staff is located in three other offices in Dublin city, namely, the Adoption Board (Shelbourne Road, Dublin 4), the Health Repayment Scheme Appeals Office (Irish Life Mall, Dublin 1) and the Disability Appeals Office (Clondalkin, Dublin 22).

The breakdown, by grade, of my Department's staff across all offices, is as follows:

	WTE	Headcount
Secretary General	1	1
Assistant Secretary	8	8
Principal Officers	36.8	38
Assistant Principal Officers	99.4	111
Higher Executive Officers	94.4634	105
Administrative Officers	13.5	14
Executive Officers	93.6	102
Staff Officers	10.4	14
Clerical Officers	102.4617	116
Special Advisor	3	3
Personal Asst	6	8
Personal Secretary	4	4
Civilian Driver	6	6
Advisory Counsel	2	2
Statistician	4	4

	WTE	Headcount
Probation/Welfare Officers	6.35	7
Deputy Chief Medical Officers	5.4	6
Appeals Officers	1.4	2
Service Officers	10.8	11
Porter	2	2
Others	18.1317	20
Total	528.7	584

The Deputy should note that the above figures are based on the monthly returns made to the Department of Finance for my Department at end November 2008 and includes staff of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and staff seconded in to my Department. All staff working in the Department are civil servants with the exception of 13 staff (11.6 WTE) who are working under secondment arrangements to my Department. Of these 9 staff (8.6 WTE) are public servants.

Information relating to the State-sponsored bodies under the aegis of my Department is currently being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Departmental Agencies.

261. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of her Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the Budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47064/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The programme of rationalisation in the health sector involves a total of fifteen agencies as follows:

3 agencies are to be amalgamated to form a new Public Health and Medicines Safety Authority

- Food Safety Authority of Ireland
- Office of Tobacco Control
- Irish Medicines Board

6 agencies are to be integrated into the Health Service Executive

- National Cancer Screening Service
- National Cancer Registry
- Drug Treatment Centre Board
- Crises Pregnancy Agency
- Post Graduate Medical and Dental Board
- National Council for Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery

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3 agencies to be integrated into the Health and Social Care Professionals Council

- National Social Work Qualifications Board
- Opticians Board
- Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council

The timeframe for rationalisation spans the period 2009 to 2011 inclusive, but this is highly dependent on the necessary legislation being in place.

The Department of Finance has issued each relevant Department with an Implementation Plan which is to be updated on an ongoing basis to enable that Department to report to Government on progress being made by each Department on the roll out of the Rationalisation of Agencies. The work being done in my Department at present relates to data collection and analysis across the fifteen Agencies together with the progressing of a number of pieces of legislation relevant to rationalisation and the discussions with Agencies which are now underway.

While there is clearly a need to secure efficiencies from the rationalisation programme, the primary aim of these measures is to streamline service delivery, professional registration and policy making in a number of areas in the health sector, through the integration and/or amalgamation of function. Efficiencies will derive over time from economies of scale and the elimination of duplication in areas such as recruitment, procurement, payroll and ICT systems.

Medical Cards.

262. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason medications (details supplied) are no longer on the medical card approved list; and the guidelines which she has issued to the Health Service Executive for deciding whether persons should be given support with these medications on hardship grounds. [47082/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The supply of drugs and medicines is a service matter and therefore this matter has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services.

263. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5. [47090/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Departmental Expenditure.

264. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of taxpayers' money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon Referendum. [47102/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): In November, 2007, my Department paid the annual corporate membership subscription of €6,000 to the Institute.

Question No. 265 answered with Question No. 227.

Hospital Services.

266. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the additional services she plans to introduce at Our Lady's Hospital in Navan, County Meath for 2009; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47175/08]

267. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reduction in services she has planned at Our Lady's Hospital in Navan, County Meath for 2009; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47176/08]

268. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of staff employed at Our Lady's Hospital in Navan, County Meath; the breakdown under each category; the way this compares from 2002; and if she will provide the information in tabular readable form. [47177/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 266 to 268, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services.

269. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children if it is permissible for parents to have the collection and storage of their baby's umbilical cord blood if they are prepared to enter a written contract with Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, County Louth and if they are willing to fund the procedure from their personal resources; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47181/08]

270. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Health and Children, further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 90, 91, 92 and 93 of 22 October 2008, the person who carries out such procedures; the location at which same is carried out, when sanctioned by the Health Service Executive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47182/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 269 and 270 together.

As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy

EU Funding.

271. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of EU funding received by her Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under her aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47247/08]

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.

Road Safety.

272. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport if, in view of the particularly adverse weather conditions which have been prevailing in the midlands area, including Westmeath, Longford, Offaly and Laois, he will take steps to provide a special allocation of funding to the relevant authorities in these counties to enable them to grit and salt the roads which have been virtually impassable due to the ice and frost conditions pertaining for the past number of

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weeks and which are expected to continue over Christmas. Local authorities do not have the necessary finance available to enable them to grit and salt these roads, especially some of the secondary and country roads to enable people to travel about their daily business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46531/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Under the Roads Act, 1993, the maintenance of roads, including winter maintenance, is a statutory function of each individual road authority. This work is funded out of each authority's own resources, supplemented in the case of regional and local roads by discretionary and block grants allocated annually by my Department. In the case of national roads, funding for maintenance, which includes the gritting of roads and other safety related work in winter, is provided by my Department to the NRA which allocates it among the local authorities.

Local authorities are advised that they should set aside contingency sums from these resources to finance works necessitated by severe weather conditions. In 2008, the total discretionary maintenance grant allocated to county councils by my Department was €29.56 million and the total block grant allocated to urban authorities was €16.133 million. The maintenance grant, including winter maintenance, forecasting and monitoring, by my Department to the NRA for allocation to local authorities in 2008 was €58.21 million. Local authorities are regularly reminded by my Department of their responsibilities in relation to winter maintenance of roads. During 2008, the matter was brought to the attention of local authorities on 5 February and again on 10 December.

Air Services.

273. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport his position on the possible take-over of Aer Lingus (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46953/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Following its initial announcement on 1 December, Ryanair has posted a detailed offer to Aer Lingus shareholders on 15 December. In accordance with the Takeover Rules, the Board of the Company must set out a detailed response within 14 days following the release of the detailed offer so that shareholders can make a decision on the acceptance of the offer or otherwise. Of course the Deputy will be aware that the Board of Aer Lingus has publicly announced its rejection of the proposed offer.

I have said that the Government would consider the Ryanair offer when received. It is now being examined by my Department.

274. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport his views on competition in the Irish aviation sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46634/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Government recognises the importance of competition in the Irish aviation sector. The policy, as set out in my Department's current statement of strategy, is to promote regular, safe, cost effective and competitive air services linking the country and key business and tourism markets. The priority, from an Irish economy perspective, is to maintain the highest possible levels of connectivity between Ireland and key markets around the world and my Department will continue to closely monitor developments in the aviation sector that impact on that objective.

I would also refer the Deputy to my reply to today's priority PQ 46527/08.

Tax Code.

275. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport his view on the statement of the Minister for Finance that the new air travel tax should have little, if any, impact on aviation

policy; and if he will make a statement on same and on Aer Lingus assertion that it will cost them an additional €30 million in 2009. [46526/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Ireland's aviation policy, as set out in my Department's current Statement of Strategy is to promote regular, safe, cost effective and competitive air services linking the country and key business and tourism markets. The priority, from an Irish economy perspective, is to maintain the highest possible levels of connectivity between Ireland and key markets around the world.

The Air Travel Tax announced in Budget 2009 will come into force in respect of passengers departing from Irish airports on and from 30 March 2009. The decision to introduce the new tax was taken in the context of the overarching priority to reduce the budgetary deficit.

Ireland is not unique in regard to applying a tax on air travel. I understand a number of countries within the EU apply similar taxes including, the UK, France and the Netherlands, as do Australia and New Zealand. The proposed rates for the Irish air travel tax at €10 and €2 are not unreasonable when compared to rates in other countries.

I understand that tourists will only be subject to the tax on their return journey and, on this basis, it is envisaged that the additional €10 or €2 in the context of a much larger purchasing decision involving travel, hotel expenditures etc. should not have much of an effect on tourist numbers.

I appreciate the airline industry continues to go through a difficult period reflecting in the main weak world economic activity. However, this is somewhat offset by the recent fall in oil prices. Oil prices which have now more than halved from the all-time high prices experienced earlier in the year. Moreover, fuel used by commercial airlines is completely exempt from tax so it is a sector that already has considerable preferential treatment.

The cost implications for airlines arising from the air travel tax would be a commercial matter for each airline concerned. It is open to the airlines to decide whether or not they wish to pass the tax on in full to their customers.

Rail Network.

276. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Transport if there are plans to carry out a feasibility study on the advantages of having a rail network for County Donegal and connecting Derry and Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46636/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The provision of rail links in County Donegal does not form part of Transport 21, though I am aware that a Donegal County Council led steering group is considering undertaking a feasibility study on possible rail links to Donegal. The commissioning and funding of the study is a matter for the organizations and agencies participating in the steering group. I will consider, in conjunction with Irish Rail, the outcome of the study.

Departmental Property.

277. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Transport the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46672/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): There have been nine instances of equipment being reported lost, missing or stolen from my Department in the past twelve months. These instances included five laptops and four Blackberries. Of these, four laptops and one Blackberry were subsequently recovered. One laptop and three Blackberries are still missing.

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I have been assured by my officials that each incident has been investigated and that there is no evidence that any private or sensitive data was compromised as a result of these incidents.

All Departmental laptops are issued to staff with password protection enabled. Since October 2007, all data replicated from my Department's network to laptops is automatically encrypted. Mechanisms are in place to remotely immobilise and wipe any information on any portable data devices lost, missing or stolen from my Department.

There has been no other instance of data or equipment being reported missing, lost or stolen from my Department in the last 12 months.

My Department ensures that data security measures are regularly reviewed in the light of changing circumstances and that any appropriate measures identified are implemented in order to prevent risk to data.

Departmental Expenditure.

278. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Transport the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46687/08]

279. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Transport the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46702/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 278 and 279 together.

The costs of accommodation and other expenses including meals for Departmental staff who are travelling at home, or abroad, are met from within the rates for subsistence expenses which are authorized from time to time by the Minister for Finance. As such a specific figure is not available for accommodation costs.

In relation to procuring accommodation for domestic travel Departmental staff source accommodation themselves subject to accommodation falling within the rates set by the Minister for Finance. In relation to foreign travel Departmental staff can use the services of Club Travel who hold the contract for providing air travel and other services to the Department to book accommodation. The rates claimable for foreign travel must comply with those set by the Minister for Finance.

The procurement and expenditure activities of the agencies operating under the aegis of my Department are a day-to-day operational matter for the agencies concerned, subject to compliance with the Code of Practice for the Corporate Governance of State Bodies and relevant Department of Finance guidelines in this regard. Accordingly, my Department does not maintain records of such expenditure by the relevant State agencies.

Departmental Property.

280. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Transport the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46717/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department owns 171 servers, which have a total capacity of 23 Terabytes.

In relation to agencies under the aegis of my Department, the administration of their computer systems is an operational matter for them.

Departmental Staff.

281. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46993/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): An estimated cost of incremental pay increases to existing staff in my Department in 2009 and comparative costs for each year from 2002 to date in 2008 is currently being compiled. As it cannot be given within the specified timeframe, the information will be forwarded directly to the Deputy once available.

In relation to agencies under the aegis of my Department, the payment of salaries is a matter for the agencies concerned.

Decentralisation Programme.

282. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47008/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): 10 posts from the Department's Road Haulage function and 40 Road Safety Authority Posts were decentralised to Loughrea and the move was completed in July 2007. Decentralisation of an additional 62 Road Safety Authority posts (which were not part of the original Government decision) to Ballina was also achieved.

While Road Safety Authority posts are categorised as public service posts, civil servants transferring from my Department to the RSA retained their Civil Service status for 3 years from Vesting Day, 13th September, 2006. This involved 6 staff transferred to Loughrea and 210 staff transferred to Ballina.

Following the Government decision to defer a number of decentralisation projects to 2011, no further moves are planned for 2009. 9 of the 50 posts moved to Loughrea were filled by CAF applicants from Dublin with the remainder filled by CAF applicants from other locations. Of the Ballina posts, 8 were filled by CAF applicants from Dublin with 19 filled by CAF applicants from other locations.

Departmental Staff.

283. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47023/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the following table. Please note that staff are grouped into administrative grade-equivalents and the numbers also include seconded staff.

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Admin. Grade equivalent	€0 – €50,000	€50,001 – €60,000	€60,001 – €70,000	€70,001 – €80,000	€80,001 – €90,000	€90,001 – €100,000	€100,000+
Service Officer	15						
Clerical Officer	183						
Staff Officer	21						
Executive Officer	93	15					
Higher Executive Officer	7	65	25				
Administrative Officer	24	31	3				
Assistant Principal Officer	2	2	8	24	42	21	
Principal Officer					3	4	32
Assistant Secretary & General Secretary							8

284. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47038/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The following table shows the numbers of civil servants working in this Department since 2002.

Year	Number
2008 (to end November)	562
2007	450
2006	694
2005	511
2004	508
2003	517
2002	509

Returns in relation to the non commercial semi state bodies under the aegis of this Department have only been compiled following the decision of 1 July 2003 and are contained in the attached table.

Name	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Dublin Transportation Office (DTO)	28	28	28	26	28	28
National Roads Authority (NRA)	90	88	89	120	149	149
Medical Bureau of Road Safety (MBRS)	18	17	17	17	21	31
National Safety Council (NSC)	12	11	12	To RSA		
Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR)		17	18	16	20	22.5
Railway Safety Commission				7	8	8
Road Safety Authority					297	319
Commission for Taxi Regulation						22

285. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47053/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): As it will take some time to gather the information requested, this will be compiled and forwarded directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Agencies.

286. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47068/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department is at present developing proposals for the implementation of the decision announced in Budget 2009 in relation to the rationalisation of State agencies. For my Department, this involves the establishment of the Dublin Transport Authority and the amalgamation of air, marine, and rail accident investigation functions.

It is proposed that the Dublin Transport Authority will incorporate the Dublin Transportation Office, the Commission for Taxi Regulation and the Public Transport Licensing function of my Department. My Department has recently prepared an implementation plan in this regard, the details of which are under on-going discussion with the Department of Finance. I am not, therefore, in a position to comment further on the plan at this stage.

I am satisfied that substantial benefits will accrue as a result of the improved procurement, regulation, management and co-ordination of transport services. Those benefits will accrue to the travelling public, employers, taxpayers and society at large and will make an important contribution to sustaining competitiveness and addressing the increasing challenges of climate change.

In relation to the amalgamation of the accident functions, the position is that I have recently accepted a proposal for merging the three accident investigation areas into one organisation, on an administrative basis initially, through the establishment of an Office of Accident Investigation attached to my Department. I have also recently established an implementation team to draw up an implementation plan for my approval. The Department of Finance has been advised of the position in this regard. I believe also that the amalgamation of the accident investigation functions will enable efficiencies to be achieved primarily from the integration of support functions.

Departmental Expenditure.

287. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport the amount of taxpayers' money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead-up to the Lisbon referendum. [47106/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department holds corporate membership of the Institute of International and European Affairs. The annual fee for 2008 was €6,000.

Question No. 288 answered with Question No. 89.

Road Network.

289. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport his preferred options for spending on major road development projects for the alleviation of traffic chaos in each of the

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next five years; if any of the proposals are expected to be hit by recession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47220/08]

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 and the allocation of funding thereto, is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Act, 1993 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. Notwithstanding the current difficult economic climate, this Government is committed to continuing investment in the national transport infrastructure.

Rail Services.

290. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport the extent of the upgrading of the commuter rail services throughout County Kildare that has taken place in the past five years; the proposals for the further development in this area over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47221/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Major improvements have taken place on the Kildare and Maynooth lines in recent years. Capacity on the Kildare Line has been increased by 160% in recent years. In addition platform extensions allowing for longer trains, introduction of Sunday services and the turnback facility at Newbridge have facilitated better services. The Kildare Route Upgrade Project which is currently under construction and due to be completed in 2010 will more than treble capacity for commuters on the line.

The position in regard to the improvement of railway services on the Maynooth line is that capacity has been trebled in the last five years. I understand from Iarnród Éireann that it plans to re-signal the line and to close a number of level crossings to improve journey times. The line will also be electrified as part of the re-alignment of the Dart services which is a necessary precursor for the Dart Underground. I understand from Iarnród Eireann that both the re-signalling and electrification should be completed by 2013.

EU Funding.

291. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport his views on the extent of EU financial aid received for major or minor road works, rail or bus services or installations in each of the past 10 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47222/08]

292. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport the extent of EU funding received for the provision of road, rail, air and sea-port transport or installations in the past 20 years to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47223/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 291 and 292 together.

Ireland has received a substantial level of EU aid for the transport sector over the past 20 years under a number of Operational Programmes for which my Department has responsibility. The total sum of EU aid involved (€2,820m) has been a major contributory factor to the provision of key infrastructure and economic development in Ireland and the importance of the EU contribution is fully recognised and has been acknowledged. Full details of the Programmes concerned, the current status of each Programme and the total amount of EU aid received was provided in response to a similar question tabled by Deputy John O'Mahony on Tuesday, 5th

February 2008. A copy of that reply is attached for the information of the Deputy. A copy of the detailed follow-up data referred to in that reply will be sent to the Deputy in the near future.

EU funding for transport projects was also received under various other Programmes including a number of INTERREG Programmes, the Peace Programme and the Cohesion Fund 1993-2003. EU funding for local and regional roads has also been received under the Regional Operational Programmes for the Border, Midlands and Western Region (BMW) and the Southern and Eastern Region (S&E). My Department does not have lead responsibility for any of these Programmes.

Public Transport.

293. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport the extent to which the public capital transport programme is expected to proceed in each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47224/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The provision of increased capacity will be a key consideration in determining public transport investment priorities in the coming years. Given their potential to greatly increase capacity of the public transport network in the Greater Dublin Area, Metro North and the DART Underground are key priorities. Investment in increased bus capacity, subject to the outcome of the cost and efficiency review of the CIE bus companies, and bus priority measures are also priorities. The adjustment in capital funding in 2009 will not have a significant effect on the roll out of the Transport 21 public transport programme and will not result in the postponement of the start of construction of any public transport project.

All of the public transport projects currently under construction will continue on schedule and some, such as the Cork — Middleton line, Phase 1 of the Western Rail Corridor and the Luas extension to the Docklands, will be completed in the course of the year. The start and completion dates of public transport projects, which have not yet commenced, will be determined by the funding allocation available during the current difficult economic climate. The commencement dates for these projects will also be influenced by the time taken for public consultation, the relevant statutory process and the procurement and contract award processes.

Regional Airports.

294. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport his preferred options for the development of a regional airport network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47225/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The six regional airports at Donegal, Sligo, Knock, Galway, Kerry and Waterford provide a network which complements the facilities provided by the State airports and contributes to balanced regional development. My Department's approach to the regional airports is to implement targeted safety and other investments in the regional airports and targeted subventions for regional air services.

This overall approach is reflected by my Department providing direct financial support for the six regional airports under two schemes — one relating to operational expenditure and the other to capital investments. In addition funding is provided by my Department in respect of the provision of PSO services connecting Dublin Airport with Kerry, Galway, IWAK, Sligo and Donegal regional airports and with the City of Derry Airport.

Questions Nos. 295 to 298, inclusive, answered with Question No. 89.

Ground Rents.

299. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will support a matter (details supplied). [47089/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): A legal challenge to the constitutionality of certain provisions of existing ground rents legislation was heard in the High Court during 2005. The High Court's judgment upholding the constitutionality of the legislation was delivered in early 2006 but it has since been appealed to the Supreme Court. While operation of the law in relation to ground rents continues to be reviewed in my Department, there are no proposals for changes pending the outcome of the appeal that I have mentioned.

It should be noted that the law already provides a statutory scheme for the acquisition of the fee simple in dwellinghouses which is set out in the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rents) (No. 2) Act 1978. Part III of that Act makes provision for a streamlined procedure, operated by the Property Registration Authority, whereby a person may acquire the fee simple in their dwellinghouse.

Visa Applications.

300. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46520/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The wife and child of the person concerned have previously been granted multiple journey 'C' type visas, valid for one year. In this instance, long stay 'D' type visas were approved on 8 December 2008. The validity period of the visa being three months refers to the time frame, within which the persons concerned may present at the port of entry to the State.

It should be borne in mind that a visa is merely a pre-entry clearance to seek permission to enter the State — no automatic right of entry or residency is conferred. Whether a person is permitted to enter and the exact period for which s/he is allowed to remain is a matter for the Immigration Officer at the port of entry.

Prisoner Releases.

301. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if persons (details supplied) in County Kerry who were released under licence could have the conditions of their release supplied to them. [46532/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I wish to inform the Deputy that both persons (details supplied) were granted a period of temporary release earlier this year subject to numerous conditions, including the stipulation that they return to prison on the completion of the period of temporary release. Both persons have signed their temporary release forms, which set out in writing the conditions of their temporary release, acknowledging these conditions and verifying that they had been given a copy of their temporary release notice. If they require a further copy they should contact their respective prisons.

Visa Applications.

302. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his Department has reviewed the appeal from a person (details supplied) whose application for a holiday visa for two weeks over Christmas 2008 was refused on 17 November 2008; if the

additional substantive information submitted will permit the appropriate time limited visa to the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46536/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 374 of 25 November 2008. The visa application referred to was received in the Visa Office, Dublin on the 10 November 2008. Following consideration by a Visa Officer it was refused on 17 November 2008. An appeal was received in the Visa Office, Dublin on 15 December 2008. The current processing time for visa appeals is 3 — 4 weeks from the date of receipt in the Visa Office, Dublin. Given the number of appeals currently awaiting consideration, a decision may not be made within the time frame that the person concerned proposes to travel.

Residency Permits.

303. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of an application for leave to remain by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; if he will expedite a decision on the application based on the details of the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46552/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Immigration Division of my Department that an application on behalf of the person in question for residence in the State on the basis of marriage to an Irish national was received in May 2008.

Applications of this kind, in fairness to all other such applicants, are dealt with in chronological order and currently take up to twelve months to process. It should be noted that marriage to an Irish national does not confer an automatic right of residence in the State. The content of the Deputy's Question is noted and my Department will be in touch with the person in question in this regard.

Criminal Prosecutions.

304. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if investigations are continuing regarding crime in County Donegal; the progress being achieved; if there is cooperation between the Gardaí and the PSNI regarding a particular crime (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46635/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the investigation into the crime referred to by the Deputy is ongoing and that a number of avenues of inquiry are being actively pursued with the co-operation and assistance of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The Deputy will appreciate that in circumstances where a Garda investigation is ongoing it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Crime Prevention.

305. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of the establishment of a committee (details supplied); the persons who will constitute its membership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46641/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Joint Policing Committees are provided for in the Garda Síochána Act 2005. Their purpose is provide a forum where An Garda Síochána and the local authority — the two organisations which make the most significant contribution to preventing and tackling crime in a specific area — can come

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together, with the participation of members of the Oireachtas and community and voluntary interests, on matters affecting the area.

On 24 September I launched, with my colleague the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the roll out of the Committees from an initial pilot phase in 29 local authority areas to all 114 local authority areas. The Guidelines which I made set out the membership of, and the procedures to be followed in setting up, the Committees.

Membership will be made up of local authority elected members, Oireachtas members, local authority officials, Garda officers nominated by the Commissioner and persons representing the community and voluntary sector.

Following the formal decision by a local authority meeting to establish a Committee, a process is set in train to select the Committee members from the elected members of the local authority, the members of the Oireachtas who have registered their interest in becoming members and the community and voluntary sector, and various procedural matters have to be dealt with. The Garda Síochána representatives will be appointed by the Garda Commissioner.

I am informed that the relevant local authorities, including Limerick County Council, have been requested to take the necessary steps to secure the establishment of these Committees, and I understand that this process is now underway. In addition, my Department has written to the Garda Commissioner requesting that he arrange for the establishment of the Committees in conjunction with the relevant local authorities.

Organised Crime.

306. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to incidences whereby protection money has been illegally demanded from businesses in the State or in which protection money is being paid; the State protections afforded to businesses who find themselves in such circumstances; the efforts being made by his Department and that of An Garda Síochána to counter such activity; if An Garda Síochána has been provided with sufficient resources to address such activity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46644/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Where information comes into the possession of An Garda Síochána indicating the type of activity suggested by the Deputy, it is subject to thorough investigation.

An Garda Síochána, in accordance with the priorities determined by the Minister for Justice, Equality, and Law Reform pursuant to Section 20 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and 2007, is committed to targeting organised criminal groups engaged in serious crime and those who facilitate the activities of these groupings.

The Garda Commissioner's Annual Policing Plan sets out strategic goals including inter alia a commitment to significantly reduce the impact of crime and criminal behaviour. These goals are backed up by strategic actions which include a commitment to continue and intensify intelligence-led operations against groups and individuals engaged in the trafficking of illegal drugs, guns and immigrants into and within the State.

An Garda Síochána utilises intelligence-led operations to target organised crime gangs. All available intelligence is fully analysed and used in the strategic deployment of both local and specialised operational Garda units to target particular gangs.

Organised crime is being targeted on a number of fronts, including the use of uniformed and plain-clothes Gardaí overtly and covertly disrupting known criminals in the course of criminal

activities. Specialist units from National Support Services are also assisting in these operations and apply their expertise to different aspects of criminal activity. A number of organised crime groups have been targeted in this manner recently with firearms being recovered and drugs seized resulting in a number of people being prosecuted and convicted before the Courts.

In November 2005 the Organised Crime Unit at the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation was set up to combat the growth of organised crime, and in particular armed criminal gangs. The Unit will continue to work closely with other specialist units, including the Garda National Drugs Unit and the Special Detective Unit / Emergency Response Unit, in targeting those suspected of involvement in organised criminal activity.

Senior management in An Garda Síochána will continue to monitor the activities of criminals to ensure that law enforcement activities adapt to changing circumstances.

Criminal Prosecutions.

307. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of people in each Garda division who were detected for driving vehicles whilst serving a ban from driving in each of the past five years by An Garda Síochána; the number who were successfully prosecuted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46656/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office, as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have requested the CSO to provide the statistics sought by the Deputy directly to him.

308. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of people in each Garda division who were detected for driving vehicles whilst uninsured in each of the past five years by An Garda Síochána; the number who were successfully prosecuted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46657/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office, as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have requested the CSO to provide the statistics sought by the Deputy directly to him.

Departmental Property.

309. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46669/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): No equipment or data has been reported stolen or lost from the Department. A small number of Blackberry devices have been lost and not recovered to date. They were quickly missed, the accounts frozen and the data removed by the server. There was no loss of data.

Departmental Expenditure.

310. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency

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under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46684/08]

311. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46699/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 310 and 311 together.

I wish to inform the Deputy that the information requested in respect of hotel accommodation costs incurred by staff in my Department on official business is not separately identifiable because it forms part of the total travel and subsistence expenditure.

As a general principle, competitive accommodation rates are sourced where possible by staff in my Department. In addition, for the past two years, my Department has engaged the services of a company which specialises in sourcing and procuring hotel accommodation at competitive rates. There is no charge for this service to the Department.

Departmental Property.

312. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46714/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): My Department has 510 servers in total. The capacity of each server varies depending on function, and that function can change depending on business requirements, but the approximate total capacity of the servers is 41 terabytes.

Garda Equipment.

313. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of An Garda Síochána firearms stolen, reported stolen, missing or otherwise unaccounted for in each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46725/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The information requested will take time to be compiled. I will forward the answer to the Deputy in due course.

314. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, with regard to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 313 to 338 of 18 November 2008 for which answers are outstanding, he will provide the information requested; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46727/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The following table below sets out the information requested by the Deputy on a quarterly basis. I am advised that it would take extensive garda time and resources to compile the information on a monthly basis as requested by the Deputy. The number of motorised vehicles has increased from 40 to 53 and from 2 to 8 in respect of mountain bikes in the period referred.

Station	Type	Jan 07	Apr 07	Jul 07	Oct 07	Jan 08	Apr 08	Jul 08	Oct 08
Taghmon	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Oylegate	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
RosslarePier	Car	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Rosslare Strand	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Oulart	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
New Ross	Cars	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
	Vans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Motorcycles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	4x4s	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mountain Bikes	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Enniscorthy	Cars	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	5
	Vans	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1
	Mountain Bikes	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Ferns	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Glynn	Car	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gorey	Cars	4	4	5	6	6	7	8	8
	Vans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Motorcycles	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2
	4x4s	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
	M.P.V.	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Mountain Bikes	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Duncannon	Car	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Kilmore Quay	Car	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Kiltealy	Car	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Courtown Harbour	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Clonroche	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Castlebridge	Car	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carrickbyrne	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Carrick on Bannow	Car	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Campile	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bunclody	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Blackwater	Car	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Ballywilliam	Car	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ballycullane	Car	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
Baldwinstown	Car	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wexford	Cars	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	9
	Vans	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
	Motorcycles	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1
	4x4s	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Mountain Bikes	0	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
TOTAL		42	45	45	45	49	51	58	61

Garda Deployment.

315. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of community Gardaí currently assigned in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46728/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of 30 November 2008, the latest date for which figures are readily available, there were 689 Gardaí assigned to the Community Policing Unit.

The Deputy will be aware that Garda Divisional boundaries and County boundaries are not co-terminous. The 2008 Garda Annual Policing Plan sets out the Commissioner's proposals to realign the boundaries of Garda Divisions around the country to make them coterminous with local authority boundaries. The 2009 Policing Plan will also have proposals in this regard. The planned changes will bring about greater efficiencies and effectiveness in facilitating the establishment and functioning of Joint Policing Committees.

In the following table the number of community Gardaí are broken down by their current Division.

Division	Community Policing
Carlow/Kildare	4
Cavan/Monaghan	4
Clare	6
Cork City	27
Cork North	2
Cork West	5
D.M.R. East	41
D.M.R. North Central	71
D.M.R. North	66
D.M.R. South Central	64
D.M.R. South	54
D.M.R. West	87
Donegal	16
Galway	17
Kerry	7
Laois/Offaly	10
Limerick	92
Longford/Westmeath	17
Louth	8
Mayo	8
Meath	8
Roscommon/Galway East	2
Sligo/Leitrim	6
Tipperary	15
Waterford/Kilkenny	23
Wexford	9
Wicklow	20
TOTAL	689

Crime Levels.

316. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of legally held guns and pistols that have been licensed by the Garda authorities since the ban on such guns was lifted in 2004; the number of legally licensed hand guns or pistols that have been reported as stolen since the ban on such guns was lifted; the reason behind his

recently announced proposal to again ban the holding of such licensed guns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46729/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Garda Commissioner informs me that 31 legally held handguns have been stolen since the start of 2004. As the Deputy is aware, for over 30 years prior to 2004, it was policy not to license handguns in this jurisdiction. Following a series of judicial decisions, that is no longer the case and approx. 1,800 handguns have been licensed since then. This was not the result of a considered or deliberate public policy decision. While, thankfully, violence related to the troubles in the North has largely been brought to an end we are now faced with a gun culture operating in criminal gangs. It is a matter of great regret that the activities of criminal gangs should impinge on the interests of law abiding licensed firearms owners but I cannot overlook the fact that the overall level and kind of licensed firearms prevalent in the community is relevant to the prevention of crime, in the same way the prohibition on handguns was considered appropriate from the early seventies on.

I have been conscious too of the remarks of Mr. Justice Charleton in a recent judgement that a reasonable person is entitled to feel alarmed at the proliferation of handguns. I am aware too of calls made by members of the Oireachtas from a number of parties to address this situation. I am aware that some people have a strongly held view that once they are of good character and make the necessary secure arrangements for the storage of their firearms they should be free to have firearms of any kind licensed to them. I feel that that would represent an unacceptable situation where our gun laws could mirror those of countries such as the United States and that, if the present situation continued unchecked, this would happen.

It was against this background that I directed my Department and An Garda Síochána to carry out an urgent and intensive review of the firearms law. Proposals arising from that review will be reflected in a Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous) Provisions Bill which will be published shortly. My proposals for reform in this area include a ban on issuing new licenses for handguns, although there will be limited exceptions in relation to Olympic sports. Those who have licenses already can, when they are due for renewal, apply to have them renewed under a new licensing procedure where the safety of the community will be paramount. Together with the Garda Commissioner I will keep under annual review the outcome of the licensing procedure and, if the outcome leaves a situation which still poses an unacceptable risk to the community, will use new powers to ban particular types of firearm. There have been suggestions in some quarters that this move arose, in some way, as a response to recent gangland crime. It did not.

I have been on record for many months saying I was looking at this issue, especially in light of Judge Peter Charleton's remarks in July. I felt that it was incumbent on me and the Oireachtas to respond to his views. Otherwise in the light of tragic incidents the public would correctly ask the question: Why, when they were warned, did the politicians not do something about it? I am aware that the vast majority of licensed firearms holders pursue their interests legitimately and I am conscious too that many of them deeply resent any connection that is made to the issue of licensed handguns in the context of our crime problem. But as Justice Minister I cannot avoid the reality that the overall number of weapons in circulation and the type of those weapons can add to a gun culture which I do not believe is acceptable. My proposals for reform in this area represent a balanced approach and it is important to stress that these proposals will not impinge on the vast majority of licensed firearms holders. While any inconvenience caused to those who will be affected by the proposals is, of course, regretted I am satisfied that my proposals will be in the public interest.

Garda Strength.

317. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Garda reservists who have been appointed to Garda stations in County Limerick. [46788/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): There are currently 11 attested Garda Reserve members attached to Limerick Garda Division. At present all the Reserve members in the Limerick Division are attached to Henry Street Garda station. A further 6 people are in training and will be assigned as Reserve Gardaí to the Limerick Division upon completion of their training. Recruitment for the Garda Reserve is ongoing and I would welcome the prospect of further assignments of Garda Reserve members to the Limerick Division as additional Reserve members from the area become available.

Citizenship Applications.

318. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of an application for naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46913/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): An application for a certificate of naturalisation on behalf of the person referred to in the Deputy's Question was received in the Citizenship Division of my Department in June 2008. Processing of the file has been completed and I have reached a decision. The person in question will be informed of that decision in due course.

319. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of an application for naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46914/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): An application for a certificate of naturalisation on behalf of the person referred to in the Deputy's Question was received in the Citizenship Division of my Department in June 2008. Processing of the file has been completed and I have reached a decision. The person in question will be informed of that decision in due course.

320. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of an application for a person (details supplied) who has applied for naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46915/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): An application for a certificate of naturalisation for the person referred to in the Deputy's Question was received in the Citizenship Section of my Department in August 2005. Officials in that Section inform me that processing of the application has commenced and the file will be forwarded to me for a decision in the coming months.

Consultancy Contracts.

321. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount spent or paid to each consultancy company or firm in each of the years 2000 to date in 2008; the cost of each report carried out; the work enacted; the reason for such a report; the name of each company or firm which undertook each report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46917/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): As I indicated in my Reply to Parliamentary Question No. 162 of 11 December, 2008, it has not been possible to compile the full and accurate detail of the information sought by the Deputy. When I have the information to hand I will respond to both Deputies.

Prison Building Programme.

322. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, with respect to the proposed Thornton Hall prison project, recent increases in the cost of debt financing may impact on either the financial viability of the project or on the cost to the Exchequer; if he has set a deadline for the completion of the tendering process for the project; when construction of the prison will begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46955/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Negotiations are currently underway with a commercial consortium, which was selected following an EU tender procedure as the preferred bidder for the design, construction, finance and maintenance of the proposed prison facilities at Thornton Hall, North County Dublin. While these negotiations are advanced stage they have not yet been completed to the point that the Project Agreement can be signed. I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that it is anticipated that it will not be possible to have a contract signed this year. The aim would be to have a contract signed early in 2009. Construction will commence immediately after contract award and should take no more than 3 years. This timeframe is subject, of course, to the successful completion of the contract negotiations. If, for any reason, these negotiations are not successfully concluded there are other tenderers and other options which can be considered.

The Thornton Hall project is a complex Public Private Partnership Project which involves the construction of more than 30 buildings, including 8 prison facilities on the site, a major internal road network, extensive perimeter security and a vast array of security systems both physical and electronic. Additional matters have had to be addressed following the extensive public consultation involving the publication of the Environmental Impact Assessment and consideration of the development by the Oireachtas. Pressures on the international financial markets have had implications for a number of major capital projects including Thornton. In particular the availability and cost of finance has been affected.

The National Development Finance Agency, as the financial adviser to the Irish Prison Service, is keeping the financial impacts of the current international “credit crunch” situation under review. Before a contract is awarded the final cost must be within the budget (capital envelope) allocated to the project and be under the Public Sector Benchmark. The Public Sector Benchmark is a monetary value that represents a risk adjusted cost, over the construction and 25 year maintenance period, to the sponsoring agency of delivery the project using ‘traditional’ public sector procurement. The National Development Finance Agency will advise my Department whether the project represents value for money when compared to the Public Sector Benchmark.

Garda Strength.

323. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí stationed at the Blanchardstown Garda station County Dublin currently and for each of the past five years; the number of these gardaí who are, or have been for each of the past five years, allocated to community policing on a dedicated basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46967/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength, including Community Gardaí, of Blanchardstown Garda station as at 31 December 2003-2007 and 30 November 2008 the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the table hereunder:

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Personnel Strength	142	152	167	174	180	192
Community Gardaí	19	17	17	19	22	26

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 allocation of Community Gardaí will be fully considered by the Commissioner within the overall context of policing requirements throughout the country.

Departmental Staff.

324. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46990/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 158 of 23 October 2008.

Decentralisation Programme.

325. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47005/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department's decentralisation programme has been extremely successful to date. Five hundred and sixty civil servants have already moved to their decentralised locations. Two hundred and ninety two moved from provincial locations and two hundred and sixty eight staff moved from Dublin. Overall, this represents over 60% of the target numbers for my Department and we now have a presence in all of the seven locations covered by the programme. It is anticipated that a further seventy staff will have moved by the end of 2009, bringing the total number up to six hundred and thirty.

Departmental Staff.

326. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47020/08]

327. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47035/08]

328. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47050/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 326 to 328, inclusive, together.

There are 2,407 staff currently serving in my Department. This includes those agencies that are staffed by my Department. It does not include bodies in the wider Justice sector that recruit their own staff such as those of the Courts Service, Garda Síochána, Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, Legal Aid Board, Property Registration Authority and non-administrative staff in the Irish Prisons Service. Figures for previous years are not readily available and in any event they would not be comparable with current figures. A breakdown of the number of staff in the various income bands outlined by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

Income Band	Number of staff
Under €50,000	1,503
€50,001 to €60,000	312
€60,001 to €70,000	251
€70,001 to €80,000	121
€80,001 to €90,000	99
€90,001 to €100,000	23
Over €100,000	98

As certain grades are in two or more income bands due to the salary range and/or the work attendance patterns of individuals, it would not provide any meaningful information to include a breakdown of the grades under each band. The staff of my Department and associated agencies covered in this reply are distributed across a large number of locations in Dublin and around the country. Staff in Dublin are currently based in some 29 individual locations across the capital, including 10 Probation Service offices. Outside Dublin, staff are based in 7 decentralised locations (Killarney, Longford, Tipperary, Portarlinton, Portlaoise, Navan and Roscrea). In addition, there are 31 regional Probation Service offices. In view of the large number of staff, grades and locations involved, the provision of a detailed breakdown in this regard would involve a disproportionate amount of staff time and resources.

Departmental Agencies.

329. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the Budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47065/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I can inform the Deputy that the position remains unchanged from my Reply to Question Number 322 of 25 November, 2008.

Garda Investigations.

330. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the action he has taken to investigate the issues raised by a person (details supplied) who has been protesting outside Dáil Eireann for several months; if the allegations they make relating to what happened his daughter in a public house in Dublin have been investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47078/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Garda authorities that, following an investigation of the matter referred to by the Deputy, a person was arrested, charged with assault and convicted. The court also ordered compensation to be paid, and I understand this was done. I am also informed that subsequent civil proceedings were settled before coming to court. Where an offence is disclosed, the matter is investigated by An Garda Síochána and an investigation file prepared for the law officers, who, in the exercise of their independent role, determine the matter of criminal charges against any person. As the Deputy is aware, the courts are, subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions, and it is not open to me to comment on or intervene in any way in the conduct of, or decision in, any individual court case.

Crime Levels.

331. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the steps he will take to deal with the problems for communities created by the actions of anti-social teenage gangs, particularly having regard to recent evidence that some of these gangs may be able to access firearms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47080/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Tackling anti-social behaviour is a priority for both An Garda Síochána and my Department — as is evidenced by the resources we continue to commit to front line policing. The Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme, operated by Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers, has proved to be highly successful in diverting young persons away from crime by offering guidance and support to juveniles and their families. It also enables referral to the Garda Youth Diversion Projects which are community-based, multi-agency crime prevention initiatives operating separately from the Diversion Programme. There are currently 100 of these projects operating in various locations throughout the country.

The Children Act 2001 is now fully in force and provides a modern framework for responding to the needs of young people who come in contact with the criminal justice system. The Irish Youth Justice Service has been established to develop an integrated response to youth offending. This response is set out in the National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010, launched last March. There is a deep responsibility on parents where the behaviour of their children is concerned. The Children Act 2001 provides a number of measures in relation to parental responsibility in respect of children involved in anti-social behaviour, and children found guilty of offences.

Public disorder offences make up a significant proportion of crime committed by juveniles, and are an issue where cooperation between the Gardaí and the local community is vital. That is why I am proceeding with the roll out of the joint policing committees, following their successful pilot phase. These committees enable local authority representatives and officials

and the Gardaí, with the participation of Oireachtas members and community interests, to get together in a structured way to discuss matters affecting the policing of the area.

Operation Anvil commenced in the Dublin Metropolitan Region in 2005 to deal with serious crime and was extended nationwide in 2006. The primary focus of the Operation is the targeting of active criminals and their associates involved in serious crime by preventing and disrupting their criminal activity through extensive additional overt patrolling and static checkpoints by uniform, mobile and foot patrols, supported by armed plain clothes patrols. Under Operation Anvil up to the end of November, 1,200 firearms have been recovered in Dublin and 1,000 in the rest of the country. There have also been over 7,000 arrests for serious crimes such as murder, robbery and burglary and 67,000 searches for weapons, drugs and stolen goods. In this way, the Gardaí will continue to address the issue of illegal guns relentlessly. Funding for Operation Anvil will increase in 2009 from €20 million to €21 million. I can assure the Deputy that I attach the highest importance to tackling the serious threat posed by firearms. The Gardaí will pursue relentlessly those who use firearms in the commission of crime, and I will provide both the resources necessary to do this and legislation required to prevent the availability of such weapons.

Asylum Applications.

332. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of persons having been refused permission to stay here, who voluntarily leave and subsequently reapply to work here as a non-EEA national; the number who are successful in their application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47083/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): As the Deputy will be aware, one of the options open to persons faced with the prospect of having a Deportation Order issued in respect of them is that they can seek to return voluntarily to their country of origin. Details of the number of asylum seekers and irregular migrants from non-EU countries who voluntarily repatriated during the period since 2003 are outlined in the following table:

Year	Number of self-managed voluntary returns	Number of voluntary returns — International Organisation for Migration assisted	Total
2003	361	401	762
2004	218	393	611
2005	125	210	335
2006	63	175	238
2007	162	255	417
2008 (to 15 Dec)	72	434	506

In relation to the number of persons who voluntarily leave and subsequently reapply to work here as a non-EEA national, I can inform the Deputy that, although immigration history is taken into account in visa decisions, my Department does not record the personal and immigration history of visa applicants in a statistical format. Consequently, it is not possible to provide the information requested by the Deputy. I should also inform the Deputy that not every non-EEA national is visa required. Where non-EEA nationals are visa required, visas for the purpose of employment are issued worldwide by both my Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs. Each case is dealt with on its own merits on a case-by-case basis at the time of processing.

Citizenship Applications.

333. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding an application for naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [47087/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): 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 on 25 November 2004. On examination of this application it was determined that the person in question did not meet the statutory residency requirements as set out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. A letter informing the applicant of this was issued on the 16 March 2007 and the person in question was invited to make a new application under his existing reference number. The purpose of this letter was to ensure that the person concerned would not lose his place in the processing queue. This application was lodged on 23 April 2007. Officials in the Citizenship Section of my Department inform me that processing of this application has commenced and the file will be forwarded to me for a decision in the coming months.

Proposed Legislation.

334. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will support a group (details supplied). [47088/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): My colleague the Minister for Transport is responsible for legislation relating to the matters raised by the Deputy which I understand will be addressed in the context of a new Road Traffic and Transport Bill.

Departmental Expenditure.

335. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount of taxpayers' money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon treaty referendum. [47103/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): My Department pays an annual corporate membership to the Institute for International and European Affairs which falls due every August. In this connection it paid €6,000 in 2008. No other payments were made to the Institute by my Department apart from for the purchase of a number of publications.

Visa Applications.

336. **Deputy Michael Noonan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be made on an application for a re-entry visa by a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47111/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the re-entry visa application referred to has been approved.

Asylum Applications.

337. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas are entitled to attend hearings in respect of asylum seekers in regard to their status on their claims, for the purpose of providing further infor-

mation known to them; if they are not entitled to attend, the reason for such decisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47184/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Under the Refugee Act 1996, applications for refugee status in the State are determined by an independent process comprising the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal which make recommendations to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on whether such status should be granted.

Under the Act an oral hearing may arise in the case of an appeal to the Tribunal under section 16 against a recommendation of the Commissioner. Section 16 does not include any specific reference to a role for a member of a House of the Oireachtas at an oral hearing. The section does include the following provisions which could have a bearing on the matter: for the purposes of an oral hearing the Tribunal may direct in writing any person whose evidence is required by the Tribunal to attend before the Tribunal to give evidence and to produce any document or thing in his or her possession or control; the Tribunal shall enable the applicant to be resent at the hearing and present his or her case to the Tribunal in person or through a legal representative or other person; and an oral hearing shall be held in private.

Road Traffic Offences.

338. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of persons apprehended while driving under the influence of illegal drugs in each of the past five years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47231/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office, as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose. I have requested the CSO to provide the statistics sought by the Deputy directly to him.

Crime Levels.

339. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of unlawful killings caused by the use of legally or illegally held handguns in each of the past six years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47232/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The following table contains the number of cases of murder and manslaughter recorded in which firearms were used for the years 2003 to 2007 and in 2008 up to 30 September.

The number of cases of murder and manslaughter recorded in which firearms were used for the years 2003 to 2007 and in 2008 up to 30 September

Year	Recorded
2008*	13
2007	18
2006	27
2005	23
2004	9
2003	21

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

[Deputy Dermot Ahern.]

I have sought further information from An Garda Síochána in relation to the types of weapons used and will communicate further with the Deputy.

EU Funding.

340. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount of EU funding received by his Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under his aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47248/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am advised that it is not possible to provide the extensive information requested as its collation would require a disproportionate and inordinate amount of staff time and effort which cannot be justified in current circumstances where there are other significant demands on resources.

Garda Operations.

341. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the information obtained from the recent Operation Cellar campaign by the Garda that can assist local drug task forces in identifying areas, communities or families that need help and assistance under the remit of the LDTF; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40922/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have been informed by the Garda Authorities that similar to Operation ‘Clean-Street’, Operation ‘Cellar’ is a ‘test-purchase’ initiative targeting suppliers of heroin and cocaine, led by the Garda National Drugs Unit, assisted by personnel from Divisional and District Drug Units, in a number of locations nationwide. This initiative led to the arrest of 155 individuals, and the commencement of 236 proceedings for related offences.

An Garda Síochána is represented by a Garda Inspector on the Local and Regional Drug Task Forces. This officer provides relevant information on drug prevalence and supply to the Local and Regional DTF’s. In addition An Garda Síochána is also represented by a Garda Superintendent on the National Drug Strategy Team and he provides continuous feed-back on various operational initiatives which have relevance and feed into the ongoing work of the Local and Regional Task Forces. This assists the Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces in the preparation of strategies to reduce demand for, and target the supply of, illegal drugs in Ireland.

Road Safety.

342. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will report on the status of the national speed camera roll-out and tendering competition; if he will provide a commencement and completion date for the national speed camera roll-out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46359/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Following a two stage tender and evaluation process to procure an outsourced safety camera network, a preferred bidder has been identified. I am informed by the Garda authorities that one of the unsuccessful tenderers has requested clarification. The issues raised are expected to be resolved shortly, and An Garda Síochána are expected to commence contract discussions with the preferred bidder.

As soon as the contract is concluded, roll-out; of the network of cameras will commence. Roll-out will involve a service start-up phase, which will include drawing up policy and procedures by the service provider and their approval by An Garda Síochána; service testing, following which the Garda Commissioner will issue a service commencement certificate; and

roll-out; of the service until operating at full capacity. Every effort is being made to proceed with this project as speedily as possible. Until the contract discussions are concluded it is not possible to indicate a specific timescale for the project.

The 2009 Estimates provide €10 million in the Garda Vote for the provision of the service, which will allow the project to proceed to full roll-out; in 2009.

Human Rights Issues.

343. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the actions of the Iranian Government against the Baha'i community with regard to arbitrary arrests and imprisonment of same; and the action that has been taken in protesting such discriminatory measures with Iranian counterparts. [46608/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I share the concerns of the Deputy about the oppressive treatment of the Baha'i minority in Iran. In my reply to Written Question 42351/08 on 25 November (attached), I set out these concerns in detail, as well as the action taken by the Government to impress these concerns on the Iranian authorities.

Further to that reply, I wrote last week directly to Foreign Minister Mottaki of Iran on a number of human rights issues. In that letter, I set out at length my deep concern about the treatment of the Baha'i in the strongest terms, including urging that detained Baha'i be released and that the Baha'i community be afforded the same protection and tolerance as all other Iranians.

My Department will continue to monitor actively the situation of the Baha'i community in Iran, and to convey my strong views to the Iranian authorities.

Foreign Conflicts.

344. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the blockade of humanitarian supplies to the Palestinian inhabitants of the Gaza Strip by the Israeli Government; the action the he proposes to take as part of the EU, in view of the fact that some 80% of those living in the Gaza Strip depend on these supplies to live; if his attention has been drawn to the calls by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and EU External Affairs Commissioner Beneta Ferrero-Waldner for the immediate reopening of the commercial crossings into Gaza; and his views of such a proposal. [46609/08]

346. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on recent hostilities between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants; his views in particular on comments attributed to Israel's Minister for Foreign Affairs to the effect that the truce in the area is over; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46612/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 344 and 346 together.

The Government remain seriously concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which has effectively been isolated since the Hamas takeover in June 2007, even during a ceasefire between Israeli forces and Hamas which was broadly respected from 19 June 2008 until 4 November 2008. Since then there have been a number of clear breaches on both sides.

The Government has consistently and repeatedly called for an end to the isolation of the people of Gaza, in particular through the re-opening of crossing points for the movement of people and goods. The Government agree with those who state that the effective isolation of Gaza constitutes collective punishment and is illegal under international humanitarian law. Ireland will continue to work with EU partners to ensure that our concerns about the situation in Gaza are conveyed to the Israeli Government at every appropriate opportunity.

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

Since 4 November, Israel has effectively closed all border crossings for commercial goods, and even for humanitarian supplies. I understand, however, that the situation has improved somewhat in recent days and that Israel has allowed more vital supplies, including fuel, to be delivered to the people of Gaza. This is a welcome development but the population of 1.5 million people continue to face virtually unsustainable conditions.

While expressing our humanitarian concerns about Gaza, the Government unreservedly condemn the recent renewal of rocket attacks from Gaza on towns in southern Israel. An immediate end to all violence is essential. In this regard, it is vitally important that both sides reinstate and renew the ceasefire originally agreed last June and which will formally expire on 19 December. Ireland will continue to support Egyptian efforts to restore the truce.

I raised the situation in Gaza with EU partners at both the meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels on 8 December and a Foreign Ministers' discussion which took place en marge of the European Council on 11-12 December. Ireland was instrumental in ensuring that the Council Conclusions adopted on 8 December call for the humanitarian situation in Gaza to be addressed with all urgency, as well as stating that crossings should be opened for the supply of goods and services, and that the ability of the UN Works and Relief Agency (UNWRA) to deliver humanitarian assistance should be assured. The European Council, in its Conclusions of 12 December, also reiterated that the Middle East Peace Process and efforts to achieve a viable two-State solution must be a priority for the international community in 2009.

Ireland also raised the situation in Gaza during the Universal Periodic Review of Israel at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on 4 December, calling on Israel to respect its obligations under international human rights instruments and international humanitarian law.

FAI Welfare Scheme.

345. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the details of the recently announced scheme whereby the Football Association of Ireland is to have a welfare officer with responsibility for young Irish players living in Britain; the way it is proposed to fill, finance and maintain this position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46610/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): On 27 November, together with Chief Executive of the Football Association of Ireland, Mr. John Delaney, I announced the appointment of Terry Conroy as the new FAI welfare officer for Britain. This followed a two-stage interview process conducted by the FAI and officials from the Irish Abroad Unit of my Department. This initiative is a direct response to concerns that the welfare needs of young Irish players who travel to Britain to take up positions at professional clubs be addressed. The vast majority of these young people are ultimately released by their clubs and some experience considerable hardships.

The new welfare officer will liaise with clubs in Britain on behalf of players and their families, particularly in cases where difficulties arise in relation to alcohol, substance abuse or gambling. He will work directly with the players to ensure that they are aware of local educational and other vocational training opportunities and will also be available to assist retired Irish footballers who may have fallen on hard times.

The Department has allocated a €50,000 grant towards the programme this year, with matching funding provided by the Football Association of Ireland, under whose aegis the welfare officer is employed. The welfare officer will report directly to the FAI, which will in turn report to the Department on the programme's progress. A comprehensive progress report will also be submitted to the Department within twelve months.

Question No. 346 answered with Question No. 344.

Foreign Conflicts.

347. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will report on the situation as it currently pertains in Thailand. [46614/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): While the situation in Thailand remains tense, the demonstrations mounted by the People's Alliance for Democracy, which paralysed the capital and key airports in recent weeks, have ended. A new Prime Minister — Abhisit Vejjajiva, leader of the opposition Democrat Party — was elected by the parliament on 15 December, and the process of establishing a new government is now underway. However, in response, supporters of the previous Government launched their own protests in the capital and the situation remains volatile, with the deep-seated polarisation of Thai politics and society unresolved. Thailand also faces both economic difficulties and the task of restoring its international image as a major tourist destination.

If political stability is to be achieved, and if Thailand is to successfully address the many challenges it faces, it is vital for the parties there to engage in dialogue in a spirit of national reconciliation. Defining the role of the military will need to be a feature of this process. Of key importance also, in both the short and longer term, will be observance of the rule of law, respect for the Thai constitution and protection of the democratic process.

With regard to the situation of Irish citizens in Thailand, the main airports have now reopened and officials and airlines are working to clear the backlog of stranded passengers. Assistance to Irish citizens continues, of course, to be available through our Honorary Consul in Bangkok and our Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, should it be required.

348. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the position in Mumbai, India following the recent terrorist attack there; if all Irish persons who had been in the vicinity have safely left the area; and if Irish and European officials have contacted Indian counterparts in the aftermath of the events. [46615/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): India remains in a state of heightened alert in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks. There are concerns that there may be further terrorist incidents, particularly as the country prepares for national elections due before May 2009. Security remains tight throughout the country, particularly in major cities and at installations such as airports and Government buildings. My Department is currently advising travellers to exercise caution in relation to journeys to and within India.

My Department provided consular assistance to over 30 individuals with whom it was in contact. Thankfully, there were no Irish injuries, but several Irish citizens had been in hotels attacked by the militants. All of these managed to escape without injury, though some were deeply distressed by the experience. Assistance provided to them included replacement of travel documents which had to be abandoned when the attacks took place, travel arrangements home or out of Mumbai and general advice about the situation and safety issues. My Department is not aware of any Irish citizens that now require follow-up advice or assistance in the affected region. The Irish Ambassador in India visited Mumbai on 15 and 16 December for a series of official meetings and calls, including a number of calls on persons and agencies who were helpful to Irish citizens during the crisis.

At their meeting on 8 December, EU Foreign Ministers renewed their strong condemnation of the attacks in Mumbai and reiterated their expression of condolences to the families of the victims and their solidarity with the people of India and with the Indian authorities. Ministers also reiterated their determination to contribute to the fight against terrorism throughout South

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Asia and called for the stepping up of regional cooperation in combating terrorism. They also underlined their hope that Pakistan will cooperate fully with the Indian investigation into the attacks and that both countries and their neighbours will work together to bring those responsible to justice.

In terms of my own contacts, as I stated in response to a previous Parliamentary Question on 4 December, I spoke with the Indian Ambassador in Dublin on 27 November, the day after the attacks began, to convey my sincere condolences on behalf of the Irish people at the tragic events which were taking place at that time. I also expressed the hope that the Indian authorities would be able to resolve the situation without further loss of life and that those who carried out or plotted these attacks would be brought to justice. On 9 December I wrote to the Minister of External Affairs of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, to express my personal condolences on the tragic loss of life which occurred at Mumbai and to express the deep appreciation of the Government for the support extended by the relevant Indian security and emergency services to officials in our Embassy in New Delhi and our Consulate General in Mumbai as they carried out their consular duties following the attacks. I assured the Minister of our support and solidarity at this most difficult time for India.

Human Rights Issues.

349. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will report on the third session of the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council which was held between 1 and 15 December 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46616/08]

350. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will report on discussions regarding Colombia at the third session of the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council. [46617/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 349 and 350 together.

The third session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council took place in Geneva between 1 and 15 December 2008. The UPR is one of the major new aspects of the Council, which subjects each UN member State to a thorough review of its human rights performance every fourth year. The reviews are based on information provided by the concerned State, compilation reports prepared by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and input from NGOs. Each review is facilitated by three States members who act as rapporteurs. During the UPR Working Group sessions, States and NGOs have the opportunity to participate in an interactive dialogue with the State under review.

Sixteen countries were reviewed at the third UPR session, namely Bahamas, Barbados, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Colombia, Israel, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan. Ireland participated actively at the session, putting questions and recommendations to Botswana, Burundi, Colombia, Israel, Montenegro, Serbia and Uzbekistan. The questions and recommendations of participating States, including those from Ireland, are reflected in the outcome reports that were adopted by the UPR Working Group and can be viewed on the website of the Human Rights Council: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRmain.aspx>

In relation specifically to the examination of Colombia, the Irish Delegation raised issues and made recommendations regarding human rights defenders, victims of gender-based violence and extrajudicial killings. Ireland welcomed recent Colombian government assurances on

the protection of Human Rights Defenders and the development of a Protection Programme for Human Rights Defenders. Ireland also recommended that Colombian legislation on Human Rights Defenders be implemented in full. Ireland recommended that the Colombian government implement the May 2008 Constitutional Court ruling that the witness protection programme be revised to deal with gender-based violence.

Ireland recommended that the Colombian Government implement urgently the recommendations of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2008. In welcoming recent Colombian government efforts to end the incidence of extrajudicial killings in Colombia, Ireland further recommended that the new National Plan of Action on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law be used to address comprehensively the issue of extra-judicial killings. Ireland will examine the conclusions and recommendations of the report of the Universal Periodic Review of Colombia which was adopted on 15 December.

The establishment of a strong UPR mechanism was viewed by Ireland and the wider EU membership as a key innovation of the Human Rights Council. Its universal nature counters charges of selectivity. We have stressed the importance of ensuring that experts and NGOs are fully involved in the process, and the importance of concrete outcomes and operational follow-up. The first two UPR sessions took place in April and May 2008 respectively. As 16 States are reviewed at each session, a total of 48 States have been reviewed so far. Ireland is due to undergo the UPR process in 2011.

Pigmeat Sector.

351. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the discussions he has held with colleague Ministers throughout the European Union, following the withdrawal for sale of Irish pork products, in efforts to have such products available for sale again. [46618/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Government has been working to ensure that Irish pork products are available for sale again as soon as possible in Ireland's major markets, including in the European Union. My Department, through its network of Embassies, is working closely with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Bord Bia to keep the relevant authorities in our major markets fully informed of developments and so provide reassurance, when required, with regard to Irish pork products.

Departmental Property.

352. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46667/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Within the period in question, the Department of Foreign Affairs has had two laptops stolen, one USB memory stick was lost and three mobile phones were lost or stolen. These devices did not contain any sensitive data and both laptops were encrypted. The Department encrypts all laptops before issue and also issues guidelines to all officers on the appropriate use of IT equipment, highlighting the obligations arising under the Data Protection Act.

Departmental Expenditure.

353. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46682/08]

354. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46697/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to reply to Questions Nos. 353 and 354 together.

I have provided below in tabular form details of the hotel accommodation costs incurred under the headquarters budget of my Department for each year from 2004 to date, for officers travelling overseas and within Ireland in an official capacity. There are no State Agencies operating under the remit of my Department.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Hotel Costs	€931,006	€1,025,476	€1,010,159	€980,942	€967,201

With regard to the procurement arrangements for sourcing hotel accommodation, the central contract for travel booking services for government officials includes provision for making hotel reservations. This contract is currently held by Club Travel Limited and was awarded following an EU-level advertised procurement process conducted earlier this year. Club Travel is used by my Department to book hotel accommodation for officers travelling to Brussels.

The central aims of the travel policy of my Department, which is based on the travel policy for Government Departments laid down by the Department of Finance, are to minimise official travel costs and to achieve value for money for expenditure necessarily incurred, consistent with the effective discharge of official duties. The Departmental travel policy advises that the most reasonably priced, appropriate, hotel accommodation should be used when engaged in official travel.

Throughout Ireland's diplomatic network of 75 Missions abroad, Embassies and Consulates maintain lists of Hotels with whom special rates have been negotiated locally. When official or Ministerial travel is being undertaken abroad, the Mission accredited to the country will book appropriate accommodation for officials and Ministers in line with Departmental travel policy and in consultation as necessary with the Minister's Office.

Departmental Property.

355. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46712/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): My Department has 257 computer servers across offices in Ireland and its 75 Missions around the world. Each of these servers is owned by the Department.

Server capacity falls into the following ranges:

- (a) Up to 100 gigabytes — 29 servers
- (b) Between 300 and 400 gigabytes — 226 servers
- (c) Above 400 gigabytes — 2 servers There are no State agencies under the aegis of my Department.

Departmental Staff.

356. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46988/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Increments are paid annually to staff in my Department who have not reached the maximum point on the appropriate salary scale for their grade provided that they meet required standards in relation to performance and attendance set down under the Civil Service Performance Management and Development System.

In the time available, it has not been possible to provide the financial information being sought for the years prior to 2008. However, I can advise the Deputy that the estimated overall cost for the payment of increments in my Department for 2008 and 2009 amounts to €1.07 million and €1.1 million respectively.

Decentralisation Programme.

357. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47003/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Under the Government's decentralisation programme announced in 2003, 125 posts attached to the Development Cooperation Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs were to decentralise to Limerick. The Division is the Headquarters of Irish Aid. Following sanction of an additional 20 posts by the Department of Finance in 2005, the total number of posts attached to Irish Aid Headquarters increased to 145. Of these, 138 are decentralising and 124 staff have now moved into the new permanent Headquarters building in Limerick. The remaining 14 posts are expected to be filled in early 2009. The information requested by the Deputy is conveyed in the tabular format below:

Decentralisation of Irish Aid to Limerick as at 15 December 2008

	Total	Civil Servants	Other Public Servants
Number of staff who decentralised from Dublin	86	86	0
Number of staff who decentralised from elsewhere	38	38	0
Number of staff who are due to decentralise in 2009	14	14	0
Total number due to decentralise by the end of 2009	138	138	0

Departmental Staff.

358. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000

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per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47018/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The core staffing number approved by the Department of Finance for my Department is 1,576 (on a full-time equivalent basis). This figure includes approximately 300 locally recruited staff employed at missions abroad. The following table sets out the number of staff on the Department's payroll, excluding those who are locally recruited abroad, broken down by grade and the relevant salary scales for the grades in question.

Grade	Number	Salary scale (non-PPC rate)	Salary scale (PPC rate)
Secretary General	1	€253,635	€266,985
Second Secretary	4	€221,929	€233,610
Deputy Secretary	5	€177,547	€186,891
Assistant Secretary	42	€131,748 – €150,712	€138,683 – €158,644
Principal Development Specialist	1	€100,191 – €114,285	€105,463 – €120,300
Counsellor/PO	102	€92,730 – €114,366* €86,168 – €106,582	€97,617 – €120,383 €90,702 – €112,191
Senior Development Specialist	14	€80,016 – €97,109	€84,225 – €102,218
Assistant Principal/First Sec	195	€72,681 – €90,884* €66,179 – €82,520	€76,510 – €95,665 €69,659 – €86,865
Development Specialist	32	€66,179 – €82,520	€69,659 – €86,865
HEO/Third Sec/AO	193	€46,558 – €59,097* €49,379 – €59,097	€49,007 – €62,210 €51,980 – €64,296
EO	126	€32,179 – €53,067* €32,179 – €51,054	€30,566 – €50,410 €30,566 – €48,504
SO	45	€34,941 – €46,655	€36,779 – €49,104
CO	532	€24,255 – €38,397* €23,174 – €37,584	€25,532 – €40,417 €24,397 – €39,558
Cleaners/Services Officers, Nightwatchpersons (NWP)	45	€20,913 – €24,281 Cleaner €21,901 – €29,199 Services Officer €21,966 – €27,022 NWP	€21,840 – €25,559 Cleaner €22,876 – €30,735 Services Officer €22,946 – €28,444 NWP

*These are the salary levels applying to the higher scale posts in the relevant grade.

Personal Pension Contribution (PPC) scales apply where officers were employed since 6 April 1995, pay class A rate of PRSI and make a personal pension contribution.

359. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47033/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The core staffing number approved by the Department of Finance for my Department is 1,576. This includes 320 permanent staff

who are working in the Passports Offices in Ireland and approximately 300 local staff currently employed at missions abroad.

The number of staff currently serving as of 1 December is 1,557. The shortfall of 19 is accounted for by vacancies for which replacements have not yet been appointed.

The table below provides details of the number of civil servants in my Department for each of the years from 2002 to 2008. It does not include the local staff employed at missions abroad. It should also be noted that the figures for 2002 and 2003 include a total of 19 staff who were employed by the Agency for Personal Services Overseas (APSO), a body under the aegis of my Department until it was fully integrated into it in 2004.

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
1,091	1,177	1,127	1,081	1,130	1,214	1,257

360. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47048/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The core staffing number approved by the Department of Finance for my Department is 1,576.

The number of staff currently serving as of 1 December is 1,557. Of this total, 927 staff are based in six offices located in Ireland. The remaining 630 staff, of whom 300 are locally recruited, are based in Missions abroad. The following table provides a breakdown by grade of the staff serving in the six Irish locations.

Staff by Location and Grade

	Sec Gen	Asst Sec	Counsellor/ PO	1st Sec/ AP	3rd Sec/ HEO/EO	EO	SO	CO	Other Grades	Total
Dublin	1	9	25	68	93	61	24	236	2 Accountants 2 Architects 41 Cleaners/Services Officers/NWPs 3 Services Officers	562
Balbriggan				1	5	14	5	106		134
Cork				1	3	7	6	68		85
Limerick		1	9	21	17	16	2	26	26 Development Specialists 4 Accountants 2 Services Officers	124
Armagh		1	1	4	1			4		11
Belfast		2	3		2			4		11

Departmental Agencies.

361. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the Budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47063/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): There are currently no State agencies or authorities operating under the responsibility of my Department. There are three Advisory Committees and one Educational Commission, which come under the aegis of the Department; these are the Development Education Advisory Committee; the Government Emigrant Services Advisory Committee; the Advisory Board for Irish Aid; and the Fulbright Commission.

No announcement was made in respect of any of these bodies in the Budget 2009.

Departmental Expenditure.

362. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the amount of taxpayers' money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon Referendum. [47101/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Institute for International and European Affairs (IIEA) is an independent policy research think-tank and forum. The Department of Foreign Affairs pays an annual fee, currently set at €6,000, in respect of its corporate membership of the IIEA.

In the past, the Institute has also received funding from my Department under the Communicating Europe Initiative (CEI). The scheme provides grants to organisations and individuals for projects aimed at increasing knowledge and awareness of the European Union. In 2007, the IIEA received funding of €3,000 under the CEI.

As part of the Department's public information campaign on the Lisbon Treaty, the Institute was paid €23, 626 for Consolidated and Annotated versions of the EU Treaties, as amended by the Lisbon Treaty. Copies of these texts, which were published by the Institute, were made available on request to members of the public and were also distributed to all public libraries throughout the State.

Official Engagements.

363. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of receptions hosted (details supplied) in the period from June 2007 to May 2008 in tabular form. [47113/08]

364. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of receptions hosted (details supplied) in a specific period in tabular form. [47114/08]

365. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the breakdown of receptions hosted (details supplied) in tabular form. [47115/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 363 to 365, inclusive, together.

The information on the hospitality hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Ministers of State in the Department of Foreign Affairs in the period June 2007 to date is detailed in the

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tables below. The breakdown of events is as follows: lunches 68%, receptions (wine and canapés) 25%, dinners 4.2%, receptions (wine only) 1.4%, others 1.4% and black-tie events 0%.

Receptions hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Ministers of State in the Department of Foreign Affairs, June 2007-May 2008

Host	Lunch	Reception	Dinner	Other
Mr. Dermot Ahern T.D., Minister for Foreign Affairs	17	6	0	0
Mr. Dick Roche T.D., Minister of State for European Affairs	4	4	1	0
Mr. Michael Kitt T.D. Minister of State for Overseas Development	6	2	0	1

Receptions hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of State in the Department of Foreign Affairs, May 2008 to present

Host	Lunch	Reception	Dinner	Other
Mr. Micheál Martin T.D., Minister for Foreign Affairs	16	7	2	0
Mr. Dick Roche T.D., Minister of State for European Affairs	5	0	0	0
Mr. Peter Power T.D., Minister of State for Overseas Development	0	2	0	0

EU Funding.

366. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the amount of EU funding received by his Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under his aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47246/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): As the Deputy will appreciate, in the time available, it has been difficult to research all aspects of funding received by my Department over such a long period.

However, following a detailed examination of the Department's records, I understand that the only direct EU funding received by my Department was the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace I), which was targeted at Northern Ireland and the six border counties in the South. This programme ran from 1995 to end-December 2001, with continued funding being drawn down to the end of 2005.

This Department had responsibility for two measures under the sub-programme of Peace I which dealt with cross border development. The first of these two measures was entitled Measure 3.3 on Cross-Border co-operation between Public Bodies and had an expenditure of approximately €11 million. The second was entitled Measure 3.1 on Cross-Border Business and Cultural Linkages and had an expenditure of €12 million. The latter measure was implemented by an intermediary agency, Co-Operation Ireland, under the supervision of this Department.

Sports Capital Programme.

367. **Deputy Deirdre Clune** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the level of

funding which will be available under the sports capital programme for 2009; when he will accept applications for funding under this programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46640/08]

372. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when application forms for grants (details supplied) will be made available; if the grants will be allocated at a later stage in 2009; if the application process will be delayed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46780/08]

374. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the date the sports capital programme will be announced; if there are indications as to the amount of capital that will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46789/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 367, 372 and 374 together. The Deputies will be aware that allocations under the 2008 Sports Capital Programme were announced in July last. No decision has yet been made about the timing of further rounds of the Programme. In the 2009 Estimates, €56m has been provided in my Department's vote to cover payments to be made from the C-1 sub-head, out of which grants are paid for the provision of sports and recreation facilities.

Departmental Property.

368. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46659/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): I would refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question Ref. No. 30139/08 answered on Wednesday, 24th September 2008. Since my reply to that Parliamentary Question, the Department, including the National Archives of Ireland, has suffered no loss or theft of its IT equipment or data.

Departmental Expenditure.

369. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46674/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): Staff of the Department employed on official business away from their headquarters are paid subsistence expenses within the rates authorised from time to time by the Minister for Finance. The subsistence allowance payable is not intended to meet the whole cost of subsistence when absent from home and headquarters and is not intended to be a source of emolument or profit. Subsistence allowances are payable only in respect of necessary absence from headquarters. The cost to staff members of hotel accommodation incurred by them is met wholly or partly from the subsistence allowance paid to them.

From time to time my Department incurs accommodation costs. The schedule below shows the direct cost of accommodation in respect of 2007 and 2008. The figures in respect of 2004-2006 are not readily available.

Year	€
2007	6,833.60
2008	6,704.10

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Details of the costs of hotel accommodation in the organisations under the aegis of my Department is a matter for the Boards and Directors of those organisations.

370. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46689/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): The procurement by the Department of hotel accommodation for overnight accommodation either for me as Minister or for Departmental staff is determined by and accords with public procurement and/or travel and subsistence guidelines, as prepared by the Department of Finance.

The procurement of services by any of the agencies under the aegis of the Department is determined by applicable guidelines contained in the Department of Finance's Government-endorsed Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. I can confirm that this Code has been brought to the attention of those agencies, which are themselves responsible for compliance with the relevant financial procedures, including procurement guidelines.

Departmental Property.

371. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46704/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): The Department owns and operates 22 servers currently in its offices at Kildare Street and Killarney. The capacity of the hard drives on these servers is as follows: 6 servers with 136 GB each, 5 servers with 409 GB each, 4 servers with 465 GB each, 4 servers with 68 GB each, 2 servers with 285 GB each and 1 server with 34 GB.

The National Archives has 7 servers operating on its local area network (LAN). The capacity of the hard drives on these servers is 16 GB, 75 GB, 136 GB, 204 GB, 204 GB, 408 GB and 836 GB.

Additionally, the National Archives has 8 servers externally hosted at a data centre, which service the Census of Ireland online facility. Each of these servers has a 72 GB capacity. It also has 1 externally hosted server servicing the National Archives website, and this has a capacity of 146 GB. Neither the Department nor the National Archives lease any of their servers.

Details regarding computer services in the Department's agencies are a matter for those agencies and my Department does not have such details.

Question No. 372 answered with Question No. 367.

Sports Capital Programme.

373. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of applications for funding under the sports capital grant over the past five years; the number of applications from County Kildare; the number of successful applications from County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46786/08]

375. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the funding not drawn down from the sports capital grants scheme over each of the past five years; the funding not drawn down in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46790/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 373 and 375 together.

Under the Sports Capital Programme, which is administered by my Department, funding is allocated to sporting and community organisations. It is the main vehicle for development of sports facilities at local, regional and national level throughout the country.

Since 1998 the Sports Capital Programme has allocated over €725m to 7,401 sports facility projects. This investment has transformed the sporting landscape of Ireland with improved facilities in virtually every village, town and city. The facilities funded range from new equipment for the smallest clubs, to regional multi-sport centres and national centres of sporting excellence. For a project to be considered for funding under the programme it must first meet a certain number of basic requirements such as showing evidence of the minimum required level of own funding or evidence of freehold or sufficiently long leasehold to ensure that the facility stays in sporting use. All projects that do not meet these minimum requirements are considered ineligible and are not assessed for funding.

When assessing applications that have met these minimum requirements the Department uses a number of criteria. Applications are scored according to how well they meet these criteria and then ranked in order of priority within their own county. The amount of funding available for distribution under the Programme in each county is determined on a pro-rata basis based on the 2006 Census of Population. This method of assessment and allocation ensures that all counties, including those with growing populations, receive proportionate levels of funding. However, if a county does not have a sufficient number of eligible projects it is of course not possible to allocate that county's share of the total allocations. In these cases the funding is distributed to projects elsewhere.

Information in relation to the number of applications received under the sports capital programme nationally and in Kildare, and the number of successful applications from Kildare, in each of the last five years and the amount of outstanding allocations as at the end of October is set out in the table below:

Year	No. Of Applications — Total	No. Of Applications — Kildare	No. Of Successful Applications — Kildare	Funding allocated nationally but still to be drawn down
				€
2004	1,304	44	27	12,532,168
2005	1,362	44	16	15,863,306
2006	1,338	33	19	34,465,958
2007	1,533	38	17	56,699,574
2008	1,453	44	21	47,298,000

The amount of funding allocated to clubs and organisations in Kildare over the period 2004 to 2008 but not yet drawn down is almost €6.5 million.

Question No. 374 answered with Question No. 367.

Question No. 375 answered with Question No. 373.

376. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the reason a club (details supplied) in County Kildare has not being able to draw down capital lottery funding to allow their club carry out necessary works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46791/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): Under the Sports Capital Programme, which is administered by the Department, funding is allocated to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. The aim of the Programme is to maximise participation in sport through the provision of modern high quality, safe, well-designed and sustainable facilities and sports equipment. The provision of such facilities allows for increased numbers to participate in sport.

A grant of €120,000 was provisionally allocated to the project in question under the 2007 Sports Capital Programme. A number of queries have been raised by my Department in relation to the procurement of works carried out in relation to this project. The club responded to these queries last week and the matter is currently being considered. It is expected that a letter will issue to the organisation in question later this week.

Departmental Staff.

377. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46980/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): The estimated cost of incremental pay increases for staff in the Department in 2008 and 2009 is set out below:

Year	€
2008	70,000
2009	75,000

The Department did not retain figures for the annual cost of incremental increases in the past as there was no specific budgetary provision within the overall payroll provision to cover such increases. The rationale for this is based on the principle that the overall cost of increments for staff should be offset by reductions in costs arising from the retirement or other movements of staff at higher points on pay scales and their replacement by staff at lower points.

The figure for 2009 is calculated on the basis of existing staff in the Department but the final figure will be impacted, inter alia, by further staff turnover in the context of finalising the decentralisation of the Department to Killarney in early 2009. The cost of incremental pay increases for the agencies under the remit of the Department is a matter for each agency to be met from within their particular pay budget allocation.

Decentralisation Programme.

378. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46995/08]

381. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47040/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 378 and 381 together.

The Department of Arts Sport and Tourism was designated for relocation to Killarney, Co. Kerry, under the Government's Decentralisation Programme, which was announced in the 2004 Budget. The Department, with a staff of 130, excluding the National Archives, was designated an "early mover" by the Decentralisation Implementation Group (DIG). To date, 76 staff (including two service officers who were recruited directly) have relocated to new purpose built offices in Killarney. The Department is now in two locations — Kildare Street in Dublin and New Road in Killarney.

The breakdown of information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below.

GRADE	Located at Kildare St. Dublin	Located at New Road, Killarney	Decentralised from Dublin	Decentralised from Provincial Locations
Secretary General	1	0	0	0
Assistant Secretary	3	0	0	0
Principal Officer	5	5	3	2
Assistant Principal	6	17	13	4
Accountant	0	1	0	1
Higher Executive Officer	8	16	11	5
Executive Officer	10	20	6	14
Staff Officer	2	0	0	0
Clerical Officer	6	15	1	14
Service Officer	1	2	N/A	N/A
Total	42	76	34	40

It is not possible at this time to estimate the exact number of staff who will be located in Killarney by the end of 2009. The Department is currently arranging for the next group of officials to transfer to Killarney while simultaneously assessing how best to provide an efficient and effective service to its stakeholders including meeting the needs of the Minister, the Minister of State and the Houses of the Oireachtas in the context of implementing Government decisions on decentralisation.

Departmental Staff.

379. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47010/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): There are currently 183 people working in the Department, which includes the National Archives. The salary details requested by the Deputy are set out hereunder;

Salary Earnings	No of staff	Grade
Over €100,000	10	Secretary General 1 Assistant Secretary 3 Director 1 Principal Officer 5
Between €90,001 and €100,000	6	Principal Officer 4 Assistant Principal 2
Between €80,001 and €90,000	19	Principal Officer 2 Professional Accountant 1 Keeper 1 Assistant Principal 15
Between €70,001 and €80,000	9	Assistant Keeper I 1 Assistant Principal 7 Senior Archivist 1
Between €60,001 and €70,000	11	Assistant Principal 2 Senior Archivist 2 Archivist 2 Higher Executive Officer 5
Between €50,001 and €60,000	34	Assistant Principal 1 Archivist 6 Higher Executive Officer 21 Executive Officer 6
Below €50,000	94	Archivist 6 Higher Executive Officer 2 Executive Officer 31 Staff Officer 5 Secretarial Assistant 1 Clerical Officer 40 Head Services Officer 1 Services Officer 8

Departmental Staff.

380. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47025/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): In the case of the Department, including the National Archives, the core number of staff, based on whole time equivalents, all of whom are civil servants, is as follows:

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Number	460	456	448	168	168	172	174

In the case of the agencies under the aegis of the Department, funded from the Department's Vote, the total core number is as follows:

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Number	525	521	511	777	1,017	1,017	1,020

These staff are almost exclusively public servants. The changes in 2005 were due to the establishment as separate legal entities of the National Museum of Ireland and the National Library of Ireland, which were up to then part of the Department. The figures also reflect a continued reduction in staffing numbers from 2002 in line with Government policy. The additional figures for 2006 arose from the amalgamation of the Regional Tourism Authorities with Fáilte Ireland, involving an incorporation of the former staff of the Regional Tourism Authorities and the recognition of the Crawford Gallery as a National Cultural Institution.

Question No. 381 answered with Question No. 378.

Departmental Agencies.

382. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47055/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Questions Nos. 76, 77 and 84 of 19 November 2008. The decisions which were announced in budget 2009 were to amalgamate the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Crawford Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Ireland, while retaining their separate brand identities; and to amalgamate the National Archives, the Irish Manuscripts Commission and the National Library. The consultative process with the directors of the national cultural institutions involved is continuing.

EU Funding.

383. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of taxpayers' money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon referendum. [47095/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): The Department was a corporate member of the Institute for International European Affairs up to the end of January 2008. As part of an effort to reduce the Department's administrative costs, membership was not renewed. There is no record of any other payment being made to the Institute.

384. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of EU funding received by his Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under his aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47238/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): Since its establishment in 2002, the Department has received EU funding as set out in the following tabular statement:

[Deputy Martin Cullen.]

Sector	Year	Purpose of EU Funding	Amount
Arts/Culture	2008	Minerva Joint Irish-UK Workshop	€3,943.69

In respect of the agencies under the aegis of the Department, applications for and the receipt of EU funding are day-to-day matters for the agencies themselves. Details of such funding arrangements are usually set out in the annual reports and accounts of the agencies in question, copies of which are available in the Dáil Library.

Clár Forbartha Áitiúla.

385. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Dinny McGinley** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil iarratas déanta ag Eagraíocht (sonraí tugtha) ar airgeadú dá n-imeachtaí agus an gcuirfidh sé na hacmhainní riachtanacha ar fáil sa dóigh gur féidir leo leanúint lena gcuid oibre; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [46535/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Comhairlítear dom nach bhfuil aon iarratas foirmeálta faighte ag mo Roinnse ón eagraíocht atá sonraithe ag an Teachta. Cuireann mo Roinn maoiniú ar fáil faoin gClár Forbartha Áitiúla do chuimsitheacht shóisialta chun díriú ar mhíbhuntáiste a shárú agus combhionannas agus cuimsitheacht shóisialta agus eacnamaíochta a chur chun cinn. Úsáidtear an maoiniú seo chun réimse leathan tograí a fhorbairt chun dul i ngleic le riachtanais áitiúla. Tuigtear dom gur cuireadh maoiniú de thart ar €500 in aghaidh na bliana ar fáil don eagraíocht atá sonraithe ag an Teachta i gcomhair tionscnaimh traenála agus acmhainn an phobail a fhorbairt. Tuigtear dom freisin ó Údarás na Gaeltachta go bhfuil ceist mhaoiniú na heagraíochta atá luaite pléite le tamall anuas agus go bhfuil curtha in iúl don eagraíocht nach mbeidh an tÚdarás ag déanamh maoinithe ar a cuid imeachtaí i 2009.

Data Protection.

386. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46661/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I am informed that no IT equipment or data was lost or stolen from my Department in the last 12 months.

Departmental Expenditure.

387. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46676/08]

388. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46691/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 387 and 388 together.

The general position in my Department is that payments for overnight subsistence are made at standard rates in line with Department of Finance guidelines. Such standard payments are intended, *inter alia*, to cover any hotel accommodation costs for officials that may arise. However, direct expenditure on hotel accommodation may arise in certain cases — for example, if the overnight subsistence rate does not cover the cost of hotel accommodation for officers travelling abroad. In the case of hotels abroad, my Department has a contract in place with a service provider who has special negotiated hotel rates in Brussels hotels and access to a global hotel programme with over 12,000 properties in 47 countries, with an average discount of 20% on corporate rates. All such expenditure is paid in accordance with Department of Finance guidelines. Similar arrangements to those set out in the preceding paragraph also apply to Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla and the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests. With regard to other bodies funded from within my Department's ministerial Vote group, my Department has been assured that the procurement arrangements in place comply with relevant Department of Finance guidelines. Relevant information on direct expenditure on hotel accommodation costs arising in respect of my Department and bodies funded from within my Department's ministerial Vote group is being compiled. I have arranged for it to be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Property.

389. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server.
[46706/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The details sought by the Deputy in relation to my Department and the bodies funded from within its ministerial Vote group are provided in tabular format in the appendix to this reply. I understand that Foras na Gaeilge was unable to supply the relevant details within the timeframe for reply to this question. Accordingly, I have arranged to have the information appertaining to that organisation forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Name of organisation	Number of computer servers owned or leased	Amount of capacity on each server
Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	50	1 @17GB 1 @29GB 1 @34GB 7 @68GB 1 @72GB 1 @83GB 1 @120GB 4 @170GB 1 @203GB 1 @215GB 1 @267GB 1 @272GB 1 @279GB

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Name of organisation	Number of computer servers owned or leased	Amount of capacity on each server
		1 @284GB 4 @292GB 6 @341GB 1 @409GB 1 @558GB 1 @584GB 2 @624GB 1 @755GB 2 @876GB 2 @904GB 1 @940GB 1 @1,016GB 1 @1,346GB 1 @1,383GB 1 @1,979 GB 2 @2,092GB
Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla	1	100 GB
Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests	1	68 GB
Údarás na Gaeltachta	14	1 @ 256 MB 5 @ 1GB 1 @ 1.5 GB 5 @ 2GB 1 @ 3.5 GB 1 @ 256 GB
Western Development Commission	2	1 @ 75 GB 1 @ 200 GB
Waterways Ireland	40	4 @2GB 1 @ 2.5 GB 2 @3GB 1 @4GB 3 @5GB 1 @ 5.2GB 1 @ 5.5 GB 1 @6GB 2 @7GB 1 @10 GB 2 @11 GB 1 @13 GB 1 @20 GB 1 @21 GB 2 @25 GB 1 @28 GB 1 @38 GB 1 @39 GB 2 @40 GB 2 @43 GB 1 @48 GB 1 @51 GB

Name of organisation	Number of computer servers owned or leased	Amount of capacity on each server
		3 @58 GB 1 @70 GB 1 @78 GB 1 @82 GB 1 @100 GB
Foras na Gaeilge	N/A	N/A
Ulster Scots Agency	2	1 @140 GB 1 @ 210 GB

NB — GB refers to Gigabyte and MB refers to Megabyte.

Community Development.

390. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the make up of the management committee of Kilmore West CDP in Dublin 5; the remit of the group; if his attention has been drawn to their annual funding streams; the amount his Department contributes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46816/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): The Community Development Programme was established in 1990 in recognition of the role of community development in tackling the causes and effects of poverty and disadvantage. The programme provides financial assistance to projects to help meet the cost of staffing and equipping local resource centres, which provide a focal point for community development activities. Projects are concerned with the needs of women and children, those with disabilities, the homeless, lone parent families, the elderly, the unemployed, young people at risk, Travellers and other disadvantaged groups. Kilmore West community development project has been funded through the programme since 1999. Its principal activity is to establish and organise community development projects and to act as promoters of such projects for the benefit of the local community and environs. The management committee of Kilmore West community development project is made up of local people from target groups in the community, such as older people and lone parents. Core funding under the programme for Kilmore West community development project for 2008 was set at €120,483. Many projects leverage additional funds from a variety of sources, including the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Health Service Executive and the VEC. Kilmore West community development project reported the receipt of additional funds of €34,400 from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in 2007, and over €43,000 in 2008 from the Department of Health and Children in support of an after-school project.

Departmental Staff.

391. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46982/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 171 of 23 October 2008. The position, as set out in that reply, is that year-to-year increases in allocations would not normally be granted to allow for increments. In the normal way, the overall cost of increments for some staff on incremental

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scales should be offset by reductions in cost arising from retirements or other movements by staff on higher incremental points and their replacement by staff on lower points. I can confirm that there is no increased provision for increments in the pay bill in my Department's group of Votes for 2008, nor is such a provision being made for 2009. The position would be the same in relation to previous years.

Decentralisation Programme.

392. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46997/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Under the decentralisation programme, my Department's headquarters will be decentralising to Charlestown, County Mayo. To date, 100 civil servants have moved to interim accommodation in Tubbercurry, County Sligo, 51 of whom relocated from Dublin. It is not planned to move any further staff to this location until a permanent headquarters is in place in Charlestown in mid-2011. The decentralisation of ten civil servants from my Department to Na Forbacha, County Galway, is now complete, with five of the staff concerned having relocated from Dublin. In relation to Foras na Gaeilge, none of the public servants employed in that organisation has relocated to Gaoth Dobhair, County Donegal, as yet. The matter is being pursued in a North-South context. It is anticipated that five staff will relocate in 2009. For the sake of completeness, I should add that 25 of the staff of Pobal, a private company with charitable status, have relocated to Clifden, County Galway. All except one were recruited locally. I understand that it is not planned to move any further staff to this location in 2009.

Departmental Staff.

393. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47012/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): There is an agreed core of 276 whole-time equivalent staff in my Department. In addition, there are eight whole-time equivalent staff seconded from my Department to the Office of the Commissioner of Charitable Donations and Bequests. For completeness, the information provided below includes details in respect of the staff seconded from my Department to the office of An Coimisinéir Teanga, the National Advisory Committee on Drugs and the National Drugs Strategy Team. It should be noted that the numbers reflected below include work sharers.

Staff earning below €50,000 per annum

Grade	Staff Numbers
Higher Executive Officer	11
Executive Officer	48
Clerical Officer	69
Staff Officer	3
Professional/Other	22

Staff earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum

Grade	Staff Numbers
Administrative Officer	4
Higher Executive Officer	35
Executive Officer	7
Professional/Other	9

Staff earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum

Grade	Staff Numbers
Assistant Principal Officer	9
Administrative Officer	1
Higher Executive Officer	9
Professional/Other	3

Staff earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum

Grade	Staff Numbers
Assistant Principal Officer	15
Professional/Other	4

Staff earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum

Grade	Staff Numbers
Principal Officer	4
Assistant Principal Officer	11
Professional/Other	4

Staff earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum

Grade	Staff Numbers
Principal Officer	5
Assistant Principal Officer	1
Professional/Other	2

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Staff earning over €100,001 per annum

Grade	Staff Numbers
Secretary General	1
Assistant Secretary	3
Principal Officer	9

394. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47027/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The number of public and civil and public servants working under the aegis of my Department from 2002 to 2008 is as follows: 2002, 735; 2003, 776; 2004, 785.20; 2005, 814.50; 2006, 813; 2007, 808.54; and 2008, 819.34.

395. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47042/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The information sought by the Deputy is as follows:

Name of Agency/Body	Location	No. of Public Servants	No. of Civil Servants	Breakdown by Grade
Dept. Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs	43-49 Mespil Road, Dublin		87.50	7 Principal Officers 12 Assistant Principal Officers 2 Administrative Officers 16.2 Higher Executive Officers 14.8 Executive Officers 0.6 Staff officers 19.9 Clerical Officers 15 Professional / other
	Teeling Street, Tubbercurry, Sligo		100.00	7 Principal Officers 11 Assistant Principal Officers 2 Administrative Officers 24 Higher Executive Officers 26 Executive officers 25 Clerical Officers 5 Professional / Other
	Na Forbacha, Galway		49.90	2 Principal Officers 8 Assistant Principal Officers 10.73 Higher Executive Officers 9.1 Executive Officers 2 Staff officers 12 Clerical Officers 6 Professional / Other
	Other Locations		22.00	2 Assistant Principal Officers 2 Higher Executive Officers 2 Executive Officers 4 Clerical Officers 12 Professional / Other
Foras na Gaeilge	Belfast	4.00		1 Deputy Chief Executive Officer 3 Staff Officers

Name of Agency/Body	Location	No. of Public Servants	No. of Civil Servants	Breakdown by Grade
	Dublin	51.00		1 Chief Executive Officer 2 Directors 5 Programme Managers 1 Administrative Officer 5 Higher Executive Officer 6.6 Executive Officer 6 Clerical Officer 1 Services Officer 1 Warehouseman 1 Sales Rep 1 Senior Editor 1 Editor 7 Assistant Editor 1 Technical Officer 2 Assistant Terminologists 1 Project Manager 1 Dictionary Editor 7 Seasonal staff at Clerical Officer grade
	Ráth Cairn, Co Meath	3.00		1 Higher Executive Offer 1 Executive Officer 1 Clerical Officer
Ulster-Scots Agency	Raphoe, Donegal	2.00		1 Higher Executive Officer 1 Clerical Officer
	Head Office, Belfast	12.00		1 Grade 7 2 Deputy Principals 5 Staff Officers 2 Executive Officers 2 Administrative Officers
Waterways Ireland	Athlone	4.32		1 Assistant Lockkeeper 1 Boatperson 2 Engineering Technicians 1.24 Inspectors of Navigation 0.08 Storekeeper Clerk Grade 2
	Ballyconnell	3.00		1 Engineering Technician 1 Go Light Equipment Operator 1 Senior Ganger
	Carrick-on-Shannon	14.17		1 Administrator 0.17 Assistant Inspector of Navigation 3 Clerical Officers 4 Engineers 1 Engineering Technicians 1 Head of Administration 1 Regional Manager 1 Senior Administrator 2 Senior Engineers
	Coleraine	6.00		2 Labourers 2 Lockkeepers 1 Senior Engineers 1 Supervisor
	Dublin	10.71		2 Clerical Officers 1.71 Engineers 2 Engineering Technicians 1 Head of Asset and Project Management 1 Regional Manager 3 Senior Engineer Operations
	East Barrow	19.00		1 Civil Forman Grade 1 2 Go Basic 2 go Chargehands 2 Go light Equipment Operators 1 Go Plant Operator A 4 Go Plant Operators B 7 Lockkeepers

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Name of Agency/Body	Location	No. of Public Servants	No. of Civil Servants	Breakdown by Grade
	East Grand Canal	51.67		2 Carpenters 2 Civil Foreman Grade 1 2 Civil Foreman Grade 2 1 Craftsman 3.92 Go Basic 8 Go Chargehand 2 Go Light Equipment Operator 9 Go Plant Operator A 9 go Plant Operator B 10.75 Lockkeeper 1 Mechanical Fitter / Welder 1 Mechanical Foreman Grade 1
	East Royal Canal	21.00		1 Civil Foreman Grade 1 1 Craftsman 2 Go Basic 3 Go Chargehand 2 Go Light Equipment Operator 6 Go Plant Operator A 6 Go Plant Operator B
	Enniskillen	57.63		1 Administrative Assistant 14 Administrators 1 CEO 7.76 Clerical Officers 2 Directors 2 1 Director 3 1 Director 1 2.78 Engineer Designers 3 Heads of Administration 2 heads of Engineering 2 Heads of Function 1 Project Accountant 9.81 Senior Administrator 4 Senior Engineers 1.41 Support Services Officers 1.87 System Analysts 2 Valuers
	Kilclare	6.00		1 Boatperson Skipper Fox 1 Civil Foreman Grade 2 2 Go Chargehands 1 Go Light Equipment Operator 1 Go Plant Operators B
	Killaloe	1.00		Go Light Equipment Operator
	Lowtown, Kildare	3.08		2.08 Go Basic 1 go Plant Operators A
	North Lough Erne	6.58		0.58 Assistant Wardens 2 Go Basic 2 Labourers 1 Supervisor 1 Warden
	North Lower Bann	3.00		1 Labourer 2 Lockkeepers
	North Shannon Erne	16.98		1 Boatperson 0.31 Civil Foreman Grade 1 1 Civil Foreman Grade 2 1.63 Go Basic 5.44 go Light Equipment Operator 3 Go Plant Operator A 2 Go Plant Operator B 1 Lockkeeper 1 Mechanical Fitter/Welder 0.6 Waterway patroller

Name of Agency/Body	Location	No. of Public Servants	No. of Civil Servants	Breakdown by Grade
	Portumna	41.05		1 Assistant Lockkeeper 6 Boatpersons 2 Boatpersons Skipper Coill an Eo 1 Carpenter 1 Civil Foreman Grade 1 1 Civil Foreman Grade 2 1 Craftsman 0.18 Gauge Reader 1 Go Basic 2 Go Chargehand 8 Go Light Equipment Operator 2.53 Go Plant Operator A 3 Go Plant Operator B 2.51 Lockkeeper 1 Mechanical Foreman Grade 2 1 Office Foreman grade 1 1 Office Supervisor 2 Senior Ganger 1.83 Storekeeper Clerk Grade 1 1 Storekeeper Clerk Grade 2 1 Storekeeper Clerk in Charge
	Roosky	2.00		1 Ganger and Excavator Driver 1 Go Light Equipment Operator
	Scariff	16.96		1 Administrator 1 Boatperson 0.17 Caretaker / Cleaner 2.79 Clerical Officer 3 Engineer 2 Environment Officer 1 Internal Auditor 1 Mechanical Safety Services 1 Regional Manager 1 Safety Advisor 2 Senior Engineer 1 Senior Environment Officer
	Tullamore	31.49		1 Assistant Inspector of Navigation 1.75 Carpenter 1 Civil Foreman Grade 1 1 Craftsman 2 Engineer mechanical 1 Engineering Technician 4 Go Basic 1 Go Light Equipment Operator 3 Go Plant Operator A 4 Go Plant Operator B 3 Lockkeeper 2.25 Mechanical Fitter / Welder 1 Office Foreman Grade 1 1 Regional Engineer 2 Storekeeper Clerk Grade 1 0.74 Storekeeper Clerk Grade 2 1 Storekeeper Clerk in Charge 0.75 Storeperson
	West Shannon Navigation	17.95		0.24 Assistant Lockkeeper 2 Boatpersons 1.71 Boatpersons Skipper Fox 1 Carpenter 2 Civil Foreman Grade 2 4 Go Light Equipment Operator 1 Go Plant Operator A 6 Lockkeepers
An Coimisinéir Teanga	An Spidéal, Galway		7.00	1 Principal Officer 3 Assistant Principal Officers 1 Higher Executive Officers 1 Executive Officer 1 Clerical Officer

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Name of Agency/Body	Location	No. of Public Servants	No. of Civil Servants	Breakdown by Grade
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Na Forbacha (Head Office), Galway	71.00		1 Chief Executive 1 Assistant Chief Executive 2 Senior Manager 3 Managers 15 Grade 1 12 Grade 2 16 Grade 3 15 Grade 4 6 Grade 5
	Regional Office, Galway	11.00		1 Senior Manager 1 Grade 1 5 Grade 2 1 Grade 3 1 Grade 4 2 Grade 5
	Regional Office Donegal	16.00		1 Grade 1 5 Grade 2 6 Grade 3 1 Grade 4 2 Grade 5
	Regional Office, Kerry	10.00		1 Senior Manager 1 Grade 1 2 Grade 2 4 Grade 3 1 Grade 4 1 Grade 5
Western Development Commission	Ballaghaderreen, Roscommon	16.54		1.14 Principal Officers 3 Assistant Principal Officers 8.4 Higher Executive Officers 1 Executive Officers 3 Clerical Officers
National Advisory Committee on Drugs	Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Dublin 4	2.00	1.60	1 Director 1 Research Officer 1 Higher Executive Officer 0.6 Clerical Officer
National Drugs Strategy Team	Dublin	4.80		1 Principal Officer 3 Assistant Principal Officer 0.8 Higher Executive Officer
Charitable Donations & Bequests	12 Clare Street, Dublin 2	8.00		1 Assistant Principal 1 Higher Executive Officer 1 Executive Officer 1 Staff Officer 3 Clerical Officers 1 Service Officer

Answers are supplied on a full-time equivalent basis.

Departmental Agencies.

396. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the budget for 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47057/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I refer the Deputy to my replies to Questions Nos. 90 and 128 of 18 Samhain 2008 and 403 of 25 Samhain 2008.

As outlined in those replies, the following developments are relevant in this context. In accordance with a decision made by the North/South Ministerial Council and in order to secure good practice and value for money, the functions and funding of Bord na Leabhar Gaeilge transferred to Foras na Gaeilge with effect from 1 January 2008. The Council has also decided that the functions, staffing and funding of Colmcille in Ireland should transfer to Foras na Gaeilge and arrangements to that end are in hand.

The Charities Bill 2007, which was passed by Seanad Éireann on 11 December 2008, provides for the dissolution of the Office of Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests for Ireland. The Bill further provides that the Office of Commissioners will be replaced by a new Charities Regulatory Authority, which will take on the statutory functions of the Office of Commissioners, as well as having broader statutory regulatory functions relating to charities operating in the jurisdiction.

A total of 94 local development bodies and 184 community development projects receive funding through my Department or through Pobal for local delivery of community and rural development measures. Arising from the cohesion process, which involves the merger of overlapping LEADER and Partnership groups, the number of local development bodies is being reduced from 94 to 54.

Further opportunities to secure improved efficiencies and outcomes across bodies within the ambit of my Department will be pursued over the coming period.

EU Funding.

397. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of EU funding received by his Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under his aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47240/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Amounts received as appropriations-in-aid in respect of EU programmes directly under my Department's remit for the period since its establishment in June 2002 to end-2007 are set out in the Appropriation Accounts for the years in question. For the Deputy's convenience, the relevant amounts are included in Table 1, as well as amounts received in 2008 to date.

Table 1: Appropriations-in-aid received by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in respect of EU programmes 2002 to 2008 (to date)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
	€000s	€000s	€000s	€000s	€000s	€000s	€000s
Programme for PEACE & Reconciliation	0	1,862	5,391	2,567	15,003	7,435	5,331
Rural Development Schemes	0	2,119	3,572	3,744	6,468	7,143	0
LEADER, INTERREG & Peace Programme	0	2,137	13,686	6,923	3,827	9,702	7,990
LEADER Rural Economy Sub Programme 2007-2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	8,190	8,190

With regard to Údarás na Gaeltachta, the amounts of EU funding received for the period 2002-07, which have been communicated to my Department by an tÚdarás, are set out in Table 2. With regard to 2008, I understand from an tÚdarás that EU funding in excess of €1 million has been received this year to date.

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Table 2: EU funding received by Údarás na Gaeltachta 2002 to 2007

Year	€'000
2002	2,693
2003	1,723
2004	1,924
2005	2,239
2006	3,637
2007	1,921

Social Welfare Benefits.

398. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when she expects to issue instructions to reverse the situation whereby Irish citizens are refused social welfare benefits under the habitual residency clause; if the habitual residency clause is in line with the Constitution in view of the fact that any Irish citizen who has been abroad more than once in the past four years will be deemed ineligible; if this is in line with convention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47604/08]

415. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the instructions she has issued throughout her Department to persons dealing directly with members of the public, Irish nationals and non-Irish nationals, to render it difficult if not impossible to qualify for various social welfare or Health Service Executive payments or supports in some cases in violation of precedent and international human rights; if it is intended by the application of such guidelines to starve out specific categories; if cognisance is taken of the potential hardship caused in such cases; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the habitual residency clause as currently applied is based on unsound legal grounds; if it is her intention to force people to emigrate by the use of such methods; the way this equates with the previously stated objective of the requirement of an extra 500,000 immigrants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47234/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 398 and 415 together.

The requirement to be habitually resident in Ireland was introduced as a qualifying condition for certain social welfare payments with effect from 1 May 2004, in the context of the Government's decision to open the Irish labour market to workers from the 10 new EU Member States without the transitional limitations which were imposed at that time by most of the other Member States.

It applies to claims for jobseeker's allowance, non-contributory State pension, blind pension, non-contributory widow's and widower's pensions and guardian's payment, one-parent family payment, carer's allowance, disability allowance, supplementary welfare allowance including rent supplement, and child benefit.

The effect of the condition is that a person whose habitual residence is elsewhere is not qualified for these payments on arrival in Ireland. Three out of every four claims that require detailed examination with regard to the habitual residence condition are found to satisfy that condition. Those who are refused are mainly people who have not been granted access to the labour market or people who have had no attachment, or insignificant attachment, to the work force since arrival in Ireland. There is therefore no conflict between this provision and the

policy of attracting to Ireland qualified workers to fill jobs which cannot be filled from the current labour force.

No distinction is drawn in social welfare legislation on grounds of nationality. To introduce any such distinction would be in conflict with the provisions of the Equal Status Acts and with international conventions. Therefore Irish people are subject to the habitual residence condition in the same way as others when they claim one of the relevant payments.

It is not the case that a person “who has been abroad more than once in the past four years will be deemed ineligible”. The factors taken into consideration in deciding whether the condition is satisfied include: length and continuity of residence in Ireland, length and purpose of any absence from Ireland, the nature and pattern of employment, the applicant’s main centre of interest and the future intention of the applicant. These factors were originally set down in judgements of the European Court of Justice and were included for clarity in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act in 2007. Taking into account, particularly, the last two of these factors, Irish nationals returning to live here on a permanent basis should experience no difficulty in demonstrating that they satisfy the requirements of the Habitual Residence Condition.

The Department consulted with the Attorney General’s Office in the course of drafting the habitual residence legislation and subsequently when issues were raised regarding compliance with the EU legislation and other international convention commitments. None of the issues raised with the Department have warranted a change in the legislation.

The habitual residence condition does not apply to exceptional or urgent needs payments under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme. In addition to this, the EU regulations covering migrant workers who have been employed in Ireland since arrival here are carefully observed. Direct provision is also available for asylum seekers. In these ways, the application of this provision conforms fully to our EU and international obligations.

The guidelines for deciding officers with regard to the habitual residence condition are updated periodically and published on the Department’s website at: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/OperationalGuidelines/Pages/habres.aspx> Similar guidelines have been circulated to community welfare officers of the Health Service Executive who administer the supplementary welfare schemes.

Social Welfare Appeals.

399. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be called for an oral hearing. [46550/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Further to my response to Parliamentary Question 40903/08 on 18 November 2008, I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that there is no update to the information given in that response. Every effort will be made to have this appeal dealt with as quickly as possible.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office is an office of the Department that is independently responsible for determining appeals against decisions on Social Welfare entitlements.

Data Protection.

400. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from her Department in the past 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46670/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): This Department administers some fifty schemes and makes payments to one million people each week. Because of the

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nature, scale and diversity of its work, the Department holds extensive and detailed personal information about its customers and takes its responsibilities to safeguard this data extremely seriously. Every effort is made by the Department and the agencies under its aegis to ensure that personal customer data is held securely.

In the past 12 months, the following equipment and data was lost or stolen from the Department:

- Two Desktops — Social Welfare Local Office, Buncrana, Co. Donegal;
- Two Laptops — (1 house break-in, 1 office break-in).

None of the equipment held sensitive data. The two desktops were used to access applications which are run from the DSFA Data Centre in Dublin. All client data is held on central databases and, therefore, no client data was held on the desktops. The laptops were being used to access centrally-stored client information through a secure remote log-in. No client data was retained on the laptops after the remote sessions ceased. It is Departmental policy that sensitive data is not to be held on mobile devices unless absolutely necessary and, even then, only when appropriately secured. All new laptops are fitted with full disk encryption software before issue, and all existing laptops are being recalled for encryption.

Departmental Expenditure.

401. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by her Department and each State agency under the aegis of her Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if she will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46685/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Details of expenditure on hotel accommodation by my Department and each State Agency under its aegis are not immediately available.

My Department is compiling this information and my officials will write to the Deputy with these details as soon as they are available.

402. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the procurement arrangements in place in her Department and each State agency under the aegis of her Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for her, for her Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46700/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information requested is currently being compiled within the Department and will be made available to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Property.

403. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by her Department and each State agency under the aegis of her Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46715/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The current number of servers in use by my Department and its Agencies is 30 VMS Servers with an average of 4 GB of memory per server and 351 Windows Servers with an average of 2.5 GB of memory per server.

The capacity of each server is dependent on the nature of the application involved and the particular ICT service being provided. Most servers are connected to a Storage Area Network and the amount of disk capacity allocated varies according to the function assigned to the server at any given time.

A migration programme is currently underway to move all remaining Open VMS applications to the Windows platform and the implementation of consolidation and virtualisation initiatives has commenced to reduce the physical number of servers deployed.

Grant Payments.

404. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if families who have a GMS card are entitled to claim funding from local community welfare officers under the book grant scheme to defray the cost of schoolbooks for students. [46812/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The school books grant scheme is a scheme operated by the Department of Education and Science. Decisions regarding entitlement under the scheme are a matter for that Department.

Consultancy Contracts.

405. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the amount of money spent or paid to each consultancy firm in each of the years 2000 to date in 2008; the cost of each consultancy report; the work carried out by each; the name of each consultancy company; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46918/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being compiled within the Department and will be made available to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Staff.

406. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a transfer to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in Naas, County Kildare will be offered to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46924/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The person is on the Central Transfer List for the Garda Station in Naas, Co. Kildare, which comes under the remit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The decision in relation to the transfer is a matter for that Department.

407. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the budgeted cost to her Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of her Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46991/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information requested by the Minister pertaining to 2008 is set out in the following tabular statement.

The rest of the information in respect of previous years is currently being compiled within the Department and will be made available to the Deputy as soon as possible.

All costs, which are based on existing staff levels, are estimates and as such are liable to fluctuate due to factors such as staff movements.

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

Organisation	Annual cost of increments in 2008
	€
Dept. of Social and Family Affairs	1,915,800
Combat Poverty Agency	18,000
Pensions Board*	25,000
Citizens Information Board	116,000
Family Support Agency	40,000
Office Pensions Ombudsman	6,500

*The cost will be borne from funds generated by the Pensions Board with no expense accruing to the Exchequer.

Decentralisation Programme.

408. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47006/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Under the Government's current decentralisation programme for the civil and public service, some 1,200 posts comprising the Department's headquarter sections and the Social Welfare Appeals Office are relocating to 6 locations — Sligo, Carrick-on-Shannon, Donegal Town, Buncrana, Carrickmacross and Drogheda.

To date, 212 posts have relocated from the Department's Dublin Offices to Carrick-on-Shannon and Sligo under the current programme — 140 posts to Carrick-on-Shannon and 72 posts to Sligo. As outlined in the following table, 69 officers were based in Dublin prior to their relocation under the decentralisation programme. Posts relocated to date under the programme of decentralisation

	PO	AP	HEO	EO	SO	CO	Service Grades	Total
Grade breakdown of posts decentralised from Dublin	5	19	36	47	9	92	4	212
No. of Dublin based staff that decentralised	1	2	23	24	1	17	1	69
No. of Provincial based staff that decentralised	4	17	13	23	8	75	3	143

During 2009, it is anticipated that a further 120 posts will transfer to Buncrana and Carrick-on-Shannon — 115 posts to Buncrana and 5 posts to Carrick-on-Shannon. A site in Buncrana has been purchased, the building is under construction and the expected completion date of the project is late 2009. The table below outlines the breakdown requested. Posts to relocate during 2009 under the programme of decentralisation (subject to the completion of accommodation)

	PO	AP	HEO	EO	SO	CO	Service Grades	Total
Grade breakdown of posts due to decentralise in 2009	1	2	5	13	14	82	3	120
No. of staff currently based in Dublin that will decentralise	0	1	5	6	4	27	0	43
No. of staff currently based in Provincial locations that will decentralise	1	1	0	7	1	27	0	37

The Central Application will remain open for new applications until the full decentralisation programme is complete. Assignments will continue to be made for Buncrana bound Business Units during 2009.

In addition, the Department has decentralised offices in Longford, Sligo, Letterkenny, Waterford, Dundalk and Roscommon and some 219 Civil Servants have transferred to these offices and other offices of the Department to fill vacancies created by the current decentralisation programme. Furthermore, a total of 258 employees of the Department have transferred to other Government Departments for the purposes of their decentralisation programmes.

Departmental Staff.

409. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of people working in her Department; the number earning less than €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning more than €100,000 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47021/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The number of posts occupied in the Department at 15 December 2008 is 4,506 posts comprising of 4,911 permanent civil servants. This does not include staff working for bodies under the Department's aegis or temporary staff working in the Department.

Details of earnings across the bands set out are not immediately available in my Department but are being compiled and my officials will write to the Deputy when this information is available.

410. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of her Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47036/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The following table outlines the number of posts in the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Agencies from the year 2002 to 2008. The agencies under the remit of the Department are The Pensions Board, Family Support Agency (from May 03), Citizens Information Board (formerly Comhairle) and the Combat Poverty Agency. The Pensions Ombudsman's Office also comes under the remit of the Department.

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

Year	Dept of Social and Family Affairs (Number of Posts)	Agencies (Number of Posts)
1st Jan 2002	4,439	152
1st Jan 2003	4,417	156
1st Jan 2004	4,306	182
1st Jan 2005	4,286	190
1st Jan 2006	4,281	191
1st Jan 2007	4,317	189
1st Jan 2008	4,439*	201
15th Dec 2008	4,516	192

*Includes 61 posts from the General Register Office, which transferred from the Department of Health and Children to the Dept of Social and Family Affairs on 1st January 2008.

411. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of her Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47051/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The following table (Table 1) details the locations and breakdown of posts in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Table 2 refers to locations and posts in the agencies of the Department. The agencies under the remit of the Department are The Pensions Board, Family Support Agency, Citizens Information Board (formerly Comhairle), the Combat Poverty Agency. The Office of the Pensions Ombudsman also comes under the remit of the Department and the posts in that Office are included in Table 2.

Table 1: No. of Posts by grade and location

Location	SEC	DS	ASC	PO	AP	HEO	AO	EO	SO	CO	Service Grades	Total
Achill						1.00		1.00	1.00	1.00		4.00
Ardee						1.00						1.00
Arklow						3.00		4.50	4.00	6.60		18.10
Athlone					2.00	7.00		3.00	6.50	14.20	0.49	33.19
Athy						1.00		1.00			0.24	2.24
Baileboro						1.00						1.00
Ballaghdereen						1.00						1.00
Ballina					1.00	5.00		8.00	6.50	13.90		34.40
Ballinamore						1.00						1.00
Ballinasloe					1.00	1.00		1.00				3.00
Ballybofey						0.60		1.00				1.60
Ballyhaunis						1.00						1.00
Ballyshannon						1.00				0.50		1.50
Bandon						1.00						1.00
Bantry						2.00		1.00	2.50	4.00		9.50
Belmullet						1.00		1.00	1.00	7.00		10.00
Birr						1.00						1.00
Bray						5.50		3.60	4.33	12.90	1.00	27.33
Buncrana						4.00		3.60	4.40	12.56	1.00	25.56
Cahiriveen						1.00		1.00	1.50	2.60		6.10
Carlow					1.00	4.00		5.00	5.30	12.60	1.00	28.90
Carrickmacross						1.00						1.00
Carrick-on-Shannon				3.00	10.00	20.00		29.20	10.00	73.81	3.00	149.01
Carrigaline						1.00		1.00	3.80	7.80	1.00	14.60
Castlebar					1.00	5.00		2.00	2.00	8.23		18.23

Table 1: No. of Posts by grade and location — continued

Location	SEC	DS	ASC	PO	AP	HEO	AO	EO	SO	CO	Service Grades	Total
Castleblaney						1.00						1.00
Castlereagh						1.00						1.00
Cavan					1.00	4.00		3.60	4.80	13.80		27.20
Ck-On-Suir						1.00						1.00
Claremorris						1.00						1.00
Clifden						2.00		0.50	2.00	3.50		8.00
Clonakilty						1.00						1.00
Clones						1.00						1.00
Clonmel					1.00	4.00		6.00	4.60	11.10	1.00	27.70
Cobh						1.00		1.00	1.00	2.20		5.20
Cork				3.00	7.00	21.55		28.20	20.40	53.80	3.00	136.95
Donegal Town					1.00	3.00		4.80	6.00	6.00		20.80
Drogheda					1.00	6.00		7.00	7.10	19.23	2.00	42.33
Dublin	1.00	1.00	6.00	49.80	119.00	262.10	7.00	331.96	173.53	679.75	68.03	1,699.17
Dundalk				2.00	6.00	13.00	1.00	29.20	15.15	70.23	2.00	138.58
Dunfanaghy						1.00		2.00	1.00	6.50		10.50
Dungarvan						1.00						1.00
Dungloe						3.00		2.00	2.00	9.00		16.00
Dunmanway						6.50		0.50	8.60	16.80	1.00	40.40
Ennis					2.00	1.00		5.50	1.00	1.00		4.00
Enniscorthy					1.00	1.00		1.00				1.00
Falcarragh					5.00	13.70		12.40	13.30	35.80	3.00	85.20
Galway				2.00								

Table 1: No. of Posts by grade and location — continued

Location	SEC	DS	ASC	PO	AP	HEO	AO	EO	SO	CO	Service Grades	Total
Gorey						1.00						1.00
Gort						1.00						1.00
Granard						1.00						1.00
Kells						1.00						1.00
Kenmare						1.00		1.00		2.00		4.00
Kilkenny						4.50		7.00	7.80	17.50	1.00	37.80
Killarney						4.00		1.00		1.60		6.60
Killybegs						1.00						1.00
Kilmallock						1.00						1.00
Letterkenny				2.00	5.00	12.00		24.10	21.13	186.03	5.00	255.26
Limerick				1.00	4.00	15.00		10.50	13.50	39.00	3.00	86.00
Listowel						4.00		2.00	4.00	8.80		18.80
Longford				1.00	5.80	21.40		52.96	24.03	244.64	6.00	355.84
Loughrea						1.00		1.00	2.60	6.80		11.40
Macroom						1.00						1.00
Mallow					1.00	3.00		2.00	3.80	4.90		14.70
Manorhamilton						1.00		1.00	1.00	2.00		5.00
Monaghan					1.00	2.00		1.00		1.00		5.00
Moveille						1.00						1.00
Mullingar					1.00	4.80		6.00	6.00	12.10	1.00	30.90
Naas						4.00						4.00
Navan						2.00		4.00	7.00	12.90	1.00	26.90
Nenagh					1.00	2.00		1.00		1.00		5.00

Table 1: No. of Posts by grade and location — continued

Location	SEC	DS	ASC	PO	AP	HEO	AO	EO	SO	CO	Service Grades	Total
New Ross						2.00		7.30	7.80	21.80	2.00	2.00
Newbridge					1.00	3.00		3.00	4.00	10.00	1.00	21.00
Newcastle West						1.00						1.00
Newmarket						4.00		2.00				6.00
Portlaoise						7.60		7.73	3.33	25.10	2.00	48.76
Roscommon				1.00	2.00	43.40		86.13	39.83	364.60	11.00	576.76
Sligo				6.00	22.80	1.00	3.00					1.00
Swinford						5.00		3.50	5.00	11.00	1.00	25.50
Thurles						1.00		1.00				2.00
Tipperary						6.00		7.00	8.10	20.46	1.00	43.56
Tralee					1.00	3.00						3.00
Tuam						1.00						1.00
Tubbercurry						6.50		3.00	5.00	10.40	1.00	26.90
Tullamore					1.00	14.10		14.53	17.24	57.23	1.00	109.11
Waterford				1.00	4.00	2.00		1.00	1.80	4.80		9.60
Westport						5.00		9.00	11.63	26.00	1.00	53.63
Wexford					1.00	1.00						1.00
Wicklow						1.00						1.00
Youghal						1.00						1.00

*Principal Officer Grade includes the Departments Medical Assessors.

Location	PO	AP	HEO	EO	SO	CO	Pensions Ombudsman	CEO	Actuary	Solicitor	Service Manager	Area Co-Ordinator	Mediator	Total
Athlone						0.50							0.39	0.89
Castlebar			1.00			1.50							0.39	2.89
Cavan						1.00								1.00
Cork		1.00	3.00	1.00		2.00						1.00	0.39	8.39
Dublin	8.00	28.50	41.60	30.10	2.00	35.7	1.00	3.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.51	157.41
Dundalk			2.00			1.50							0.39	3.89
Galway		1.00	1.50	1.00		1.00						0.60	0.78	5.88
Kilkenny		1.00	2.50	1.00										4.50
Letterkenny			1.00			1.00							0.39	2.39
Limerick			2.00			2.00						1.00	0.39	5.39
Mullingar			1.00			0.50								1.50
Portlaoise						0.50							0.39	0.89
Sligo			0.50			0.50							0.39	1.39
Tralee						0.50							0.39	0.89
Tullamore						1.00								1.00
Waterford			1.00			1.50							0.39	2.89
Wexford						0.50							0.39	0.89
TOTAL														202.08

Departmental Agencies.

412. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of her Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47066/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): In Budget, 2009 the Government announced proposals in relation to the future of two of the agencies under the aegis of the Department — the Combat Poverty Agency and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS). The legislative provisions to give effect to the proposed changes for the Combat Poverty Agency and the MABS are contained in the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2008.

The Combat Poverty Agency is to be integrated with the Office for Social Inclusion in a new Division within the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The decision on integration was informed by the findings of a review of the Combat Poverty Agency undertaken on foot of a Government Decision of 6th June, 2007.

The Department is working with the Board of the Agency in finalising a plan for the smooth integration of both bodies. This will include meetings and workshops with the staff involved before the plan is finalised and subsequently in the course of its implementation. A Steering Committee comprised of senior officials in the Department and members of the of the Agency has been set up to oversee the integration project and it is envisaged that a six month period will be required to complete the arrangements for the transition of the Combat Poverty and the Office for Social Inclusion to the new Division.

The integration of the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office for Social Inclusion will create a stronger, more cohesive and better resourced body to support the Government's anti poverty and social inclusion strategies, including engagement with the social partners and other stakeholders. The quality and extent of the support provided will be much greater than each body has been able to provide separately. Integration will represent much better value for money not only for taxpayers but also for those experiencing poverty and social exclusion in terms of the improved overall support which can now be provided. There will be additional direct savings in terms of accommodation and support services. The extent and timing of these savings will be identified and dealt with as part of the implementation process which is underway.

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) is the main Government funded service which provides assistance to people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems. It is widely recognised as providing a high quality, confidential, personal service to the public that makes a significant difference to the lives of many people. There are 53 independent companies with voluntary boards of management and over 240 money advice staff operating the local services throughout the country. However, it has been recognised for some time that the Service needs a proper legislative basis and structure. The Government has decided that this can best be achieved by placing the MABS with the Citizens Information Board. It is not envisaged that significant savings or additional costs will arise on the assignment of the provision of the MABS to the Citizens Information Board. Rather the intention is, in line with the Programme for Government, to provide strong management support to the local voluntary companies in the provision of a high quality service to meet the needs of people encountering debt difficulties in today's society. Cost efficiencies will be realised in the medium to longer term through the integration of support services such as administration and IT.

It is envisaged that a six month period up to July 2009 will be required to complete the arrangements for the transfer of responsibility for the MABS to the Citizens Information Board. Details of the implementation plan are being worked out in consultation with the Citizens Information Board and the Chief Executive Officer.

Social Welfare Benefits.

413. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of payments made to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare from the community welfare officer for the period 2000 to 2002; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47166/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme is administered on behalf of the Department by the community welfare division of the Health Service Executive.

The Executive has advised that the person concerned received basic weekly SWA payments totalling €5,310.90 from 10 January 2002 to 31 July 2002, travel supplement payments totalling €210 from 7 January 2002 to 23 February 2002 and mortgage interest payments totalling €483.20 from 1 January 2002 to 30 April 2003. He received no SWA payments in 2000 or 2001.

If the person concerned requires further clarification on these payments then he should contact the community welfare officer at his local health centre who will assist him.

414. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason an appeal has not been accepted against the decision to refuse unemployment benefit in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if her attention has been drawn to the hardship and anxiety caused arising from this decision arising from the reply to a previous question; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47233/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The person concerned was in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance from January 2008 to 28 October 2008. Payment ceased when he failed to sign the Live Register on the appointed day (23 October 2008) and thereby failed to prove he was unemployed from that time.

He made a repeat claim on 10 November 2008 and the claim was disallowed on the grounds that he had failed to submit any evidence of his efforts in seeking employment.

Notification of the decision and his right to appeal issued on 12 November 2008 and an appeal was received on 15 December 2008. All relevant papers will be sent to the Appeal Office as soon as possible and they will be in touch with him in due course.

In the meantime it is open to him to contact the local Community Welfare Officer who may be in a position to help him.

Question No. 415 answered with Question No. 398.

EU Funding.

416. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the amount of EU funding received by her Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under her aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47249/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Details of the amount of EU funding received by my Department directly and for bodies under its aegis in the past 20 years are not immediately available.

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

My Department is compiling this information and my officials will write to the Deputy with these details as soon as they are available.

Data Protection.

417. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Defence the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46662/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): Insofar as my Department is concerned no equipment or data has been reported lost or stolen in the last twelve months.

In relation to Defence Forces ICT equipment, one DF laptop was reported stolen from a private residence of a member of the Defence Forces in June of this year. The laptop was encrypted and sensitive or private data was not compromised.

In relation to all other non-ICT items of equipment or data held by the Defence Forces, the information cannot be assembled in the short timeframe available, given the scale and variety of equipment and the geographical spread of the Defence organisation, at home and abroad. However, this information will be collated as part of the accounting cycle for the twelve months ending 31st December 2008 and will be available in early 2009. I will provide details to the Deputy as soon as they are available.

Departmental Expenditure.

418. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Defence the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46677/08]

419. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Defence the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his Departmental staff and staff at each State agency when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46692/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): I propose to take Questions Nos. 418 and 419 together.

Where hotel accommodation is necessary, the costs are generally met by the individual staff member out of his/her overnight fixed rate of subsistence as is the case throughout the public service. In certain limited cases, my Department pays the cost of hotel accommodation directly. However, records are not readily available in these cases and it would take an inordinate amount of time and resources to manually compile the information.

I am satisfied that the procurement arrangements in place in my Department and its agencies for sourcing hotel accommodation when necessary are in compliance with the Department of Finance guidelines. Approval for overnight accommodation in relation to official business is sought in advance from a senior official in my Department and sanction is only authorised when it is established that the overnight accommodation is essential. In advance of payment, claims made in respect of overnight accommodation are certified by an authorised official as being in accordance with the provisions of the appropriate Department of Finance Travel and Subsistence circulars. The Department of Finance circulars on Travel and Subsistence are brought to the attention of all staff and are readily available on my Department’s intranet site.

Departmental Property.

420. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Defence the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46707/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): The number and capacity of computer servers in my Department and the Defence Forces is spread over a number of mainstream applications, including Local and Wide Area Networks, business, administrative and financial systems, web hosting, mission-critical support systems and a wide range of local and specialist applications. The capacity varies according to need. There is also a wide geographical spread, given the nature and scope of the Defence organisation. The following is a summary of the position.

Civil Branch of the Department, including integrated civil/military modules: a total of 79 Servers; the storage capacity varies from 300 GB (gigabyte) to 1.0TB (terabyte; 1 TB=1000GB) per server. None are leased. Defence Forces — military only applications: a total of 152 servers. The storage capacity varies from 70GB to 1.1 TB per server. There are four servers leased by the Defence Forces. Three of these have a 160 GB capacity and one has a capacity of 144 GB.

Defence Forces Property.

421. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces firearms stolen, reported stolen, missing or otherwise unaccounted for in each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46726/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): There are controls in place to ensure that there can be no interference to inventoried weapons assigned to a Unit of the Defence Forces. All weapons are stored in sound and secure premises where access is restricted to designated personnel. There are frequent and detailed inspections of the serial-numbered assets and items of controlled stores.

Defence Force Regulation L2 on Weapons, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Items of Ordnance and Defence Force Regulation S2 on Financial and Accounting Instructions comprehensively outline the schedule of checking required in respect of all serial-numbered items. There are no reports of firearms belonging to the Defence Forces having been stolen or reported missing as stolen from stores within the State and no weapons are unaccounted for.

The following weapons have been reported as stolen/missing from the Defence Forces during the period 2004 to 2008:

- Steyr Rifle from KFOR in Kosovo in March 2004.
- Walter PPK 9mm Pistol from UNMIL in Liberia in September 2004.
- Steyr rifle was lost overboard at sea from the LE Aisling in July 2006.
- HK 9mm Pistol from the 97th Infantry Battalion in Chad in July 2008.

Each of the above incidents has been investigated. The location of the rifle lost at sea is known but the rifle cannot be recovered. In each of the other incidents the stolen or missing firearms have not been recovered.

Estate Management.

422. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Defence if final agreement has been reached

[Deputy Jack Wall.]

with Kildare County Council in regard to the taking over of an estate (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46822/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): In April 2008, officials from my Department met with the residents from Orchard Park to outline plans for a programme of works including a children’s play area and the upgrade of laneways to deter antisocial behaviour. This work is currently underway. It is hoped that these remedial works will assist in the takeover of the estate by Kildare County Council.

Since that meeting, my officials have been in contact with Kildare County Council in order to arrange a meeting to discuss the taking over of the estate. A response is awaited from Kildare County Council to my department’s invitation to discuss the matter.

Departmental Staff.

423. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Defence the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46983/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): I have set out in the table the estimated cost to my Department for 2008 and 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of my Department. These figures are based on existing personnel numbers and do not reflect any changes in numbers or profile of staff that might take place in the future. Some of the factors that can influence this are resignations, career breaks, retirements and decentralisation. The figures for the years 2002 to 2007 are not readily available and compiling this information would require a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

Increments

	2008	2009
	€	€
Defence Forces	2,878,460	2,975,675
Civilian Employees	128,520	129,520
Civil Servants	230,400	237,400
Civil Defence Board	3,650	3,750
	3,241,030	3,346,345

Decentralisation Programme.

424. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Defence the number of civil servants and other public servants who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government’s decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46998/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): The Government decision on decentralisation provides for the transfer of my Department’s Dublin-based civil service staff, together with a number of military personnel, to Newbridge, Co. Kildare, and for the decentralisation of the Defence Forces Headquarters (DFHQ) to the Curragh.

The number of posts to be relocated to Newbridge is approximately 200 civil service posts together with 43 military. Six members of staff have relocated from provincial offices to Dublin in advance of the move to Newbridge which is scheduled for end of 2009. A further 335 military posts together with 78 support staff will decentralise to the new DFHQ building in the Curragh. A state-owned site has been chosen for a new building and the timeframe for completion of the project will be determined by the outcome of the proposed tender competition that is currently being prepared by OPW. All military personnel decentralising are based in Dublin.

Departmental Staff.

425. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Defence the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47013/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): I have set out in the following table the information requested by the Deputy:

Grades	Earnings less than €50,000	Earnings between €50,001 and €60,000	Earnings between €60,001 and €70,000	Earnings between €70,001 and €80,000	Earnings between €80,001 and €90,000	Earnings between €90,001 and €100,000	Earnings over €100,001
Accountant	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	Nil	Nil
Administrative Officer	Nil	2	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Assistant Principal Officer	2	1	7	14	9	Nil	Nil
Assistant Secretary	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	2
Cleaners and Superintendent	5	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Clerical Officer	148	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Executive Officer	79	5	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Higher Executive Officer	28	23	6	3	Nil	Nil	Nil
Minister's Personal Asst	1	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Minister's Press Adviser	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	Nil
Minister's Special Adviser	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	Nil
Principal Officer	1	2	Nil	2	2	Nil	8
Secretary General	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1
Services Officer/Attendant	16	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Staff Officer	36	1	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Storeman	1	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Watchman	4	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total Number per category	321	34	13	19	12	2	11

In relation to the figures set out above, please note the following:

- Some employees are in lower earnings categories owing to pro-rata pay for reduced working hours for such schemes as Term Time, Parental Leave, Work sharing etc.
- Similar categories of grades have been amalgamated. (i.e. Clerical Officer, Clerical Officer Higher Scale and Pre and Post '95 Clerical Officer grades are shown as Clerical Officer.)
- The figures include overtime and allowance earnings in 2008.

426. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Defence the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47028/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): I have set out in the table below the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of my Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008.

Number of Civil and Public Servants

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
412.1	407.1	406.4	389.4	384.5	400.8	406.8

427. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Defence the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47043/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the table:

Grade	Dublin	Roscrea	Galway	Brussels	Cork	Curragh	Kosovo	Athlone
Secretary General	1.0							
Asst Secretary	2.0							
Head of Corporate Services	1.0							
PO	10.5	1.0	2.0	1				
Accountant			1.0					
AP	24.1	3.0	8.0	2				
Technical Officer	1.0							
HEO	32.8	4.8	19.2	1				
Properties Officer	1.0							
Admin Officer	1.0						1	
EO	43.3	4.8	31.1	1	1	1		
SO	15.2		17.3					
CO	39.5	8.0	90.4	2	1	1		1
Storeman	1.0							

[Deputy Willie O’Dea.]

Grade	Dublin	Roscrea	Galway	Brussels	Cork	Curragh	Kosovo	Athlone
Storekeeper		2.0						
Head Services Officer	1.0							
Services Officer	10.0	1.0	6.0					
Services Attendant	1.7							
Watchman			3.0					
Cleaner	5.0							
TOTAL	191.1	24.6	178.0	7	2	2	1	1

The Dublin-based staff of my Department are due to decentralise to Newbridge, Co. Kildare at the end of 2009.

Departmental Agencies.

428. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Defence the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47058/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): The bodies under the aegis of my Department are the Civil Defence Board, the Board of Coiste an Asgard and the Army Pensions Board. Budget 2009 does not contain any proposals in relation to these bodies nor is it my intention to merge, amalgamate, or abolish any of them. My Department provides support services (finance, IT, human resources) to all three and I am satisfied that this is an efficient and effective arrangement.

Departmental Funding.

429. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the amount of taxpayers money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon referendum. [47097/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): I wish to state that no taxpayers’ money was given by my Department to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon Referendum. The only payment made to this company is in respect of Corporate Membership renewal in the sum of €6,000, which fell due in September 2008.

EU Funding.

430. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the amount of EU funding received by his Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under his aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47241/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): My Department has been in receipt of funding from the EU since 1979 in the form of a financial contribution towards expenditure incurred on fishery protection measures. The amount of funding received in the past 20 years is as follows:

Year	Amount in €m
1986-1989	0.0
1990	1.0
1991	4.6
1992	4.8
1993	5.2
1994	6.2
1995	3.4
1996	4.1
1997	3.4
1998	1.7
1999	8.6
2000	2.2
2001	3.2
2002	0.2
2003	0.0
2004	0.7
2005	0.9
2006	0.0
2007	0.0
2008	0.7
Total	50.9

Environmental Policy.

431. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will report on the early December meeting in Poznan, Poland on climate change issues; the progress which was made at the meeting; the position and contribution made by Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46611/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change took place in Poznan from 1-12 December. The meeting was an important stocktaking exercise at the mid-way point between last year's agreement on the Bali Road Map and the new global climate change agreement that will be reached next year in Copenhagen. A number of important decisions were made at the meeting, including on accelerating the negotiations in 2009. This will be facilitated by the work programmes agreed that provide an ambitious and clearly defined timetable for the different stages of the negotiations next year, including the production of a negotiating text by June 2009 for the future global climate agreement. Agreement on the operational of the Adaptation Fund was also reached in Poznan, so that funding will be available for climate change adaptation projects in developing countries from 2009. I delivered a national statement in the Plenary Session, focusing on adaptation of developing countries to the inevitable effects of climate change, and I intervened in the Ministerial Roundtable on a shared vision on long-term cooperative action. I also participated in the daily meetings of the EU Ministers to coordinate the position of the Community's negotiators. Members of my delegation participated in the negotiations as active and important players in the broader European Union delegation, including negotiating and presenting on behalf of the EU.

Decentralisation Programme

432. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of posts assigned at assistant principal level in his Department's soon to be decentralised office in Wexford; the number of officials who have taken up duty in his Department to fill these posts; the number who have yet to take up duty; when he expects that they will be notified to take up duty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46522/08]

433. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of officers at assistant principal level who had taken up duty in his Department from other Departments with a view to decentralising to Waterford, New Ross or Kilkenny prior to the recent announcements regarding decentralisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46523/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 432 and 433 together.

The Government announcement on 14 October 2008 confirmed that the decentralisation of my Department's Headquarters to Wexford (270 posts) will proceed as planned. However the transfer of posts to the three other locations in the South East — Waterford (225 posts), New Ross (125 posts) and Kilkenny (62 posts) — is being deferred pending the outcome of a review in 2011 in light of budgetary developments.

My Department's Headquarter offices in Wexford are under construction and expected to be completed and ready for occupation in Q1 2009. My Department will then transfer 270 posts into these offices in 2009. 47 Assistant Principal Officer (AP) posts are being assigned to the Department's Headquarters in Wexford and 41 of these posts are currently filled. The remaining posts (6) will be filled in early 2009.

The following table sets out the position in relation to the number of Assistant Principal Officers from other Departments who have joined the Department and signed-up to decentralise to Waterford, New Ross and Kilkenny:

Location	Assistant Principals in situ for location	Assistant Principals in situ for location from other Departments
Waterford	4	4
New Ross	6	3
Kilkenny	6	4

Environmental Policy.

434. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the standards used to determine the safety levels at Haulbowline Island by a company (details supplied) in its recent report were in fact the threshold values for industrial use, not residential use; the way, in view of the fact that these levels exceed the internationally accepted limits for residential use by many multiples, it is appropriate to reassure persons working on the island as well as the residential inhabitants of Cork Harbour that there are no identified risks to the residents. [46537/08]

435. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will make available to the public and consult with it over the alternative proposals for the future of the toxic dump on Haulbowline Island before he brings a report to Government for decision on whatever actions are shown to be necessary. [46538/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 434 and 435 together.

My Department re-engaged consultants, White Young Green (WYG), to carry out an independent and rigorous assessment of current site conditions on Haulbowline, following recent works on the area of the site known as the East Tip. This assessment comprised three distinct modules, and the consultants had available the advice of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Marine Institute and the Health and Safety Authority in their development:

1. assessing quality of surface water, marine sediment and mussel bivalves in the vicinity;
2. assessment of any health or environmental risks posed by current site conditions;
3. ambient air monitoring.

Analytical results in respect of the above modules were compared against the most relevant and appropriate comparative screening values in all cases. Ambient air monitoring was undertaken in accordance with relevant national and international occupational exposure limit values, finding that air quality complied with all relevant standards and guidelines, including in Cobh which was the main population centre that was monitored, and that there is no occupational risk to human health from airborne substances.

Similarly the assessment of water, sediment and mussel samples employed the relevant applicable screening criteria and found no identifiable risk to the residents of Cork Harbour, though some findings do merit further investigation and monitoring. In the case of assessing the health and environmental risks posed by potential contaminants in the waste material on the East Tip itself the screening was undertaken using threshold screening values for commercial/industrial use. These human health generic assessment criteria which are derived from guidance issued in the UK are considered most appropriate for the site and are conservative for on-site exposures for current land use. In that context any exceedances of these screening values identified in the report do not suggest a risk to health of people on site undertaking normal activities or to those in the Cork harbour area including the Naval Base.

Furthermore, at the request of the local residents and public representatives, it was arranged that the site assessment reports be reviewed by independent experts in order to offer reassurance to the local communities that the scope of works, tests and analysis employed conform to best international practice in determining whether there exists any immediate health or environmental threat posed by the site. Professor Phillip Morgan (Sirius Geotechnical & Environmental Ltd) and Dr. Marcus Trett (Physalia Limited, Consultant & Forensic Ecologists) carried out this peer review and considered the aspects of the WYG reports relating to the potential risk posed by contamination present in, on or under the land to human health and environmental and ecological receptors that could realistically be impacted by such contamination. The peer reviewers considered that, overall, the reports represent work that is of a quality consistent with good professional practice for such projects.

In relation to consultation with the local communities my Department and I have previously met with the local residents and, while their views are well known to my Department, it is intended that further consultation will take place in the New Year prior to my submitting proposals to Government in respect of the future use of the site.

Social and Affordable Housing.

436. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 474 of 21 October 2008, the position

[Deputy Fergus O'Dowd.]

regarding the proposal from an association (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46549/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I intend to announce details of the voluntary housing projects to be approved for funding under the Capital Assistance Scheme for 2009 as early as possible in the New Year.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

437. **Deputy Noel O'Flynn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps his Department will take to replace lead water pipes in housing estates in which the lead contamination is higher than the acceptable allowable limit; and if grants are available to local authorities and private households to replace lead pipes with PVC pipes. [46556/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Management of the public drinking water supply infrastructure is the responsibility of the relevant local authority. I have put in place a rigorous supervisory framework to ensure that good quality drinking water is available to the public and that effective mechanisms exist to deal quickly and effectively with any problems which may arise. Under the European Communities (Drinking Water) (No. 2) Regulations, 2007, local authority drinking water supplies are subject to supervision by the EPA and I have given the Agency the necessary resources to back up its new enforcement powers.

Substantial funding towards local authorities' water conservation programmes, including replacement of old pipework, is being provided under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme. In this context it is open to each authority to prioritise any necessary pipe replacement in its own area.

In relation to individual service connections and internal plumbing, water services legislation provides that the owner of a premises is responsible for ensuring that the internal water distribution system is capable of delivering drinking water that complies with drinking water standards. My Department's Water Services Investment Programme does not extend to funding or providing grants for replacement of individual services connections or other measures relating to single households.

Planning Issues.

438. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the status of decisions made by An Bord Pleanála if membership of the board does not include members from each of the areas as outlined in section 106 of the Planning and Development Act 2000; if there has been an instance since the creation of An Bord Pleanála when membership of the board did not reflect the instructions as laid out in the Act; if so, the way this would affect the work of the board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46630/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): As enacted, the Planning and Development Act 2000 provided that An Bord Pleanála should consist of a Chairperson and 7 ordinary members, and that the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government would appoint 6 of the ordinary members from among persons nominated by each of six panels of prescribed organisations representing various sectoral

interests. The seventh ordinary member would be an officer of the Minister. Under this structure, if a vacancy occurred on the Board following the retirement, resignation or removal from office of a nominated ordinary member, it may follow that, pending the filling of that vacancy, there would be no nominee of the panel concerned on the Board. However, the 2000 Act provides that the Board may act notwithstanding a vacancy in the office of Chairperson or among the ordinary members, as long as there is a minimum of three members to form a quorum for a meeting of the Board. Where a vacancy occurs, the Minister shall, as soon as may be, take steps to fill the vacancy.

Accordingly, I am advised that while there have from time to time been vacancies on the Board, it was nevertheless entitled to act and to continue to perform its functions under the 2000 Act. The 2000 Act was amended in 2006 to provide that the Board would comprise a Chairperson and 9 ordinary members, and that the Minister would appoint 2 ordinary members from among persons nominated by each of four panels of prescribed organisations representing various sectoral interests. Given that the terms of office of various ordinary members spanned the transition from a Board of 7 ordinary members to one of 9, and a change in nominating panels, it followed that the distribution of backgrounds currently envisaged under section 106 of the Act need not be immediately achievable and might fall to be dealt with as future vacancies arise.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

439. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the proposed sewerage scheme for Gweedore, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46638/08]

446. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the proposed upgrading and extension of a sewerage scheme (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46721/08]

447. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the proposed upgrading and extension of a sewerage scheme (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46722/08]

448. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the proposed upgrading and extension of a sewerage scheme (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46723/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 439, 446 to 448, inclusive, together.

I refer to the reply to Question No. 405 of 4 November 2008. The position is unchanged.

Local Authority Housing.

440. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has plans to advise or instruct local authorities to purchase houses on the open market for inclusion on their housing stock in view of the reduction of prices throughout the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46655/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Acquisitions already form an important component of the Social Housing Investment Programme. Local authorities have powers under the Housing Act 1966 to acquire dwellings for social housing purposes and must consider such acquisitions in the context of their housing action plan and their available funding.

As is the case with all Social Housing Investment Programme projects, proposals for acquisitions must be developed in accordance with the policy framework set out in *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, addressing inter alia an identifiable housing need and promoting a desirable tenure mix in the wider locality, and must also fully comply with the usual procurement requirements and procedures as outlined in my Department's Circulars which place particular focus on achieving best value for money.

Departmental Property.

441. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46665/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I assume that the question relates to ICT equipment. In the past twelve months three laptops and one external hard drive have been reported stolen and have not been recovered. No sensitive or personal data was stored on any of these devices.

Departmental Expenditure.

442. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46680/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The table sets out the expenditure on hotel accommodation by my Department (including Met Éireann) for each of the years from 2004 to date. Expenditure on hotel accommodation by the State agencies under the aegis of my Department is a matter for the agencies themselves.

Year	Hotel accommodation costs
	€
2004	457,600
2005	170,802
2006	214,699
2007	217,002
2008 (to 15 December)	236,867

443. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46695/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The sourcing of hotel accommodation, where an overnight stay is necessary, is generally organ-

ised at section level in the Department, or by my Ministerial Office in the case of my own travel requirements. The Department of Finance sets and amends, as appropriate, subsistence rates for hotel and other accommodation expenses, which my Department applies.

Some foreign hotel accommodation is also booked through the Department's travel provider, which negotiates corporate rates with hotels on behalf of the Department.

In the case of block bookings for conferences and other such events, the Department, in line with procurement guidelines, obtains a number of quotes from local hotels in order to secure the most competitive rates possible.

The sourcing of hotel accommodation by the State agencies under my aegis is a matter for the agencies themselves and they have been reminded of the need to comply with Department of Finance guidance on travel and subsistence.

Departmental Property.

444. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46710/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department has 124 servers with an average capacity of 210 Gigabytes. The number and capacity of computer servers owned or leased by agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for the individual agencies.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

445. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the proposed upgrading and extension of a sewerage scheme (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46720/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Falcarragh Sewerage Scheme is included for funding in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009.

My Department is awaiting submission of Donegal County Council's Preliminary Report for the scheme.

Questions Nos. 446 to 448, inclusive, answered with Question No. 439.

449. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the proposed upgrading and extension of a sewerage scheme (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46724/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Killybegs Sewerage Scheme is included for funding in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009.

My Department is awaiting submission by Donegal County Council of Tender Documents for the wastewater treatment plant for Killybegs which is being procured as a bundled contract with Bundoran, Convoy and Glencolmcille. I understand that the Council has sought tenders for the Killybegs sewer network and outfall contract.

Local Authority Housing.

450. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of people who are on the waiting list for local authority housing in County Donegal; the steps he proposes to take to shorten this list and provide housing for those most in need as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46797/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The number of households on a local authority's waiting list continuously fluctuates as households on the list are allocated housing and new households apply for housing support. My Department does not hold information in relation to the numbers currently on waiting lists in County Donegal.

The 2008 statutory housing need assessment indicated that the net housing need in County Donegal at 31 March 2008 was 2,519 households. The breakdown by authority in that county is:

- Donegal County Council — 1,763 households;
- Bundoran Town Council — 91 households;
- Buncrana Town Council — 150 households; and
- Letterkenny Town Council — 515 households.

The Government has been responding to the increased social housing need over the last number of years by expanding its social housing investment programme. Local authorities have recorded significant levels of housing output culminating in a record output of over 9,000 units in 2007. Indications are that the public housing programme will provide over 9,000 new dwellings again in 2008 through a combination of local authority construction and acquisition programmes, the programmes of voluntary and co-operative housing bodies and by means of long term arrangements with private property owners under the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

Looking to the future, €1.66 billion in funding has been provided for housing in the 2009 Estimates which will support continued strong momentum towards meeting housing needs, our commitments in Towards 2016 and our long-term goals under the National Development Plan.

Local Authority Staff.

451. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the negative impact of recent cutbacks in posts in Donegal County Council, resulting in 138 part-time and contract workers being made redundant; if there are plans to assist the council in maintaining these jobs due to the negative impact they will have on services and employment within the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46799/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): It is a matter for each local authority to prioritise its spending, within the resources available to it, across the range of services it provides. Equally, local authorities must ensure full value for money for the resources invested, and seek the maximum efficiency across their operations.

General purpose grants are important in assisting local authorities to balance their budgets, and comprise about one fifth of the funding required by authorities to provide their day to day services, although the proportion varies between authorities.

Local authorities receive income from a range of sources including rates, charges for goods and services, specific State grants and general purpose grants from the Local Government Fund.

Donegal County Council's general purpose grant allocation for 2009 is €41,475,164. General purpose grants to Donegal County Council have increased by some 218% since 1997.

I am satisfied that the general purpose allocation I have provided for 2009, together with the income available from other sources, will enable Donegal County Council to provide an acceptable level of service to their customers.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

452. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the €500,000 funding allocated to Health Service Executive west for housing aid for the elderly; if this amount was intended for County Galway; the amount that was allocated to each county within Health Service Executive west; the number of applications approved in each county; the cost for each county; the number awaiting payment; the cost for each county mentioned in the above breakdown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46803/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The allocations to the Health Service Executive (HSE) under the Special Housing Aid for the Elderly Scheme (SHAE) are determined by a Task Force, which operates under the aegis of my Department. The scheme is operated at a local level by the HSE. While the scheme has been closed to new applications since 1 August 2008, having been replaced by the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme, the HSE is continuing to process applications on hands at that stage.

Funding is provided to the HSE on a regional basis and it is a matter for the HSE to apportion funding within regions. The total allocation to the HSE West in respect of the SHAE scheme in 2008 is €5.5 million.

Departmental Expenditure.

453. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount spent by his Department in each year over the past five years, including 2008, on the distribution of publications from his Department to local authorities and to other sources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46814/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The following table sets out the money spent by my Department on postal services over the past five years:

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
€347,056	€330,823	€216,786	€290,312	€236,695

My Department does not record data on the breakdown of general post versus postal charges for distribution of publications or to specific destinations as stated in the question.

Fire Service.

454. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the level of administration in the fire service when compared to other

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jurisdictions; his further views on the ratio of managers to fire fighting personnel in the State; and if he plans to take action to address this matter. [46815/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under section 10 of the Fire Services Act 1981. Staffing and organisational arrangements for the purposes of carrying out the functions of fire authorities are a matter for the relevant city or county manager under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001.

Urban Renewal Schemes.

455. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when funding will be made available for the remedial housing programme in an area (details supplied) in Dublin 17. [46817/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): My Department is currently considering a proposal for regeneration works in Buttercup Park, Darndale and will be writing to Dublin City Council in connection with the matter shortly.

Departmental Schemes.

456. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his competency and power to sanction an application for rates, remissions or rebates proposed for start-up businesses by local authorities pursuant to section 2 of 1970 Local Government (Rates) Act; if local authority members can devise a system to alleviate the rates payable by start-up companies on a progressive basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46818/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My sanction is required under the Local Government (Rates) (Waiver) Regulations 1970 to the making or amending of a rates waiver scheme by a rating authority. The making of a rates waiver scheme is a reserved function and the scheme may relate to ratepayers generally or classes of ratepayers in respect of properties of a class or classes specified in the scheme under section 2 of the Local Government (Rates) Act 1970.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

457. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46826/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Gorey Sewerage Scheme is included for funding under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009, based on an assessment of needs by Wexford County Council in 2006.

The Council's contract documents for the scheme are being examined in my Department and are being dealt with as quickly as possible.

458. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46827/08]

459. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46828/08]

460. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46829/08]

461. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46830/08]

463. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46832/08]

464. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46833/08]

466. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46835/08]

468. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was

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received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46837/08]

469. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46838/08]

470. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46839/08]

471. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46840/08]

472. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46841/08]

473. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46842/08]

474. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46843/08]

475. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports;

when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46844/08]

476. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46845/08]

477. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46846/08]

478. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46847/08]

479. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46848/08]

481. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46850/08]

482. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46851/08]

484. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these

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schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46853/08]

486. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46855/08]

489. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46858/08]

490. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46859/08]

491. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46860/08]

492. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46861/08]

493. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46862/08]

495. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these

schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46864/08]

496. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46865/08]

497. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46866/08]

498. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46867/08]

500. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46869/08]

501. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46870/08]

502. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46871/08]

503. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46872/08]

504. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46873/08]

505. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46874/08]

506. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46875/08]

507. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46876/08]

510. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46879/08]

511. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46880/08]

514. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46883/08]

515. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was

received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46884/08]

516. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46885/08]

517. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46886/08]

518. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46887/08]

519. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46889/08]

520. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46890/08]

522. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46892/08]

524. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these

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schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46894/08]

525. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46895/08]

527. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46897/08]

528. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46898/08]

529. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46899/08]

530. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46900/08]

531. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46901/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 458 to 461, inclusive, 463, 464, 466, 468 to 479, inclusive, 481, 482, 484, 486, 489, 490 to 493, inclusive, 495 to 498, inclusive, 500 to 507, inclusive, 510, 511, 514 to 520, inclusive, 522, 524, 525, 527 to 531, inclusive together.

There are no sewerage schemes for any of these locations included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas Library.

462. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46831/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Bunclody Sewerage Scheme has been approved for funding under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 as part of the Rural Towns and Villages Initiative, based on an assessment of needs by Wexford County Council in 2006.

I have approved the Council's tender recommendations for the scheme and it is a matter for the Council to arrange for the carrying out of the works.

Question No. 463 and 464 answered with Question No. 458.

465. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46834/08]

467. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46836/08]

483. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46852/08]

485. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46854/08]

487. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports;

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when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46856/08]

508. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46877/08]

512. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46881/08]

521. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46891/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 465, 467, 483, 485, 487, 508, 512 and 521 together.

These schemes are being advanced as a single grouped project and are included for funding under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009, based on an assessment of needs by Wexford County Council in 2006. The Council's Preliminary report for the grouped scheme is being examined in my Department and is being dealt with as quickly as possible.

Question No. 466 answered with Question No. 458.

Question No. 467 answered with Question No. 465.

Questions Nos. 468 to 479, inclusive, answered with Question No. 458.

480. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46849/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Enniscorthy Sewerage Scheme is included for funding under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009, based on an assessment of needs by Wexford County Council in 2006.

My Department is awaiting submission of Wexford County Council's contract documents for the scheme.

Questions Nos. 481 and 482 answered with Question No. 458.

Question No. 483 answered with Question No. 465.

Question No. 484 answered with Question No. 458.

Question No. 485 answered with Question No. 465.

Question No. 486 answered with Question No. 458.

Question No. 487 answered with Question No. 465.

488. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46857/08]

499. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46868/08]

513. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46882/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 488, 499 and 513 together.

These schemes have been approved for funding under the Serviced Land Initiative measure of my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009, based on an assessment of needs by Wexford County Council in 2006.

My Department has approved the Council's design proposals for the schemes and, in accordance with devolved procedures, it is now a matter for the Council to proceed with the works.

Questions Nos. 489 to 493, inclusive, answered with Question No. 458.

494. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46863/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):

This scheme is included for funding under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009, based on an assessment of needs by Wexford County Council in 2006. I understand that the scheme is under construction and information in relation to expected completion and commissioning dates may be sought from Wexford County Council.

Questions Nos. 495 to 498, inclusive, answered with Question No. 458.

Question No. 499 answered with Question No. 488.

Questions Nos. 500 to 507, inclusive, answered with Question No. 458.

Question No. 508 answered with Question No. 465.

509. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; and when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46878/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I understand that construction work on this scheme, which was funded under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme, has been completed. Information in relation to the commissioning date may be sought from Wexford County Council.

Questions Nos. 510 and 511 answered with Question No. 458.

Question No. 512 answered with Question No. 465.

Question No. 513 answered with Question No. 488.

Questions Nos. 514 to 520, inclusive, answered with Question No. 458.

Question No. 521 answered with Question No. 465.

Question No. 522 answered with Question No. 458.

523. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was received by his Department; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; and when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46893/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Fethard Sewerage Scheme is included for funding under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009, based on an assessment of needs by Wexford County Council in 2006.

My Department is awaiting submission of the Council's contract documents for the scheme.

Questions Nos. 524 and 525 answered with Question No. 458.

526. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the initial application for funding regarding an area (details supplied) was

received by his Department for funding; when his Department received preliminary reports; when his Department expected to sanction approval to the local authority in respect of these schemes to proceed to tender and construction; when construction and commissioning is expected to be completed in respect of these schemes. [46896/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I understand that construction work on the Coolgreaney Sewage Scheme, which was funded under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme, has been completed. Information in relation to the commissioning date may be sought from Wexford County Council.

Questions Nos. 527 to 531, inclusive, answered with Question No. 458.

Consultancy Contracts.

532. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when this Deputy will receive a full reply to Parliamentary Question No. 470 of 18 November 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46909/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): A full reply to Question No. 470 of 18 November 2008 issued on 16 December 2008.

Departmental Staff.

533. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46986/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The estimated cost of incremental pay increases for my Department in 2008 is €908,000 and €913,000 in 2009. These estimated figures are based on the current number of staff employed in my Department and they take into account the pay increase due in 2009 under Towards 2016. However, the year to year costs of incremental pay increases are normally offset by corresponding reductions in costs associated with retirements and other movements by staff on higher points on the incremental scales and their replacement by staff on lower points.

The comparative cost of incremental pay increases for each year from 2002 to date is not readily available and its compilation would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work.

The budgeted cost of incremental pay increases in respect of the agencies under the aegis of my Department is a matter for the agency or body concerned and my Department is not involved in their day to day operational activities.

Decentralisation Programme.

534. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47001/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Government announcement on 14 October 2008 confirmed that the decentralisation of my Department's Headquarters to Wexford (270 posts) will proceed as planned. However the

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transfer of posts to the three other locations in the South East — Waterford (225 posts), New Ross (125 posts) and Kilkenny (62 posts) — is being deferred pending the outcome of a review in 2011 in light of budgetary developments.

The transfer of the National Building Agency and the Local Government Computer Services Board, to Wexford and Drogheda respectively, are also deferred pending the review. My Department's Headquarter offices in Wexford are under construction and expected to be completed and ready for occupation in Q1 2009. My Department will then transfer 270 posts into these offices in 2009.

An advance office was established in Wexford on 25 June 2007 and is currently staffed by 43 people. Of these, one staff member transferred from an original location outside of Dublin and one staff member was recruited locally. The remainder of the staff transferred from an original Dublin based location.

The advance office staff will transfer to the permanent office first, followed by the remaining staff to complete the filling of 270 posts. Of these staff, a further 59 will be transferring from an original location outside of Dublin, with the rest transferring from an original Dublin based location.

Departmental Staff.

535. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47016/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): There are currently 1316.72 people (figure indicates full time equivalent) working in my Department. The information requested is set out in the following table.

Grade	<€50,000	€50,001- €60,000	€60,001- €70,000	€70,001- €80,000	€80,001- €90,000	€90,001- €100,000	>€100,001
Secretary General	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Asst Sec*	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
PO*	0	0	0	0	8.6	17.8	55
AP*	11.33	9.76	51.55	72.2	92	20	0
AO*	38.73	30.73	24	1	1	0	0
HEO*	51.1	134	40	0	0	0	0
EO*	277.95	39	0	0	0	0	0
SO*	17.55	0	0	0	0	0	0
CO*	149.62	0	0	0	0	0	0
Services Officers	39.8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ministerial Staff	8	2	0	0	2	0	2
Industrial	111	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	705.08	215.49	115.55	73.2	103.6	37.8	66

*Includes administrative, professional and technical staff at each grade level.

536. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47031/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested is set out in the table.

Year	DEHLG	State Bodies**
2002	1355.04	573
2003	1363.18	585
2004	1374.81	589.5
2005	1374.93	616.7
2006	1373.79	664.7
2007	1416.46	684.7
2008*	1316.72	801.1

*The figures provided for 2008 cover the period up to 30 November 2008 for DEHLG and up to 30 September 2008 for the State Bodies.

**As the Dublin Docklands Development Authority, the Housing Finance Agency and the National Building Agency are not publicly funded, their staffing numbers are not included.

Due to the realignment of heritage-related functions between my Department and the Office of Public Works in 2002 and 2003 the above table does not include Industrial staff figures for those years.

537. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47046/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested for my Department is set out in the table.

The locations at which the staff of the agencies under the aegis of my Department are assigned are a matter for the agency or body concerned and my Department is not involved in their day to day operational activities.

Location	Secretary General	Asst Sec*	PO*	AP*	AO*	HEO*	EO*	SO*	CO*	Service Officers	Ministerial Staff	Non Industrial Total	Industrial Total
2 Patrick's St., Kilkenny	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00
3 Society St., Ballinasloe	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
4 Claremont Rd., Sandymount	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00
4/5 Harcourt Rd. Dublin 2	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00
6 Upper Ely Place	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.80	4.50	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.30	4.00
Ardeavan	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.60	3.00	10.00	11.70	1.00	10.00	2.00	0.00	44.30	0.00
Athlone — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Atumney	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00
Ballina	0.00	0.00	1.00	8.00	1.00	13.73	24.60	2.73	27.18	4.00	0.00	82.24	0.00
Ballinacorney	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.00	1.00
Ballybay	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.80	0.00	8.60	0.00	0.00	11.40	0.00
Ballycroy National Park, Mayo	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	5.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.00	1.00
Belmullet	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	5.00	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.00	6.20	0.00
Birr	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00
Carlow — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Casement Aerodrome	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	8.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	9.00	0.00
Cavan — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Clare — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.60	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.60	0.00
Clifden Court, Clifden	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00
Clones	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00
Connemara National Park	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	9.00
Cooile Park, Gort	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	3.00
Cork — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.00	0.00
Cork Airport	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	6.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.00	0.00
Custom House	1.00	7.00	48.60	104.06	12.00	88.76	80.70	9.80	67.30	17.00	15.00	451.22	0.00
Donegal — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	4.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.50	0.00
Dromore Woods	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00
Dublin Airport	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	6.00	8.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	15.00	0.00
Dublin Castle	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.00	1.00	0.00	6.00	0.00
Dún Scéine	0.00	0.00	3.00	15.73	19.73	7.00	6.70	0.60	13.00	2.00	0.00	67.76	0.00
Eastgate, Little Island, Cork	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	4.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.00	1.00

Location	Secretary General	Asst Sec*	PO*	AP*	AO*	HEO*	EO*	SO*	CO*	Service Officers	Ministerial Staff	Non Industrial Total	Industrial Total
Ely Court, 7 Ely Place, D2	0.00	0.00	3.00	19.00	11.80	12.30	9.80	1.00	10.10	3.00	0.00	70.00	0.00
Emmet Place Youghal	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
ENFO 17 St. Andrew St. Dub. 2	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	1.80	2.00	0.00	6.50	1.00	0.00	14.30	0.00
Friarismill Road, Mullingar	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.00	0.00
Galway	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
Galway — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	8.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.00	0.00
Glengarriff Nature Reserve	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	3.00
Glenveagh National Park	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	4.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.00	34.00
Government Buildings Cork	0.00	0.00	1.00	6.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.00	0.00
Government Buildings Mullingar	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Govt. Buildings, Nenagh	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.00	0.00
Govt. Bldgs, The Glen, Waterford	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.60	0.00
Headford Rd. Galway	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.73	4.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.73	0.00
Irish Life	0.00	0.00	7.80	15.00	1.00	9.20	10.80	0.00	2.40	1.00	0.00	47.20	0.00
Kerry — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.00	0.00
Kilkenny — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Killarney National Park	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	9.00	0.00	2.73	0.00	0.00	13.73	33.00
Kilmurray Sth., Kilworth, Cork	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Knock Airport	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	5.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.00	0.00
Laoise — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Leitrim — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Limerick — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.60	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.60	0.00
Longford — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Malin Head	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	6.00	0.00	0.00	0.24	0.00	7.24	0.00
Mayo — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.00	0.00
Met Éireann HQ	0.00	1.00	9.00	35.50	0.00	32.00	17.50	0.00	11.00	3.41	0.00	109.41	0.00
Monaghan — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00
Moyné, Co. Longford	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00
Mullingar	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00

Location	Secretary General	Asst Sec*	PO*	AP*	AO*	HEO*	EO*	SO*	CO*	Service Officers	Ministerial Staff	Non Industrial Total	Industrial Total
Nat. Monuments Depot, Mallow	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00
O'Connell Bridge House	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	2.50	0.00	1.00	0.80	0.00	0.00	5.30	0.00
Offaly — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.00	0.00
Old Mill, Dromohair, Co. Leitrim	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	1.00
Portlaoise — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Roscommon — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00
Rosslare	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.49	0.00	3.49	0.00
Shannon Airport	0.00	0.00	1.00	6.50	0.00	9.00	8.50	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	26.00	0.00
Sligo — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00
Spruce Hse., Leeson Lane, D2.	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
St. Francis St., Ennis	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	0.00
Station Rd., Kildare Town	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.00	0.00
Tipperary — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.60	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.60	0.00
Valentia Observatory	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	7.00	0.00	4.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	15.00	2.00
Waterford — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	4.00	0.00
Westmeath — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Wexford — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	1.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.00	0.00
Wexford Wildfowl Reserve	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	2.00
Wicklow — Field Staff	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Wicklow Mountains National Pk.	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.00	14.00
Total	1.00	8.00	78.40	256.92	110.83	216.89	295.60	18.13	167.61	37.34	15.00	1205.72	111.00

*Includes administrative, professional and technical staff at each grade level.

Departmental Agencies.

538. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47061/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Work to merge the Local Government Management Services Board and the Local Government Computer Services Board, into the Local Government Services Board, has been initiated and is expected to require the preparation of legislation. These Bodies are funded through the local government system rather than by way of direct Exchequer subvention, and their merging will be designed to promote further efficiency and effectiveness in shared service provision in local government. It is, accordingly, not possible to provide the requested level of detail at this time.

It is planned that the Rent Tribunal will merge with the Private Residential Tenancies Board. My Department is currently examining appropriate mechanisms for advancing the merger. I anticipate that legislation will be required and in that event it will be introduced through the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2008. No savings will accrue to the Exchequer in 2008 and the expected savings in 2009 will be dependent on the timing of the merger. The full year savings arising are estimated to be in the region of €70,000 to €100,000 per annum.

Constituency Boundaries.

539. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he will establish a commission to make recommendations on the proposal for a boundary extension for Limerick city; if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties encountered in developing Limerick as the gateway to the mid-west region in the absence of such an extension and the urgency of addressing the issue of the narrow confines of the current boundary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47077/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): On 1 March 2008 I altered the boundary of Limerick City under Part V of the Local Government Act 1991 to support the wider task of regeneration in Limerick. The 2008 boundary alteration was supported by both Limerick City Council and Limerick County Council.

The Green Paper on Local Government, Stronger Local Democracy — Options for Change, which I published in April 2008, discusses the issues of the governance of the gateways, the establishment and role of the Local Government Commission, and local authority boundary changes. The White Paper on local government, which I am currently finalising, will set out the Government's proposals in relation to these matters.

Local Authority Funding.

540. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of the local government fund allocation made to Donegal County Council which is from the levy that is to be collected from non principle residents. [47079/08]

543. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of the local government fund allocation that was made to each local authority which is from the levy that will be collected from non principle residents. [47170/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 540 and 543 together.

I refer to the reply to Question No. 401 of 16 December 2008. The position is unchanged.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

541. **Deputy Deirdre Clune** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding funding he will provide to Cork City Council and to Cork County Council under the housing adaption grant schemes for older persons and persons with a disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47084/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): My Department made combined capital allocations of €1,962,090, €2,545,140 and €1,008,930 to the North, South and West Divisions, respectively, of Cork County Council and €1,855,620 to Cork City Council, in May 2008, for the operation of the Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability. The schemes are funded by 80% recoupment available from my Department together with 20% contribution from the resources of the local authority. In light of particularly significant levels of activity experienced by Cork County and City Councils this year, I announced in October 2008 a supplementary Exchequer allocation of €1,200,000, (that is €300,000 for Cork City Council and €300,000 for each of the County Council's three Divisions), towards the operation of these schemes in 2008. It is a matter for local authorities to decide on the specific level of funding to be directed towards each of the schemes, from within the combined allocation notified to them, and to manage the operation of the schemes in their areas from within this allocation.

My Department is in the process of liaising with all local authorities regarding their funding requirements under the schemes in 2009 and it is my intention to notify individual allocations to local authorities early in the New Year.

In line with my objective of prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable households, the total financial provision secured for housing in 2009 will allow for the level of funding allocated towards housing supports for older people and people with a disability next year to be increased by 8% over the initial estimate for 2008. This provision will enable local authorities to continue effectively to respond to the housing needs of these target groups through the payment of increased numbers of grants.

Departmental Funding.

542. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of taxpayers' money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon referendum. [47100/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department pays an annual corporate membership fee to the Institute of International and European Affairs, which amounts to €6,000.

Question No. 543 answered with Question No. 540.

Local Authority Reform.

544. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans for devolution of authority to local authorities; the scale of such devolution; the timescale envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47185/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):

The Green Paper on Local Government, Stronger Local Democracy — Options for Change, which I published in April 2008, discusses the role of local government within Ireland's political and governmental system. It acknowledges the opportunity for national government to devolve functions which can be delivered at local level, but that local government needs to be strengthened if it is to take on greater responsibility.

The conclusions of the OECD's recent Review of Public Management in Ireland, and the subsequent Report of the Task Force on the Public Service are also of relevance to the balance of functions between central and local government. The Report of the Task Force in particular recommends that local government structures should be drawn upon to enhance public service delivery, particularly through leadership at local level of shared services, case-based approaches and integrated responses. The Government's proposals in relation to the strengthening of local government will be set out in the White Paper on local government which I am currently finalising. These proposals will be taken forward in parallel with the overall proposals for public sector reform set out in the recent Government statement on Transforming Public Services and the above-mentioned Report of the Task Force on the Public Service.

EU Funding.

545. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of EU funding received by his Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under his aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47244/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):

While my Department has had responsibility for the implementation of a number of capital expenditure programmes that qualified for EU funding over this period, the Department of Finance is responsible for drawing down associated European Regional Development and Cohesion funds which are then paid directly into the Central Fund as a capital receipt. Historic information on the extent to which EU assisted expenditure has been incurred for the entire period concerned is not readily available in my Department. Receipts received by this country since Ireland joined the EU can be obtained from the document Budgetary and Economic Statistics published by the Department of Finance which is available on the website www.finance.gov.ie.

Departmental Schemes.

546. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the grants available for persons in houses which are in need of insulation for heat preservation and retention if there are grants available for upgrading windows through Sustainable Energy Ireland or through his Department; if he will furnish the relevant documentation in support thereof; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47253/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I am providing funding for two programmes that assist households in need of improved insulation.

The Warmer Homes Scheme is targeted at households on low incomes, such as those in receipt of fuel allowance, invalidity or disability benefit. The Scheme provides cavity wall insulation, attic insulation, boiler lagging jackets, draught proofing measures and Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs). Advice is also provided to householders on minimising energy use. These measures are provided free or at a nominal cost.

[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

The Warmer Homes Scheme is delivered principally through community based organisations. Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI) oversees the Programme. Applications for assistance under the Scheme should be made via the relevant community organisation, details of which can be found under the grants section of SEI's website (www.sei.ie/grants). I have increased the funding for this Scheme to €5 million in 2009 and have secured another €5 million in matching funding from ESB Customer Supply and Bord Gáis Éireann.

The Home Energy Saving Scheme, which is also managed by SEI, will provide grant assistance to householders generally to install energy efficiency measures from next year. I launched the Scheme on a pilot basis earlier this year, in a selected number of areas and with a budget of €5 million.

The pilot phase of the Scheme is providing 30% grants towards cavity wall insulation, wall lining insulation, external insulation, attic insulation, heating controls and low-e double glazing. This pilot phase is informing the design of the wider roll out of the Scheme in 2009 for which provision of €20 million has been made. I am currently finalising the operational details of the full Scheme, including the measures that will be supported, and I expect to be in a position to make an announcement in respect of new applications at the beginning of 2009.

Data Protection.

547. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46660/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): There have been no reported losses of desktop PCs or memory keys in my Department to date in 2008. There have been two Blackberry devices lost, neither of which was recovered or found.

There have been no reports that any sensitive data has been compromised by these losses. The level of personal information relating to members of the public processed within my Department is very small.

Whilst the risk of personal data being released is considered very low, my Department is in the process of identifying a suitable product that will provide encryption for laptops and other portable devices. It is expected that this will be selected, and implementation started, in January 2009.

Departmental Expenditure.

548. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46675/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The expenditure on hotel accommodation by my Department for the period June 2007, when this Department was formed, to date is set out in the following table.

Period	Hotel accommodation expenditure
	€
June to December 2007	105,258.04
January 2008 to Present	74,814.89
Total hotel accommodation expenditure	180,072.93

Expenditure on hotel accommodation by any agency under the aegis of my Department is a day to day operational matter for the agency concerned and I have no function in it.

549. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46690/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Arrangements in my Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for official business reasons are subject to the various circulars and guidelines on Travel and Subsistence issued by the Department of Finance.

The sourcing of hotel accommodation by the Agencies is a day-to-day operational matter for the agencies themselves and I have no function in that regard.

However, I would also draw the Deputy's attention to the reply I gave in this House to Question No. 97 of 2 December 2008 when I outlined that all such expenditure by the relevant Agencies is subject to review and scrutiny by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. I also confirmed, in that reply, that my Department has contacted the relevant State Agencies in relation to ensuring that their travel and subsistence rules comply with the regulations and guidelines governing same.

Departmental Property.

550. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46705/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department has ninety-six physical computer servers, providing live, development and test environments for internal services. The number of physical servers will reduce over the first half of 2009 as virtual server technologies are used to provide multiple services from a single physical server.

The amount of storage on each of these servers varies between 36 Gigabytes and 12 Terabytes, depending on the age and function of the server. Currently there is a total of 55 Terabytes of storage available to these servers.

The number of servers used by the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for which I have no responsibility.

Consultancy Contracts.

551. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural

[Deputy Paul Kehoe.]

Resources when this Deputy will receive a full reply to Parliamentary Question No. 485 of 18 November 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46903/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I refer the Deputy to the reply to Question No. 485 on the 18th November last and reaffirm the position that the identification of records prior to January 2007 cannot be facilitated without undue commitment of staff resources and administrative cost. I would also point out that this Department is only in existence in its current format since June 2007. If the Deputy has a question in relation to a specific item I will make appropriate enquiries.

Waste Disposal.

552. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has had discussions with the ESB regarding the traceability, sale, use and disposal of oils which have been used in their electricity transformers, in view of the concern that such oil may have been responsible for the contamination of the food recycling plant which gave rise to the pork industry crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46932/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The operation of electricity transformers is a day-to-day matter for the company and not one in which I have a function.

Nonetheless, I have had enquiries made on this issue and I understand the following is the current position. The companies contracted by the ESB to dispose of oils used in their electricity transformers do not convey any waste products into the food business. The waste oils are used in the production of asphalt for road building purposes. The ESB has longstanding contracts with these companies but in light of the recent pork industry crisis, the ESB undertook discussions with the relevant companies to ascertain the up-to-date position and, based on the assurances it has received, the board is confident of the traceability of such waste products.

Departmental Staff.

553. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46981/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources was established in June 2007.

My Department has calculated that the cost of increments to Departmental staff will be approximately €290,000 in 2009. The comparative figure for 2008 was €340,505.

The staff in my Department are placed on a pay scale, according to their grade, with annual increments up to a maximum level. The annual increment is normally paid on the anniversary of appointment provided performance and attendance during the year is satisfactory.

Decentralisation Programme.

554. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each

set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46996/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Government's original decision on Decentralisation involved the relocation of my Department's headquarters to Cavan with the transfer of some 300 posts.

54 administrative staff already have decentralised to my Department's offices in Elm House, Cavan. Of these, 48 have relocated from Dublin and 6 from non-Dublin locations.

In accordance with the recent Government Decision, no further relocation of posts will take place prior to the formal review of the Decentralisation Programme scheduled for 2011.

Departmental Staff.

555. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47011/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Department currently employs a total number of 298 full time equivalent staff.

The following table lists the information requested by the Deputy. Some of the posts listed are part-time positions.

Salary	Number of Staff	Number per Grade
Less than €50,000	173	4 Temp Field Assistants, 2 Superintendent of Mapping 4 Staff Officers 9 Services Officers 1 Storekeeper 1 Service Attendant 21 HEOs 2 Senior Geologists 1 Personal Assistant to Minister 1 Head Services Officer 1 Lab Technician 7 Geologists 50 Eos 63 Cos 2 Civilian Drivers 1 Assistant Superintendent 2 Cartographers 1AP
€50,001 – €60,000	41	1 Temp Field Asst 2 Superintendent of Mapping 1 Superintendent of Cartography 23 HEOs

[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

Salary	Number of Staff	Number per Grade
		3 Geologists 1 Executive Engineer 6 Eos 1 AP 3 AOs
€60,001 – €70,000	27	7 APs 2 Executive Engineers 1 Geologist 8 HEOs 6 Senior Lab Technicians 1 Senior Lab Technician 2 Senior Lab Tech Class 2
€70,001 – €80,000	22	11 APs 1 Staff Engineers 2 Chief Superintendent of Mapping 1 Chief Technologist 1 Legal Advisor 6 Senior Geologists
€80,001 – €90,000	29	18 APs 4 Principals 3 Principal Geologist 1 Professional Accountant Gr1-Ppc 3 Staff Engineers
€90,001 – €100,000	4	4 Principals
Over €100,000	23	1 Asst Dir Geological Survey 1 Asst Director of Communications 3 Asst Secretaries 2 Chief Technical Advisors 1 Deputy Secretary 1 Director of Communications 1 Director Geological Survey 2 Petroleum Exploration Specialists 10 Principals 1 Secretary General

556. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47026/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources was established in June 2007. The number of staff in this Department at the end of 2007 was 339. The current staffing complement stands at 298.

557. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47041/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Civil Servants working directly for my Department are located in four buildings as follows: 29-31 Adelaide Rd, Dublin 2 with a staff complement of 164. Tom Johnson House, Beggars Bush, Dublin 2, with a staff complement of 74. Leeson Lane, Dublin 2, with a staff complement of 21. Elm House, Cavan, with a staff complement of 54. The table herewith details the grade breakdown for each location.

In addition, there are currently 12 Departmental staff who work from home on a part-time basis under the Department's e-working scheme. These staff members also have a workstation in one of the four locations listed above.

The location of buildings occupied by State Agencies is a matter of public record and is available in the library of the Houses of the Oireachtas. Accommodation, staffing and staff related issues for the agencies under the aegis of my Department, are a day to day operational issue for the agencies themselves and I have no function in that regard.

DCENR Staff by Grade & Location

Grade	Adelaide Rd	Beggars Bush	Leeson Lane, Cavan
Secretary General	1	0	00
Deputy Sec General	1	0	00
Assistant Secretary	3	0	00
Principal Officer	12	1	12
Assistant Principal Officer	29	3	35
Higher Executive Officer	36	3	210
Administrative Officer	4	0	00
Executive Officer	30	5	316
Staff Officer	2	0	11
Clerical Officer	30	10	518
Services Officer	7	3	11
Professional & Technical Staff	9	49	51

Departmental Agencies.

558. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47056/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I would draw the Deputy's attention to the reply I gave in this House to Question No. 487 on 25 November 2008.

[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

I would further update the Deputy as follows. Work on the necessary amending legislation to give effect to the decision is already well advanced in my Department. I have also established a tightly focused group chaired by my Department with representation on behalf of the existing Boards to guide the implementation of this decision.

This Group is developing the key features of the new model and is advising on the legislative provisions required to deliver the new regime. It will also devise appropriate transitional arrangements so as to ensure the smooth changeover to the new structures.

The Department of Finance has requested an implementation plan and this will be submitted shortly.

Departmental Funding.

559. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount of taxpayers' money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon referendum. [47096/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department pays an annual Corporate Membership Fee to the Institute of European Affairs (IEA). The fee in respect of the year commencing 1st November 2007 was €6,000.

Media Funding.

560. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to funding directly or indirectly through sponsorship or other form of financial support or patronage to the broadcasting or print media, public or private, from any source associated with euro scepticism; the basis or nature of such funding or support; if understandings, agreements or arrangements have been entered into and on what basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47236/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My attention has not been drawn to any of the matters raised by the Deputy insofar as they relate to broadcasting. I have no function in relation to the print media.

EU Funding.

561. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount of EU funding received by his Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under his aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47239/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources was established in June 2007. To assist the Deputy, the following table sets out the EU funding received by the Department and predecessor Departments for programmes and schemes under its remit as and from 1 January 1997. It should be noted that the receipts relate to the specific responsibilities that were under the Department's remit at the time received. The receipts are shown primarily on an activity related basis.

The identification of records prior to January 1997 cannot be facilitated without undue commitment of staff resources and administrative cost. However, if the Deputy has a question in relation to a specific item I will make appropriate enquiries.

EU Receipts received by Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources since 1997

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Technical Assistance			34,876	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tourism OP		59,811	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Harbour Works		564,368	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fisheries Conservation	221,464	291,800	520,816	50,000	515,030	44,501	529,239	53,395	801,539	263,017	140,635	—
Inland Fisheries Boards	697,654	49,856	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Forest Service	14,583,846	48,084,050	57,266,314	57,367,249	39,444,031	60,641,898	44,358,963	—	—	—	—	—
Aquaculture						1,721,849	2,453,497	4,217,275	3,503,077	6,819,070	1,876,121	—
Marine Institute	480,593	1,747,374	2,447,966	1,999,252	536,761	803,616	1,643,550	2,499,339	2,969,522	1,654,394	3,100,000	—
BIM	9,845,248	5,046,624	10,272,229	9,987,257	3,808,000	—	—	—	253,270	120,000	57,000	—
Interreg	—	—	—	235,500	195,894	—	—	78,910	—	—	—	—
Salmon Research Agency	18,729	11,346	156,687	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Coillte Teo	57,179	100,778	145,191	81,704	119,777	119,997	15,111	—	19,506	56,604	—	—
Sustainable Energy Ireland						9,100,000	12,000,000	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity Supply Board						3,848,862	—	—	—	—	—	—
Formation of Fish Producers Organisations				57,830	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Advance for new Fisheries OP					4,746,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
FIFG Fisheries							3,268,521	4,343,518	16,360,352	5,223,371	1,849,964	—
ESF Element of Fisheries OP 94-99							198,683	—	368,925	—	—	—
Vessel Monitoring System									63,460	—	—	—
Contributions to Conferences												
Peace II Initiative					189,001	—	—	—	—	753,466	472,962	—
Euro	25,904,713	55,956,007	70,844,079	69,778,792	49,554,494	76,280,723	64,467,564	11,192,437	24,339,651	14,889,922	7,496,682	Nil

Fisheries Protection.

562. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his attention has been drawn to the results of the data obtained by the sustainable management of interactions between aquaculture and wild salmonid fish funded by the EU and partnered between Ireland, Scotland, and Norway and the data obtained by the national fish stock assessment programme of the Central Fisheries Board in 2007 which demonstrated the increased mortalities in wild salmon as a result of marine salmon farms and their sea lice infestations; and the measures he plans to take to protect the Irish wild salmon as the competent authority under the Habitats Directive which list the salmon for protection. [46539/08]

571. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will report on the recommendations of the high level sea lice monitoring and control working group which was established by the then Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources in 2005 and comprised representatives of the Department, the Fisheries Boards, Marine Institute and Bord Iascaigh Mhara to examine and review the systems and processes for controlling sea lice levels at marine finfish farms. [46546/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): I propose to take Questions Nos. 562 and 571 together.

Since the transfer of fisheries functions to my Department, work has continued on this issue and in May of this year my Department published a Strategy for Improved Pest Control on Irish Salmon Farms. A National Implementation Group with representatives from my Department, BIM, Marine Institute and industry representatives has been formed and will drive the implementation of the strategy. The Implementation Group has commenced its work and is expected to present its report to me by end of May, 2009.

Grant Payments.

563. **Deputy Noel J. Coonan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason for delay in rural environment protection scheme payments in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; when payment will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46516/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): REPS 4 is a measure under the current Rural Development Programme 2007–13 and is subject to different EU Regulations from the preceding versions of REPS. Under REPS 4, all payments are to be made in just two instalments. The first payment, of 75%, can be made only when all administrative checks on all 2008 applications for REPS 4 and the Single Payment Scheme are completed. This is why it has not yet been possible to release payments even to farmers who applied for REPS 4 some time before the closing date of 15 May.

Most REPS plans are now prepared using eREPS, the electronic planning system approved and funded by my Department. As the information in these plans is in computerised format, the administrative checks can be carried out quickly. However a substantial minority of plans submitted this year were not prepared using eREPS. Administrative checks on these have to be done manually and are extremely time-consuming. An effect of recent industrial action in my Department's local offices was that this process was delayed. While normal working has resumed in the local offices following the intervention of the Labour Relations Commission, there is still much to be done before the administrative checks are completed. In these circumstances my Department sought some flexibility from the European Commission which would have allowed payment of those REPS 4 cases which had been fully cleared, but the Commission

were not prepared to allow this. As a result, it is now apparent that REPS 4 payments cannot issue before the end of 2008.

While I am anxious that the REPS 4 payments should go out as soon as possible, and my Department will make every effort to facilitate this, there are of course still over 48,000 farmers in REPS 3 and just under 16,000 of those have anniversary dates on 1 November and 1 December this year. Staff in my Department's local offices are currently engaged in processing the annual payment applications for these farmers, and I have asked them to make every effort to issue as many payments as possible before Christmas.

I have asked senior management in my Department to give me regular updates on the payment situation.

564. Deputy Martin Ferris asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he made an initial order to pay REP scheme four payments in November 2008; and if so, the reason applicants have been told not to expect payment until January 2009. [46533/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): REPS 4 is a measure under the current Rural Development Programme 2007-13 and is subject to different EU Regulations from the preceding versions of REPS. Under REPS 4, all payments are to be made in just two instalments. The first payment, of 75%, can be made only when all administrative checks on all 2008 applications for REPS 4 and the Single Payment Scheme are completed. This is why it has not yet been possible to release payments even to farmers who applied for REPS 4 some time before the closing date of 15 May.

Most REPS plans are now prepared using eREPS, the electronic planning system approved and funded by my Department. As the information in these plans is in computerised format, the administrative checks can be carried out quickly. However a substantial minority of plans submitted this year were not prepared using eREPS. Administrative checks on these have to be done manually and are extremely time-consuming. An effect of recent industrial action in my Department's local offices was that this process was delayed. While normal working has resumed in the local offices following the intervention of the Labour Relations Commission, there is still much to be done before the administrative checks are completed. In these circumstances my Department sought some flexibility from the European Commission which would have allowed payment of those REPS 4 cases which had been fully cleared, but the Commission were not prepared to allow this. As a result, it is now apparent that REPS 4 payments cannot issue before the end of 2008.

While I am anxious that the REPS 4 payments should go out as soon as possible, and my Department will make every effort to facilitate this, there are of course still over 48,000 farmers in REPS 3 and just under 16,000 of those have anniversary dates on 1 November and 1 December this year. Staff in my Department's local offices are currently engaged in processing the annual payment applications for these farmers, and I have asked them to make every effort to issue as many payments as possible before Christmas.

I have asked senior management in my Department to give me regular updates on the payment situation.

EU Directives.

565. Deputy Tony Gregory asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will identify the person permitting processes within his Department that are not in line with EU Directive 2003/35/EC on public participation in environmental decision making; and the action

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he will take to bring them into compliance with this Directive to enable Ireland to ratify the Aarhus Convention. [46540/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The Public Participation Directive (PPD) was issued by the European Commission in order to provide members of the public with opportunities to participate on the permitting and ongoing regulation of certain categories of activities within Member States. Such opportunities are provided through access to information, justice, and through consultation on certain key documents.

The transposition of the EU Public Participation Directive 2003/35/EC will include consents granted under the Foreshore Act 1933-2005 where an Environmental Impact Assessment is required under the European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations, 1999 (S.I. No. 93 of 1999).

My Department is currently putting in place the necessary measures to ensure that the Foreshore Acts 1933-2005 fully complies with the Public Participation Directive 2003/35/EC.

The Government decided on 2 October 2007 that responsibility for certain foreshore functions under the Foreshore Acts 1933-2005 would transfer to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

My Department is currently putting in place the necessary arrangements to ensure the efficient and effective transfer of the appropriate legislation and associated functions.

My Department will continue to work closely with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the context of progressing the various elements required to fully transpose the EU Public Participation Directive 2003/35/EC in the context of the Foreshore Acts 1933-2005.

Afforestation Programme.

566. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason Ireland no longer avails of European funding for the forestry programme here taking into consideration the requirement for Departments to reduce expenditure; and the cost to the Exchequer through the loss of this funding. [46541/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The provision of 100% grants for the establishment costs of afforestation has been a key element of national forestry policy and is considered essential to overcome the traditional reluctance to plant and to recognise the long-term commitment of land to forestry. However, the maximum grant aid available to applicants in Ireland for any afforestation scheme co-funded from EU and Exchequer funds under the Rural Development Regulation 1698/2005 is 80%.

The EU, however, has no objection to Member States paying a higher rate of aid on a national basis. In fact, the EU makes specific provision in its state aid rules for a 100% rate of aid in countries, like Ireland, where forest cover is particularly low. Consequently, and in order to provide for the continued payment of 100% grants, it was decided not to include the forestry measures under the Rural Development Programme and to fund them from the Exchequer instead.

The overall amount of EU support for rural development in Ireland for the period 2007 to 2013 was fixed at €2.339 billion in 2006 and is fully allocated to other schemes in Ireland's Rural Development Programme. Accordingly, the decision not to include the forestry programme in the Irish Rural Development Programme has no bearing on the total amount of EU support for rural development in Ireland.

Common Agricultural Policy.

567. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his attention has been drawn to the recent report of the Court of Auditors on the failure of cross compliance (details supplied); and if he proposes to publish for farmers the precise obligations deriving from the relevant 19 directives and regulations and define a complete set of verifiable requirements and standards which are understandable for farmers, limited to the farmer's responsibility, applicable and controllable and which take account of the specific characteristics of the areas and farming practices, as recommended in this report. [46542/08]

568. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his attention has been drawn to the recent report of the Court of Auditors on the failure of cross compliance; and if he will assure the Houses of the Oireachtas that Ireland is not one of the member states that have not implemented effective control and sanction systems which provide sufficient assurance on farmers' compliance. [46543/08]

569. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide details of monitoring of cross compliance to recipients of CAP since 2005 to date in 2008. [46544/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): I propose to take Questions Nos. 567 to 569, inclusive, together.

I am aware of the report referred to by the Deputy. My Department conducted a series of countrywide information meetings for farmers on the introduction of the Single Payment Scheme during the latter half of 2004 and again during 2005. In addition, my Department published two separate booklets on the introduction of cross-compliance and copies were sent to every farmer in the country. These booklets dealt with the 18 Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) under cross-compliance. A separate information booklet dealing with the Nitrates element of cross-compliance issued to all farmers during September 2006 and this was followed in November 2006 by a further series of countrywide information seminars for farmers. More recently, in August 2007, my Department issued a further information leaflet to every farmer in the country setting out, in simple language, what to expect in the event of being selected for an on-farm cross-compliance inspection. All of these information booklets are available on my Department's website *www.agriculture.gov.ie*.

Ireland also has a farm advisory service (FAS) in the form of Teagasc and private REPS planners. My Department has organised training for these advisers with particular emphasis on the cross-compliance requirements. Details of all the agencies approved as FAS agencies are held on my Department's website and farmers have been encouraged to make use of these agencies. Furthermore, as advertised in the national press, Teagasc, in conjunction with my Department, has recently undertaken practical on farm demonstrations for farmers on the requirements of cross-compliance.

The rate of on-farm inspection required for cross-compliance is 1% of those farmers to whom the Statutory Management Requirements or GAEC apply. However at least 5% of producers must be inspected under the Bovine Animal Identification and Registration requirements as this level is prescribed under the relevant Regulations. In the sheep sector 3% of producers must be inspected annually involving 5% of animals. Over the four years 2005 to 2008, my Department carried out 23,684 on-the-spot inspections for cross-compliance and applied sanctions in 3,811 cases.

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

I am satisfied that my Department is making every effort to ensure that Irish farmers are fully aware of the cross-compliance requirements. While we have effective monitoring and control arrangements in place, I have asked my officials to examine in detail the recent Court of Audit Special Report and I am happy to consider any recommendations which would further enhance my Department's implementation of the cross-compliance regime.

Aquaculture Development.

570. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason Ireland no longer avails of European funding for the aquaculture industry, taking into consideration the requirement for Departments to reduce expenditure; and the cost to the Exchequer through the loss of this funding. [46545/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The total aid available to Ireland under the EFF amounts to €42 million for the period 2007 — 2013. In line with this funding, an Operational Programme for Fisheries in support of the seafood industry has been developed and approved by the EU Commission. Priority has been given to the Decommissioning of Fishing Vessels Scheme for which a total of €32 million has been set aside. A scheme for vessels over 18 metres in length was launched earlier this year and payments are currently being made.

In relation to aquaculture, the EU Commission was not prepared to support the inclusion of aquaculture development in the EU Operational Programme for Fisheries because of its concerns in relation to environmental compliance issues by Ireland. Aquaculture development will now be supported by state funds. In 2009, €5 million has been made available for aquaculture development support, in addition to funds provided by BIM. A further € 1.46 million has been set aside specifically in 2009 to support compliance of fisheries and aquaculture with respect to activities in Natura 2000 sites.

Question No. 571 answered with Question No. 562.

572. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will recall for assessment aquaculture licenses which operations have been conclusively linked to mortalities of wild salmon by the sustainable management of interactions between aquaculture and wild salmonid fish project funded by the EU and partnered between Ireland, Scotland, and Norway and by the data obtained as part of the national fish stock assessment programme. [46547/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The monitoring and control of aquaculture licences is carried out by my Department in consultation with those bodies, BIM and Marine Institute, provided by statute to carry out that function. All relevant licences now granted by my Department include specific obligations on the licensee in regard to Sea Lice Monitoring and Control.

Grant Payments.

573. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their REP scheme four payment. [46551/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): REPS 4 is a measure under the current Rural Development Programme 2007-13 and is subject to different EU Regu-

lations from the preceding versions of REPS. Under REPS 4, all payments are to be made in just two instalments. The first payment, of 75%, can be made only when all administrative checks on all 2008 applications for REPS 4 and the Single Payment Scheme are completed. This is why it has not yet been possible to release payments even to farmers who applied for REPS 4 some time before the closing date of 15 May.

Most REPS plans are now prepared using eREPS, the electronic planning system approved and funded by my Department. As the information in these plans is in computerised format, the administrative checks can be carried out quickly. However a substantial minority of plans submitted this year were not prepared using eREPS. Administrative checks on these have to be done manually and are extremely time-consuming. An effect of recent industrial action in my Department's local offices was that this process was delayed. While normal working has resumed in the local offices following the intervention of the Labour Relations Commission, there is still much to be done before the administrative checks are completed. In these circumstances my Department sought some flexibility from the European Commission which would have allowed payment of those REPS 4 cases which had been fully cleared, but the Commission were not prepared to allow this. As a result, it is now apparent that REPS 4 payments cannot issue before the end of 2008.

While I am anxious that the REPS 4 payments should go out as soon as possible, and my Department will make every effort to facilitate this, there are of course still over 48,000 farmers in REPS 3 and just under 16,000 of those have anniversary dates on 1 November and 1 December this year. Staff in my Department's local offices are currently engaged in processing the annual payment applications for these farmers, and I have asked them to make every effort to issue as many payments as possible before Christmas. I have asked senior management in my Department to give me regular updates on the payment situation.

Farm Waste Management.

574. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the moneys paid to date or already committed for payment in 2008 for the farm waste management grant; the moneys available for applications outstanding; the funding available in 2009 to pay for applications submitted by 31 December 2008; the time taken to process such applications for payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46560/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): To date in 2008, €364.7 million has been paid by my Department to farmers under the Farm Waste Management Scheme. The 2009 allocation for the Scheme is €125 million. My Department endeavours to ensure that, as far as possible, payments under the Farm Waste Management Scheme are made to farmers in line with the commitments set out in the Charter of Rights for Farmers 2005/2007.

Grant Payments.

575. **Deputy Edward O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when payment in respect of a the REP scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [46626/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): REPS 4 is a measure under the current Rural Development Programme 2007-13 and is subject to different EU Regulations from the preceding versions of REPS. Under REPS 4, all payments are to be made in just two instalments. The first payment, of 75%, can be made only when all administrative checks on all 2008 applications for REPS 4 and the Single Payment Scheme are completed.

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

This is why it has not yet been possible to release payments even to farmers who applied for REPS 4 some time before the closing date of 15 May.

Most REPS plans are now prepared using eREPS, the electronic planning system approved and funded by my Department. As the information in these plans is in computerised format, the administrative checks can be carried out quickly. However a substantial minority of plans submitted this year were not prepared using eREPS. Administrative checks on these have to be done manually and are extremely time-consuming. An effect of recent industrial action in my Department’s local offices was that this process was delayed. While normal working has resumed in the local offices following the intervention of the Labour Relations Commission, there is still much to be done before the administrative checks are completed. In these circumstances my Department sought some flexibility from the European Commission which would have allowed payment of those REPS 4 cases which had been fully cleared, but the Commission were not prepared to allow this. As a result, it is now apparent that REPS 4 payments cannot issue before the end of 2008.

While I am anxious that the REPS 4 payments should go out as soon as possible, and my Department will make every effort to facilitate this, there are of course still over 48,000 farmers in REPS 3 and just under 16,000 of those have anniversary dates on 1 November and 1 December this year. Staff in my Department’s local offices are currently engaged in processing the annual payment applications for these farmers, and I have asked them to make every effort to issue as many payments as possible before Christmas. I have asked senior management in my Department to give me regular updates on the payment situation.

Data Protection.

576. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46658/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The number of Department owned laptops or other data devices, such as Blackberries and memory keys, reported lost or stolen from my Department in 2008 are set out in the following table:

Data Device	Number	Lost/Stolen
Laptop	6	Stolen
Blackberry	1	Lost
Memory Stick	1	Lost

When a device, such as a laptop or Blackberry, is reported lost or stolen, access by that device to the Department’s computer network is immediately suspended and use of the device is blocked. In all cases where devices were reported stolen the theft was reported to the Gardaí. To date, no data concerning members of the public has been compromised. All laptops are protected by use of a user-id and password. The Department has commenced a programme of encrypting all laptops used by its staff.

Departmental Expenditure.

577. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency

under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46673/08]

578. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46688/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): I propose to take Questions Nos. 577 and 578 together.

While procurement arrangements in place in my Department are not specifically for the sourcing of hotel accommodation, all overnight subsistence rates are paid in line with Finance Circular 11/82. Sourcing of hotel accommodation by Bodies under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is, in the first instance, a matter for the Bodies themselves as part of the day-to-day activities governing their operation. Under Section 10.2 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, published by the Department of Finance, in addition to being required to submit to an Annual Report and Accounts, the Chairperson of each State Body is required to submit a separate report covering corporate governance issues including affirmation that all appropriate procedures for procurement are being carried out.

The following are details of expenditure by my Department on hotel accommodation in countries other than Ireland in the each of the years 2004 to date in 2008:

Expenditure on Hotel Accommodation for Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Year	€
2004	303,469.89
2005	268,813.38
2006	280,879.61
2007	331,113.00
2008 to date	361,953.12

It is not possible to supply information in relation to expenditure on hotel accommodation within Ireland for the period in question because in accordance with Civil Service regulations officers are paid a flat rate for overnight subsistence and they are not required to specify the type of accommodation they use.

Departmental Property.

579. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46703/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The number of servers that are owned by this Department is 376. The average memory capacity of each server is 5 Gigabytes. The average windows based server hard disk capacity is 230 Gigabytes. The implementation of servers by agencies under the remit of my Department is an operational matter for the agencies themselves.

Farm Waste Management.

580. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to parliamentary Question No. 393 of 9 December 2008, if his Department ever approached the European Commission for approval to extend the deadline of 31 December 2008 for completion of work by farmers under the revised farm waste management scheme; if so, the dates on which such approaches were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46819/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The deadline of 31 December 2008 for completion of work by farmers under the revised Farm Waste Management Scheme introduced by my Department in March 2006 is a condition of the EU state aid approval for the Scheme. The European Commission has since reaffirmed that it expects Ireland to respect this deadline strictly.

Grant Payments.

581. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will be granted their entitlements from the lease which has been transferred to their name; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46921/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application was received on 14 May 2008 requesting the transfer of 23.93 Single Payment Scheme entitlements to the person named from another farmer by way of lease. The application was processed on 12 November 2008. In addition to the payments that issued to the person named on 16 October and 1 December relating to her own entitlements, a supplementary payment for the leased entitlements issued on 9 December.

Animal Feedstuffs.

582. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department monitors drying processes for animal or human foodstuffs in this State, including the fuels used in these processes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46931/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): While the use of oil in the generation of feed drying facilities has not, heretofore, caused problems within the feed industry, this aspect is now being pursued with the feed industry and with the relevant Regulatory State Agencies that are involved.

583. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the list of suppliers of oil for the drying process at a plant (details supplied) in County Carlow; the periods of supply relevant to each supplier over the period since 1 September 2008; if the oil or any quantity of it was recycled; the source from which it came from; the processes it was subjected to, to make it suitable for the purposes of the operation there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46933/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): As this matter is the subject of a Garda investigation it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this time.

Departmental Staff.

584. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the budg-

eted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46979/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): There is no specific budgetary provision for staff incremental pay increases in 2009. The cost, which is part of the overall salaries provision for the Department, will be determined by the numbers of staff qualifying for increments and the stage in the year from which individual incremental payments are made. Precise information is not readily available but the estimated cost for my Department in 2008 and 2009 is €2,054,000 and €2,245,000 respectively.

It is not feasible to compile information on comparative costs from 2002 to 2007 having regard to the complexity and extent of the calculations for the staff numbers involved. Incremental increases awarded by State Agencies which come under the remit of my Department are an operational matter for the agencies themselves.

Decentralisation Programme.

585. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of civil servants and other public servants, who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government's decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46994/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My Department's original Decentralisation Implementation Plan allowed for a phased move to Portlaoise and the 2005, 2006 and 2007 advance phases were completed on schedule. To date, the Department has met its targets set out in its original plan and in total, since the programme was announced, there has been an increase of 297 full-time posts in Portlaoise and 84 in Clonakilty. The Department's move to Clonakilty is now substantially complete. Of the 297 posts moved to Portlaoise and 84 to Clonakilty, all were civil servants; 220 and 33 respectively were from Dublin.

The OPW announced late last year that a consortium, the Macquarie Partnership, has won the tender for the project to build the permanent offices in Portlaoise, Mullingar and Carlow (a design, finance, build and maintain contract). Planning permission has been granted and following the budget announcement that the project will proceed, we are expecting an update on timeframes shortly. To reflect the changes to the timetable and the progress so far, as well as the evolving operating environment, a revision to the Department's Decentralisation Implementation Plan is now being considered. As part of this an additional advance phase has been agreed that will involve some 150 posts in the period until completion of the permanent accommodation. The exact breakdown of these posts in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere is expected to be similar to the proportions evidenced to date.

Departmental Staff.

586. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001

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and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47009/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table. The total number of staff in each category is not adjusted to take account of staff working on a part-time basis.

Number in each Income Band as at 17th December 2008

Grades	Below €50,000	€50,001 – €60,000	€60,001 – €70,000	€70,001 – €80,000	€80,001 – €90,000	€90,001 – €100,000	Over €100,000	TOTAL
Administrative Officers	18	8	1					
Advisory Counsel Grade 3				1				
Agricultural Inspectors			15	24	60			
Area Superintendent			19					
Asst Secretary							11	
Asst Agricultural Insp Agric	34	59	16					
Asst Principal			14	77	49	13		
Chemist		1	2					
Chargehand Craft	1							
Chief Analyst				1				
Chief Inspector Agric							1	
Chief Veterinary Officer							1	
Civilian Drivers	4							
Cleaners	28							
Clerical Officers	1,259							
Craftsmen	5							
Dairy Produce Officer		9						
Deputy Chief Veterinary Off							4	
Deputy Chief Analyst				4				
Director Of Laboratories								
Director of Coford	1							
District Superintendent		41	82					
Engineer Grade 1, 2 & 3 Civil	3	4	7	3	10			
Executive Officers	441	113						
First Asst Solicitor Agric				1				1
Forestry Inspector Grade 1,2 & 3	7	2	19	5	4			
General Operatives	65							

Number in each Income Band as at 17th December 2008 — *continued*

Grades	Below €50,000	€50,001 – €60,000	€60,001 – €70,000	€70,001 – €80,000	€80,001 – €90,000	€90,001 – €100,000	Over €100,000	TOTAL
Harb. Constables	2							
Harbour Master	2		2					
Head Laboratory Attendant	1							
Head Services Officer	1							
Higher Executive Officers	40	208						
Higher Seed Analyst	3							
Ind. Foremen	6							
Inspector Grade 1 & 2 & Fisheries			4	8	2		2	
Laboratory Analyst	43	34						
Laboratory Attendant	34							
Librarian		1						
Minister							1	
Minister Of State		2						
Miscellaneous Grade	27		1	1				
Poultry Officer		6						
Principal							33	
Professional Accountant Gr 1					2	5		
Research Officer					1	14		
SAO	59	227		1	9		1	
Secretary General								
Secretarial Assistant	2							
Seed Analyst	14							
Senior Auditor				1				
Senior Dairy Produce Officer		4						

Number in each Income Band as at 17th December 2008 — *continued*

Grades	Below €50,000	€50,001 – €60,000	€60,001 – €70,000	€70,001 – €80,000	€80,001 – €90,000	€90,001 – €100,000	Over €100,000	TOTAL
Senior Inspector		3	48			2	13	
Senior Lab Analyst	1							
Senior Legal Clerk								
Senior Research Officer		1					16	
Senior Seed Analyst		2						
Senior Serological Assit								
Senior Superintend Vet Insp							10	
Senior Surveyor	1							
Serological Assistant	38							
Services Attendant	9							
Services Officer	39							
Staff Officer	133							
Storekeeper	1							
Superinten Sen Research Off							5	
Superintendent Surveyor			1					
Superintending Vet Insp							56	
Supervising Serological Asst	12							
Supervisory Poultry Officer		1						
TAO	553	6						
Technical Grades L					38			
Veterinary Insp						152		
Total	2,887	728	296	129	175	187	197	4,599

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

587. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47024/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The numbers of civil servants working in my Department from 2002 to 2008 are listed as follows. The figures quoted refer to Whole Time Equivalents (WTE).

End Year	WTE Staff Numbers
2001	4,546
2002	4,521
2003	4,578 ¹
2004	4,538
2005	4,441
2006	4,242
2007	4,307 ²
End November 2008	4,165

¹This figure includes Forestry staff added to my Department in that year.

²This figure includes Fisheries staff added to my Department in 2007.

Departmental Offices.

588. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47039/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Civil servants from my Department carry out their duties in over 250 locations throughout the country. There were 4,165 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) staff employed in the Department at the end of November 2008. The following table provides details of these staff, broken down by grade category. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food breakdown of staff by grade category at end November 2008:

Grade	WTE
Admin Officer	24.6
Advisory Counsel Grade	1.0
Agricultural Inspector	94.1
Area Superintendent	22.0
Assistant Secretary	11.0
Asst Agricultural Insp Agric	108.4
Asst Principal	135.9
Asst Prncp Snr Sys Analyst	11.0
Chemist	3.0
Chief Inspector Agric	1.0
Chief Technologist	1.0
Chief Veterinary Officer	1.0
Civilian Driver	4.0

Grade	WTE
Cleaner	19.5
Cleaner Part- Time	12.0
Clerical Off	1,047.3
Clerical Off Temp	23.6
Clerical Officer Temporary Ter	10.0
Dairy Produce Officer	9.0
Deputy Chief Technologist	3.0
Deputy Chief Veterinary Off	3.0
Deputy Dir Vet Research Lab	1.0
Director Vet Research Lab	1.0
District Superintendent	121.7
Engineer	23.0
Executive Officer	489.0
First Asst Solicitor Agric	2.0
Forestry Inspector	31.0
General Operative	1.0
Harbour Master	6.0
Head Laboratory Attendant	1.0
Head Of Legal Services In Agri	1.0
Head Services Officer	1.0
Higher Executive Officer	282.5
Higher Seed Analyst	3.8
Inspector	12.0
Inspector & Eng Fisheries	2.0
Inspector Of Fisher/Eng Gr 1	1.0
Laboratory Analyst	70.6
Laboratory Attendant Ag&Mar	35.0
Laboratory Attendant S Lab	1.0
Librarian	1.0
Personal Assistant	2.0
Personal Secretary	2.0
Poultry Officer	6.0
Principal	39.6
Professional Accountant Gr 1	1.0
Research Officer	20.8
Secretary General Agriculture	1.0
Section Managers Marine	2.0
Seed Analyst	10.9
Senior Auditor	1.0
Senior Dairy Produce Officer	4.0
Senior Inspector	14.0
Senior Lab Analyst Class 2	2.0
Senior Laboratory Analyst	45.9
Senior Legal Clerk	1.0
Senior Research Officer	14.6
Senior Seed Analyst	1.0
Senior Serological Assistant	1.0
Senior Superintend Vet Insp	12.0

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Grade	WTE
Senior Surveyor	1.0
Serological Assistant	33.6
Services Attendant	9.0
Services Officer	40.0
Staff Officer	120.2
Superinten Sen Research Off	3.0
Superintendent Surveyor	1.0
Superintending Vet Insp	55.0
Supervising Poultry Officer	1.0
Supervising Serological Asst	9.0
Supervisory Agric Off	266.5
Supervisory Agric Off Ag&Ee	20.0
Technical Agricultural Off	550.9
Technical Grades Level 4	6.0
Veterinary Inspector	230.0
Visually Impaired Telephonist	3.0
Wildlife Inspector Grade 2	1.0

Departmental Agencies.

589. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[47054/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Included in the Budget statement by the Minister for Finance on the 14th October was the decision to transfer the marketing functions of Bord Iascaigh Mhara to An Bord Bia and to merge the National Council for Forestry Research and Development (COFORD) into my Department.

The Government's initiative in transferring the seafood marketing and promotion functions to Bord Bia will ensure the strengthening of seafood marketing as part of a more cohesive overall food marketing effort, while allowing BIM to focus all its energies in developing the seafood industry in line with the Cawley Strategy — Steering A New Course.

The integration of seafood marketing with the State's domestic and international food marketing body will deliver synergies and opportunities for seafood producers where Bord Bia can draw on its expertise in the food sector to identify key future trends and opportunities for growth while pre-empting and reacting to market, competitors and global changes.

The amalgamation of the promotion and market development functions of BIM with Bord Bia, will enable one single agency to manage Ireland's food and drink marketing effort on domestic and international markets. This will facilitate a more effective and efficient marketing effort. It will include the merging of the agencies presence internationally, which overlap in the four markets where BIM currently has a presence. My ambition is that the transfer will be effective from early in 2009, subject to the appropriate legal instruments being in place.

As Bord Bia determines funding priorities and allocations within its Estimate it is not possible at this stage to estimate possible savings to the Exchequer for the years mentioned. The amalgamation of COFORD into the Forest Service of my Department early next year will produce savings in the area of accommodation currently taken for that Organisation. Further possible savings will be accessed as part of the overall estimate provision for the Forest Service in 2009 and beyond.

Departmental Funding.

590. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the amount of taxpayers' money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon referendum. [47094/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My Department pays an annual membership fee to the Institute for International and European Affairs. The amount paid in 2008 was €6,000.

EU Funding.

591. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the amount of EU funding received by his Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under his aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47237/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My Department's Compendium of Agricultural Statistics, which is published annually, provides a detailed breakdown of EU receipts in Ireland, including those from the FEOGA Guidance and Guarantee Funds, and from the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund and the European Agricultural Rural Development Fund which have replaced them since 2007.

The Compendium for 2008, which is at present being finalised, shows EU receipts of more than €43 billion in the period 1973-2007, and € 36.137 billion in the 20 years from 1987 to 2007. The following is a copy of the Tables to be published in the 2008 Compendium for the Deputy's information. To date in 2008, EU receipts by my Department amount to €288.637 million.

EU Receipts to Ireland, 1973-2007

Year	FEOGA Guarantee	FEOGA Guidance	European Agriculture Guarantee Fund	European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development	European Social Fund	European Regional Development Fund	Cohesion Fund	Other*	Total
	€m	€m			€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
1973					—	—		—	0.0
1974					4.6	—		—	4.6
1975					5.1	2.3		0.6	8.0
1976					5.8	10.8		2.3	18.9
1977					10.4	10.8		4.7	25.9
1978					24.5	14.1		5.7	44.3
1979					36.6	32.4		75.9	144.9
1980					59.3	58.9		69.3	187.6
1981					57.5	69.3		76.7	203.5
1982					92.9	83.9		74.8	251.7
1983					117.7	73.9		90.7	282.3
1984					107.0	82.8		29.6	219.4
1985					179.4	96.5		24.1	300.0
1986					161.8	97.9		14.6	274.3
1987	939.1	86.2			245.7	111.0		15.1	1,397.1
1988	1,064.7	81.8			161.0	164.6		2.9	1,474.9
1989	1,223.3	97.4			176.0	143.4		4.7	1,644.7
1990	1,633.8	119.2			163.2	285.8		8.6	2,210.6
1991	1,694.3	182.0			470.7	434.1		13.8	2,794.9
1992	1,414.0	187.2			352.1	564.5		14.1	2,531.9
1993	1,627.6	159.9			395.7	589.7	51.7	25.4	2,849.8
1994	1,490.3	166.2			351.8	223.0	86.6	20.1	2,338.0
1995	1,460.5	181.5			325.3	454.7	127.1	17.5	2,566.5

EU Receipts to Ireland, 1973-2007 — continued

Year	FEOGA Guarantee	FEOGA Guidance	European Agriculture Guarantee Fund	European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development	European Social Fund	European Regional Development Fund	Cohesion Fund	Other*	Total
	€m	€m			€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
1996	1,732.6	191.2			321.1	377.2	176.4	21.8	2,820.3
1997	1,929.8	210.7			344.1	452.3	216.6	36.6	3,190.0
1998	1,618.7	235.7			397.6	596.8	142.6	23.9	3,015.1
1999	1,723.0	106.3			265.5	265.0	290.0	29.1	2,678.9
2000	1,681.4	34.7			220.6	513.1	152.2	—	2,601.9
2001	1,854.2	20.7			135.0	345.9	297.1	92.3	2,745.2
2002	1,709.3	11.4			107.5	438.3	206.0	29.9	2,502.4
2003	1,945.2	16.6			111.4	293.5	172.6	35.5	2,574.8
2004	1,829.7	61.9			208.3	449.3	25.8	36.5	2,611.5
2005	1,806.0	33.0			211.2	255.6	15.6	61.1	2,382.5
2006	1,723.3	41.4	1,388.0	374.0	160.9	192.3	39.5	43.4	2,200.8
2007		50.2			136.1	105.4	0.0	35.1	2,088.8
Total 1973-2007	32,100.5	2,274.9	1,388.0	374.0	6,123.3	7,889.0	1,999.9	1,036.4	53,186.0
<i>Note:</i> Receipts shown in Table N1 differ from claims submitted in subsequent tables.									

* Includes EMS, Veterinary Fund, Education, Fisheries Protection, etc.

Source: Department of Finance (Budgetary and Economic Statistics).

Commencing in 2007, the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) / (FEOGA), has been replaced by two new funds;

- The European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF);
- The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Following the setting up of the new funds a discontinuity has been inserted into the table with the column headings being changed to reflect the 2007-2013 Financial Framework Headings for agriculture.

Animal Diseases.

592. **Deputy Mary Alexandra White** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of badgers captured by each district veterinary office, by year, in the past ten years. [47250/08]

593. **Deputy Mary Alexandra White** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of badgers, by district veterinary office licence, which have been subject to post-mortem. [47251/08]

594. **Deputy Mary Alexandra White** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of badgers that were subject to post-mortem which tested positive for tuberculosis per district veterinary office licence. [47252/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): I propose to take Questions Nos. 592 to 594, inclusive, together.

All badgers captured are subject to a gross post mortem. However, due to the low sensitivity of the technique, the Department carries out pooled tissue culturing on a percentage of all badgers captured (currently approximately 2,500) across all of the DVOs. Culturing a pooled sample, which involves mixing tissue extracted from up to 14 sites from an individual badger, is significantly less sensitive than the most detailed culturing techniques available (which involve culturing 30 pieces of tissue for each badger), but is deemed to be sufficient for research purposes. From a cost perspective, it would not be economic to carry out laboratory culturing on all badgers and the current arrangements are considered by this Department to be a prudent use of scarce resources. Where detailed post mortem with culturing of tissue is undertaken, TB has been confirmed in 45%-50% of badgers.

The number of badgers that have been subject to post mortem and the results of these for each District Veterinary Office area are not available. The total number of badgers captured over the past 10 years is set out as follows:

Year	Number of badgers removed
1998	2,474
1999	3,533
2000	4,727
2001	3,558
2002	5,686
2003	4,737
2004	2,973
2005	5,171
2006	5,589
2007	5,937

A detailed breakdown of the numbers captured by each DVO is not currently available. However, my Department will provide the Deputy with this information as soon as it can be compiled.

Cuiteachas Ranna.

595. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Dinny McGinley** den Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta an aon-

taíonn sé gur buille mór don Ghaeilge agus don Ghaeltacht cealú an deontais caipitíochta do na coláistí samhraidh; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [46796/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): Aithním an ról tábhachtach atá ag na coláistí samhraidh Gaeltachta i saol na Gaeilge agus molaim obair na gcoláistí as ucht líofacht a chothú i measc na mac léinn a dhéanann freastal orthu. Is ábhar dóchais é go leanann líon suntasach mac léinn orthu ag freastal ar na coláistí seo sa Ghaeltacht. Aithním chomh maith go mbíonn tionchar nach beag ag na coláistí ar eacnamaíocht na gceantar Gaeltachta in a bhfuil siad lonnaithe.

In a ainneoin seo agus in ainneoin an mhéadaithe de €302 milliún atá sa bhuiséad oideachais do 2009, éacht nach beag agus an eacnamaíocht mar atá sé, ní raibh aon dul as ach roinnt cinntí cruá, deacra a dhéanamh. Léiríodh na cinntí seo i measc na bhfógairtí Lá an Bhuiséid, agus ina measc bhí cealú an deontais a bhí á íoc ag mo Roinnse do na coláistí samhraidh Gaeilge. B’ é ráta an chúnamh deontais seo a cuireadh ar fáil ná tuairim is €53 in aghaidh gach mac léinn a bhí rollaithe ar chúrsa trí seachtaine i 2008, méid ab ionann is cuid bheag go leor den chostas foriomlán a ghabh le freastal ar an gcúrsa.

Leanfaidh tacaíocht an Stáit do mhic léinn a fhreastalaíonn ar na coláistí samhraidh Gaeltachta i bhfoirm na bhfóirdheontas a íoctar le teaghlaigh a chuireann cóiríocht ar fáil do na mic léinn. Leanfar leis an maoiniú a dhéantar ar fhreastal ábhar oidí ar na coláistí samhraidh sa Ghaeltacht. Leanfar freisin leis na socrúithe maidir le saoire phearsanta bhreise a cheadú do mhúinteoirí bunscoile a mhúineann ar na coláistí samhraidh.

Toisc gurb iad áiteanna dúchais na teanga, tuigim an tábhacht chultúrtha agus sochtheangeolaíoch a bhaineann leis na limistéir Ghaeltacht go háirithe, d’fhoghlaimoirí na teanga agus tá áthas orm go leanfar le tacaíocht a thabhairt dóibh.

Special Educational Needs.

596. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will reverse the decision to close the special needs class at a school (details supplied) in County Leitrim. [46519/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): As the Deputy will be aware, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through the local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports. This includes the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required and the discontinuation of such classes where the need no longer exists.

The continuation of the class referred to by the Deputy is no longer warranted on the basis that the children enrolled in the class do not meet my Department’s criteria for enrolment in the class. A number of discussions have taken place involving the HSE, NCSE and National Educational Psychological Service to determine the best arrangements for pupils with a disability living in the locality. The SENO is awaiting proposals from the school management in this context. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child’s special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Departmental Funding.

597. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the funding which will be provided for Gaeltacht summer schools following the abolition of the capital grant

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scheme previously provided; the position in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46557/08]

598. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the effects on an industry following the cutback in a capital grant scheme (details supplied); and if he will reconsider same. [46558/08]

611. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if his attention has been drawn to the impact the abolition of capital grants for Irish colleges will have on the Irish language, the economy of the Gaeltacht and the Irish colleges themselves; his views on restoring the grant for 2009 and future years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46800/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 597, 598 and 611 together.

I recognise the important role of the Gaeltacht summer colleges and I commend the work of the colleges for fostering fluency among the students who attend them. It is encouraging that a significant number of students continue to attend these colleges in the Gaeltacht. I recognise also that the colleges have a considerable influence on the economy in the Gaeltacht areas in which they are located. However, the 2009 Budget required difficult choices to be made across all areas of public expenditure. These decisions were made to control public expenditure and to ensure sustainability in the long run. In this respect Education, while protected to a much greater extent than most other areas of public expenditure, could not be totally spared.

Notwithstanding the increase of €302 million in the education budget for 2009, which is a real achievement in the current economic climate, a number of tough and difficult decisions had to be taken. These decisions were outlined in the Budget day announcements and included the abolition of my Department’s grant to Irish summer colleges. The rate of grant assistance provided per student enrolled on a three week course in 2008 was approximately €53 which represented a relatively small portion of the overall cost of attending.

State support will continue for students who attend the summer colleges in the form of the subsidies which are paid to families which accommodate students. The funding of student teachers’ attendance at summer colleges in the Gaeltacht and the arrangements regarding additional personal leave for primary teachers who teach in summer colleges will also continue. I understand the cultural and sociological importance of Gaeltacht areas for students of the language and I am delighted that support will continue to be given to them.

Grant Payments.

599. **Deputy Seán Ardagh** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will examine the concerns expressed in correspondence from the school principal of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 10; if he will respond to their concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46559/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The 2009 Budget required difficult choices to be made across all areas of public expenditure. These decisions were made to control public expenditure and to ensure sustainability in the long run. In this respect, the education sector, while protected to a much greater extent than most other areas of public expenditure, could not be totally spared. The various impacts at school level were included in the Budget day announcements. Even with the Budget measures in place there will still be a significantly increased borrowing requirement in 2009.

My Department will be advising individual schools in the normal way in relation to their staffing and grant allocations. The preparatory work for this has commenced with the processing of enrolment data that has been received from schools. The staffing allocation processes, including notification to schools, will commence early in the New Year. The allocation process includes appellate mechanisms under which schools can appeal against the allocation due to them under the staffing schedules. In addition to the mainstream classroom teachers, my Department also allocates teaching resources to schools for special needs and language support. The final allocation to a school is also a function of the operation of the redeployment panels, which provide for the retention of a teacher in an existing school if a new post is not available within the agreed terms of the scheme.

I have no difficulty in setting out for this House or for the public generally the overall changes on aggregate teacher numbers or on grant levels in schools for the 2009/10 school year. I will do this when the allocation processes have been completed. Furthermore, the staffing schedule will be published; it is a transparent and clear way of ensuring that schools are treated consistently and fairly and know where they stand.

Schools Building Projects.

600. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to parliamentary Question No. 512 of 4 November 2008, when payment will issue to a contractor (details supplied) in County Clare; if the review of all payments have been made regarding the project in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46628/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school in question is seeking funding over and above that sanctioned by the Department for the installation of prefabs. The issue is under consideration in the Department and it will be in contact with the school authority shortly in relation to this matter.

601. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science if his attention has been drawn to the condition of one of the prefabricated buildings at a school (details supplied) in County Cavan; if he will intervene to secure a new school building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46629/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school referred to by the Deputy has an application with my Department for large scale capital funding for an extension project. The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction is dependent on the prioritisation of competing demands on the funding available under my Departments capital budget. This project will be considered on an on-going basis in the context of my Department’s multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. However it is open to the school in question to apply for an emergency works grant. Emergency works grants are made available to schools most in need of resources as a result of unforeseen emergencies of a capital nature that may rise during the school year. Should the school submit an application it will be assessed and the school notified of the outcome.

Special Educational Needs.

602. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an educational services provider (details supplied) that has been working in conjunction with his Department for four years in the provision of early intervention for children with an autistic spectrum disorder; if his Department will allow the

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parents to use their home tuition scheme grant in order for their children to continue attending the services provided here in 2009; the plans he has in place for the provisions to allow attendance beyond 2009 in order that significant savings can be made by the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46646/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): My Department is continuing to work with the service provider in question in the context of a proposal which they submitted in relation to home tuition payment arrangements.

Higher Education Grants.

603. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of higher education grant applications made in 2008-2009; the number of successful applications; the number of applications that have been paid out to students; the number of unsuccessful applications; the number of applications that still have to be processed; if he will provide the information in tabular readable form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46652/08]

604. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of money allocated for higher education grants in 2008-2009; the amount of money that has been paid out to students to date for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46653/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 603 and 604 together.

My Department funds four maintenance grant schemes for third level and further education students. These are the Higher Education Grants Scheme, the Vocational Education Committees’ Scholarships Scheme, the Third Level Maintenance Grants Scheme for Trainees and the Maintenance Grants Scheme for Students attending Post Leaving Certificate Courses. The Higher Education Grants Scheme is administered by the local authorities. The other three schemes are administered by the Vocational Education Committees.

In January each year my Department carries out a survey of the 66 local authorities and VEC’s in respect of the status of applications. The survey indicates, on a specified date, the number of applications received, the number awarded a grant, the number refused a grant and the status of other applications on hand. The details in respect of applications for student grants for the academic year 2008/09 will not be available until the January 2009 survey is completed and analysed.

In relation to the amount of money allocated for higher education grants I can confirm that the allocation in 2008 is €263 million. This allocation spans two academic years — the second and third recoupments of the 2007/08 academic year and the first recoupments of the 2008/09 academic year. The first recoupments of the 2008/09 academic year are currently being processed by my Department; this process will be completed by the end of December.

Data Protection.

605. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the equipment and data that was lost or stolen from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46663/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): No desktop computers, laptops or blackberry devices were reported as lost or stolen in my Department in the past 12 months.

One USB memory key was reported lost but was subsequently found. No data, including personal data, was lost.

Departmental Expenditure.

606. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of money spent on hotel accommodation by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for each of the years 2004 to date in 2008; if he will provide the information available in tabular readable form. [46678/08]

607. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the procurement arrangements in place in his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department for the sourcing of hotel accommodation for him, for his Departmental staff and staff at each State agency, when overnight accommodation is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46693/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 606 and 607 together.

The information in relation to expenditure on hotel accommodation by my Department is being compiled and will be forwarded to the deputy as soon as possible. In relation to the procurement arrangements in place in my Department the position is as follows. In instances where overnight accommodation is required for particular purposes for example conferences, training and development programmes etc where possible, quotes are obtained from a range of hotels which best meet the accommodation and facilities requirements of the particular event. Advice is usually sought from the local Irish embassy in relation to obtaining suitable accommodation for the Minister at official events abroad. With regard to bodies under the aegis of my Department the expenditure incurred and the procurement arrangements are a matter for each agency and this information is not collated centrally.

I recently wrote to the Chairpersons of agencies under my Department’s aegis to remind them of the need to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in respect of expenditure of public funds generally and in particular in relation to business travel and subsistence expenditure. I emphasised the importance of the agencies being in a position to provide assurance, through appropriate control procedures and monitoring arrangements, that the necessary measures are in place to ensure compliance with prescribed procedures in relation to expenditure and that such procedures are documented and being implemented as required by statute, regulation or guideline as appropriate.

Departmental Property.

608. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of computer servers that are owned or leased by his Department and each State agency under the aegis of his Department; and the amount of capacity on each server. [46708/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): In total my Department has 124 servers supporting a range of systems and services and including production, development, test, and training environments. They are categorised in the following table based on storage capacity. The memory and processor capacity varies depending on the function of the server. My Department owns all of the servers.

With regard to the agencies under the aegis of my Department, each agency is responsible for its own Information Technology services and the number of servers in each agency is

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therefore a matter for the individual agency. This information is not monitored or collated centrally.

However if the Deputy is interested in a particular agency my Department officials will be happy to arrange for the provision of this information.

Size from (GBs)	Size to (GBs)	Number of Servers
0	499	82
500	999	36
1,000	1,999	4
> 2000		2
Total		124

Schools Refurbishment.

609. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if an application has been received from a school (details supplied) in County Donegal for an extension and refurbishment; when the application was made; the stage the planning is at; when it is expected that approval will be given; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46718/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I can confirm to the Deputy that an application was received in 2000 from Co Donegal VEC for large scale capital funding for an extension/refurbishment project at the school to which he refers.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction is dependent on the prioritisation of competing demands on the funding available under my Departments capital budget. This project will be considered on an on-going basis in the context of my Department’s multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

Schools Building Projects.

610. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if an application has been received in his Department for a new school for a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; when the application was made; the stage the project is at; when it is expected that the project will be progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46719/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application in 2000 to my Department for large scale capital funding for a new school. Following assessment it was determined that a 24 classroom school would be required and the appointment of a design team is awaited.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction is dependent on the prioritisation of competing demands on the funding available under my Department’s capital budget. This project will be considered in the context of my Department’s multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

Question No. 611 answered with Question No. 597.

612. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Science the progress in the provision of a new school (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46801/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The development of a building project for the school in question is at an early stage.

The commencement and progression of all large scale building projects from initial design stage through to construction phase, including this project, will be considered on an on-going basis in the context of my Department’s Multi-Annual School Building and Modernisation Programme.

Departmental Expenditure.

613. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Science the cost for each of the years 2002 to 2007 for the provision of annual rental or lease of prefabs for classroom and facilities at primary and second level schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46802/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The amount spent on renting temporary accommodation, including — but not limited to — prefabricated accommodation for each of the years 2002 to 2007 is as follows:

- 2007: €35.5m (5.49% of total spend of €647m on school buildings);
- 2006: €24.5m (4.95% of total spend of €495m on school buildings);
- 2005: €15.7m (3.1% of total spend of €501m);
- 2004: €11.3m (3.4% of total spend of 333m);
- 2003: €9.4m (2.9% of total spend of €327m);
- 2002: €8.4m (2.4% of total spend of €344m).

The Deputy will be aware that demand for additional accommodation in schools has risen significantly over the last number of years, with the appointment of 6,000 extra teachers in the primary sector alone since 2002. In considering the need to provide extra resource and other teachers to schools in recent years, the Government could have decided to make children wait until permanent accommodation could be provided. However, we prioritised putting the extra teachers into schools as soon as possible. Against this background, my Department has nonetheless managed to keep expenditure on temporary accommodation low. It should be noted that the amount spent on rental accommodation was still only 5.5% of the total investment in school buildings in 2007.

It should also be noted that temporary accommodation is not limited to prefabs and can also involve the rental of high quality buildings.

School Staffing.

614. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of permanent teaching posts created by sector at second level in each of the years 2000 to date in 2008. [46804/08]

615. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of contracts of indefinite duration posts created by sector at second level in each of the years 2000 to date in 2008. [46805/08]

616. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of pro rata fixed term contracts created by sector at second level in each of the years 2000 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46806/08]

617. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the permanency ration across each sector at second level in each of the years 2000 to date in 2008. [46807/08]

618. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of casual part-time created by sector at second level in each of the years 2000 to date in 2008. [46808/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 614 to 618, inclusive, together.

The number of permanent teaching posts available in individual schools at any one time is determined in accordance with the agreed criteria relating to the application of the pupil teacher ratio. It is a matter for the individual school authority, as employer, to determine whether any particular post when vacated may be filled on a permanent basis.

In arriving at its decision in this regard, the school authority must take account of the current and future requirements of the school and the flexibility needed to meet those requirements.

The information in the format requested by the Deputy is not available in my Department. I will arrange for information in regard to the current number of posts in the different categories referred to by the Deputy to be forwarded to him.

Disadvantaged Status.

619. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science his views on including schools (details supplied) in County Roscommon in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools programme; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that both areas are high unemployment blackspots. [46809/08]

620. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the criteria used in including and giving recognition to schools under the DEIS programme; if he and his Department are penalising schools (details supplied) for working harder, getting better results and ensuring better attendance by not including them in the DEIS programme even though they satisfied the qualifying criteria and were part of the disadvantaged programme and the fact that Castlerea and Ballaghaderreen Central Statistics Office figures confirm more families are unemployed in the region. [46810/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 619 and 620 together.

The schools to which the Deputy refers are among the schools that were judged by an independent identification process in 2005 not to have a sufficient level of disadvantage among their pupils to warrant their inclusion in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools), the Action Plan for educational inclusion. The next identification process is scheduled

to be held at the end of the current DEIS programme which runs from 2005-2010. There will not be an opportunity before this to be included in the current DEIS programme of supports.

These schools were among 73 post primary schools that retained resources, both human and financial, under pre-existing schemes and programmes for addressing educational disadvantage. When DEIS was introduced, a commitment was given as a concessionary measure to these schools that they would retain a level of support for the duration of the DEIS Initiative.

While it is appreciated that the discontinuation of these resources will impact on these schools, given the current volatile and challenging economic climate, difficult decisions had to be made in order to contain public sector spending. One of these decisions was to advance the withdrawal of such supports from non DEIS schools to the beginning of the next school year.

The main focus of Social Inclusion measures will be to retain resources in DEIS schools. There is a need to focus targeted resources on the schools in most need and this approach is in line with the broad thrust of the recommendations of the Comptroller and Auditor General which are set out in his report on Primary Disadvantage of 2006, which recommended that my Department should focus its educational disadvantage measures on those schools serving the most disadvantaged communities.

The process of identifying schools for participation in DEIS was managed by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) on behalf of my Department and supported by quality assurance work co-ordinated through the Department's regional offices and the Inspectorate.

The ERC's overall approach was guided by the definition of educational disadvantage in the Education Act (1998), as: “. . . the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools”.

In the primary sector, the identification process was based on a survey carried out by the ERC in May 2005, from which a response rate of more than 97% was achieved. The analysis of the survey returns from primary schools by the ERC identified the socio-economic variables that collectively best predict achievement, and these variables were then used to identify schools for participation in the School Support Programme. The variables involved were:

- % unemployment
- % local authority accommodation
- % lone parenthood
- % Travellers
- % large families (5 or more children)
- % pupils eligible for free books.

In the case of second-level schools, the Department supplied the ERC with centrally-held data from the Post-Primary Pupils and State Examinations Commission databases. Based on an analysis of these data, the variables used to determine eligibility for inclusion in the School Support Programme were as follows:

- Medical card data for Junior Certificate candidates (including Junior Certificate School Programme candidates) 2002, 2003, 2004

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- Junior Certificate retention rates by school for the 1995, 1996 and 1997 school entry cohorts Junior Certificate exam results aggregated to school level (expressed as an OPS — “Overall Performance Scale” — score).

This was based on each student’s performance in the seven subjects in which s/he performed best aggregated to school level for the 2002 and 2003 examination cohorts Leaving Certificate retention rates by school for the 1995, 1996 and 1997 school entry cohorts.

The identification process was in line with international best practice and had regard to and employed the existing and most appropriate data sources available.

A review mechanism was put in place to address the concerns of schools that did not qualify for inclusion in DEIS but regarded themselves as having a level of disadvantage which was of a scale sufficient to warrant their inclusion in the programme. The review process operated under the direction of an independent person, charged with ensuring that all relevant identification processes and procedures were properly followed in the case of schools applying for a review.

Out of a total of 3,300 primary and 733 second-level schools, 876 schools have been included under the DEIS action plan. These comprise 673 primary schools and 203 second-level schools.

Targeting resources at the most disadvantaged schools that are working to counteract educational disadvantage will continue to be a priority for the Government.

School Staffing.

621. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the measures of supervision under health and safety that are necessary in schools. [46811/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 sets out the responsibilities on individual school management authorities to have a safety statement in place in their schools. The Statement should identify potential hazards, assess the risks to health and safety and put appropriate provision in place to safeguard the safety and health of employees and pupils. The Safety Statement should be reviewed on a regular basis. In practical terms, individual school authorities are best placed to assess the detail of their own health and safety requirements.

Sections 14, 15 and 23 of the Education Act, 1998 assigns each Board of Management and Principal Teacher responsibility for the day-to-day management of schools. Principals should organise supervision for the order and general behaviour of pupils during school hours. In particular, they should organise and participate in the effective supervision of the pupils during breaks, lunch-breaks, assembly and dismissal.

Rules 121(4) and 124(1) of the Rules for National Schools and Section 23(2) of the Education Act 1998 also oblige teachers to take all reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of pupils and to participate in supervising pupils when the pupils are on school premises, during school time and/or on school activities.

622. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a school (details supplied) is to lose a teacher resulting in larger class sizes; the action that can be taken for the school not to lose this teacher; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46905/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I have consistently said that the 2009 Budget required difficult choices to be made across all areas of public expenditure. These decisions were made to control public expenditure and to ensure sustainability in the long run. In this respect Education, while protected to a much greater extent than most other areas of public expenditure, could not be totally spared. The various impacts at school level were included in the Budget day announcements. Even with the budget measures in place there will still be a significantly increased borrowing requirement in 2009.

When the country was able to afford it we reduced the basis on which primary teachers are allocated to schools from being based on an average number of primary pupils per teacher from 35 pupils in 1995/96 down to the current level of 27 pupils. This is reflected in the improvements that we have made on class sizes over the years and these improvements reflect our commitment to education. The change to a new average of 28 pupils per teacher from September 2009 has to be viewed in that context. Although it reverses some of the progress that we have made in recent years I had no option but to curtail the annual increase in teacher numbers. The reduced class sizes for the most disadvantaged in our DEIS schools of an average of 1 teacher for every 20 pupils in Junior classes and an average of 1 teacher for every 24 pupils in Senior classes will not be changing in 2009.

While the budget measures will impact on class sizes it will be necessary in the more testing economic climate ahead for us to continue to target and prioritise our resources to maximum effect for everyone. While teacher numbers are important numerous influential reports have highlighted the fact that teacher quality is the single most important factor — far and above anything else — in improving educational outcomes for children. Ensuring high quality teaching and learning is a challenge and dealing with factors that inhibit it represent a challenge for the Government, the Department, school management and indeed the teacher unions.

My Department will be advising individual schools in the normal way in relation to their staffing allocations. The preparatory work for this has commenced with the processing of enrolment data that has been received from schools. The staffing allocation processes including notification to schools will commence early in the New Year. The allocation process includes appellate mechanisms under which schools can appeal against the allocation due to them under the staffing schedules. In addition to the mainstream classroom teachers my Department also allocates teaching resources to schools for special needs and language support. The final allocation to a school is also a function of the operation of the redeployment panels which provide for the retention of a teacher in an existing school if a new post is not available within the agreed terms of the scheme.

I am confident that as the global economy improves it will be possible to build again on the significant achievements of recent years and do so in a manner consistent with overall prudent management of the Irish economy.

Departmental Expenditure.

623. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Science when this Deputy will receive a full reply to Parliamentary Question No. 612 of 18 November 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46906/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The deputy will be aware that I provided comprehensive information with regard to money paid to consultants from 2003 to end October 2008 and that I indicated that information relating to consultancy expenditure from 2000 to 2002 is not readily available and would involve an inordinate amount of adminis-

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trative time to compile. The relevant material is archived and is not in a format which would allow the data to be readily compiled from the original documentation. However I include a table compiled previously by my Department in relation to expenditure including expenditure on consultancies for the years in question for the Deputy’s information.

Year 2000

Consultants, Experts, Advisors	Purpose	Cost
		£
C.Sheffield	Employee Assistance Service Review	4,090
CRC, Trinity College	Evaluation of Early School Leavers Initiative	52,810.89
CRC, Trinity College	Preparation of National Youth Work Development Plan	54,300
Crowleys — DFK	ESF verification report	70,654.81
Deloitte & Touche	Organisational review	35,214
Dennehy Associates	PR Consultancy	19,360
Dermot Rochford	Review of the Pilot Employee Assistance Scheme	8,894
Dermot Rochford	Staffing resource and organisational needs of NQAI, HETAC and FETAC	14,336.08
Dermot Rochford	Staffing needs of admin office in Tourism College, Killybegs	4,089.90
Eileen Costello	Consultancy — Inventory System	1,625
ERC, St. Pat’s Drumcondra	Research on 8 — 15 Early School Leaver Initiative	111,117
Ernst & Young	Review of Work in the Building Unit DES	15,137
Eustace Patterson Ltd	Review of Gaisce	15,157
Farrell Grant Sparks	Report on Tralee IT under Section 20 of RTC Act 1992	32,017.18
Farrell Grant Sparks	PPP Project Launch	18,297.79
Farrell Grant Sparks/A&L Goodbody	Pilot PPP Education Projects (Five PPP Schools and Cork School of Music)	103,665.99
Inishowen Technology	School information and communication technology	15,695
Lesley Dee	Orchard Cope Foundation	5,075
Noel Lindsay	Saving & loan fund for adult & continuing education	2,000
NUI — Maynooth	Adult Education — Green & White Papers	35,000
Oliver Freaney & Co	3rd Level Finance accountancy	19,950
Philip Lee Solicitors	Consultancy -Vet School	29,34.25
Prospectus	Business Planning and Partnership in DES	17,949
Prospectus	Review of Special Education	26,645
Prospectus	Staff survey on internal communications	23,262
Seamus Ó hUallacháin	Interim Review of Institutes of Technology	1,100
Sean Cromien	Review of Department of Education operations & structures	16,500
Todd Architects	Masterplan — Portlaoise	59,508
Tony Bromwell	Review of Safety Procedures in Lisnagry, Co.Limerick	3,534
WRC Social&EconomicConsults	Review of VTOS	11,654
WRC Social&EconomicConsults	Women’s Education Initiative	20,100
WRC Social&EconomicConsults	Improving Effectiveness of VTOS	29,140
	Total	850,812.89

Year 2001

Consultants, Experts, Advisors	Purpose	Cost
		€
Anne Colgan	DES Task Force on Autism	10,000.00
Conor Galvin/ Bryn Holmes	Research Consultancy on ICT Usage in Schools	5,078.95
Deloitte & Touche	Business Analysis & Development of the Financial Management Function	88,854.00
Deloitte & Touche	Specification and selection of FMS System	42,418.00
Deloitte&Touche/A&L Goodbody	Pilot PPP Education Projects (National Maritime College)	336,480.00
Dennehy Associates	PR Consultancy	126,338.94
Dermot Rochford	VEC staffing study	85,982.85
Dominic McCanny	Investigation for Personnel Unit (DES)	2,618.75
Educational Research Centre	Evaluation of the sole use of the answer questions in Apprentice Tests	47,989.78
Elizabeth Waters	Lifelong Learning Consultation	13,500.00
Eustace Patterson Ltd	Contribution to study of FIT	8,853.71
Farrell Grant Sparks	Financial advice re: European Investment Bank refinancing of PP Projects	63,000.00
Farrell Grant Sparks/A&L Goodbody	Report on the Strategic Development Site for education & health purposes	120,625.12
Farrell Grant Sparks/A&L Goodbody	Five PPP Schools & Cork School of Music	164,537.10
Gartner Group	Research Advisory Services	33,065.13
Institute of Leisure & Amenity (ILAM)	PE Halls	1,061.74
Jonathan Wliiams	Editing of reports	886.73
Jordan Akustik	Cork School of Music	7,102.91
Kevin Leonard	Management Consultancy NEPS Administration	5,325.64
McCann Fitzgerald	Seminar on Public Procurement	4,207.38
McIver Consulting	Review of PLC Sector	88,722.00
Michael Collins and Associates	Architectural advice	32,886.22
National Women's Council	Technical support for education equality initiative	106,072.15
Niall Fitsimons & Co.	Site Report on St. Finbarr's Farranferris	5,561.45
Price Waterhouse Coopers	Review of financial guidelines	11,995.03
Prospectus	Internal Customer Action Plan and Business Planning	7,618.43
Sean O Fiachra	OECD INES network C — developing a new governing structure for ERC	10,270.89
Tony Bromwell	Review of Safety Procedures in Lisnagry, Co. Limerick	2,441.71
WRC Social&EconomicConsults	Women's Education Initiative	10,801.98
WRC Social&EconomicConsults	Independent assessment of the young people's facilities and services fund	29,010.98
	Total	1,473,307.57

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Year 2002

Consultants, Experts, Advisors	Purpose	Cost
		€
A & L Goodbody	PPP Projects	3,840.79
AHEAD	Review of disability needs in further education	38,000.00
Aine Hyland	Preparation of Eurydice Dossier	3,174.00
Anne Tuffy	Report on European Schools	7,180.86
Cynthia Deane	Educational Disadvantage Forum	5,050.00
Deloitte&Touche/A&L Goodbody	Pilot PPP Education Project (National Maritime College)	98,500.00
Deloitte & Touche	Verification Programme for ESF-aided Programmes 2000-2001 VEC sector	21,454.51
Dennehy Associates	PR Consultancy	38,443.65
Dermot Rochford	Study of VEC staffing structure & job evaluation of librarian (St Catherines)	4,830.00
Dominic McCanny	Investigation for Personnel Unit DES	523.75
Eustace Patterson Ltd	Contribution to study of FIT	7,682.00
Helen Leonard	Survey to evaluate pay of library staff in St Catherine’s	3,807.36
Irish Project Supervisors Ltd	Report: Health & Safety Spec & Risk Assessment for window cleaning	3,810.05
John Coolahan	Preparation of Eurydice Dossier	8,583.00
John Coolahan	OECD Report on Teachers	6,300.00
Mazars Consulting	Corepay support	22,997.18
Mazars McIver	Assessment of staffing requirement of National Adult Learning Council	4,695.00
McIver Consulting	Review of PLC sector	48,164.00
National Women’s Council	Technical support for education equality initiative	87,000.00
Occupational Health Consultants	Asbestos lecture	751.73
Professor Iseult McCarthy	Art Teachers Diploma Review	7,503.82
Professor Thomas Mitchell	Work for the Irish Academy for the Performing Arts	3,900.00
Project Management Limited	Pilot Schools Inventory Project	1,092,749.00
Sean Glenane	OECD INES Project	2,933.14
University Limerick (Frank McGourty)	Research on Laboratory Design & Equipment	104,055.00
Vivian Cassells	Report on European Schools	7,180.86
	Total	1,633,109.70

School Staffing.

624. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the way the appeals system will operate for schools scheduled to lose teachers or support staff as a result of cutbacks in the 2009 education budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46965/08]

625. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Dublin 15 area has one of the largest immigrant populations of school-going age needing extensive language support and that schools in the Dublin 15 area could lose up to 75 language support teachers as a result of the education cutbacks announced in budget 2009; the way the appeals system will operate for schools scheduled to lose language

support teachers as a result of cutbacks in the 2009 education budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46966/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 624 and 625 together.

It is open to the Board of Management to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeal Board which was established to adjudicate on appeals on mainstream staffing allocations in primary schools. Details of the criteria and application dates for appeal are contained in the staffing schedule which issues annually to all Boards of Management and is also made available on my Department’s website. The criteria are also available in Circular 0024/2007 (Appeal Board for Mainstream Staffing in Primary Schools) which is also on my Department’s website.

The Appeal Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

My Department will be advising individual schools in the normal way in relation to their mainstream staffing allocations. The preparatory work for this has commenced with the processing of enrolment data that has been received from schools. The staffing allocation processes including notification to schools will commence early in the New Year. In addition to the mainstream classroom teachers my Department also allocates teaching resources to schools for special needs and language support.

The budget measures will mean that the level of language support will be reduced from a maximum of six extra teachers per school to a maximum of two teachers per school, as was the case before 2007.

Nonetheless, schools that require language support will still be entitled to get it. We still envisage having over 1,400 language support teachers in our schools in September 2009 and up to about 500 other teachers in part-time posts. By any standards this is a very significant resource and the challenge will be to ensure that it is used to maximum effect.

As I announced on budget day we will also provide for some alleviation for the position of those schools where there is a significant concentration of newcomer pupils as a proportion of the overall enrolment. This will be done on a case by case basis.

The allocation process for language support teachers is an annual one and existing provision is not rolled over automatically. Schools will be applying afresh in the spring and early summer of 2009 for the 2009/10 school year, based on their assessment of the prospective needs of existing pupils and any new pupils they are enrolling. The position for individual schools will become clear at that stage.

626. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the location and construction of a school (details supplied); if the school will open at a permanent or temporary site in September 2009; the funding that has been allocated in the 2009 capital education budget for the establishment of this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46968/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): My Department has been aware of a need for further post primary provision in the Dublin 15 area and in that context, I sanctioned the establishment of a new post primary school for the area.

My Department is working closely with Co. Dublin VEC and is currently examining the possibility of opening the new school in September 2009 subject to the identification of suitable accommodation. It is envisaged that the new school will open in temporary accommodation in 2009 and an announcement will be made on the exact location shortly.

Schools Recognition.

627. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the establishment of a Gaelscoil in Tyrrelstown, Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46969/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Department was made aware of proposals to establish a new Gaelscoil to serve Tyrrelstown/Hollystown in August 2008. A formal ‘Notification of Intent’ to establish this new school was received from the proposed Patron, An Foras Patrúnachta, in September 2008.

However, as the Deputy will be aware, on 14th September last, I announced a review of the procedures for recognising primary schools. In the interim period, it is not planned to recognise any new primary schools except in areas where increases in pupil numbers would require the provision of a new school.

The application to establish a new Gaelscoil to serve Tyrrelstown/Hollystown will be considered in this context.

628. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the establishment of an Educate Together primary school in Carpenterstown, Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46970/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): An application for recognition, from September 2008, of the proposed new school to which the Deputy refers was not granted in 2008.

Given the significant additional levels of primary school provision made in the area in question in the past 3 years, my predecessor was satisfied that sufficient provision has been made to serve the current and future population in the short to medium term and that appropriate diversity of provision has been provided. The Patron was informed that this did not preclude recognition at a future date.

As the Deputy will be aware, on 14th September last, I announced a review of the procedures for recognising primary schools. In the interim period, it is not planned to recognise any new primary schools except in areas where increases in pupil numbers would require the provision of new schools.

The application to establish a new Educate Together School to serve the Carpenterstown area will be considered in this context.

Schools Refurbishment.

629. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will make provision for the upgrading of the science laboratories in a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15 during 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46971/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school referred to by the Deputy applied to my Department for funding under the Summer Works Scheme in 2008 to renovate/upgrade the science and home economics facilities in the school at an estimated cost in excess of €1.6m.

My Department has focused on delivering as many large projects as possible in 2008 particularly in developing areas, while also delivering improvements in the quality of existing primary

and post-primary school accommodation throughout the country and funding was not made available for a Summer Works Scheme this year.

I intend to have a Summer Works Scheme in 2009. The details of the operation of the scheme and the level of funding to be made available under the scheme in 2009 are currently being considered and will be completed as soon as possible. The Professional and Technical Reports provided by schools for 2008 can be used again for future projects so that schools will not be at the loss of expenditure on them.

Departmental Staff.

630. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the budgeted cost to his Department for 2009 of incremental pay increases for all staff in and under the aegis of his Department; the comparative cost for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46984/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in my Department.

However, based on a recent reply to a Parliamentary Question, it was estimated that increments accounted for approximately 1.63% of the total pay bill of my Department for 2008.

By applying a similar percentage to the Pay bill for the years in question the Table gives an estimate of the cost of incremental pay increases for the years 2002-2008.

I wish to point out that in general no additional money is provided for incremental pay increases in any year. The additional cost of increments for staff on incremental scales is offset by reductions in costs arising from the retirement or other movements of staff at higher salary points and their replacement by staff at lower salary points.

Year	€m
2002	52
2003	61
2004	67
2005	72
2006	79
2007	86
2008	91

Decentralisation Programme.

631. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of civil servants and other public servants who have relocated to locations outside of Dublin under the Government’s decentralisation programme; the estimated number of each category who will have relocated by the end of 2009; the breakdown of each set of figures in terms of those who are relocating from Dublin and relocating from elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46999/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has completed the decentralisation of 88 posts to Athlone and 7 posts to Mullingar. Of these posts, 66 Civil Servants relocated from Dublin and the remaining 29 posts were filled by Civil Servants relocating from provincial locations.

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The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, a body under the aegis of my Department, has decentralised 12 posts to Portlaoise in advance of its decentralisation to Portarlington. Of the 12 posts, 8 staff relocated from Dublin and the remaining 4 relocated from provincial locations.

Departmental Staff.

632. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of people working in his Department; the number earning below €50,000 per annum; the number earning between €50,001 and €60,000 per annum; the number earning between €60,001 and €70,000 per annum; the number earning between €70,001 and €80,000 per annum; the number earning between €80,001 and €90,000 per annum; the number earning between €90,001 and €100,000 per annum; the number earning over €100,001 per annum; the number in each staff category (details supplied) for each income band. [47014/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The details requested by the Deputy are not readily available. My Department will arrange to compile and forward the details requested as soon as possible.

633. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department for each year from 2002 to date in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47029/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The number of civil and public servants (expressed as whole time equivalents) working in or under the aegis of my Department in the years in question is as follows:

Year	€
2002	79,873
2003	80,022
2004	81,641
2005	85,105
2006	89,263
2007	92,427
2008	94,407

634. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of locations where civil and public servants working in or under the aegis of his Department are located; the locations of same; the number, and the number in each category (details supplied) of staff at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47044/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The following information relates to administrative and non-administrative staff in my Department. The information relating to agencies under the remit of my Department is currently being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Administrative Staff by Location

Grades	Athlone	Dublin	Tullamore
Secretary General		1.00	
Asst. Secretary	2.00	6.00	1.00
Director		1.00	
Principal Officer (PO)	10.00	20.2	9.00
Assistant Principal Officer (APO)	28.00	36.5	16.00
Higher Executive Officer (HEO)	58.90	61.13	27.40
Administrative Officer (AO)	2.80	5.00	0.00
Executive Officer (EO)	126.42	79.53	66.19
Staff Officer (SO)	26.70	11.36	4.60
Clerical Officer (CO)	188.46	71.70	42.03
Ministerial		6.00	
	443.28	299.42	166.22

Regional and Local Offices

	CO	SO	EO	HEO	APO	PO	TOTAL
Blanchardstown	1		1	1	1		4
Castlebar	0.5						0.5
Cork	3		1	2	1		7
Drogheda	1						1
Galway	2		1	1	1		5
Limerick	2		1	1	1		5
Mullingar	3	1	3	2	1	1	11
Naas	2		1	1.1	0.8		4.9
Navan	2		1	0.5	1		4.5
Sligo	3			1	1		5
Tallaght	1		1	0.8	1		3.8
Tralee	1						1
Waterford	1		1	1	1		4
Wexford	1						1

Non-Administrative staff by location

Athlone

	Number
Cleaner	8
General Operative	1
Senior Inspector	1
District inspector	1
Services Officer	5
	16

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

Carlow

	Number
Senior Psychologist	1
Psychologist	1
District Inspector	1
Post Primary Inspector	1
	4

Clare

	Number
Divisional Inspector	1
Senior Inspector	1
District Inspector	1
	3

Cork

	Number
Assistant Chief Inspector	1
Post Primary Inspector	3
Senior Inspector	5
District Inspector	2
Divisional Inspector	5
Psychologist	11
*Regional Director	1
Senior Psychologist	5
	33

Dublin

	Number
Advisory Counsel	2
Assessor of Youth Work	1
Cleaner	6
Deputy Chief Inspector	1
Manager (School Building Unit)	1
Assistant Chief Inspector	9
Post Primary Inspector	7
Senior Inspector	11
Divisional Inspector	5
Records Manager	1
Services Officer	15

	Number
Senior Statistician	1
Solicitor	1
Statistician	2
Accountant	2
Telephonist	1
*Director	1
Psychologist	24
*Regional Director	3
Senior Psychologist	16
	110

Donegal

	Number
District Inspector	2
Psychologist	5
Senior Psychologist	2
	9

Dundalk

	Number
Senior Inspector	2
Divisional Inspector	1
	3

Galway

	Number
Post Primary Inspector	1
Senior Inspector	2
District Inspector	2
Divisional Inspector	3
Psychologist	3
Senior Psychologist	5
	16

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

Working from home

	Number
Post Primary Inspector	7
Senior Inspector	2
District Inspector	6
Divisional Inspector	4
Psychologist	1
Senior Psychologist	1
	21

Kerry

	Number
Divisional Inspector	1
Psychologist	4
Senior Psychologist	2
	7

Monaghan

	Number
Post Primary Inspector	1
Divisional Inspector	1
	2

Castlebar

	Number
Psychologist	4
Senior Psychologist	1
	5

Cavan

	Number
Psychologist	3
Senior Psychologist	1
	4

Clonmel

	Number
Psychologist	1
Senior Psychologist	2
	3

Drogheda

	Number
Psychologist	3
Senior Psychologist	2
	5

Ennis

	Number
Psychologist	1
Senior Psychologist	2
	3

Kilkenny

	Number
Psychologist	1

Limerick

	Number
Psychologist	5
Senior Psychologist	1
	6

Mullingar

	Number
Psychologist	5
*Regional Director	1
Senior Psychologist	1
	7

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

Naas

	Number
Psychologist	6
Senior Psychologist	3
	9

Navan

	Number
Psychologist	4
Senior Psychologist	1
	5

Tipperary

	Number
Psychologist	1
Senior Inspector	1
District Inspector	1
Divisional Inspector	1
	4

Portlaoise

	Number
Psychologist	4
Senior Inspector	1
District Inspector	1
Post Primary Inspector	1
	7

Roscommon

	Number
Psychologist	3
Divisional Inspector	1
District Inspector	1
	5

Sligo

	Number
Psychologist	2
*Regional Director	1
Senior Psychologist	1
	4

Waterford

	Number
Psychologist	1
Senior Psychologist	2
	3

Wexford

	Number
Psychologist	2
Senior Psychologist	3
Post Primary Inspector	1
Senior Inspector	1
Divisional Inspector	2
	9

Tullamore

	Number
Architectural Assistant	10
Architect	5
Engineer	3
Manager	2
Quantity Surveyor	3
Services Officer	3
Senior Architect	5
	31

Wicklow

	Number
Senior Inspector	2
Divisional Inspector	1
	3

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

Regional Office — Cork

	Number
Post Primary Inspector	2
Senior Inspector	1
District Inspector	1
Divisional Inspector	2
	6

Regional Office — Galway

	Number
Divisional Inspector	1

Regional Office — Limerick

	Number
Assistant Chief Inspector	1
Post Primary Inspector	2
District Inspector	2
Divisional Inspector	5
	10

Regional Office — Mullingar

	Number
Post Primary Inspector	2
Senior inspector	2
District Inspector	1
	5

Regional Office — Naas

	Number
Senior Inspector	1
District Inspector	2
Divisional Inspector	1
	4

Regional Office — Navan

	Number
Senior Inspector	2
District Inspector	4
Divisional Inspector	1
	7

Regional Office — Sligo

	Number
Post Primary Inspector	1
Divisional Inspector	1
	2

Regional Office — Tallaght

	Number
Senior Inspector	1
District Inspector	5
Divisional Inspector	2
	8

Regional Office — Waterford

	Number
Post Primary Inspector	1
Senior Inspector	1
District Inspector	2
Divisional Inspector	1
	5

*The posts of Director and Regional Director are grades at the National Educational Psychologists Service (NEPS).

Departmental Agencies.

635. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the agencies, bodies or authorities under the aegis of his Department that have been scheduled for merging, amalgamation, abolition or sharing of services as announced in the budget 2009; the progress that has been made on the implementation of these organisational changes; the details of the implementation plan for these organisational changes; the cost savings that will arise from each of these organisational changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47059/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The following measures were also taken by my Department as part of the Government’s programme for the rationalisation of agencies.

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) are to be amalgamated into a single agency.

An Implementation Advisory Group, representative of the key stakeholders in the amalgamation process, has been formed to advise the Department of Education and Science in relation to the functions of the new organisation. An implementation paper will be produced covering the functions of the new agency and key legislative considerations. A period of public consultation will then take place, followed by legislation. Allowing for planning and consultation, it is anticipated that the legislative process will be complete and the new statutory agency will be established by the end of 2010. Options for closer co-operation and sharing of administration support between the existing bodies prior to statutory establishment are being explored.

It should be noted that the primary reason for the amalgamation is not to achieve cost savings in themselves, but to ensure a more coherent approach by establishing a single integrated organisation. Savings would not arise from the abolition of functions but from efficiencies resulting from them being performed by a single body. It is anticipated that some savings will arise, inter alia, from the removal of parallel top level management and board structures and from the sharing of administrative support. Further work on administrative planning will be required before savings can be quantified.

The Educational Disadvantage Committee was formally abolished in October 2008. If provision was to be made for the Committee’s reconstitution it would have been of the order of €100,000 per annum.

The National Adult Learning Council (NALC) was formally disbanded in October 2008. The expenditure incurred on the National Adult Learning Council was as follows:

- €21,012 in 2002;
- €59,491 in 2003.

The Council has not met since 2003 and no further expenditure has been incurred. It is estimated that to have proceeded with the Council as originally envisaged would have involved significant additional annual expenditure.

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education was closed in September 2008. Recurrent annual funding for the Centre was in the region of €1 million.

Schools Recognition.

636. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of primary schools which are awaiting permanent recognition, permanent accommodation and are in prefabs partly or in whole; the patronage of each school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47086/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy.

Departmental Funding.

637. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of taxpayers’ money given to the Institute for International and European Affairs in the lead up to the Lisbon Referendum. [47098/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Department of Education and Science, like other Government Departments, is a corporate member of the Institute of International and European Affairs, and pays an annual subscription to the Institute of €6,000.

Membership of the Institute allows the staff of my Department to benefit from opportunities for professional training and development and to broaden their awareness of European and international issues of relevance to their work by attending events organised by the Institute.

No additional funding was given to the Institute by my Department in the lead up to the Lisbon Referendum. The Department’s International Section, which is responsible for the EU dimensions of education and training, purchased a number of copies, from the Institute, of its publication “Consolidated Version of the Treaties amended by the Treaty of Lisbon” for official use.

School Staffing.

638. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will support a matter (detail supplied). [47108/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): A special arrangement regarding the retention of their teaching posts operates for teachers who are members of the Oireachtas. The terms of the arrangement provide that a teacher in a recognised primary or second level school whilst a member of the Oireachtas can retain their teaching post subject to the approval of the school’s managerial authority.

Teaching salary is paid to the Oireachtas member for the duration of the arrangement but the total cost of the replacement teacher including pension and PRSI contributions is deducted from the salary. The arrangement allows that the balance of salary, if any, remaining after the deductions have been made may be paid to the Oireachtas member. A number of Oireachtas members do not accept any balance of salary that may be payable.

The information requested will be forwarded to the Deputy.

Schools Building Projects.

639. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding a school building project at a school (details supplied) in County Meath; if payment will be made to progress this project in 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47171/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school to which the Deputy refers has applied to my Department for large scale capital funding for a new building.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from site acquisition and initial design stage through to construction will be considered in the context of the school building and modernisation programme.

However, in view of the level of demand on the Department’s capital budget currently, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression the project at this time.

640. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding a school building project at a school (details supplied) in County Meath; if payment will be made to progress this project in 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47172/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school referred to by the Deputy applied to my Department for funding under the Summer Works Scheme in 2008.

The particular emphasis in 2008 has been on providing sufficient school places in developing areas, while also delivering improvements in the quality of existing primary and post-primary school accommodation throughout the country. Accordingly my Department has focused on delivering as many large projects as possible in 2008 and funding was not made available for a Summer Works Scheme this year.

I intend to have a Summer Works Scheme in 2009. The details of the operation of the scheme and the level of funding to be made available under the scheme in 2009 are currently being considered and will be completed as soon as possible. The Professional and Technical Reports provided by schools for 2008 can be used again for future projects so that schools will not be at the loss of expenditure on them.

641. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding a school building project at a school (details supplied) in County Meath; if payment will be made to progress this project in 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47173/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): An extension project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently in early architectural planning. My Department has received a revised stage 2 submission (initial sketch scheme) from the school authorities which is currently being examined.

The progression of all large scale building projects including this project will be considered on an ongoing basis in the context of the Department’s multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. It is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

Disadvantaged Status.

642. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will confirm that the commitment given by him to a school (details supplied) in County Meath that has dispersed disadvantaged status, will continue to receive supports in line with the level of disadvantage among its pupils, despite its unsuccessful DEIS application and appeal in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47174/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): The school to which the Deputy refers is among the schools that were judged by an independent identification process in 2005 not to have a sufficient level of disadvantage among their pupils to warrant their inclusion in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools), the Action Plan for educational inclusion. The next identification process is scheduled to be held at the end of the current DEIS programme which runs from 2005-2010. There will not be an opportunity before this to be included in the current DEIS programme of supports.

This school together with 26 other urban primary and 73 post primary schools retained resources, both human and financial, including Home School Community Liaison services under pre-existing schemes and programmes for addressing educational disadvantage. When DEIS was introduced, a commitment was given as a concessionary measure to these schools that they would retain a level of support for the duration of the DEIS Initiative.

While it is appreciated that the discontinuation of these resources will impact on these schools, given the current volatile and challenging economic climate, difficult decisions had to

be made in order to contain public sector spending. One of these decisions was to advance the withdrawal of such supports from non DEIS schools to the beginning of the next school year.

The main focus of Social Inclusion measures will be to retain resources in DEIS schools. There is a need to focus targeted resources on the schools in most need and this approach is in line with the broad thrust of the recommendations of the Comptroller and Auditor General which are set out in his report on Primary Disadvantage of 2006, which recommended that my Department should focus its educational disadvantage measures on those schools serving the most disadvantaged communities.

School Staffing.

643. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science if moneys were allocated for the provision of facilities in respect of a person (details supplied); the extent of moneys allocated; the basis on which the allocation was made; if an appropriate teacher was to be appointed as a consequence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47183/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I am aware of the matter to which the Deputy refers and as the case remains before the Courts it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on the detail of the proceedings.

However the Deputy should be aware that resources were made available by the Department of Education and Science to both of the schools named to facilitate provision for educational placement for the child in question.

Departmental Funding.

644. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a school (details supplied) in County Meath that had requested much needed works to be carried out on their grounds, were refused; and if he will review the decision on same. [47187/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The School to which the Deputy refers submitted an application for additional works to the grounds of the existing temporary school.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding for works to the grounds will be provided in the context of the application for additional temporary accommodation for September 2009.

Schools Building Projects.

645. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Meath which has applied for an extension to its school building; the status of its request; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47188/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Department has received an application for an extension at the school referred to by the Deputy. Agreement has been reached with the school authorities to bring it up to a 16-classroom school. This project is currently awaiting approval to appoint a design team.

The progression of all large scale building projects including this project will be considered in the context of the Department’s multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. It is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

646. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Meath which has been waiting on a new school building for ten years; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47189/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Department has agreed to the provision of two new 24-classroom schools. One school will cater for the boys national school and the other for the girls national school, in the area referred to by the Deputy.

These projects are currently awaiting permission to appoint a design team and will be treated as a joint project.

The progression of all large scale building projects including this joint project will be considered on an ongoing basis in the context of the Department’s multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. It is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

647. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application for an extension by a school (details supplied) in County Meath; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47190/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the building project for the school to which he refers, was one of 25 major school projects included in my announcement of 29 September 2008, which have been given the go ahead to proceed to tender and construction.

My Department has been in contact with the school authorities in this regard.

648. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application for a new building by a school (details supplied) in County Meath; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47191/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Department has agreed in principle to the provision of a new 24-classroom school building for the school referred to by the Deputy. The Schedule of Accommodation has also been agreed with the school authorities.

The progression of all large scale building projects including this project, will be considered in the context of my Department’s multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. However, in light of current competing demands on the capital budget of my Department, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

Schools Refurbishment.

649. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth for the refurbishment of its toilet facilities; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47192/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): There is no record in my Department of an application for funding for the refurbishment of toilet facilities from the school referred to by the Deputy.

The school should contact the Modernisation and Policy Unit of my Department in the matter.

650. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for

emergency fire safety works and renovations to its science laboratories; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47193/08]

652. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for essential work on its heating and on toilet systems; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47195/08]

654. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47197/08]

655. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47198/08]

657. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47200/08]

659. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47202/08]

660. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47203/08]

661. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47204/08]

665. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Galway for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47208/08]

669. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47212/08]

670. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47213/08]

671. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47214/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 650, 652, 654, 655, 657, 659 to 661, inclusive, 665, 669, 670 and 671 together.

The schools referred to by the Deputy applied to my Department for funding under the Summer Works Scheme in 2008.

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

The particular emphasis in 2008 has been on providing sufficient school places in developing areas, while also delivering improvements in the quality of existing primary and post-primary school accommodation throughout the country. Accordingly my Department has focused on delivering as many large projects as possible in 2008 and funding was not made available for a Summer Works Scheme this year.

I intend to have a Summer Works Scheme in 2009. The details of the operation of the scheme and the level of funding to be made available under the scheme in 2009 are currently being considered and will be completed as soon as possible. The Professional and Technical Reports provided by schools for 2008 can be used again for future projects so that schools will not be at the loss of expenditure on them.

651. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth for works on its school; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47194/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school to which the Deputy refers has applied to my Department for large scale capital funding.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project from initial design stage through to construction will be considered in the context of the school building and modernisation programme. However, in view of the level of demand on the Department’s capital budget currently, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression the project at this time.

Question No. 652 answered with Question No. 650.

Schools Building Projects.

653. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for a new school building; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47196/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Department has agreed to the provision of a new 36-classroom school building to cater for an amalgamation of two schools including the school referred to by the Deputy. The project to provide the new school is in architectural planning and is currently at stage 2b (detailed design) of the planning process.

The progression of all large scale building projects including this project will be considered in the context of the Department’s multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. It is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

Questions Nos. 654 and 655 answered with Question No. 650.

Schools Refurbishment.

656. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47199/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The proposed building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is at an early stage of architectural planning.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction will be considered in the context of the school building and modernisation programme. However, in view of the level of demand on the Department's capital budget currently, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression the project at this time.

Question No. 657 answered with Question No. 650.

658. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47201/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): The application for major works at the school referred to by the Deputy is currently being re-tendered. My Department is awaiting contact from the school authorities in this regard.

Questions Nos. 659 to 661, inclusive, answered with Question No. 650.

662. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth which has applied for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47205/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): The school to which the Deputy refers has applied to my Department for large scale capital funding for an extension and refurbishment project. The project is in the early stages of architectural planning.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction will be considered in the context of the school building and modernisation programme. However, in view of the level of demand on the Department's capital budget currently, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression the project at this time.

663. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47206/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): The school to which the Deputy refers has applied to my Department for large scale capital funding.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction will be considered in the context of the school building and modernisation programme. However, in view of the level of demand on the Department's capital budget currently, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression the project at this time.

664. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Louth for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47207/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): The Department has received an application for a major extension from the school referred to by the Deputy. Schedules of accommodation have been agreed with the school authorities on the additional accommodation to be provided. This project is currently awaiting approval to appoint a design team.

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

The progression of all large scale building projects including this project will be considered in the context of the Department’s multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. It is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

Question No. 665 answered with Question No. 650.

666. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47209/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The proposed building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction will be considered in the context of the school building and modernisation programme. However, in view of the level of demand on the Department’s capital budget currently, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression the project at this time.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that, as an interim measure, the Department has taken a decision in principle to replace a number of prefabs at the school. It received information from the school recently which will enable this matter to progress further.

667. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47210/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): There is no record in my Department of an application for capital funding from the school referred to by the Deputy. The school should contact the Modernisation and Policy Unit of my Department in the matter.

Schools Building Projects.

668. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for a new school building; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47211/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Department is aware of the accommodation pressures being experienced by the school referred to by the Deputy.

The project at this school has a band rating of 1, the highest priority that the Department assigns to major capital projects.

A permanent site has been identified and is being acquired under the Fingal School Model Agreement.

The progression of the school’s major capital project will be considered on an on-going basis in the context of the Department’s Multi-Annual School Building and Modernisation Programme and availability of capital resources.

Questions Nos. 669 to 671, inclusive, answered with Question No. 650.

Schools Refurbishment.

672. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47215/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school to which the Deputy refers has applied to my Department for large scale capital funding.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction will be considered in the context of the school building and modernisation programme. However, in view of the level of demand on the Department’s capital budget currently, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression the project at this time.

Schools Building Projects.

673. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for a new school building; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47216/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school to which the Deputy refers has applied to my Department for large scale capital funding for a new building.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction will be considered in the context of the school building and modernisation programme. However, in view of the level of demand on the Department’s capital budget currently, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression the project at this time.

674. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for a new school building; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47217/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): Acquisition of a 6 acre site for primary school provision in Tyrrelstown is well advanced at contract stage. As the Deputy will appreciate, due to the commercial sensitivities attaching to site acquisition, I cannot comment further on the matter at this time.

The site is such that it should provide accommodation for both of the schools (including the school to which the Deputy refers) currently accommodated in temporary accommodation on the Powerstown Road. The Department will be discussing the configuration and size of the schools with the two patron bodies concerned, Educate Together and the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin.

The progression of all large scale building projects from initial design stage through to tender and construction, including this project, will be considered on an on-going basis in the context of my Department’s Multi-Annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. In light of current competing demands on my Department’s capital budget, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the further progression of the project at this time.

The school to which the Deputy refers will continue to be accommodated on the site at Powerstown Rd until their permanent accommodation is delivered.

Schools Refurbishment.

675. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47218/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school referred to by the Deputy applied to my Department for funding under the Summer Works Scheme in 2008.

The particular emphasis in 2008 has been on providing sufficient school places in developing areas, while also delivering improvements in the quality of existing primary and post-primary school accommodation throughout the country. Accordingly my Department has focused on delivering as many large projects as possible in 2008 and funding was not made available for a Summer Works Scheme this year.

I intend to have a Summer Works Scheme in 2009. The details of the operation of the scheme and the level of funding to be made available under the scheme in 2009 are currently being considered and will be completed as soon as possible. The Professional and Technical Reports provided by schools for 2008 can be used again for future projects so that schools will not be at the loss of expenditure on them.

676. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Dublin for essential works; if it has been accepted; and if so, when work will commence. [47219/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The major capital project for the School to which the Deputy refers has been assigned the highest priority band rating of 1 and a design team has been appointed.

The progression of all large scale building projects from initial design stage through to tender and construction, including this project, will be considered on an on-going basis in the context of my Department’s Multi-Annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. In light of current competing demands on my Department’s capital budget, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the further progression of the project at this time.

EU Funding.

677. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of EU funding received by his Department directly or for institutions, groups, organisations or bodies under his aegis in the past 20 years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47242/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The information requested by the Deputy is in the following tables.

Table 1 details the level of EU aid received, per Measure, by the Department of Education and Science from the European Social Fund under the Community Support Framework, 1994 — 1999.

Table 2 details the level of EU aid received, per Measure, by the Department of Education and Science from the European Social Fund under the Community Support Framework 2000-2006.

The Deputy should be aware that EU funds are drawn-down in arrears, following certification and checking of accounts and in accordance with European Commission rules and procedures.

There may be other amounts paid directly to education sector bodies/institutions by the EU Commission in relation to which my Department does not have details.

For historical data detailing the level of EU aid received by the State between 1973-1993, I would direct the Deputy to the EU Transfers Section of the Department of Finance publication — Budgetary and Economic Statistics.

Under the EU Peace II programme a total of €1,660,760 was received by my Department in the period 2003 — 2008 in respect of Peace II, Measure 5.5, Cross Border Education, School and Youth Co-operation and of this amount, under the agreed funding arrangements, a total of €217,057 was paid to the Department of Education, Northern Ireland.

Table 1(a) — EU aid received — Aid amounts in IR£

Measure	1994 ESF £'000	1995 ESF £'000	1996 ESF £'000	1997 ESF £'000	1998 ESF £'000	1999 ESF £'000	ESF
HUMAN RESOURCES OP							
Preventive Actions	2,625	2,629	2,691	2,464	2,602	10,511	23,522
Early School Leavers	4,635	4,433	4,433	4,180	8,548	12,387	38,616
Vocational Preparation and Training	22,835	36,254	37,179	33,400	37,496	41,050	208,214
Apprenticeship	8,581	7,619	7,799	7,143	7,377	7,529	46,048
Middle Level Technician/Higher Technical Skills	32,489	40,533	46,218	46,084	47,782	48,630	261,736
Advanced Technical Skills	7,565	5,911	6,050	5,542	5,345	3,077	33,490
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme	13,894	9,518	9,743	8,923	9,215	9,406	60,699
Training of Trainers	3,678	4,664	5,497	6,409	6,618	7,215	34,081
Certification	666	1,107	1,481	1,427	1,660	1,862	8,203
Promotion of Equal Opportunities	0	2	16	16	443	1,500	1,977
Technical Assistance	0	93	225	119	0	0	437
Modern Languages	0	0	0	0	270	912	1,182
Adult Literacy						4,678	4,678
SUB-TOTAL	96,968	112,763	121,332	115,707	127,356	148,757	722,883
INDUSTRY OP							
Graduate Training	44	345	517	634	759	1,115	3,414
Enterprise Development	197	378	342	222	242	741	2,122
SUB-TOTAL	241	723	859	856	1,001	1,856	5,536
TOURISM OP							
Initial Training	4,186	5,590	4,292	4,027	4,348	4,716	27,159
Continuing Training	465	621	477	447	481	527	3,018
SUB-TOTAL	4,651	6,211	4,769	4,474	4,829	5,243	30,177
GRAND TOTAL	101,860	119,697	126,960	121,037	133,186	155,856	758,596

Table 1(b) — EU aid received — Aid amounts in €

Measure	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	ESF €'000
HUMAN RESOURCES OP							
Preventive Actions	3,333	3,338	3,416	3,129	3,302	13,347	29,865
Early School Leavers	5,885	5,629	5,629	5,307	10,854	15,728	49,032
Vocational Preparation and Training	28,994	46,033	47,207	42,410	47,609	52,123	264,376
Apprenticeship	10,895	9,675	9,903	9,070	9,367	9,560	58,470
Middle Level Technician/Higher Technical Skills	41,253	51,467	58,684	58,515	60,671	61,747	332,337
Advanced Technical Skills	9,606	7,505	7,682	7,036	6,786	3,907	42,522
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme	17,641	12,085	12,371	11,330	11,701	11,943	77,071
Training of Trainers	4,670	5,922	6,980	8,137	8,403	9,161	43,273
Certification	845	1,405	1,880	1,812	2,108	2,365	10,415
Promotion of Equal Opportunities	0	2	21	20	563	1,905	2,511
Technical Assistance	0	119	285	151	0	0	555
Modern Languages	0	0	0	0	343	1,158	1,501
Adult Literacy	0	0	0	0	0	5,940	5,940
SUB-TOTAL	123,122	143,180	154,058	146,917	161,707	188,884	917,868
INDUSTRY OP							
Graduate Training	56	438	656	804	964	1,416	4,334
Enterprise Development	251	480	435	282	307	941	2,696
SUB-TOTAL	307	918	1,091	1,086	1,271	2,357	7,030
TOURISM OP							
Initial Training	5,315	7,098	5,449	5,113	5,520	5,988	34,483
Continuing Training	590	788	605	568	611	670	3,832
SUB-TOTAL	5,905	7,886	6,054	5,681	6,131	6,658	38,315
GRAND TOTAL	129,334	151,984	161,203	153,684	169,109	197,899	963,213

Table 2 — EU Aid received under the 2000-2006 Round — Amounts in €

Programme/Measure	2000 ESF €'000	2001 ESF €'000	2002 ESF €'000	2003 ESF €'000	2004 ESF €'000	2005 ESF €'000	2006 ESF €'000	2007 ESF €'000	2000-2007 ESF €'000
Employment Human Resources Development OP									
School Completion Programme	1,412	3,164	7,823	8,912	8,865	9,078			39,254
Third Level Access	815	2,921	5,746	6,969	7,472	6,731			30,654
Early School Leavers — Community Training Workshops	0	1,169	630	706	804	1,986			5,295
Early School Leavers — Youthreach & Travellers Workshops	18,866	23,005	14,763	36,689	27,180	29,456			149,959
Back to Education Initiative	0	0	0	3,823	3,205	5,331			12,359
Adult Literacy	11,611	0	2,671	6,110	5,962	8,618			34,972
Undergraduate Skills	0	1,582	40,289	5,682	3,463	15,400			66,416
Certification and National Qualifications Framework	2,164	253	848	742	777	358	984		6,126
Education Equality Initiative	0	84	175	26	0	-			273
Equal Opportunities Promotion and Monitoring	0	64	304	355	438	187			1,348
All measures (not distributed across measures)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5,866	5,866
TOTAL	34,868	32,242	73,249	70,014	58,166	77,133	984	5,866	352,522

(a) Under the 2000-2006 Round, the European Commission will process the final Operational Programme payments (estimated at over €20million in aid) based on the submission of the Member State's final closure documents.

(b) It is estimated that aid of €130 million (approx.) will be received in respect of education related measures during the period 2007-2013.