



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

Thursday, 18 February 2010.

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Déardaoin, 18 Feabhra 2010.

Thursday, 18 February 2010.

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

Paidir.

Prayer.

Requests to move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 32.

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

Deputy James Bannon: Given that Fianna Fáil looped the Green Party members yesterday into a three card trick arrangement over the O’Dea affair and that those Members have trumpeted education reform, I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the threat to the education of our second level students and to the future needs of the economy due to the findings of a recent report which highlights the fact that approximately half of mathematics teachers in secondary schools are unqualified—

Deputy Timmy Dooley: What report is that?

Deputy James Bannon: —which goes a long way to explaining why only 20% of pupils opt to take higher level leaving certificate mathematics. This is a significant indictment of the Government, and the Green Party members in government who continually talk about the need for an increase in the number taking higher level mathematics but, on the other hand, turn a blind eye to the disgracefully substandard teaching that is being given to our secondary school pupils.

Deputy Tom Hayes: Hear, hear.

A Deputy: It is surely a certainty that this matter will be taken.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to discuss the following matter of urgent national importance, namely, the need for the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to give an undertaking to the House that she will immediately underwrite the applications from former SR Technics employees for third level education courses, while they await confirmation from the European globalisation fund, to ensure that these people get access to courses before the close-off date for funding under the fund in October 2011, and to get an undertaking from the Minister that she will directly intervene in the decision by the Dublin Institute of Technology not to proceed with the proposed acceleration of the engineering systems maintenance course for the former SR Technics

[Deputy Arthur Morgan.]

employees because of the failure by her Department to commit or underwrite funds — which would not cost her anything — for these courses. It is clear that these workers have been let down by the Government on many occasions and there is a serious onus on the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment on this occasion to underwrite these courses immediately in order that these workers can be up-skilled, which is part of Government policy. This is Tánaiste's chance to show that.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I seek leave to move a motion for the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to discuss an issue of national importance and concern, namely, the urgent need to resolve the crisis at Dublin Airport with regard to the potential of 300 jobs for former SR Technics staff and call on the Government, Ryanair and other interested parties to act in a sensible and common sense manner to ensure these jobs are created for the north side of Dublin.

Deputy John Cregan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: We support that.

Deputy Frank Feighan: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to discuss an issue of national importance, namely, the fact that tens of thousands of workers, especially those in many local authorities, cannot avail of the cycle to work scheme introduced by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government last year. The local authorities, although they are under the direction of the said Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, have no intention of introducing the scheme. I ask the Minister to investigate that anomaly immediately.

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

Deputy Alan Shatter: On a point of order, Sir, I submitted to you a Standing Order 32 request arising out of the statement made yesterday evening in this House by the Minister for Defence, Deputy Willie O'Dea, in which he admitted confidential information furnished to him as Minister for Defence——

An Ceann Comhairle: My office has written to the Department in regard to the Standing Order 32——

Deputy Alan Shatter: ——by members of the Garda Síochána had been improperly used for his own electoral gain.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to resume his seat for a moment.

Deputy Alan Shatter: Sir, this is an issue of enormous seriousness.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not disputing that matter but there are ways and means of dealing with it.

Deputy Alan Shatter: At the end of the debate yesterday the Minister, Deputy O'Dea, came into this House——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, resume your seat please.

Deputy Alan Shatter: ——and, as Minister for Defence, admitted he made a statement——

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy resume his seat until I explain the position to him as I did in the letter that was sent to him?

Deputy Alan Shatter: —that was untrue based on confidential information given to him as a Minister.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy resume his seat please?

Deputy Alan Shatter: This man has responsibility for the security of this State.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Shatter, resume your seat.

Deputy Alan Shatter: That is outrageous and unacceptable and he should no longer be a member of Cabinet.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, resume your seat. Under Standing Order 32, a matter was raised on the motion to adjourn the Dáil which is not a substantive motion. Charges of the kind raised in Deputy Shatter's notice can only be made against a Member by way of a substantive motion. We will move on to—

Deputy Alan Shatter: This man should not still be in Cabinet.

An Ceann Comhairle: —the Order of Business.

Deputy Alan Shatter: No member of the Garda Síochána—

Order of Business.

The Tánaiste: It is proposed to take No. *b12*, motion re ministerial rota for parliamentary questions—

Deputy Alan Shatter: —nor member of the Defence Forces can ensure that if he or she gives the Minister confidential information, he will not run around the streets of Limerick whispering it into ears of journalists for his own personal benefit.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Shatter, I have called the Tánaiste.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It is unacceptable.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Shatter, please.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It is different from the issue that this House dealt with yesterday. It is unacceptable.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Tánaiste to proceed.

The Tánaiste: —No. 12, motion re presentation and circulation of Revised Estimates 2010; No. 12*a*, Finance Bill 2010 — Financial Resolutions; No. 12*b*, Finance Bill 2010 — allocation of time motion for select committee; No. 13, motion of re re-appointment of An Coimisinéir Teanga — back from committee; No. 23 Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2009 [*Seanad*] — Second Stage (resumed); No. 5, George Mitchell Scholarship Fund (Amendment) Bill 2010 — Order for Second Stage, Second and Subsequent Stages; and No. 4, Road Traffic Bill 2009 — Second Stage (resumed).

It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that Nos. *b12*, 12, 12*a* and 12*b* shall be decided without debate and any division demanded on No. 12 shall be taken forthwith;

[The Tánaiste.]

and in the case of No. 12*a*, the Financial Resolutions Nos. 1-52 shall be moved together and decided by one question which shall be put from the Chair. The proceedings of No. 13 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 25 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply. The speeches shall be confined to a Minister or Minister of State and to the main spokespersons for Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin, who shall be called upon in that order, who may share their time, and which shall not exceed five 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.

The Second and Subsequent Stages of No. 5 shall be taken today and the following arrangements shall apply. The proceedings on the Second Stage shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 3 p.m. today; the opening speeches of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for Fine Gael and the Labour Party, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case. The speech of each other member called upon shall not exceed 10 minutes in each case, Members may share time and a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed ten minutes.

The proceedings on the Committee and Subsequent Stages shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 3.30 p.m. today by one question which shall be put from the Chair and which shall, with regard to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Education and Science.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Before the Ceann Comhairle puts the question on the first proposition, I raise the fact that it contains, in effect, five proposals. I know the Ceann Comhairle will apply the rule that there should be only one contribution from each party in respect of that question. The problem is that because there are five elements to the proposition, it is possible that different members of political parties or individual Members of the House may want to contribute. I do not anticipate any great controversy over the ministerial rota for parliamentary questions but Deputy Burton certainly wishes to raise some issues on the financial resolutions. There is a separate question entirely included in the first proposition, which is the taking of 52 financial resolutions together without debate.

There has been an element of drift in this regard towards a collection of proposals being lumped together to be taken without debate but this is pushing it too far. There are far too many elements in this proposal. I ask the Ceann Comhairle, as Chair, to rule as to whether it is appropriate for all five of these questions to be taken together as one proposal from the Government. Will he use his good offices with the Government to ensure we are not continuously presented with these multiple sets of proposals being put together in one proposition?

Deputy Enda Kenny: I agree with that.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I concur with Deputy Gilmore on the unacceptable structuring of the first proposition, which incorporates a reference to four specific sets of proposals and an additional structuring of the address of the financial resolutions covering 52 areas. It is beyond the compass of the House to give blanket approval to this without debate.

I ask that the Chief Whip, with the Tánaiste, will agree to break this up and allow the opportunity for financial resolutions to be placed for scrutiny and debate in the Chamber. To all intents and purposes, this is a copper-fastening of the Government intent without Opposition scrutiny. Incorporated within these financial resolutions are proposals to apply guillotines within committee. It can be seen on the Order Paper. We are being asked to approve financial resolutions and how the process will progress without going through the detail that is involved.

I am not prepared to accept guillotines here and I will not approve guillotines elsewhere within the process hidden behind what is in the Order Paper. It is wrong and this is not the way business should be done in the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: It should be borne in mind that a proposal on the Order of Business is a narrow procedural motion making arrangements for the taking of business and nothing else.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: It is a proposal for not taking business.

An Ceann Comhairle: The proposal is a motion put forward by the Government and is in accordance with precedent. The items are voted on separately when put to the House after the Order of Business.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: They are not debated.

Deputy Joan Burton: There is no debate.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will proceed.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The point made by Deputy Gilmore was that different spokespersons may want to comment——

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Exactly.

Deputy Enda Kenny: ——on the various elements contained therein.

An Ceann Comhairle: The opportunity will arise subsequent to the Order of Business.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: It will not arise.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: They are to be taken without debate.

An Ceann Comhairle: I have advised the House on the taking of business.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Deputy Gilmore made a valid point of order and I support it. These matters should be put separately so that, for example, Deputies Bruton or Burton can comment on the financial elements of the blanket proposal on the Order of Business.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: That is right. That is supported by precedent.

Deputy Joan Burton: I want to comment on them.

An Ceann Comhairle: We must bear in mind that the proposal on the Order of Business is a narrow procedural motion. The items will be dealt with separately after the Order of Business.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: If the Ceann Comhairle will bear with me, I did not intend for this to become acrimonious. There are a number of propositions, and I know Deputy Burton, on behalf of the Labour Party, will be opposing specifically the proposals for the financial resolutions. There is a separate proposal dealing with the allocation of time in dealing with the Finance Bill. The budget debate was truncated because the budget was not introduced until 9 December. It is possible that Members of this House who did not get the opportunity to speak during the budget debate may want to contribute to the Finance Bill and they may wish to oppose the allocation of time motion.

The problem arises that because all these elements are being put together, only one speaker from each party will be allowed to speak on the procedural proposal. Once that is passed,

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

nobody may address the specific issues, which are to be taken without debate. By allowing the Government to put all these proposals together, Members are in effect being prevented from speaking on these issues.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: I have been here and acted as a Frontbench spokesperson on foreign affairs for a very long time and wish to be of some assistance. There is ample precedent where matters are different from each other and affect different spokespersons, they are grouped separately. This goes to the point made by the leaders of the Labour Party and Fine Gael. We have dealt with motions relevant to European matters, which required one kind of response, and the ruling from the Chair if bundling is allowed——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is drifting from his point of order.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: ——of matters which are not cognate will be to exclude Frontbench spokespersons from commenting——

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not intended to exclude them.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: ——on matters for which they are responsible.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy resumes his seat I will advise him of the position. Under Standing Order 26, the Tánaiste is entitled to group items as proposed.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Nobody is debating that.

Deputy Enda Kenny: There is no objection to that.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Chair does not have a function in the matter.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Let us record that this matter excludes spokespersons in a totally undemocratic way. It can be added to the other undemocratic features we have experienced this week.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.

Deputy Alan Shatter: Is this a further example of Green Party Dáil reform? They are muzzled.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Ceann Comhairle said a short time ago that spokespersons would have the opportunity to participate later.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: It is stupid.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: That is not the case.

Deputy Alan Shatter: We need a political confession box.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Who would have gone if George Lee made it to the front bench?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: If we adopt the proposition there will be no further debate. The only issue we are allowed to address on the Order Paper is the procedural proposition.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Who would have been dropped?

Deputy Alan Shatter: The Deputies can get the issues off their chest.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: It would have been Deputy Shatter. A dead man walking.

Deputy Brian Hayes: We are all smiles over here, Deputy Kelleher.

Deputy James Bannon: The Minister of State should be more worried about Willie O’Dea.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Once that is agreed in this House, which the Government will clearly seek to force, that will be it. There will be no further comment and the Ceann Comhairle should clarify the matter.

An Ceann Comhairle: I must advise the Deputy on the matter.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: What you said earlier is not correct.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Government of the day makes proposals and the House disposes of them. I will proceed with the Order of Business.

Deputy James Reilly: On a point of order.

Deputy Brian Hayes: A point of order.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are three proposals to be put to the House.

Deputy Joan Burton: On a point of order.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: A Cheann Comhairle——

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Ceann Comhairle is being unnecessarily being put in an invidious position by the Government. I ask him to request of the Tánaiste to arrange that these items now be taken separately and give an opportunity to spokesmen to comment on the individual elements. This is instead of you, Sir, being put in the invidious position of defending the indefensible bungling by the Government. The Tánaiste should respond and protect the Chair and the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot change Standing Orders on the hoof, and we will not do it this morning.

Deputy Alan Shatter: On a point of order, perhaps the Tánaiste might explain to us the difference between Government bungling and Government plundering.

The Tánaiste: Yet another pathetic response. As you indicated, a Cheann Comhairle, this is a procedural matter. It may entail a potential charge to the Exchequer. This is a precedent and it will allow Members to discuss this more fully at the committee, including the setting of a timetable, so I propose the motion.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: On a point of order——

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have a point of order when we have disorder in the House, but I will allow you in briefly.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: I think you are about to put the question, but spokespersons are entitled to comment before you do so, but they have not been given——

An Ceann Comhairle: The opportunity will arise later, as you have been advised.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: If you put the question, the matter is finished.

An Ceann Comhairle: The individual items will be taken.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The spokespersons are entitled to comment on the proposal from the Government before the vote.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no provision on the Order of Business to do that.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: There is.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Precedent supports it.

Deputy Joan Burton: I oppose No. 1 on the Order of Business in respect of the financial resolutions and the Revised Estimates. The reason I do this is that on Saturday——

An Ceann Comhairle: I am allowing you in on a point of order, not on a Second Stage contribution.

Deputy Joan Burton: I am entitled to do this.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Chair will decide your entitlements. Resume your seat.

Deputy Joan Burton: I oppose——

Deputy Emmet Stagg: A Cheann Comhairle, will you read the rules?

Deputy Joan Burton: ——No. 1. The day after tomorrow, €280 million of a dividend is due to the Irish taxpayers from the €7 billion invested in Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Bank.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is not a point of order.

Deputy Joan Burton: It is included in the Revised Estimates of Government revenues for the year. This time last year, when a €3.5 billion investment was made in Bank of Ireland by Irish taxpayers, we were told it would yield a dividend of 8%. A total of €280 million is due on Saturday from the Bank of Ireland, while €280 million is due from the AIB in May.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are on the Order of Business.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Estimates being put forward do not acknowledge that this dividend has now vanished. Fianna Fáil Ministers, including the Minister for Defence, the Minister for Finance and the Taoiseach, occupied television and radio studios and told us that the €7 billion was an investment and would yield a dividend of €560 million. The Minister for Finance has acknowledged to me that this dividend will not now be paid, and as the dividend is non-cumulative, it is lost to taxpayers.

My second point of opposition to No. 1——

An Ceann Comhairle: You are out of order.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: She is in order.

Deputy Joan Burton: I am totally in order.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call on Deputy Bruton now. Deputy Burton, will you resume your seat? I have allowed you make the points on the issues involved.

Deputy Joan Burton: I want to address the issue——

An Ceann Comhairle: Will you resume your seat? I allowed you a brief comment, and I am calling on Deputy Bruton now.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: On a point of order, Deputy Burton rose to oppose No. 1 on the Order of Business. She is entitled to that and she is entitled——

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no provision for a full scale debate on the Order of Business on this matter. I allowed her some latitude and I will extend the same latitude to Fine Gael and Sinn Féin.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I am sorry, a Cheann Comhairle. Almost from the moment that she began making her contribution, you started to interrupt. She is entitled to oppose No. 1. She is entitled, on behalf of the Labour Party, to state the reasons for opposing No. 1. She had not completed making her case for opposing it. With respect, I ask you to allow
11 o'clock her to continue to explain her second reason for opposing No. 1 on the Order of Business. She is entitled to do that. There is precedent in this House for spokespersons from parties to oppose propositions on the Order of Business. A Cheann Comhairle, I ask you to defend the rights of Deputy Burton and Members of this House by allowing her to complete her contribution.

An Ceann Comhairle: Under Standing Order 26, if such a proposal is opposed, the Chair shall permit a brief statement——

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: She is being brief.

An Ceann Comhairle: ——from each party in the Opposition, and then the Taoiseach or Tánaiste shall reply. Deputy Burton, I ask you to be very brief.

Deputy Joan Burton: I thank you for allowing me make my first point. My second point is this——

Deputy Niall Blaney: On a point or order——

(Interruptions).

Deputy Brian Hayes: This will be good.

Deputy Niall Blaney: The Opposition is making a circus of the morning's business. The reality is that Deputy Kenny and Deputy Gilmore made their points on this item. We are continuing now with a second individual and we are now having a debate. Stop the circus and put the question.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Alan Shatter: If this is a circus, the Tánaiste is the ringmaster. We will not ask who the clowns are.

Deputy Joan Burton: A Cheann Comhairle, I should invite you for a cup of coffee and we can discuss this peacefully. As it is, I will try to make myself heard.

An Ceann Comhairle: If you could complete your short statement, we would be delighted.

Deputy Joan Burton: Both I and Deputy Bruton are particularly anxious to facilitate the Minister for Finance in respect of the allocation of time for the Finance Bill 2010. However,

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

there is no need to have a time based motion on Committee Stage of the Bill. The committee is perfectly capable of doing its business and is anxious to facilitate the Minister for Finance. Putting in a time based motion is the use of a parliamentary jackboot when it is entirely unnecessary.

Deputy Enda Kenny: A Ceann Comhairle, Deputy Gilmore raised a legitimate point of order, upon which a number of Deputies commented. You never even managed to put the question as to whether Nos. *b12*, *12*, *12a* and *12b* were agreed.

An Ceann Comhairle: In advance of an agreement, Deputy Gilmore asked to comment.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Yesterday was a very bad day for politics here.

Deputy Johnny Brady: The week before was worse.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Enda Kenny: Those who smirk behind their constitutional seals and harbour a perjurer at the Cabinet table should be ashamed of themselves.

An Ceann Comhairle: Have you a comment to make?

Deputy Enda Kenny: This was epitomised by the Minister for Education and Science, when he clapped the unfortunate Green Party Deputy on the back and said “Well done. You made a tough decision.”

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Kenny, can I ask you to comment on No. 1?

Deputy Enda Kenny: I will comment on the Order of Business. I oppose the Order of Business.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Paul Gogarty: On a point of order——

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Roll over. Roll over.

Deputy Paul Gogarty: The discourse between me and the Minister had nothing to do with yesterday’s vote. Deputy Kenny is not averse to telling a few fibs himself about Sinn Féin.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call on Deputy Kenny to speak on No. 1 on the Order of Business. Otherwise I will adjourn the House unless we can get some order.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I oppose the Order of Business and I will tell you why. Deputy Shatter raised the possibility of a section 32 motion, which you refused.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will not revisit an issue with which we have dealt. I have written to Deputy Shatter setting out the position and the procedures he needs to pursue in the matter.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I am setting out clear reasons for opposing the Order of Business. They are important to the interests of our State and the standards that are employed by Government. Yesterday——

An Ceann Comhairle: I will not allow the Deputy to revisit yesterday’s debate.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Am I entitled to explain myself in the House of the people?

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to address issues arising on the Order of Business.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I will do so. The Order of Business is before us for consideration and acceptance or rejection. I oppose it and will set out the reasons for doing so. Yesterday, in defending the behaviour of the Minister for Defence, Deputy O’Dea, the Taoiseach and Ministers repeatedly claimed——

An Ceann Comhairle: The House disposed of a vote of confidence in the Minister yesterday.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Yes, and today we are dealing with its consequences.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This has nothing to do with the Order of Business.

Deputy Alan Shatter: The Leader of the Opposition is entitled to finish his contribution.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy Kenny please deal with the Order of Business, as proposed for today?

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Taoiseach and Ministers repeatedly stated that when the so-called mistake of the Minister for Defence was brought to his attention he apologised to the injured party and acted in good faith.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are other ways to deal with the issue.

Deputy Enda Kenny: This is the only opportunity I will have to do so today.

An Ceann Comhairle: As I explained to Deputy Shatter, the matter cannot be raised under Standing Order 32 but if a substantive motion is put before the House, we will deal with it, which is more than adequate.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Ceann Comhairle does not want to hear what I have to say. I am not speaking under Standing Order 32 but in opposition to the Order of Business. The Taoiseach, the Head of Government who lays down standards for acceptance to members of his Cabinet, stated on Tuesday that there are standards he expects a person to show when an error is made, that the person should admit to the mistake, solve the problem and deal with it to the satisfaction of the person who is aggrieved.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are not revisiting yesterday’s debate.

Deputy Enda Kenny: These are the words of the Taoiseach. I want you, a Cheann Comhairle, to understand that in the past hour——

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not allowing Deputy Kenny to revisit yesterday’s debate. He is welcome to table a substantive motion.

Deputy Alan Shatter: The Ceann Comhairle is like a spectator gone nuts at a soccer match.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Enda Kenny: I quoted the Taoiseach’s words. In the past 60 minutes, the aggrieved person, speaking on national radio, stated that far from offering an immediate and fulsome apology, the offer of the Minister for Defence was unapologetic. He further suggested that the

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

eventual apology was in effect dragged out of the Minister kicking and screaming. This revelation——

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have a rehash of yesterday's debate. I will put the question on the Order of Business.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I want to ask the Tánaiste, the deputy head of Government, a question before I tell the Ceann Comhairle whether I will go along with the Order of Business.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy does not have a choice.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I note a Member of the Green Party is leaving the Chamber.

(Interruptions).

Deputies: Come back here.

A Deputy: He is returning to sit in the Fianna Fáil benches.

Deputy Enda Kenny: He stated on radio this morning that the Minister for Defence was ethically wrong.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Kenny to resume his seat.

Deputy Denis Naughten: Deputy Mattie McGrath, the conscience of Fianna Fáil, has arrived.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Does the Tánaiste believe it is ethically wrong for a Cabinet Minister to make a sworn affidavit which is false?

An Ceann Comhairle: I will put the question. Will Deputy Kenny resume his seat? Deputy Morgan should do likewise.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I will but I want the Tánaiste to answer my question.

(Interruptions).

Question put: "That the proposal for dealing with No. *b12*, No. 12, No. 12*a* and No. 12*b*, without debate, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 70; Níl, 65.

Tá

Ahern, Dermot.
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.
Cregan, John.
Cuffe, Ciarán.
Cullen, Martin.
Curran, John.
Dempsey, Noel.
Devins, Jimmy.
Dooley, Timmy.
Finneran, Michael.
Fitzpatrick, Michael.
Fleming, Seán.
Gogarty, Paul.
Gormley, John.
Grealish, Noel.
Hanafin, Mary.

Tá—*continued*

Harney, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Healy-Rae, Jackie.
 Hoctor, Máire.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Kenneally, Brendan.
 Kennedy, Michael.
 Killeen, Tony.
 Kitt, Michael P.
 Kitt, Tom.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 McEllistram, Thomas.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 Martin, Micheál.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.

Nolan, M. J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Donoghue, John.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keefe, Batt.
 O'Keefe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 O'Sullivan, Christy.
 Power, Seán.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Scanlon, Eamon.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Mary.
 White, Mary Alexandra.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Bannon, James.
 Barrett, Seán.
 Behan, Joe.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burke, Ulick.
 Burton, Joan.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Carey, Joe.
 Clune, Deirdre.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Coonan, Noel J.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Crawford, Seymour.
 Creighton, Lucinda.
 D'Arcy, Michael.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Doyle, Andrew.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Hayes, Brian.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Higgins, Michael D.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kenny, Enda.

Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 McCormack, Pádraic.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McGinley, Dinny.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McManus, Liz.
 Morgan, Arthur.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Quinn, Ruairí.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Reilly, James.
 Ring, Michael.
 Shatter, Alan.
 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: Is the proposal for dealing with No. 13 agreed? Agreed.

Deputy James Reilly: On a point of order, yesterday in this Chamber the Taoiseach stated on the record:

[Deputy James Reilly.]

There was a competition. Michael O’Leary and Ryanair for whatever reason, which is their own business, did not compete for the hangar, seek ownership of the hangar or seek a lease for it last September——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, that is not a point of order.

Deputy James Reilly: There is a letter here from 13 August to the Tánaiste requesting the hangar and mentioning 500 jobs.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Reilly, resume your seat please.

Deputy James Reilly: Our Taoiseach has been called a liar on the national airwaves.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, will you resume your seat please?

Deputy James Reilly: Either he comes in here and explains——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, resume your seat.

Deputy James Reilly: On a point of order——

An Ceann Comhairle: No, you are not speaking on a point of order. Resume your seat.

Deputy James Reilly: Will you not give him an opportunity to clarify the record?

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with No. 5 agreed? Agreed.

Deputy James Reilly: A Cheann Comhairle, the record needs to be corrected. The Taoiseach must come in here and explain himself.

A Deputy: Behave yourself.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Enda Kenny.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Which item are we on, a Cheann Comhairle? You have not finished the Order of Business.

An Ceann Comhairle: I called the second and I dealt with the third as well.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I have two questions for the Tánaiste. First, does she believe it was ethically correct for the Minister for Defence knowingly to submit a sworn affidavit to the High Court which he knew to be false?

An Ceann Comhairle: We have already revisited that matter.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I have had enough of that. This is a matter of standards.

An Ceann Comhairle: We had a debate on this matter yesterday. I advised earlier that any allegation must be by way of substantive motion.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Tánaiste is the deputy Head of Government. I want to know whether she is of the opinion that it was ethically correct for the Minister for Defence to submit a false affidavit to the High Court for political gain.

An Ceann Comhairle: I cannot allow that question. We spent a considerable period yesterday on this matter.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The Tánaiste wants to answer.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is all over the public airwaves.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to raise the matter by way of substantive motion. That is how it must be done when serious allegations are being made against a Member of the House.

Deputy James Reilly: Rubbish.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I have some years annual service in this House and have seen various shades of this issue being raised in Governments over the years. I am entitled to raise a question like this on the Order of Business. I am not making any grievous charge against anybody. I am asking the Tánaiste if she considers that it was ethically correct for the Minister for Defence to submit a sworn affidavit to the High Court which he knew to be false. This is a matter of considerable importance. Following on from Deputy Gogarty's intervention this morning that it was ethically wrong for the Minister, Deputy O'Dea, to do what he did, I refer to——

An Ceann Comhairle: This was debated yesterday.

Deputy Enda Kenny: ——the statement made by the leader of the Green Party, the Minister, Deputy Gormley, on 24 February 2007 that his party in government would introduce the “strictest ethical standards ever seen in this country”.

An Ceann Comhairle: I wish to advise the Deputy of the position in regard to this matter.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Does the Tánaiste believe that what the Minister, Deputy O'Dea, did was ethically correct?

An Ceann Comhairle: Members voted on this matter yesterday and that vote determined the position. If the Deputy wants to pursue the matter further, he can put down a substantive motion of no confidence in the Government and have the whole matter revisited.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I concluded my contribution on that point by asking the Tánaiste a question. I hope the Ceann Comhairle will allow her to answer it. It requires a simple “Yes” or “No” answer. Does she believe it was ethically correct for the Minister for Defence to submit a sworn affidavit which he knew to be false?

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not allowing a debate on this matter.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I do not want a debate; all the Tánaiste has to do is answer “Yes” or “No”.

Second, the record of the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in securing jobs for the State is absolutely abysmal. The revelation today that she has again failed to secure 300 high-tech jobs for north Dublin and Meath is simply another demonstration of gross incompetence. She should voluntarily submit to the Taoiseach that she would like a change of Ministry in view of her incompetence in her current role.

Can the Tánaiste confirm newspaper reports today that she telephoned the chief executive officer of Aer Lingus to ask him if that company would move from hangar six at Dublin Airport in the knowledge that when Aer Lingus was privatised, this House was informed on more than

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

one occasion that the reason the Government was holding on to 25% of the shares was for strategic reasons in terms of the development of the industry?

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question on promised business?

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is difficult to judge which is worse, when the Tánaiste intervenes or when she does not intervene. The result is the same — failure, failure, failure. Was she told to get lost when she telephoned the chief executive officer of Aer Lingus to ask whether the airline was prepared to move from hangar six so that 300 jobs could be provided there?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is the question.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I have asked two straight questions which require only a “Yes” or “No” response.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: There are questions marks over what we heard yesterday in this House. Today, I am advised that the Garda has stated that it did not provide the Minister, Deputy O’Dea, with information, as he claimed——

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not revisiting this matter at this point.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——in a statement on the floor of the House yesterday.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are procedures and avenues to be pursued if the Deputy so wishes.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: There is no avenue. How can the matter be finished if we have a situation where there is a contrary statement, a firm denial by the Garda Síochána——

An Ceann Comhairle: Serious allegations are being made against a Member of the House. The Deputy must make them by way of substantive motion. That is the only way they will be allowed.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——that it did not advise the Minister as he claimed in regard to the vexed and false statement he made against now Councillor Maurice Quinlivan.

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a query on promised legislation?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Let us make no mistake about it, the Tánaiste is a colleague and party member of the Minister for Defence, as is the Ceann Comhairle. We are now advised that the Minister allegedly instructed Fianna Fáil canvass teams to repeat his false allegation in the course of the local government election campaign last June.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Ó Caoláin to resume his seat.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I have a second question arising from the second matter raised by Deputy Kenny. How will the Tánaiste stand over her statement that young people are leaving our shores not because of the disastrous employment situation and the Government’s failure to sustain, let alone create, employment, but because they are going off to enjoy themselves?

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question on promised business?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Will the Tánaiste and the Government facilitate a debate on emigration in this House so that we can get some understanding of her bizarre theory on the exodus of so many young people from our shores in recent months?

An Ceann Comhairle: Is a debate promised on this matter?

The Tánaiste: A debate took place in the House yesterday in the context of a vote of confidence in the Minister for Defence. That motion stands and there is nothing further to say on the matter.

Deputy Seán Barrett: Does the Tánaiste have confidence in the Minister?

The Tánaiste: We have full confidence in the Minister for Defence, as has been articulated on behalf of the Government by the Taoiseach. I assume the accusations made by Deputy Kenny are based on his reading of inaccurate articles in the national newspapers.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Tánaiste has not answered my question. It requires merely a “Yes” or “No” response.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Kenny must allow the Tánaiste to respond.

The Tánaiste: In regard to employment, perhaps the Deputy does not want to hear about the jobs that were created last week. What about the jobs in Hertz, PayPal and eBay?

Deputy Enda Kenny: What about the jobs at Ryanair and SR Technics?

The Tánaiste: A huge number of jobs have been created and there is a great number of opportunities for the future.

Deputy Damien English: What is the Tánaiste’s predictions for the year?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Tánaiste must be allowed to speak without interruption.

Deputy Damien English: She does not have a clue.

The Tánaiste: It is not my problem if Deputies do not want to know the facts.

As I said, there has been incorrect information in the newspapers, including one article on Element Six. I will put it to the Deputies who represent that constituency that they know full well——

Deputy Damien English: Is the Deputy referring to Element Six or hangar six?

Deputy James Reilly: I believe “Element Six” is a movie.

The Tánaiste: ——of my personal involvement with the chairman of the board and the chief executive officer, my personal involvement with Shannon Development and the new initiative in the sustaining of those jobs. We now have, as a consequence of that intervention, continued manufacturing, for example, in the Shannon free zone and, also as a consequence of that intervention, those workers coming back from part-time to full-time employment.

Deputy James Reilly: Will the Tánaiste tell that to workers in north Dublin?

The Tánaiste: I heard what Deputy Kenny had to say about Dublin Airport, but I did not hear him talk about the needs of Aer Lingus and Aer Arann.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I did.

Deputy Noel Treacy: The Deputy did not.

Deputy James Reilly: These are former Aer Lingus workers.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Tánaiste must be allowed to respond without interruption.

The Tánaiste: People must remember that a considerable amount of effort, time and resources went into putting together Dublin Aerospace——

Deputy James Reilly: Former SR Technics and FLS employees are out of work.

The Tánaiste: ——where a number of people from SR Technics are now employed. The man who has taken over M50 Motors indicated to me that all his employees came from SR Technics. There are continued initiatives in dealing with the supports that are needed for SR Technics.

Deputy Kenny also asked about Ryanair. The Deputy is articulating and emulating the way Mr. O'Leary does his business in the way he does his business in this House.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Call his bluff if the belief is that he is bluffing.

Deputy Damien English: His business is a success, in case the Tánaiste has not noticed.

The Tánaiste: I have been working with Ryanair and the IDA since 26 February last year.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Call his bluff.

The Tánaiste: We indicated to the company on 21 July that the DAA was at an advanced stage with another party about the use of hangar 6 and our suggestion was that the best way forward was for direct contact between the DAA and the company. The IDA, on my behalf, was willing to chair such a meeting. Following considerable correspondence, the company found it was not in a position to directly involve itself in those negotiations.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Tánaiste allowed that.

The Tánaiste: It is important to reiterate on the basis that Mr. O'Leary has a fixation with access to hangar 6 that I put the idea to Aer Lingus.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: He has a fixation with the media.

Deputy Damien English: When?

The Tánaiste: I did that on the basis that people like Deputy Kenny would accuse me of inaction if I did not. On the basis of my conversation, and work with my colleague, the Minister for Transport, I assure people in north Dublin that I did ask. It was indicated to me that to sustain Aer Lingus and deal with the challenging issues in aviation it faces at present, and so it can consolidate its position, that hangar 6 was hugely important.

Deputy Damien English: Is that why it is empty?

Deputy James Reilly: What about the famous competition we are always hearing about?

The Tánaiste: On that basis I was in a position to indicate to Mr. O'Leary in my meeting that there was not just a legal impediment in the matter but that it was imperative to the sustainability of Aer Lingus that it continue to have hangar 6. On that basis, I provided further

opportunities for Ryanair in the configuration of existing hangars and offered two sites that are available in Dublin Airport.

Shannon Development also put forward a proposal that is available to Ryanair in that an entire new hangar at Shannon Airport will be provided for the specific requirements of Ryanair.

Deputy James Reilly: Half of Europe has put forward a proposal. The Tánaiste just does not get it.

The Tánaiste: We are being fair, reasonable,——

Deputy Billy Timmins: Ineffective.

Deputy Enda Kenny: And harbouring a perjurer.

The Tánaiste: ——and doing all we can but it is difficult to get across the situation that Aer Lingus has a lease for 20 years and that hangar 6 is imperative to the sustainability of the company.

Deputy Damien English: Will it be empty next year and the year after? Aer Lingus sold its planes.

The Tánaiste: Deputy Kenny would be the first, as would his Deputies in north Dublin, if we did not allow the continuation of a viable Aer Lingus, a viable Ryanair and a viable Aer Arann in this country.

Deputy James Reilly: The DAA can move Aer Lingus to another hangar.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Ryanair can move to a different hangar.

Deputy James Reilly: Ryanair can only be moved by the DAA but O'Leary cannot move the DAA.

The Tánaiste: They are all going through difficult times in aviation at present and we are still open, as I indicated to Mr. O'Leary at the meeting, to working through a number of alternative proposals and in which we are more than supportive of him if he wishes to have those 300 jobs that he wants.

Deputy James Reilly: Doing everything except what will bring the jobs. I say well done to the Tánaiste, fair play to her.

The Tánaiste: I am sure when Deputy Reilly was a little boy, the one thing his mother told him was——

Deputy Brian Hayes: Never to lie under oath.

The Tánaiste: ——that I want does not get.

Deputy James Reilly: The fact is I want 300 jobs for north Dublin, as do the redundant workers in SR Technics but Michael O'Leary will get not "I get".

The Tánaiste: So does this Government but we cannot do it on the basis of what cannot be delivered but we do have alternatives and I, the Minister for Transport and the representatives of State agencies are more than willing to support Ryanair and its requisite needs.

Deputy James Reilly: She also told me not tell lies about fictitious competition.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Is the Tánaiste going to arrange for a debate on emigration? It is very important that this issue be addressed but the Government has constantly it put on the long finger and ignored it. Many young people are leaving our shores at this time.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Can the exiles come back?

Deputy Enda Kenny: I do not wish to be disruptive to proceedings but I want to bring the Tánaiste back to the first question I asked. I understand the gardaí have clarified that they did not provide confidential information to the Minister for Defence about that the allegation he made that a citizen was running a brothel in Limerick.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot revisit this, we dealt with it yesterday. If the Deputy wants to revisit there is a procedure whereby he can do that.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Ceann Comhairle has interrupted continuously on a matter of State importance.

An Ceann Comhairle: An important principle is at stake. It could be a Minister today and a backbencher tomorrow.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I do not have the opportunity to address the Tánaiste every day. The gardaí have stated that they did not supply the information to the Minister for Defence that he claims was supplied to him.

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question on promised legislation?

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is critical that Ministers in particular should be above and beyond the spreading of malicious rumours about any citizen.

An Ceann Comhairle: We dealt with this yesterday.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I would like to know from the Tánaiste, and I am sure she wants to set the highest standards in Government, if she believes it was ethically correct for the Minister for Defence to submit a false affidavit to the High Court for political gain. Will she give a “Yes” or “No” answer?

An Ceann Comhairle: The House voted on this yesterday.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The House determined a vote of confidence by numbers. The Ceann Comhairle is defending the Tánaiste.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not defending anyone, I am defending the rights of all Members of the House.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Then she is well able to answer. The Ceann Comhairle is defending the Tánaiste in particular.

An Ceann Comhairle: If we get to a situation where serious allegations can be made against any Member of the House, standards in the House will drop. We will have a serious problem.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Standards in the House will drop? Standards in the country have dropped.

An Ceann Comhairle: They might have but it is important that we maintain decent standards in the Chamber.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Standards in the country have dropped because the Government harbours a perjurer at the Cabinet table. I want to offer the Tánaiste the opportunity to answer my question, “Yes” or “No”.

An Ceann Comhairle: We dealt with this matter yesterday, we had a vote on it. The Members divided and decided that we move on. If the Deputy wants to revisit the issue there is a process for doing that.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Ceann Comhairle is protecting the Tánaiste. I am revisiting the issue on my feet, it is a straight “Yes” or “No” answer.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is a process to go through to do that.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Does the Tánaiste believe it is ethically correct for the Minister for Defence to do what he did?

The Tánaiste: I ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw his charge that the Minister for Defence committed perjury.

Deputy Damien English: That is what he did.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I have no intention of withdrawing the remark.

Deputy James Reilly: The Government thinks it is all right to make serious allegations about people outside the House.

The Tánaiste: This matter was dealt with, an explanation was given to the House through a personal statement and a substantive motion where the Deputy had an opportunity to say what he wanted and the matter has been dealt with by the House, the Members of this House and by this Government.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Kenny to co-operate with the Chair and he is refusing to do so.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Was it ethically correct?

An Ceann Comhairle: I will suspend the House if Deputy Kenny does not co-operate, and that means sitting down.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Tánaiste is speechless for once.

Deputy Brian Hayes: On a point of order, it is a long-standing tradition of this House that where a Member deliberately or inadvertently misleads the House, an opportunity is given the next day or at the next available opportunity for that Member to correct the record.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is not a point of order.

Deputy Brian Hayes: In light of what Deputy Kenny and Deputy Ó Caoláin have told the House, whereby members of the Garda Síochána have confirmed that the information was not given to the Minister,—

An Ceann Comhairle: I have advised the House many times this morning that where serious allegations are made against a Member, there is a process to go through to deal with them. I will implement that if the proposal is put forward.

Deputy Brian Hayes: —I am asking the Ceann Comhairle to advise me if time will be made available today for the Minister to come to the House again to clarify a statement of yesterday where he suggested the information was given to him by a member of the Garda Síochána.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am advising the Deputy how to handle these matters. I ask the Deputy to resume his seat. I told the Deputy earlier how to proceed.

Deputy Brian Hayes: With respect, that was a separate matter.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not a separate matter, we are talking about serious allegations being made against a Member of the House. There is a process to go through and I will insist on that being done. We cannot proceed on this basis. We are lowering the standards in the Chamber, what is happening is disgraceful.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Standing Orders have a precedent whereby a previous occupant of the Chair—

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy does not resume his seat, I will suspend the House.

Deputy Brian Hayes: I am asking the Ceann Comhairle to permit the Minister to come before the House to correct the record.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am suspending the House.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The Minister deliberately misled the House.

Deputy Joan Burton: For how long will the House be suspended?

Deputy Noel J. Coonan: For five years.

A Deputy: For the remainder of the day.

An Ceann Comhairle: It will be suspended for ten minutes.

Sitting suspended at 11.40 a.m. and resumed at 11.58 p.m.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will endeavour to move on with the business of the day.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I think the Tánaiste inadvertently referred to element 6 when she meant hangar 6 in a response to—

The Tánaiste: No. Element 6 is in Shannon.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Yes. I was going to remind the Tánaiste that it was one of the places where she lost jobs in the course of the past year. They were also lost in Waterford and Limerick. I want to ask the Tánaiste directly whether she will now lose the 300 potential jobs for Dublin Airport? At this stage we have heard so much about hangar this and hangar that but what people want to know, particularly those hoping to get this employment, is whether these jobs will be provided.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Ask Michael O’Leary that.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Deputy Coghlan is the Tánaiste and she is Minister with line responsibility for job creation, although there is not much evidence of it. The potential for these jobs has been in existence for the best part of a year. Will they be provided?

With regard to the motion of confidence in the Minister for Defence, Deputy O’Dea, tabled yesterday by the Taoiseach and passed by the House, on the Order of Business yesterday I raised with the Taoiseach his plans for that motion.

When he informed Deputies that he was minded to bring the motion before the House yesterday, I asked him whether it was a Government motion and I understood from his reply that it was. We have been told since then by a number of representatives of the Green Party that they were somewhat bounced into the motion yesterday. When the Taoiseach informed the House on yesterday’s Order of Business that a motion of confidence in the Minister, Deputy O’Dea, would be moved, had the Government made a decision to move such a motion? Was the motion that the Taoiseach moved yesterday a Government motion and can the Tánaiste inform the House when the Government made the decision to move it? If it was a Government motion, how has it transpired that Deputy Gogarty indicated this morning that individual Members of the Green Party were unhappy with it?

12 o’clock

An Ceann Comhairle: We had this debate yesterday.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: No, we did not.

An Ceann Comhairle: We really did.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: He is speaking about this morning.

Deputy Joan Burton: This is a different point.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: It is a procedural issue.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: It will not go away.

Deputy Joan Burton: It is about procedure.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: There is no legislation promised.

An Ceann Comhairle: We wish to proceed with the Order of Business.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I note the Minister, Deputy Dempsey, is advising the Ceann Comhairle.

Deputy James Bannon: And the Tánaiste.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Deputy Kehoe does it often enough.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I am trying to clarify the status of the motion passed in the House yesterday in light of Deputy Gogarty’s comments on radio this morning and the departure by the chairman of the Green Party from the position taken by his party on the motion. I am trying to establish whether the motion was moved by the Taoiseach in his capacity as leader of the Fianna Fáil Party or on behalf of the Government and, if so, when the Government decision was taken to move it.

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

I wish to raise two other matters but I will await the Tánaiste's reply to the matters already raised.

The Tánaiste: I cannot add much more to what I have already said to Deputy Kenny on the issue of Ryanair. With regard to the motion, this matter was discussed and brought forward on the Order of Business and, as in the normal course of affairs when the Opposition proposes a motion of no confidence, the Government put forward a motion of confidence. To facilitate the House, the Taoiseach indicated in his response to Deputy Gilmore that the motion would be facilitated yesterday. That decision was intended to facilitate Members and it was made on either the Order of Business or Leaders' Questions.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Gilmore to speak about promised business.

Deputy Seán Barrett: That was not the question.

Deputy Joan Burton: It was not a Government decision, therefore.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: It was a Government motion.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I do not accept the response and I think this is part of our problem. The Tánaiste seems to think she has said all that has to be said about the jobs at the airport. I am afraid she has not.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore——

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Sorry, a Ceann Comhairle, my question to the Tánaiste is whether those jobs will be provided. All we have heard over the past several days were the details of the Tánaiste's exchanges with Mr. O'Leary and Ryanair. Whether Ryanair provides the jobs is a question——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore, the difficulty we have with the Order of Business——

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Tánaiste——

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry Deputy, allow me one moment. The difficulty we have with the Order of Business is that we cannot allow it to be turned into Question Time.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: At 90 minutes, it has been a long Question Time.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is essentially what is happening. We have provision on the three sitting days of the week for Question Time

Deputy Enda Kenny: If she answered the questions.

An Ceann Comhairle: Alternative avenues are available for pursuing these matters but the Order of Business is not intended to be used for that purpose.

Deputy Damien English: Nor should Cabinet meetings.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: If the Ceann Comhairle went to Dublin Airport, Swords or north Dublin and told one of those 300 people or anyone else who is looking for jobs that the Order of Business cannot be used for this purpose, I know where they would tell him to go. I am asking the Tánaiste——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore——

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: People are looking for jobs, a Cheann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not make——

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: They are out of work since losing their employment at the beginning of last year.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy——

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Instead of acting as a mouthpiece for Michael O’Leary, the Deputy should go and do something about it.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Tánaiste has direct responsibility.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: If you are so friendly with him, get him to do something.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Dempsey, please.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: We did not see much of Deputy Dempsey.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: A mouthpiece for Ryanair.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: He is the Minister for Transport.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore, please.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Mouthpiece.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: We did not see much of him in terms of doing something to protect those jobs.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore, the Chair is on his feet.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: If those jobs are not to be provided——

Deputy Noel Dempsey: He is a mouthpiece for Ryanair.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Noel Dempsey, please. I do not make Standing Orders; I merely implement them.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Sometimes.

An Ceann Comhairle: The clear provision in Standing Orders is that we cannot allow Question Time on the Order of Business.

Deputy Brian Hayes: When it suits.

An Ceann Comhairle: Other avenues are available for submitting questions, such as the Adjournment debate.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Tánaiste, in reply to my question, stated that she had said all that was going to be said on this. I am challenging that on the basis that if these jobs are not to be provided one way, they should be provided a different way. It is her job as Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to ensure the people who have the skills

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

needed to maintain aircraft are given the opportunity of putting their expertise to productive employment.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Is the Deputy saying that hangar six should be taken from Aer Lingus?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: My second question on this——

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I ask for clarity on that.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: He wants to take it from Aer Lingus for his Deputies from north Dublin.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: He is asking you to find a solution.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: He is a long way from Dun Laoghaire.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Kelleher, please.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is time the Deputy stopped speaking about hangars and began to hang his head in shame for the fact that he had this for a year.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: He is trying to have it both ways.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore——

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: You have had this for a year and those people are out of work.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore——

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: You have blown it.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Gilmore for his co-operation on the Order of Business.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: Sit back down on that fence.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Those jobs have been allowed to fall by the wayside.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask for the Deputy's co-operation. Please engage the Chair rather than Members.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I remind the Ceann Comhairle that I am the Member he called. I am in possession.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am not doubting that.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: The Ceann Comhairle told him he was out of order.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Members doing the interrupting are over there.

Deputy Joan Burton: They are on your side.

An Ceann Comhairle: The important thing is——

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I am the Member who is in possession.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is important that the Deputy who is in possession should be in order.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Members who are interrupting are on that side of the House.

Deputy Liz McManus: The Ministers are at fault.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: May I move on to the question of yesterday's motion?

Deputy John Cregan: Ask questions.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Is legislation promised?

An Ceann Comhairle: We went over this ground yesterday.

Deputy James Reilly: Deputy Dempsey seems to be the mouthpiece for everyone.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I would hesitate to argue against the mouthpiece over there.

Deputy James Reilly: I devoted my efforts to saving the jobs. If the Minister employed himself in the same manner we might not have had these problems.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Ceann Comhairle, I sat here——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore, we debated that matter for 90 minutes yesterday and the House divided and decided at the end of the day.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The House is misled again.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no necessity to revisit the matter at this stage.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I sat through the Order of Business waiting to be called. I did not interrupt. I did not barrack or shout at anybody. I was in possession when the Ceann Comhairle adjourned the House. I am attempting to ask a couple of questions on behalf of the people of this country who send us here. Since I stood up, I have been interrupted by Members from the Government side, including Ministers. I am asking the Ceann Comhairle to protect me in this.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: God help us.

An Ceann Comhairle: Every effort is being made to do that.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: The Deputy is out of order.

Deputy Liz McManus: He is at it again. Is he the Ceann Comhairle?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: He was told he was out of order.

Deputy Joe Costello: The Ministers are out of order.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we conclude?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: He was allowed to speak but he is out of order.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Dempsey, please.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Am I to be permitted to——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore, I wish to proceed with the Order of Business. We have much business to do and we are being delayed.

Deputy Joan Burton: Has the Ceann Comhairle nothing to say to the Ministers?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I just want to make my contribution and I do not want to engage in argy bargy.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: He is at it again.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I am being continuously interrupted. I raised a question on yesterday's Order of Business about the status of the motion which the Ceann Comhairle permitted and to which the Taoiseach replied. My understanding, which I think the Tánaiste has confirmed in her reply, was that it was intended as a Government motion. The question I asked was when the Government made the decision to bring the motion. The Tánaiste, in her reply—

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to find another means of pursuing this.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Tánaiste has indicated that, somehow, the Taoiseach made the decision while he was on his feet for the Order of Business. Is that the case or was a decision taken by the Government? Members of one of the Government parties have been saying they were bounced into the motion. Was it a Government motion?

Did the Taoiseach decide to introduce that motion while he was on his feet yesterday or did the Government make a formal decision to introduce the motion? The question is in order.

An Ceann Comhairle: Very briefly, Tánaiste.

The Tánaiste: It was a Government motion. It was moved by the Taoiseach on behalf of the Government—

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Yes, we know that, but when did the Government make the decision?

Deputy Damien English: When was it written?

The Tánaiste: —and it was supported by all members of the Government parties.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: When did the Government make the decision?

The Tánaiste: The Ceann Comhairle provided a considerable amount of time through a special notice question, which was perhaps one of the longest special notice questions ever in this House, approximately an hour and a half. The Taoiseach and I have given a considerable amount of information to Members of the House. I have briefed many Members of the constituencies, including one of Deputy Gilmore's own party members. I am pleased to hear that if they cannot be provided in one way then they should be provided in another way.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: That is right.

The Tánaiste: That is exactly what I am doing.

Deputy John Cregan: Hear, hear.

The Tánaiste: It is a matter for the party concerned now as to whether the other ways in which this matter can be dealt with will be dealt with.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: However, it is the Tánaiste's responsibility.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will move on. A number of Members are offering. As we have lost a lot of time on the Order of Business I ask Members to bear with me and I will come back to them on Tuesday. I have a list of those wishing to speak. We have a number of serious items to deal with.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: A Cheann Comhairle——

Deputy James Reilly: A Cheann Comhairle, I have to ask a question. I am seeking your advice.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy James Reilly: It is not a question of giving advice as Members on the other side of the House do, I am seeking your advice. The Taoiseach of our country, our leader abroad, the head of our nation, has been called a liar on the airwaves——

An Ceann Comhairle: Are we talking about——

Deputy James Reilly: He must come in. I believe he has misled the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Reilly should resume his seat.

Deputy James Reilly: I am asking you, a Cheann Comhairle——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Reilly should resume his seat.

Deputy James Reilly: I do not wish to engage in shouting. I am asking you a question.

An Ceann Comhairle: Let us get away from the filibustering.

Deputy James Reilly: Why will you not allow the Taoiseach the opportunity to clarify the record?

An Ceann Comhairle: We are disrupting the proper running of the House with this procedure.

Deputy James Reilly: The record needs to be clarified and corrected. I am asking you to advise me as to when the Taoiseach will clarify matters. Perhaps the Tánaiste would advise me.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am advising the Deputy. If he is making a serious allegation against another Member of the House he will have to do so by way of substantive motion.

Deputy James Reilly: I am not——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should resume his seat.

Deputy James Reilly: An allegation has been made on the airwaves by a senior international businessman that the Taoiseach told lies.

An Ceann Comhairle: But Deputy Reilly is making the allegation in the House. He has the remedy.

Deputy James Reilly: We need to have the record clarified.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should resume his seat.

Deputy James Reilly: I am asking you how to do that. Will the Taoiseach come to the House to clarify the record?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy can table a substantive motion.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: On a point of order. Your suggestion, a Cheann Comhairle that Deputies who have waited patiently to ask about proposed legislation forego that opportunity today——

An Ceann Comhairle: Today, yes, but all being well we will facilitate them immediately on Tuesday.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: No, we have patiently awaited the opportunity to find out whether legislation is coming forward so that we can plan for it. We should be given the opportunity.

An Ceann Comhairle: Let us have it now.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: A range of Deputies wish to speak and they should be allowed.

An Ceann Comhairle: Let us have it.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: He does not have a question.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: A Cheann Comhairle, if you give me a lift to Dundalk this evening in that car I could help you to sort out these matters very quickly.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I am sure you could.

Deputy James Reilly: But would he come back?

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I have two questions on legislation. The first refers to the qualification, education and training Bill. Will the Tánaiste underwrite the funding necessary for approximately 100 former SR Technics workers to get positions? The DIT informed those people in an e-mail last night that, unfortunately, the proposed accelerated programme on engineering systems maintenance is not going ahead as planned. It is not going ahead for those people because the funding is not in place. The European globalisation fund has not yet been approved.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: No legislation is promised.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Will the Tánaiste underwrite the funding of those positions now——

An Ceann Comhairle: Is legislation promised in this area?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: No.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: ——so that those workers can implement a central plank of Government policy which we are always told about in this House, namely, upskilling and training? Will the Tánaiste give an undertaking that she will underwrite that course forthwith because the DIT simply cannot?

An Ceann Comhairle: We will find out if legislation is promised.

The Tánaiste: No.

An Ceann Comhairle: No legislation is promised.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: The legislation is promised but we cannot wait for the Ministers to filibuster on this. Will the Tánaiste underwrite those courses? Is she going to answer that question?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Morgan can raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I do not wish to test your skills, a Cheann Comhairle, which I know are excellent, but I call on the Tánaiste to answer this important question. Approximately 100 ex-SR Technics workers are depending on that support. Their social welfare is about to run out and they will not qualify for that course.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy raises the matter on the Adjournment he will get a considered answer.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Will the Tánaiste give an answer?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Gilmore.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Let the record show that the Tánaiste is ignoring that question. She regularly cites it as a central plank of Government policy——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: ——but she is choosing to completely ignore it. It is a disgrace.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I thank you for calling me a Cheann Comhairle. I had indicated to you that there were two other matters I wished to raise with the Tánaiste, both of which relate to promised legislation.

Deputy John Cregan: Good.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The first is the promised legislation to have a directly elected mayor of Dublin. I have been asking for some time about when the Bill will be published.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Is Joe interested?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I understand the Government has now approved the heads of that Bill. I did ask previously if the Government would circulate the heads of the Bill. I ask the Tánaiste again if that will be done. At the request of my parliamentary party I wrote to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government three weeks ago today requesting a meeting with him to discuss his plans for the legislation. I have not yet had a substantive reply to that request. I repeat my request to the Tánaiste that the heads of the Bill, which I understand have now been approved by the Government, should be circulated to the Opposition parties so that we can at least get some idea of what the Government's plans are for this office for which it intends to hold an election this year.

The second piece of legislation I wish to ask the Tánaiste about is the promised consumer and competition Bill. I am sure she will be aware of the reports we have seen this week that Tesco and other large supermarkets are seeking to extract the advance of large sums of money. In the case of Tesco I understand the amount it is seeking is up to €500,000 from suppliers of Irish products just to put their products on the shelves of the supermarkets. My colleague, Alan

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

Kelly, MEP, has already brought this to the attention of the relevant EU Commissioner and to the Competition Authority. As the Tánaiste has direct responsibility for consumer matters, will she outline what she intends to do to deal with this “Godfather” type of activity that the large supermarket chains are now engaged in?

An Ceann Comhairle: We do not need the detail.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: This type of activity is going on at a time when jobs are being lost and farm incomes are under pressure. The supermarkets want €500,000 upfront from Irish suppliers. It is a form of extortion that should be dealt with very forcefully by the Tánaiste. I would like to hear what she is doing about it and when the long-promised Bill on consumer protection will be brought forward.

The Tánaiste: I will speak to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to facilitate the Deputy. As he correctly said, the heads of the Bill were passed by the Government on 9 February with publication intended in April. We will ensure the Minister facilitates a meeting with the Deputy.

The consumer and competition Bill will come to the House later in the year. In the interim I am proceeding with a code of practice on a non-statutory basis, which will then be included—

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Tánaiste is wasting her time.

The Tánaiste: —in the legislation. Following on from the consultation that took place with a considerable number of people, work is ongoing and I am proceeding with a code of practice as a matter of urgency.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: The previous Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Martin, promised action in terms of putting in place an external examiner for symphysiotomies. No matter how many times the Minister, Deputy Harney, was asked about the matter she has not given an answer.

Symphysiotomy was a barbaric practice, especially near the Tánaiste’s constituency, even though it was carried out all over the country.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should table a parliamentary question.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: It was promised that an external auditor would be put in place.

An Ceann Comhairle: Or she could raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Deputy Joan Burton: It affects your constituency, a Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: It was promised that an external auditor would be put in place in order to see why this procedure was carried out.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is legislation promised in this area?

The Tánaiste: It is amazing that such a procedure was accepted medical practice until 1983. The practice in obstetrics is to use caesarean section now. The Deputy is correct that the former Minister, Deputy Martin, indicated someone should be appointed. The person was not accepted by the group but the Minister for Health and Children has been working on the matter and she may find another way to resolve the matter.

Deputy Pat Breen: During private notice questions last Tuesday, I asked the Tánaiste if she would raise the issue of the axing of 18 routes from Shannon Airport by Ryanair. What reply did she receive during her *tete-a-tete* with Mr. O'Leary?

Earlier she said Shannon Development had made an offer of a hangar to Ryanair in regard to its proposal to create 300 jobs. When was the offer made? Was a meeting sought with Ryanair in this regard?

The Tánaiste: No legislation is promised on that. I raised Shannon Airport with Mr. O'Leary and Shannon Development has put together a proposal which will be forwarded to him for consideration.

Deputy Pat Breen: When was the offer made?

Deputy Joe Carey: I raised this also during private notice questions on Tuesday. I welcome the intervention by Shannon Development.

An Ceann Comhairle: Let us not revisit it now. The Deputy had his moment.

Deputy Joe Carey: It is incumbent on the Government to support Shannon Development and to put good terms and conditions in place to attract Ryanair to Shannon Airport. I welcome the Tánaiste's work on this and I encourage her to go further on it. The economic integrity of the mid-west is in question if Ryanair withdraws 18 routes. Did she raise that with Michael O'Leary on Tuesday? What reply did she get?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should table a parliamentary question or an Adjournment debate.

Deputy Pat Breen: I raised this on the Adjournment last night and I got no reply. The Minister did not come in.

The Tánaiste: A proposal has been put together by Dr. Vincent Cunnane and his team in Shannon Development and that has been forwarded to Ryanair for consideration.

Deputy Michael Ring: Currently, people can be employed through agencies for 22 months. Multinationals employ people for 22 months before letting them go. They are not entitled to statutory redundancy——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should table a parliamentary question or request an Adjournment debate on the matter.

Deputy Michael Ring: The legislation to which I refer concerns the temporary agency workers directive. When will be that be transposed into law to prevent multinationals abusing our workers?

The Tánaiste: Legislation is promised. It is an EU directive, which was agreed last year by a Minister of State in my Department, Deputy Kelleher, on my behalf. Work is ongoing on the legislation but it will be next year before it is available.

Deputy Joan Burton: In December 2008, a €500 million State-backed venture capital fund was announced. I have written to the Tánaiste on several occasions about this matter. She indicated discussions are ongoing between her Department and agencies such as the IDA, the Department of the Taoiseach and so on. St. Patrick's Day is approaching and I understood that Ministers going abroad at that time expected to be in a position to make a positive

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

announcement about the fund. I do not know whether the Tánaiste is staying in Ireland or travelling abroad. What is happening? It is 15 months since this was announced to great fanfare and I have pursued this with the Tánaiste. Nothing has happened. Many people with PhDs have returned to Ireland to participate in various science and innovation programmes in institutes of technology and universities. Companies are also interested and I have been contacted by a number of them about the fund. Has any progress been made? A sum of €500 million in venture capital in the context of the carnage of job losses, particularly when one considers the SRT workers who are highly qualified, would be welcome news and good promotion for the country during the St. Patrick's Day tours of the world Ministers will undertake. When will the Tánaiste come into the House about this?

The Tánaiste: This is totally out of order because no legislation is promised to set up a venture capital fund. This arose from the smart economy document. We are working with a number of interests and State agencies but, in the interim, Enterprise Ireland and a number of institutions have set up a number of funds, which are working well and will continue to do so. There has been no final decision on the venture capital fund referred to by the Deputy but work is ongoing.

Deputy Joan Burton: I thank the Tánaiste for her reply.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are into Question Time mode yet again.

Deputy Joan Burton: I represent a constituency which is home to many high-tech industries. People are desperate to keep PhD researchers in Ireland.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are not talking about promised legislation.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Government has set aside €500 million.

An Ceann Comhairle: All these points have been well made.

Deputy Joan Burton: It is 15 months since the Tánaiste made this announcement at a major press conference in Dublin Castle. It is in the programme for Government and, therefore, it is appropriate and in order to ask about it on the Order of Business.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should table a parliamentary question or a matter for an Adjournment debate.

Deputy Joan Burton: I have tabled parliamentary questions about this. On what date will this be finalised? I was told various Ministers are expecting to travel around the world announcing this fund—

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is holding up proceedings. We have dealt with it adequately.

Deputy Joan Burton: It is good news but the Tánaiste could tell the House about it. Will it be announced before St. Patrick's Day?

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Given the debate yesterday and today about perjury and misleading the Dáil, an important Bill is included in the legislative programme which I am sure the Minister for "I can't remember what I said" O'Dea would like us to discuss urgently, that is, the ethics in public office Bill. When will it be discussed in the House?

The Tánaiste: It is awaiting Second Stage. It has not been decided when it will be taken.

Deputy Joe Costello: The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2008 has been enacted. When will the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government make the ministerial order to permit the sale of apartments by local authorities throughout the country?

The Tánaiste: I assume the Deputy is referring to the introduction of the purchase scheme for apartments. The relevant Minister behind me says it will be fairly soon.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I refer to two Bills. I have asked about the first many times but sufficient urgency is not being attached to the issue by the Government. Is it intended to introduce legislation to provide for the establishment of a national vetting bureau for the collection and exchange of information relating to the endangerment and sexual exploitation or sexual abuse of children? Many Opposition Members, including me, have asked about this several times. Since it is deemed by most commentators to be a serious issue, which needs urgent attention, will the Tánaiste have the relevant Department exercised with a view to bringing that into the House with some urgency?

The Tánaiste: It is a priority. The heads of the Bill are being worked on and it is being dealt with as expeditiously as possible. It is complex but it is a priority.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The second Bill to which I refer concerns a housing issue, about which every Member will be aware. It comes under a variety of legislative headings. There is a backlog in applications for the disabled person's grant where people who have special needs—

An Ceann Comhairle: Is legislation promised?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I will come to that. People with special needs and elderly people for health reasons need to adapt their dwellings. Hundreds of such applicants await approval from local authorities. The scheme has been suspended on several occasions. Will the Tánaiste cause to be introduced legislation under either the environment or equality headings that will ensure local authorities can proceed with all the applications on hand?

The Tánaiste: As usual today, there is no legislation promised. There was a review by the local authorities. The Minister expects to have a decision within the next two to three weeks.

Deputy Billy Timmins: It has been established that fake Irish passports were used by people who may have been involved in the assassination of a member of Hamas. Will the Tánaiste arrange for the Minister for Foreign Affairs to make a statement on this serious development in the House next Tuesday? The Government does not seem to take the matter seriously.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy might be able to raise it in some other way.

Deputy Billy Timmins: I raised it at a committee meeting.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy Timmins try to raise it on the Adjournment?

Deputy Billy Timmins: The information that is available may not be put on the record.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy could ask a parliamentary question.

Deputy Billy Timmins: It is important that the Minister should come in here on Tuesday to outline exactly the current situation.

Deputy Joe Costello: Hear, hear. We all agree with that.

The Tánaiste: The assertion that nothing is being done is not in accordance with the facts. Deputies will appreciate that sensitivities are associated with this matter. The Minister might not be in a position to make a public pronouncement on it. He has articulated what is in hand, as the House is aware. If Deputy Timmins wants to talk to the Minister privately, I am sure he will provide a further update on how matters are progressing.

Deputy Billy Timmins: It is not satisfactory that an explanation should be provided privately.

The Tánaiste: No legislation is promised.

Deputy Billy Timmins: It is important that this House is informed on the situation.

The Tánaiste: Any request for a debate is a matter for the Whips.

Ministerial Rota for Parliamentary Questions: Motion.

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

That, notwithstanding anything in the Resolution of the Dáil of 14 June, 2007, setting out the rota in which Questions to members of the Government are to be asked, Questions for oral answer, following those next set down to the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, shall be set down to Ministers in the following temporary sequence:

Minister for Health and Children

Minister for Education and Science

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Minister for Finance

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

whereupon the sequence established by the Resolution of 14 June, 2007, shall continue with Questions to the Minister for Transport.

Question put and agreed to.

Presentation of Revised Estimates: Motion.

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I move:

That, notwithstanding Standing Order 154(1) or (2) of the Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann relative to Public Business, Revised Estimates for the Public Services for the year ending 31 December, 2010, be presented to the Dáil and circulated to members on 18 February, 2010, being a date later than that prescribed for the presentation of Estimates and that the Revised Estimates be referred to Select Committees pursuant to Standing Order 154(3) and paragraph (1)(a)(ii) of each Committee's Orders of Reference.

Question put.

The Dáil divided by electronic means.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: I call for a vote other than by electronic means.

Question again put: "That the motion re presentation and circulation of Revised Estimates 2010 be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 63; Níl, 63.

Tá

Ahern, Dermot.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Aylward, Bobby.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Áine.
 Brady, Cyprian.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Byrne, Thomas.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Pat.
 Conlon, Margaret.
 Connick, Seán.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cregan, John.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Cullen, Martin.
 Curran, John.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Michael.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Gormley, John.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Hanafin, Mary.
 Harney, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Hoctor, Máire.

Kelleher, Billy.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Kenneally, Brendan.
 Kennedy, Michael.
 Kitt, Michael P.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 McEllistrim, Thomas.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 Martin, Micheál.
 Moloney, John.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M. J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Donoghue, John.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keefe, Batt.
 O'Keefe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 O'Sullivan, Christy.
 Power, Seán.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Scanlon, Eamon.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Mary.
 White, Mary Alexandra.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Bannon, James.
 Barrett, Seán.
 Behan, Joe.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Burke, Ulick.
 Burton, Joan.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Carey, Joe.
 Clune, Deirdre.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Coonan, Noel J.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Crawford, Seymour.
 Creighton, Lucinda.
 D'Arcy, Michael.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Doyle, Andrew.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Gilmore, Eamon.

Hayes, Brian.
 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.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.

Níl—*continued*

Quinn, Ruairí.
Rabbitte, Pat.
Reilly, James.
Ring, Michael.
Shatter, Alan.
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.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is an equality of votes. Therefore, pursuant to Article 15.11.2° of the Constitution, I must exercise my casting vote. I vote for the question in this case, the result of the vote now being: Tá, 64; Níl, 63.

Question declared carried.

Deputy Alan Shatter: On a point of order, could the Tánaiste explain to the House why so many of the Deputies who should have been sitting behind her——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, that is not a point of order.

Deputy Alan Shatter: ——have so little confidence in this Government's economic policy——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, resume your seat.

Deputy Alan Shatter: ——that they deserted the House during a crucial vote?

Deputy Johnny Brady: We did not get rid of them like the Deputy's party did.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, resume your seat.

Deputy Johnny Brady: Deputy Shatter's party ran them out.

Finance Bill 2010: Financial Resolutions.

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I move the following Resolutions:

THAT section 236 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides relief from income tax in respect of the loan of certain art objects within the meaning assigned by that section, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 470A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides relief for premiums under qualifying long-term care policies within the meaning given by that section be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides for relief for health expenses, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 997A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which governs the granting of credit in respect of tax deducted from emoluments of certain directors, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 71 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides for the computation of income tax chargeable under Case III of Schedule D in respect of income arising from securities and possessions in any place outside the State, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 477 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides for relief for service charges, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 216A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides for an exemption from income tax in respect of relevant sums arising from a qualifying residence within the meaning given by that section, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 384 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides for the method of giving relief for Case V losses, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT sections 784A(1BA) and 787O of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provide, respectively, for the calculation of the specified amount in relation to an Approved Retirement Fund and for the limit on tax relieved pension funds, and Schedules 23 and 23B to that Act, which concern, respectively, administrative and procedural issues relating to occupational pension schemes and the limit on tax relieved pension funds, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 128D of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides for the tax treatment of restricted shares acquired by directors and employees, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Parts 2 and 3 of Schedule 11 to the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution by providing that the Revenue Commissioners will not approve a profit sharing scheme in certain circumstances and by prohibiting certain types of shares to be used in such a scheme.

THAT section 409C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which restricts the relief available to certain individuals who incur expenditure on approved buildings, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Schedule 13 to the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which contains a list of the bodies that are required to operate professional services withholding tax, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Chapter 2A of Part 15 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides for the limitation on the amount of certain reliefs used by certain high income individuals, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Part 22 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides for the taxation of profits or gains from dealing in or developing land or disposals of development land, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 843A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997) be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution to provide for the termination of the scheme of capital allowances in respect of expenditure incurred

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

on the construction, conversion or refurbishment of buildings or structures that are used for the provision of certain child care facilities.

THAT in the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997) section 175 which deals with payments made by a quoted company on the redemption, repayment or purchase of its own shares be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Chapter 3 of Part 3 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides rules for the taxation of certain government and other public securities be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 299 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides rules for the claiming of wear and tear allowances by lessees be amended by making provisions restricting such claims in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Chapter 4 of Part 8 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides rules for the deduction of tax from deposit interest payments be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which deals with relief for investment in films, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997) be amended by providing rules for the taxation of specified financial transactions in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT sections 198 and 246 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which grant exemptions from income tax in relation to payments of interest made to a company resident in a relevant territory, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 71 of, and Schedule 24 to, the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution to provide new rules for quantifying the amount of foreign income to be charged to tax and the amount of credit relief available in respect of foreign tax suffered on that income.

THAT the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution by inserting Part 35A to provide rules on transfer pricing.

THAT in the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997) sections 288, 291 and 291A, which relate to the modification of the scheme for relief for capital expenditure on intangible assets by companies, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 486C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides relief from corporation tax for certain start-up companies, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Chapter 1 of Part 6 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which deals with the taxation of company distributions be amended in the manner and to the extent

specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution, by providing for the denial of exemption to dividends received by Irish companies in certain circumstances.

THAT section 80A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides rules for the taxation of certain leases be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 402 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides rules for the computation of capital allowances and losses of a trading company be amended by extending this treatment to certain other companies in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 766 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which deals with tax credits for research and development expenditure, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 542 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which relates to the time of disposal and acquisition of an asset, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 598 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which grants relief from capital gains tax for disposals of business and farming assets on retirement, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Chapter 2 of Part 19 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which relates to the computation of chargeable gains and allowable losses, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 607 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which grants an exemption from capital gains tax to disposals of Government and certain other securities, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 611 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which grants an exemption from capital gains tax to disposals to the State, certain public bodies and charities, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 958 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which relates to the date of payment of income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 96 of the Finance Act 1999 (No. 2 of 1999), and Schedules 2 and 2A to that Act, which provide for the rates of mineral oil tax, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 98 of the Finance Act 1999 (No. 2 of 1999), which provides for a relief from mineral oil tax for heavy oil or liquefied petroleum gas used for horticultural production in a glasshouse, or for the cultivation of mushrooms, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT provision be made in the Act giving effect to this Resolution for imposing a duty of excise, to be known as natural gas carbon tax, in accordance with the provisions of that Act, on natural gas supplied in the State to consumers.

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

THAT provision be made in the Act giving effect to this Resolution for imposing a duty of excise, to be known as solid fuel carbon tax, in accordance with the provisions of that Act, on solid fuel supplied in the State by suppliers registered with the Revenue Commissioners.

THAT section 99 of the Finance Act 2001 (No. 7 of 2001), which provides for the liability of certain persons to excise duty, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 130 of the Finance Act 1992 (No. 9 of 1992), which provides interpretation for Chapter IV (registration and taxation of vehicles) of that Act, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT in the Value-Added Tax Act 1972 (No. 22 of 1972)–

(a) section 4B, which relates to the supplies of immovable goods, be amended to provide a joint option for taxation of the sale of a property that would otherwise be exempt in situations where the property has been repossessed,

(b) section 8, which relates to accountable persons, be amended to provide for the taxation of certain activities of the State and public bodies,

(c) section 10, which relates to the amount on which tax is chargeable, be amended to provide for the taxation of telephone cards at the time that card is used to purchase goods or services rather than at the time the card is purchased,

(d) section 13, which relates to the remission of tax on goods exported, etc. be amended to strengthen the conditions set out in the law and provide that zero-rating does not apply if those conditions are not complied with,

(e) section 15, which relates to the charge of tax on imported goods, be amended to provide that zero-rating does not apply to the importation of goods that are destined for another Member State unless the importer at the time of importation provides certain information to the Revenue Commissioners,

(f) Schedule 1, which relates to exempted activities, be amended to restrict the exemption for public postal services by excluding contracts that are individually negotiated,

and that each such amendment be made in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 41 of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 (No. 31 of 1999), which determines how a conveyance in consideration of debt is to be charged to stamp duty, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 124B of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 (No. 31 of 1999), which imposes a levy on certain life insurance premiums, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 125A of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 (No. 31 of 1999), which imposes a levy on health insurers, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 57 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003 (No. 1 of 2003), which imposes a time limit in relation to claiming a repayment of tax that has been overpaid,

be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 89 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003 (No. 1 of 2003), which grants relief in respect of agricultural property which is taken by certain individuals, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT Parts 6 and 7 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003 (No. 1 of 2003), which relate to returns and assessments and the payment and recovery of tax, interest and penalties respectively, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which consolidates the enactments relating to income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax, including certain enactments relating also to other taxes and duties, be amended to include a levy to be known as 'domicile levy' in the manner and to the extent giving effect to this Resolution.

THAT section 825 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (No. 39 of 1997), which provides for the tax residence treatment of donors of property to the State, be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution.

Question put.

The Dáil divided by electronic means.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: I understand some Members were locked out before the vote so I propose that the vote be taken by other than electronic means.

Question again put.

The Dáil divided: Tá, 65; Níl, 61.

Tá

Ahern, Dermot.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Aylward, Bobby.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Áine.
 Brady, Cyprian.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Byrne, Thomas.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Pat.
 Conlon, Margaret.
 Connick, Seán.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cregan, John.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Cullen, Martin.
 Curran, John.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Michael.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Gormley, John.
 Grealish, Noel.

Hanafin, Mary.
 Harney, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Hoctor, Máire.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Kenneally, Brendan.
 Kennedy, Michael.
 Killeen, Tony.
 Kitt, Michael P.
 Kitt, Tom.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 McEllistram, Thomas.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 Moloney, John.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Martin, Micheál.
 Nolan, M. J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Donoghue, John.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keefe, Batt.
 O'Keefe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.

Tá—*continued*

O'Sullivan, Christy.
Power, Seán.
Ryan, Eamon.
Scanlon, Eamon.
Smith, Brendan.

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

Níl

Bannon, James.
Barrett, Seán.
Behan, Joe.
Breen, Pat.
Broughan, Thomas P.
Burke, Ulick.
Burton, Joan.
Byrne, Catherine.
Carey, Joe.
Clune, Deirdre.
Connaughton, Paul.
Coonan, Noel J.
Costello, Joe.
Coveney, Simon.
Crawford, Seymour.
Creighton, Lucinda.
D'Arcy, Michael.
Deasy, John.
Deenihan, Jimmy.
Doyle, Andrew.
Durkan, Bernard J.
English, Damien.
Feighan, Frank.
Ferris, Martin.
Flanagan, Charles.
Gilmore, Eamon.
Hayes, Brian.
Hayes, Tom.
Higgins, Michael D.
Hogan, Phil.
Howlin, Brendan.

Kehoe, Paul.
Lynch, Ciarán.
McCormack, Pádraic.
McEntee, Shane.
McGinley, Dinny.
McGrath, Finian.
McManus, Liz.
Mitchell, Olivia.
Morgan, Arthur.
Naughten, Denis.
Noonan, Michael.
Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
O'Donnell, Kieran.
O'Dowd, Fergus.
O'Mahony, John.
O'Shea, Brian.
O'Sullivan, Jan.
Perry, John.
Quinn, Ruairí.
Rabbitte, Pat.
Reilly, James.
Ring, Michael.
Shatter, Alan.
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.

Deputy Alan Shatter: I put down a marker that what we have seen today are the death throes of a terminally incompetent Government.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy must resume his seat immediately.

Finance Bill 2010: Allocation of Time Motion.

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan):
I move:

THAT, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders:

(1) The proceedings in the Select Committee on Finance and the Public Service on the Finance Bill 2010 shall be brought to a conclusion in accordance with the following timetable:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Proceedings</i>	<i>To conclude not later than</i>
Tuesday, 23rd February	Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of Part 1 (sections 1 to 22) Chapter 4 of Part 1 (sections 23 to 38)	5.30 p.m. 8 p.m.
Wednesday, 24th February	Chapters 5 and 6 of Part 1 (sections 39 to 59) Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Part 2 (sections 60 to 106) Part 3 (sections 107 to 126)	1 p.m. 5.30 p.m. 8 p.m.
Thursday, 25th February	Parts 4, 5 and 6 (sections 127 to 155), Schedules 1 to 4 and the Title.	1 p.m.

and where proceedings have not concluded by the stated time, they shall be brought to a conclusion 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 or a Minister of State, nominated as substitute on his behalf, and the Question shall dispose of all amendments addressed to the Part of the Bill to which they refer.

(2) Where a division is claimed on the proceedings on the Finance Bill 2010, in the Select Committee on Finance and the Public Service, other than on a Question put as provided for in accordance with paragraph (1), the taking of such division and the putting of any Question contingent thereon shall be postponed until—

(a) immediately before the time next appointed for the putting of a Question in accordance with paragraph (1), or

(b) in the event of such Question not being put, when proceedings in Committee on the matters which would have been decided by the putting of such Question have been otherwise completed.

(3) The Select Committee shall, in accordance with Standing Order 87, send a message to the Dáil in relation to the completion of its consideration of the Finance Bill 2010, not later than 25th February, 2010.

Question put and agreed to.

Re-appointment of An Coimisinéir Teanga: Motion.

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I move:

THAT Dáil Éireann recommends Mr Seán Ó Cuirreáin for re-appointment by the President to be *An Coimisinéir Teanga*.

Ba mhaith liom an rún seo, a phlé muid i gcoiste Oireachtais inné, a mholadh. Cuireann sé fíor áthas orm an rún go n-athcheapfadh an tUachtarán an tUasal Seán Ó Cuirreáin, mar Choimisinéir Teanga a mholadh.

Tá ról an Choimisinéir Teanga ar cheann de na bun-chlocha ar a bhfuil Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla tógtha. De réir alt 20(3) d'Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, is í an tUachtarán a cheapann an Coimisinéir Teanga, ar chomhairle an Rialtais agus tar éis don Dáil agus don Seanad rún a rith ag moladh an duine a cheapfar. Sé bhliain a mhaireann téarma an choimisinéara agus is féidir é nó í a cheapadh arís. Ar an 22 Feabhra 2004, ceapadh Seán Ó Cuirreáin mar an chéad Coimisinéir Teanga. Tagann deireadh lena théarma oifige Dé Luain seo chugainn. Tá cinneadh Rialtais déanta rún a mholadh don Dáil agus don Seanad go ndéanfadh an tUacht-

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

arán an tUasal Ó Cuirreáin a athcheapadh mar Choimisinéir Teanga do thréimhse eile sé bliana.

Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghlacadh leis an Uasal Ó Cuirreáin as ucht na hoibre ar fad atá déanta aige mar Choimisinéir Teanga. Tá obair cheannródaíochta déanta aige le sé bliana anuas. Sílim go bhfuil gach duine sa Teach seo ar aon intinn faoi seo, mar a léirigh ceannairí príomh-pháirtithe an Fhreasúra sa Dáil le déanaí agus mar a léiríodh sa choiste inné. Tá go leor bainte amach aige go dtí seo. Tá an oifig i mbéal an phobail agus is acmhainn fíor-thábhachtach í don Ghaeilge agus do phobal na tíre seo ar spéis leo úsáid na Gaeilge a chleachtadh. Ba mhaith liom an deis seo a ghlacadh, thar mo cheann féin agus thar cheann an Rialtais, buíochas ó chroí a ghabháil le Seán Ó Cuirreáin agus lena fhoireann as ucht a gcuid oibre le sé bliana anuas.

Tacaím go láidir leis an rún atá molta le cur os comhair an Tí seo go gceapfaí an tUasal Ó Cuirreáin mar Choimisinéir Teanga an athuair.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Níor labhair an tAire chomh fada sin agus a bhí mé ag súil go labhródh sé. Ní raibh sé ach trí nóiméad ag caint agus bhí mé ag súil go mbeadh sé cúig nóiméad ag caint.

Tá lúcháir an tsaoil orm deis a bheith agam cur leis an rún seo, an Coimisinéir Teanga a athcheapadh ar feadh téarma eile. Tá sé bliana caite aige i mbun a chuid dualgaisí agus sílim go n-aontaíonn gach duine sa Teach go bhfuil obair fhiúntach agus obair an-mhaith ar siúl aige. Bhí muid go léir ag fanacht agus ag tnúth lean thuairisc bliaintúil gach bliain. Is cinnte go mbíonn ábhar léitheoireachta suimiúil ann.

Ba mhaith liom tagairt a dhéanamh do thuairisc a chuir sé ar fáil, an tuairisc bliantiúil do 2008. Bhí moladh iontach fiúntach sa tuarascáil sin nuair a mhol sé go mbeadh céatadán áirithe jabanna curtha ar fáil sa Stát Seirbhís do dhaoine a raibh cumas labhartha agus scríofa Gaeilge acu. Tá mé cinnte go n-aontaíonn an tAire go bhfuil laige sa Státchóras i láthair na huaire agus go bhfuil sé deacair go leor daoine a fháil a bhfuil cumas Gaeilge acu lena gcuid oibre a dhéanamh go proifisiúnta le daoine a éilíonn an tseirbhís sin. Mhol an coimisinéir go mbeadh céatadán áirithe le Gaeilge ag dul isteach sa Stát Seirbhís. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil scéimeanna ag an Stát Seirbhís le cúrsaí Gaeilge a chur a fáil do dhaoine atá sa Stát Seirbhís cheana féin, ach bheadh sé mar incentive, nó mheallfadh sé daoine an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim ar an scoil agus sa choláiste, agus mar sin de, agus cothódh sé suim san Ghaeilge taobh amuigh, dá mbeadh a fhios ag daoine go raibh céatadán áirithe áiteanna sa Stát Seirbhís do dhaoine a raibh cumas Gaeilge acu. B'fhéidir go bhfuil seirbhísí ar fáil i bhFraincís nó i dteangacha eile, ach cén fáth nach mbeadh siad ar fáil i nGaeilge? Mar a sheasann an scéal i láthair na huaire, tá an trucaíl nó an carr roimh an capall. Ba chóir an capall a chur roimh an carr agus Gaeilgeoirí a thabhairt isteach a mbeadh an cumas sin iontu.

Chomh fada agus is eol domsa, tá seo molta ag an coimisinéir. Chuir sé ar aghaidh é chuig na daoine a bhí i mbun straitéise don teanga, chuig Fiontar agus chuig na heolaithe idirnáisiúnta. Sílim freisin gur ghlac siad le staidéar ar an Idirlíon atá ag an Coimisinéir Teanga. Tuigeann an tAire cad atá á rá agam. Is mór an trua é nach bhfuil an moladh a rinne sé chomh láidir sa straitéis mar atá go dtí seo, ach tá dóchas agam go mbeidh muid ábalta athrú agus leasú a dhéanamh ar an straitéis sin. Bheadh sé iontach dá mbeadh muid in ann a rá, “Má tá cumas Gaeilge agat, tá seans níos fearr agat post a fháil sa Stát Seirbhís.” Ní hionann sin agus a rá nach gheobhaidh duine post sa Stát Seirbhís muna bhfuil Gaeilge aige nó aici, ach go mbeidh buntáiste ag duine ag a bhfuil cumas Gaeilge aige nó aici, buntáiste teoranta ach buntáiste tábhachtach. Sin é mo phríomh pointe.

Molaim go mór an obair atá á dhéanamh ag an coimisinéir agus molaim go mór go ndéanfar é a athcheapadh. Is oifigeach de chuid an Oireachtais é agus tá sé léirithe aige go dtí seo go bhfuil sé neamhspleách. Tá sé iontach tábhachtach gur mar sin a bheidh sé.

Níl a fhios agam cé mhéid ama atá fágtha, ach ba mhaith liom nóiméad a thabhairt do mo chomhleacaí, an Teachta Michael Ring.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Michael Kennedy): Tá sé leathuair tar éis a haon agus caithfear críochnú nó an rún a athrú go lá éigin eile. Tá orainn dul ar aghaidh go dtí an Bille, George Mitchell Scholarship Fund (Amendment) Bill, anois.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá fadhb ann. Phlé muid an rún seo inné sa choiste. Tá an coimisinéir le ceapadh. Tá sé as oifig Dé Luain agus seo é an lá dheireadh do suí na Dála an tseachtain seo. An féidir linn an rún a aontú inniu? Níl aon fhadhb agamsa é a phlé. Caithfinn an mhaidin ar far á phlé, ach níl aon neart agam ar an easpa ama. Níor mhaith liom, áfach, nach bhféadfainn a dhéanamh cinnte go mbeadh sé athcheaptha — tá orm dul chuig an Seanad ag a dó a chlog — roimh Dé Luain ag an Uachtarán. Mar sin, tá sé tábhachtach go nglacfar leis an rún inniu.

Acting Chairman: An bhfuil an Teachta O'Shea sásta le sin?

Deputy Brian O'Shea: Caithfimid é sin a dhéanamh.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An fáth go raibh mise chomh gearr ag caint, ná gur thuig mé go ndúradh go raibh orainn críochnú ag leathuair tar éis a haon. Sin an fáth nár thóg mé ach an dá nóiméad.

Acting Chairman: An bhfuil gach éinne sásta le sin? Ceart go leor. Glacann muid leis an rún.

Question put and agreed to.

George Mitchell Scholarship Fund (Amendment) Bill 2010: Second Stage.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I am happy to introduce to the House the George Mitchell Scholarship Fund (Amendment) Bill 2010. This Bill amends the George Mitchell Scholarship Fund Act 1998. It is a short Bill and I believe it is a relatively straightforward piece of amending legislation.

Before outlining to the House the provisions of the Bill, it is important to highlight the general background to, and context for, the legislation.

In 1998, in recognition of the pivotal contribution made by United States Senator George J. Mitchell to the Northern Ireland peace process, the Irish Government established the George Mitchell Scholarship Fund and in 1999 agreed to contribute an endowment of IR£2 million to the fund. I wish to recall at the outset, in regard to the Northern Ireland peace process, that throughout the journey we have benefited from the continued support of our friends in the United States.

The Government considers that the agreement reached two weeks ago at Hillsborough provides the basis for the future stability and success of the democratic institutions in Northern Ireland. It is a considerable achievement, and the completion of the devolution of policing and justice in a matter of weeks will be a very significant step forward. The stable and efficient operation of the Executive and the Assembly is clearly what the people of Northern Ireland want. In these challenging economic times, this agreement should enable the Executive and

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

the Assembly to deal with the pressing issues and concerns of the people in Northern Ireland such as jobs, investment, health care and education.

The Government will continue to work closely with our Northern Ireland Executive colleagues to co-operate on these issues in the North-South Ministerial Council and to drive forward joint initiatives, including in the area of education. In the current economic position, North and South, it is more important than ever that we eliminate duplication at home and collaborate to compete internationally.

The George Mitchell Scholarship Fund Act was enacted in December 1998 and it empowered the Minister for Education and Science to establish the fund in the United States and to enter into an agreement with persons to manage and control the fund. The 1998 Act provided for the creation of a scholarship fund to enable students from the United States to pursue a post-graduate year of study and-or research at certain universities and other institutions of higher education on the island of Ireland. Under the 1998 Act, the contribution of the Minister for Education and Science to the fund was the one-off endowment of IR£2 million.

The US-Ireland Alliance established a prestigious, competitive scholarship to enable American university graduates to pursue a year of study here. The alliance is a non-partisan, non-profit making organisation comprising members from both Ireland and the United States and is based in Arlington, Virginia, in the United States. A detailed agreement for the management of the fund was signed by my Department with the alliance in March 1999 and the endowment of IR£2 million was paid into the fund in April of that year. The alliance continues to manage the fund and run the scholarship programme.

The endowment made by the Irish Government into the fund was to fund two scholarships of US\$11,000 per year and to meet the administrative costs associated with running the programme. The US-Ireland Alliance also secures additional funding from other sources which has enabled the programme to offer a further ten scholarships annually. The costs of these scholarships have been met through an endowment made by the British Government in respect of two scholarships per year and through other contributions and-or sponsorship received by the alliance, including from the Government of the United States.

The first Mitchell scholars began their studies in Autumn 2000. In 2001, the nominal value of the George Mitchell Scholarship Fund, containing the Irish Government's original endowment of IR£2 million, decreased due to losses on investments made during a difficult investment climate in the United States.

In 2003, a decision was made, in consultation with my Department, to "rest" the fund for a period by not making any disbursements in respect of scholarships from the income generated from the fund with a view to re-establishing the original value of the fund. This was facilitated greatly by a decision of the United States Government to support the US-Ireland Alliance with significant financial contributions over several years. Thus the alliance was enabled to safeguard the burgeoning reputation of the scholarship programme and to continue awarding the full quota of scholarships.

In fact, since 2003, the full quota of 12 scholarships has been funded from other resources raised by the US-Ireland Alliance. In that same period, the only expenses paid from the fund have been the costs of the annual audit of the accounts and investment advisory fees for the fund. All of this information is provided in the annual report and audited accounts for the fund that are laid before each House pursuant to the provisions of the 1998 Act.

In 2007, a decision was taken to secure the long-term viability of the George Mitchell scholarship programme by increasing Ireland's contribution to the fund for the programme by €20

million. This sum is to be paid over a number of years, conditional on matching funding being raised by the US-Ireland Alliance. Such matching funding must not include funding from public funds in Ireland or Northern Ireland. It is envisaged that the increased future investment income from the additional funding of up to €40 million, inclusive of matching funding, will primarily meet the cost of bursaries for the successful students and the administration of the scheme.

The purpose of this Bill is to amend the George Mitchell Scholarship Fund Act 1998 in order to enable the new financial and necessary accounting arrangements to be put in place by creating an amended legal framework that is appropriately broad and enabling.

It is intended that the Bill will be complemented by, and also provide legal underpinning for, a detailed new funding and management agreement between the Minister for Education and Science and the alliance. Such a new agreement is necessary to give effect to the provisions of the Bill and to provide for the putting in place of appropriate governance structures. Following very detailed negotiations, the terms of a draft new agreement in that regard have been agreed between my Department, with Department of Finance approval, and the alliance. This new agreement specifies detailed management and reporting arrangements in regard to the fund. The new agreement will be executed when this amending legislation has been enacted.

A provision of €2 million is included in my Department's Estimates for 2010 in respect of the George Mitchell Scholarship Fund. When the amending legislation has been enacted and commenced and the new management and funding agreement between the US-Ireland Alliance and my Department has been signed, my Department will arrange for an appropriate payment to be made in accordance with the terms of the legislation and the agreement. The amount of the payment to be made in 2010 will have regard to the matching funding already raised by the alliance.

This additional funding further emphasises the Irish Government's deep and abiding gratitude for the key role that Senator George Mitchell played in the Northern Ireland peace process. The Government also believes that the additional endowment demonstrates our clear support for the development of our special relationship with the United States.

We strongly believe that, from a strategic viewpoint, the Irish Government's additional endowment will achieve several significant outcomes as well as helping to secure the long-term viability of the programme. The additional funding will enable the US-Ireland Alliance to strengthen further its support for and promotion of United States-Ireland and North-South relations.

The Mitchell scholarship programme ties in well with the objectives of the strategic review of Ireland-United States Relations, *Ireland and America: Challenges and Opportunities in a New Context*, launched in the early part of 2009. The strategic review highlighted that there are some 10 million Americans under the age of 18 who, while not Irish, have an interest in Ireland. They, along with our own young people, will shape the future contours of our relationship with the United States. We must work proactively to maintain their interest in and link with Ireland.

There is perhaps no more fundamental or sustainable way to engage that interest than by giving these young people the opportunity to study in Ireland. We know that people who have studied in Irish institutions, and who have had a positive experience here, go on to become privileged friends of Ireland. The young Americans who study here will be advocates and agents for the strong United States-Ireland relationship among the next generation. We recently put in place a new framework for the promotion of Ireland as a centre of international education. As part of this the Minister has established a high-level group on international

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

education which is currently developing an action plan to enhance Ireland's performance in this area. The high-level group will be examining where our priority markets will be and what co-ordinated activities we should be undertaking in those markets. The United States will clearly be one of our most important strategic partners in this regard. We have indicated to Enterprise Ireland, to which we have given responsibility for promoting and marketing Irish education, that this is a priority for the Government and that we want to lead from the front in strengthening links with the United States.

There is no doubt that the Mitchell scholarship programme will be a key plank in our efforts to develop education links with the United States. It will allow high-calibre students from American universities to participate as Mitchell scholars in a broad cross-section of postgraduate courses at universities on the island of Ireland, which will increase the profile of Irish institutions internationally. Since 1999 the programme has attracted 117 high-calibre students from American universities. The programme is successfully competing to attract participants with a number of other highly prestigious and influential scholarship programmes such as the Rhodes scholarships scheme that is operated by the United Kingdom to bring American students to Oxford University. As well as the direct financial spin-off benefit to the Irish economy, these Mitchell scholars are likely to occupy positions of influence in the United States in the future, whether in politics, business or the professions. We hope their period of study on this island will create an enduring legacy of goodwill towards Ireland amongst the scholars and be of significant benefit to Ireland in the future.

I shall now outline the main features and provisions of the Bill. Section 2 amends section 1 of the 1998 Act by adding a number of new definitions relating to key terms used throughout the Bill. Section 3 amends section 2 of the 1998 Act. In essence, it provides legal underpinning for several core provisions relating to the fund that are contained in the funding and management agreement between the Minister and the fund manager.

Section 4 amends section 3 of the 1998 Act. The 1998 Act made provision for a one-off payment of IR£2 million by the Minister into the fund. Section 4 amends section 3 of the 1998 Act to provide that the Minister shall pay a total Irish Exchequer additional funding sum not exceeding €20 million into the fund. Payments by the Minister will be subject to matching funding having been raised by the fund manager and subject to a maximum payment of €4 million in any financial year.

Section 5 amends section 5 of the 1998 Act by substituting an amended provision for that section. This arises as a consequence of the enhanced annual, operational and financial reporting obligations being imposed on the fund manager in section 3. I shall refer to those obligations in more detail on Committee Stage. Section 6 provides for the Short Title, collective citation and commencement. Molaim an Bille seo don Teach.

Deputy Brian Hayes: I propose to share time with Deputy Deenihan.

Acting Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Brian Hayes: On behalf of the Fine Gael Party, I welcome the Bill. When the original legislation was brought to the House in 1999, following the multi-party talks and the conclusion of the Good Friday Agreement, there was cross-party support for the Government's initiative. That cross-party agreement remains in place in the context of this legislation, which effectively extends the funding the State is making available for this programme.

However, the decision to extend the funding was taken by the Government in 2007. In other words, it has taken three years to bring an amendment to the original legislation before the

House. That says much about the dearth of progress made by the Department of Education and Science in legislative matters.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Three years is quick for that Department.

Deputy Brian Hayes: That is true, it is not bad by the usual standards of the Department. Nevertheless, it is extraordinary that it should take three years to put on a legislative footing a proposal that enjoys cross-party support. In future, decisions of Government should run parallel with amendments to primary legislation. This is not an extensive Bill and it could have been put together in half a day. That it took three years raises many questions for the Department of Education and Science.

The Bill proposes a substantial increase in funding for this initiative, to €20 million from the original allocation of IR£2 million in 1999. Therefore, the Bill is deserving of some scrutiny before it passes all Stages. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the extraordinary work of former Senator George Mitchell in chairing the multi-party talks which led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which was the starting point for the new political dispensation on this island and between these islands. I applaud the Government for bringing forward the idea of celebrating his work through scholarships for high-calibre United States students who choose to study in this country. That was a good idea and it is right that we should extend it now.

We should bear in mind that higher education is a global business. The programme is good for Ireland and for the United States citizens involved. It affords us an opportunity to sell the country and the opportunities that exist here at a time when we need friends in the world as never before. It is absolutely right that Ireland should give something back in return for the extraordinary contribution of financial support, mentoring and direct political intervention from successive United States Administrations. That commitment was epitomised in the extraordinary public service of Mr. Mitchell in his work on behalf of the United States Government and all Irish-Americans through his extremely constructive role in the multi-party talks.

For far too long the political engagement between Ireland and the United States has focused on the politics of Northern Ireland and on seeking to resolve the historical problems there. We now have an opportunity to offer a new generation of young United States citizens with an interest in Ireland an opportunity to be welcomed by this country. These high calibre students will eventually become ambassadors for Ireland as we seek to work through the greatly difficult economic times we are experiencing. It is also important for our institutions and universities. I have spoken to many university presidents who tell me the presence of international students in courses is important to our own higher education establishments because it offers an opportunity for an exchange of ideas and to see the products of other higher education systems, a positive thing. We must extend this across the entire spectrum of international higher education.

An idea the Minister might take on board that did not exist in the legislation in 1999 is that the Government might specify, through the Department of Education and Science, the kind of graduates we want to come to Ireland for the foreseeable future. It might be an idea to say that, as a policy objective, for the next few years we might focus on business or economics graduates from the US.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Or ethics graduates.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Ethics graduates or even communications graduates given the current turmoil. That provision does not exist in the 1999 legislation so the Minister might consider specifying the areas in which scholars would be qualified when they come.

[Deputy Brian Hayes.]

The Minister might give an indication of how many additional scholars will come to the country in light of the additional funding. In recent years there have been ten or 12. Are we talking of 20 or 24 scholars? The Government must be clear and give us a breakdown of the additional numbers who will come as a result of this additional funding.

Will the Minister give us a breakdown of numbers of scholars who have come to attend the two universities in Northern Ireland and the seven universities in the Republic and whether any of them have gone to our institutes of technology? We have a responsibility to see where these scholars can go throughout all of our colleges, North and South.

The matching funding is key in the delivery of the public funds that the State is making available. Is there information concerning whether those private funds have been obtained so the public funds can be used for the purposes as set out under the Act?

The US-Ireland Alliance should be applauded for the exemplary work it has done since this legislation first came before the House. It has provided a professional service in selecting high calibre US students to come here. We are now moving, however, to a new period, where the financial sums involved are considerable. The €2 million funding that provided in 1999 will now be €20 million, with a maximum of €4 million each year. With that, accountability must take centre stage.

I welcome the fact the legislation provides for an annual reporting mechanism and a much clearer distinction between the private investment fund and the other administrative fund. In these new times, we have an obligation to squeeze as much as we can from the administration budgets in the semi-State sector or the Department of Education and Science. Every euro we commit to this new fund is used for the purposes as set out.

Will the Minister set out during the debate how much of the funding available goes to the administrative side? As we move into this new financial underpinning, it is crucially important those issues of reportage, accountability and ensuring administration are kept to a minimum and are surveyed by Government, which will have a duty of due diligence when the legislation is ultimately passed.

On behalf of Fine Gael and my colleagues, we welcome this as an important step in the right direction that will recognise the Irish-US connection that has been worth so much to this country. That connection must flourish and this is one of the steps we can take that will give us new ambassadors for this country across the world.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: In these turbulent times in the House, it is good to have something positive to support and Fine Gael is fully behind this initiative.

The US-Ireland Alliance established this programme some time ago. I note the presence today of Trina Vargo in the Gallery and acknowledge her contribution to this programme. She played a significant role in the run up to the Good Friday Agreement and served with Senator Ted Kennedy for some time as foreign policy adviser.

The purpose of the alliance is to generate a new generation of Americans and to develop a new relationship with Ireland that is pro-business and into arts and culture that will take advantage of the goodwill in the USA towards Ireland. It works well to do that. If we look at the effects of the Rhodes scholarship between Britain and the US, and the fact that President Bill Clinton benefited from that scheme, along with others in his Administration, we will recognise the significance of this scholarship for Ireland. I have been in contact with people involved in both business and education in America going back to the 1970s and 1980s and I can see considerable potential for furthering this relationship, especially through academic means.

The tenth cohort of Mitchell scholars are currently studying in Ireland. As Deputy Hayes pointed out, the best and brightest young Americans, the future leaders in business, politics and law, are coming to this country, something we must welcome. Hundreds of American universities have been introduced and exposed to our level of education. Often those who have not been successful in obtaining a scholarship have come anyway and paid their own way. A number of successful applicants have completed PhDs here as well.

This money is long overdue, because it was some time before the Government contributed towards this fund. It will be mostly spent in Ireland, in our universities and hotels and on buses and will be spread across the country. The Mitchell scholars this year will attend Listowel writers' week, a demonstration of how we all benefit from this scheme.

Senator George Mitchell always supported this scheme and I am proud that it was former Taoiseach, John Bruton who encouraged the Senator to chair the talks in Northern Ireland. That was a significant step on the part of the Government of the day, of which Deputy Quinn was a member. Fine Gael is extremely supportive of Senator George Mitchell and the Bill before the House.

In the future, our relationship with the USA must be based on partnership and must centre on the areas of education, the arts and business. I am extremely impressed by the work of the US-Ireland Alliance, which has been to the fore in the context of redefining the special relationship between Ireland and the US. I applaud its efforts in that regard. I urge the US-Ireland Alliance to continue what it is doing but also to expand its efforts as a result of the increased funding with which it will be provided. When graduates who benefited from the George Mitchell scholarship fund begin to become involved in business, at various levels, throughout America, I am sure new sources of funding will become available to the US-Ireland Alliance.

2 o'clock

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I wish to share time with Deputy Morgan.

Acting Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Like previous speakers, I welcome the Bill which is a positive and constructive step. I accept that it has taken somewhat longer to appear than many on both sides of the negotiations might perhaps have desired. However, a difficult labour is no blot on the arrival of a new child and we welcome the legislation nevertheless.

The Bill before us builds on the work done by a departing generation of Irish-American politicians. Such politicians maintained a tradition which dates back to the 1850s and Clan na Gael, Clan na hÉireann, etc., which maintained support for Ireland in the context of its subservient position *vis-à-vis* England and the Crown. No one gave as much in respect of this tradition as the late Senator Ted Kennedy and other members of his family. The work he and others did culminated in the extraordinary contribution of Senator George Mitchell in presiding over the entire peace process. The Senator was present when the ceasefire was announced and he worked through the long nights of negotiation that led to the advent of the British-Irish Agreement.

The unresolved political relationships between the North and the South on this island and between Dublin and London defined what Irish America could do for Ireland in those dark days. Such days are now over. The US-Ireland Alliance and the George Mitchell Scholarship Fund form the platform on which a new relationship is being built. The wording used by the alliance does not refer to supporting the old sod, rather it refers to a relationship of equality and mutual benefit between Ireland and the United States.

[Deputy Ruairí Quinn.]

I echo the comments on my friend and colleague, Deputy Jimmy Deenihan, in saluting the extraordinary work done by Trina Vargo — who is present in the Gallery — in promoting the idea of the US-Ireland Alliance and in succeeding in encouraging so many people to come on board and support it. Such work is never easy to undertake and persistence and determination are required characteristics for those who do seek to undertake it. Fortunately, Ms Vargo possesses both.

I wish to focus on the work of the Mitchell scholarship programme and put a number of questions to the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Haughey. I appreciate that the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe, is otherwise detained. It is extraordinary that 117 students have come to Ireland under the programme since 1999 and that the majority of them were funded from sources other than the Irish funds. The US-Ireland Alliance was successful in raising money from the sources to which I refer. In many cases, people who failed to obtain Mitchell scholarships decided — as a result of what they saw in respect of Irish universities — that they wanted to come here in any event.

Some 300 applications for Mitchell scholarships are made each year and 70 universities receive visits from the US-Ireland Alliance in the context of what is on offer at Irish universities. As the Minister of State indicated, 10 million people who have no connection to Ireland — the old sod — whatsoever, who do not wear shamrock on 17 March, and who did not take compulsory Irish dancing lessons in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, or elsewhere have expressed an interest in coming to this country to study. These individuals have done so based on the image of Ireland presented to them rather than from what they learned at the knees of their grandmothers. It is this kind of new relationship — based on realism and idealism — which we must nurture and develop. I wish to concentrate on outlining how that might happen.

The Minister of State indicated that his Department will be setting up a centre of excellence to establish Ireland as a centre of international study. Due to the fact that the time for debating the Bill is limited, we may return to explore that matter further at a later date, particularly in view of the fact that I am not at all impressed by what the Department is attempting to do. Giving to Enterprise Ireland — based on what the Minister, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe, witnessed while on a trade mission to China — the responsibility for promoting this country as the type of centre to which the Minister of State refers will not provide us with the best way forward.

Having served as Minister for Enterprise and Employment in the 1990s, I remain to be convinced that the Department — which is now the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment — sees education or culture as part and parcel of job creation. There is evidence to suggest that its real focus is on jobs which involve people who wear overalls and who work on industrial estates or in high-tech plants and software factories. I am not so sure that this should be the basis of Enterprise Ireland’s focus.

There are people who are actively working against the Department of Education and Science in the context of attracting students to this country. What is the position with regard to someone who was unsuccessful in his or her application for a Mitchell scholarship but who comes here in any event? I am aware of the case of a Canadian citizen in my constituency who is studying medicine at Trinity College. She is paying €31,000 in fees for the privilege. Her husband accompanied her to Ireland and he currently has a job. However, he will not be in a position to continue to work when his 12-month contract reaches its end.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is continually blocking the efforts of the Department of Education and Science to facilitate students such as the woman to whom I refer. There must be joined-up thinking on the part of Government in respect of facilitating students — some of whom may have been accompanied by spouses or dependent children —

to remain in this country. I am aware of cases involving postgraduate medical students whose spouses cannot obtain visas in order that they might come here to live with them. These people were never informed, not by the Department of Education and Science but rather the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, that this would be the case. If we want to pursue the idea of promoting Ireland as a centre for international educational excellence, we will be obliged to take action with regard to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, which is putting in place serious barriers in respect of what we are seeking to achieve.

When we emerge from our current economic crisis and begin to build a new, export-led, value-added economy — unlike the boom-bust, property-speculative model which obtained in the past ten years — we will be obliged to look to our strengths. Culture and entertainment are two of those strengths. This was recently evidenced by the awards given to graduates from Ballyfermot College who are involved in movie animation. Is the Minister of State aware that Enterprise Ireland has failed, on a number of occasions, to sustain and support a cultural initiative to showcase Irish talent on the margins of the Oscar ceremonies, where we have enjoyed such high-profile success, held each year in California, which is the centre of the movie business? I suspect that he is not so aware because this matter would not necessarily be part of his brief. Why is that the case? It is because Enterprise Ireland does not report to the Department of Education and Science. I accept that the Departments of Education and Science and Enterprise, Trade and Employment enjoy a particular relationship. With respect, however, that is not the kind of relationship we need if we are to achieve the outcomes we are seeking.

The Bill is a welcome step. It is, however, only a step. It represents not the end, but rather the commencement of a journey. We must add to the cohort of people who will be doing the kind of work to which I refer. We need to find more people like Ms Trina Vargo in the United States. We need to build on her commitment. We must also build on her experience of working for so many years with the late Senator Ted Kennedy and with that old Irish-American support bloc, which — with the arrival of President Barack Obama and the shift in the population base of the United States to the south and west — no longer reflects the “mother mo chroí” relationship we had with America in the past.

We must recognise that Irish-Americans have moved out of the ghettos of the past and are now part of mainstream America. They are part of an America that has distant connections with the greenery of Ireland. It was that greenery which encouraged people to visit this country in the past. We must understand the changed cultural and political relationship that now exists between Ireland and the United States. It is a relationship of mutual benefit and this scholarship should be a foundation upon which we can add and build. The total of 12 scholars coming each year is pretty small when one looks at what the Rhodes scholarship does for 200 students and other areas through which such scholars could come to Ireland. Excellent scholars coming to our universities and centres of higher education will provide a competitive edge and a standard of excellence from another jurisdiction of education with which we are not familiar.

With those few words, and I could say much more, I commend the Bill. We will table a few amendments on Committee Stage. The Department of Education and Science should not take the Bill as the end of a process after two or three years of negotiation. I seriously and formally ask the Minister of State, given his two-hatted responsibility, to take up the question of the relationship between Enterprise Ireland and both the educational goals of the Department of Education and Science and the US-Ireland Alliance because the current relationship is not doing all it possibly could. It could create work, employment and production possibilities in the cultural field where we can play to our strengths and the United States can play to theirs.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I thank Deputy Quinn and the Labour Party for sharing time with me.

[Deputy Arthur Morgan.]

The Bill seeks to make an extra investment of €20 million in the Mitchell scholarships programme which every year brings approximately 12 students to Ireland to study. No one is disputing the benefits for research and development that such students bring to our universities, nor is there any disagreement over the great work undertaken by Senator George Mitchell during the peace process. However, I have small reservations about the Bill in the context of massive cuts to our education system. It is estimated that by the end of next month, March 2010, as many as 1,200 special needs assistants will be sacked from our schools. Some school buildings are falling apart and students face massive increases in the student registration fee, which they are struggling to pay. In light of such massive cutbacks, I cannot in good conscience give unqualified support to a Bill which seeks to make such a large investment in such a small programme.

For George Mitchell scholars, tuition, flights and accommodation are all supplied free of charge, and scholars are also provided with a living expenses stipend of \$12,000, which is approximately €9,000. As well as this, each scholar is given a €1,000 stipend to be used for travel throughout the island as well as in Europe. This may not seem like a huge amount but is it something we can really afford in such a depressed economic climate?

Post-graduate courses in Ireland vary in cost, from approximately €1,600 for ICT courses, to €4,000 for research degrees, to as high as €10,000, usually for business courses. These are huge costs, particularly in times of recession when people are out of work and grants and social welfare payments are being cut. Severe cuts have been made to third level education in particular in recent months. The budget for 2010 introduced measures for an overall reduction of 4% in provisions for institutes of technology and universities. This will see students having to deal with diminished practical and tutorial supports, shorter library opening hours, overcrowded lecture halls and limited access to laboratories. The recent fiasco at Dublin Institute of Technology, whereby laboratories were cancelled, student services were severely curtailed and libraries services cut, show just how bad an effect a cut such as this will have.

The budget also introduces a 5% cut to the student maintenance grant. It is estimated that approximately 60,000 students per year avail of this grant. With the cost of going to college estimated at approximately €7,000 to €8,000 per year, this will mean that thousands of students literally will not be able to afford to go on to higher education and will end up on dole queues.

Perhaps the programme could be improved if it were expanded with a view to bringing over more students with specific research and development goals with direct benefits to Ireland. I am not sure of what direct economic benefits those 12 students per year would bring although I accept that potential indirect benefits exist. The University of Notre Dame brings over 100 students to the island every year and Boston College has a similar programme. These universities do not receive any funding from our Exchequer.

My party and I have some reservations about the Bill. I welcome new ideas and innovations to our universities and our knowledge sector. I welcome anybody who wants to come to study in Ireland and I welcome the all-Ireland approach that this programme has taken. However, I question whether now is the right time to make such a big investment in such a small programme. That said, if our reservations find no resonance with other opinions in the House then Sinn Féin Deputies will not oppose the passage of the Bill. I acknowledge the historical role played by George Mitchell and the huge debt we owe him for his extremely important work during the peace process.

Deputy Pat Breen: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the George Mitchell Scholarship Fund (Amendment) Bill 2010. As previous speakers stated, the fund was established in 1999

to provide scholarships for US post-graduate students to attend certain universities and colleges in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Ireland has a very special and unique friendship with the United States of America. More than 36 million people, or 11 %, of the US population reported that they were of Irish ancestry in a community survey in 2008.

For generations, the Irish have been emigrating to the US. Living in County Clare and close to Shannon International Airport, I value very much the importance of our transatlantic relationship with the US. In my constituency of Clare, this relationship has fostered and played a pivotal role in the tourism and industrial development of the region. Many US companies work in the Shannon free zone and a total of 65 US companies are based in the region.

Recently, the US Government copper-fastened its commitment to Shannon Airport when it extended pre-clearance facilities to Shannon Airport, the first airport in Europe to have such a service. On 1 March it will build on this relationship when the first pre-clearance facilities will commence for business and corporate jets and Shannon will be the first airport in the world to have this facility. Corporate jets make approximately 500 or 600 crossings per week and it is hoped this will bring much business to the airport. Last night, I met the US ambassador, Dan Rooney, and he thinks it is a very exciting project that will forge closer links between Ireland the US.

As other speakers stated, there is no doubt that the doors along the corridors of power in Washington have always had a céad míle fáilte for the Irish. The election of a President with Irish links, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, ensured the US Government would always take a special interest in this country and we have forged closer links though the years. Many other US Presidents have had Irish ancestral links, including the incumbent, President Barack Obama, whose ancestors hail from Offaly in the Taoiseach's constituency.

One of the key figures in ensuring that the Irish were never forgotten in Washington was John F. Kennedy's brother, the late Senator Ted Kennedy, who passed away last year. His understanding of the Irish question and his efforts to secure peace in Northern Ireland were vital. As other speakers did, I welcome to the House his former foreign affairs policy adviser, Trina Vargo, who is now president of the US-Ireland Alliance. She worked closely with the Clinton Administration and we must recognise Bill Clinton's role in the peace process and that of his wife, US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who continues to contribute.

Mr. Clinton's right-hand man was George Mitchell, who chaired the all-party peace negotiations which led to the signing of the Belfast peace agreement on Good Friday of 1998. He received worldwide acclaim for his contribution and in January 2009 the newly elected US President, Barack Obama, appointed him special envoy to the Middle East. This is a daunting task but he is not a man who fears to take on a difficult job if he can help to alleviate the plight of minorities. I wish him well in his efforts. From his days in Northern Ireland, Mr. Mitchell has become a person we have all come to like and respect. His contribution to Northern Ireland has been recognised through the establishment of and support for the George Mitchell scholarship programme.

I have met Mr. Mitchell on several occasions, the most recent of which was when he officially opened the Doonbeg golf course. He is chairman of the Doonbeg advisory board and maintains close links with County Clare. Although he does not play golf, he officially opened the American golf course in Doonbeg, County Clare. That course continues to prosper and the club has forged close links with America.

Education and the opportunities which it affords are very important to Mr. Mitchell, who has stated: "No one in America should be guaranteed success. But everyone should have a fair chance to succeed". This scholarship fund gives students a chance to succeed in this country as

[Deputy Pat Breen.]

well as deepening our relations with America. The programme has already brought more than 100 students to Ireland and receives more than 300 applicants annually. I understand 12 students will come to Ireland on the programme this year. The purpose of the programme is to educate a new generation of Americans about Ireland. As Deputy Quinn has noted, it is important that we maintain our special relationship with America. Europe is a big place in which Ireland is a small country and attitudes towards us have changed somewhat. The programme's participants will be the future leaders of America and will help to maintain close links between our two countries. Furthermore, when the students come here to study, they are visited by their families and friends, thus contributing to our economy. This is important given that the number of US tourists coming to Ireland has dwindled in recent years for a number of reasons, including the current recession and the presidential election. However, I was glad to hear reports that US tourism is on the increase once again. One indication of the great interest shown in Ireland by American tourists is the number of carriers which fly to this country.

The programme's students attend universities around the country and they are our greatest ambassadors when they go back to the US. Ms Trina Vargo travels with the students to visit many of the fine attractions we can offer, including the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare.

The Bill before us aims to provide a legal basis to the 2007 decision to increase the Government's contribution to the scholarship programme by €20 million. This funding is conditional on matching funding from the US-Ireland Alliance but I have no doubt the money will be raised by Trina Vargo and her colleagues. I am satisfied that the accounting procedures which are being introduced will ensure copies of the accounts are laid before this House.

St. Patrick's Day is coming around again and the Taoiseach will be paying his annual visit to Washington. These visits are not just about exchanging the shamrock because no other country in the world has such an opportunity to meet the US President and persuade US companies to invest here. I support this Bill and I believe that we should be promoting, forging and building on our unique relationship and mutually beneficial with the United States.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Bill. I have inquired more times than any other Deputy into when it would be brought before the House. It pays tribute to an important person, George Mitchell, and all that he did for this country.

I am in a unique position in that my brother went in the other direction in the 1960s to study in Ohio and Pittsburgh. He was in America when the late John F. Kennedy was elected President and, sadly, when he was assassinated. That era helped to cement a new bond between the Irish, Irish-Americans and Americans in general. It was an extraordinary time for a young Irish student to travel the length and breadth of the United States. My brother stayed in family homes and hitch-hiked because he did not have any money but he had a wonderful time nonetheless. Thanks to him I understand better than most how this programme can and will benefit its participants. It will form the basis of friendships they will never forget.

I commend the more than 100 students who have already graduated from the programme and join other speakers in welcoming Ms Trina Vargo. It is sad that the late US Senator Ted Kennedy did not live long enough to see the Bill being debated in this House. He gave a massive commitment to this country and its emigrants in their time of difficulty.

I would like to see the number of programme participants increased beyond 12 annually because the more ambassadors we send from this country, the better. If these young people become involved in politics, they will offer a significant advantage for the Irish nation. I completely understand why Deputy Morgan raised the issues of support schemes, buildings and the lack of funding but this is above those issues. I live in a Border area and I remember when it

was not safe to travel through Northern Ireland. On many occasions when I was there I wondered whether I was wise. I used to travel regularly to Donegal. I went to Donegal the other night and I felt absolutely safe going home. That is something we must attribute to the likes of Ted Kennedy.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Deputy Crawford would not go to Limerick and feel safe.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: No, that is a different story. I wonder why that is. Perhaps we are getting some of the facts about it now.

What Ted Kennedy and others did for us in the Senate and White House is unreal. Possibly the greatest single thing the United States did for us was the visit by President and Mrs. Clinton to this country. We were on the Government side of the House at that time. As a Border Deputy I was given the opportunity by the then Taoiseach, John Bruton, as were all other Border Deputies, to be personally involved in welcoming the US President and his wife, Hillary, to this House. Their commitment to the peace process was beyond question. What they did and how they brought people together was extremely important.

It was through such visits that George Mitchell became involved in the peace process. He brought people together who had literally fought for years. He showed them hope when they could not see any hope. He persuaded people to get involved with each other. That was the start of the peace process. The Troubles, which were still a feature of Northern Ireland in the early 1990s, resulted in the deaths of more than 3,000 people. Compared to Haiti that might not appear to be a lot of people but it left a major mark on a small island. George Mitchell can never be forgotten for the work he did at that time. It is great that he was recognised and that he continues that type of work elsewhere.

I welcome the fact that Senator Hillary Clinton is the US Secretary of State and will be involved in Northern Ireland. When the Hillsborough talks finished recently it was great to hear her commitment to bring more industrialists to this country. That has been extremely important to Ireland. It is clear from some of the notes I received from Ms Trina Vargo and others that they consider Ireland is a different place today. Although we are in some financial difficulty, it is a much better country. However, there are still problems of unemployment in Border areas and in Northern Ireland, which is extremely dependent on the public service. Anything US companies can do to help will be extremely welcome.

I pay tribute to Abbott Ireland which, approximately 30 years ago, came to Cootehill on the border between Cavan and Monaghan to set up a babyfood plant. It has expanded and provided tremendous work and wealth in that area. It also has plants in Sligo and elsewhere. That company came here for the long haul. It did not come here just to get tax breaks, as some have said. That was said one night in Washington in the presence of George Mitchell and President Clinton, but it was not the case. Abbott came for the long haul and did the work.

My colleague, Deputy Brian Hayes, has already spoken in detail on the Bill and I will not go into the legalities of it. It is extremely important that we fund the process being set up by the Bill and ensure the money is properly spent because that has not always been the case in the past in some areas; we must utilise the scheme to the best advantage. The Bill will allow young people from the United States to come to this country to study for a number of years. It is important that those who are involved in organising the scholarships know they have a guaranteed future. I am sure Ms Vargo is happy with that. She and others have put considerable work into the scheme.

The Minister of State made it clear that this country's contribution to the fund will be increased by €20 million. That sum will be paid over a number of years and is conditional on

[Deputy Seymour Crawford.]

matching funding being raised by the US-Ireland Alliance. Such matching funding must not include funding from public funds in Ireland or Northern Ireland. It is envisaged that the increased future investment income from additional funding of up to €40 million, inclusive of matching funding, will primarily meet the cost of bursaries. It is extremely important that this commitment is included.

Ms Vargo outlined to us how well the scheme is working. Many Mitchell scholars have come to the Dáil, some of them might even have worked here as interns. She said that Ireland has been welcoming to the Mitchells, as is only right. That has been a huge part of the success of the programme. We all want the scholars to go home saying, “That was the best year of my life.” That is good for Ireland. I am pleased to hear that former scholars have been reunited at a later stage and are facilitated to keep in touch. This group of students who have received friendship and education in colleges in this country, North and South, can and will be future ambassadors for this country.

I welcome the Government’s commitment. However, I am a little surprised that some of those who are involved with me in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, and others from the Government side, have not seen fit to comment on the Bill. It is important that not only is this an all-party issue, but it is seen to be so——

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: They cannot even make it to the Joint Committee on Education and Science.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: ——and that we are enthusiastic about it.

Deputy John Perry: I am delighted to speak on this important issue. I have taken a deep interest in working to improve Ireland-US relations. For many years I have attended the annual Saint Patrick’s Day celebrations in New York city. In the interests of transparency I add that my trips were not made at public expense. I congratulate Ambassador Rooney on his outstanding work since his appointment, also his chief of mission, Robert Faucher, and all the staff at the American Embassy. They play a critical role in the continuation of American investment, which as Deputy Crawford correctly indicated, is evident in the number of pharmaceutical and high-tech medical companies along the western seaboard that have invested heavily in this country. That investment is critical.

Emigration from the north west has been a sad feature of life in the region for many decades. We thought it had ended in the past decade, but now, thanks to Fianna Fáil incompetence, involuntary emigration is likely to resume on a significant scale once again.

I know and understand from meeting with Irish emigrants in the New York region and from meeting with successive generations of Irish Americans that the celebration and honouring of Irish culture and tradition is important to them. Keeping up economic, tourism, social, political, educational and personal links between our two countries in an important activity that I fully support. The Irish diaspora consists of 54 million people and that offers huge potential. Many links have been established, such as in the educational sector. Prior to that we had the INTERREG programme, cross-Border funding for community development and activities in the Six Counties and the six southern Border counties. I congratulate INTERREG on its sense of vision and determination and for the regeneration that is evident in many of the community developments in the six southern Border counties, which has benefitted every county. Many excellent organisations are working in the education sector to provide young Irish and US citizens with the opportunity to follow academic studies and to gain practical work experience. Among these many fine organisations I would like to compliment the Washington Ireland

Program, in particular. This organisation works to provide six-month programmes for personal and professional development. It brings outstanding Protestant and Catholic university students from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to Washington for summer internships and leadership training. The programme begins and ends with practical service in Northern Ireland and Ireland. I have met a number of them. They worked on Capitol Hill and they have played a critical role in the past ten years.

I would like to add to the sentiments expressed by other contributors regarding the importance of giving full and generous recognition to the work of George Mitchell in helping to bring peace to the country. George Mitchell did outstanding work and made a massive contribution to the peace process. I fully support the notion that an appropriate way to recognise and honour his contribution to the peace process is by way of a scholarship programme for US students to carry out postgraduate study and research in Irish universities. President Obama appointed George Mitchell as special envoy to the Middle East and I wish him well in that challenging role.

It is as important that this scholarship program be adequately funded. The primary purpose of the Bill is to make provision for a new allocation of funds of up to €20 million, with no more than €4 million to be provided in any one year. This new funding requirement is designed to replenish the original allocation from some years ago. Without going into how this has arisen, it is clear that the investment policy to be followed in respect of this new funding must be prudent, with emphasis on protecting the value of the capital sums being invested. Given this new taxpayer money will reinvigorate the program, it is necessary that the Government has much tighter control on the investment options used in future in order that the endowment amounts continue to be available to fund scholarships.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: If the Government was put in control, it would only lose more.

Deputy John Perry: I would not disagree entirely and that is a concern.

In Washington participants gain first-hand experience of a mature political process and are exposed to a culture of diversity. Students gain invaluable practical experience by completing internships in US government, media, business and non-profit organisations. At the end of the summer, participants return to Ireland with enhanced professional and interpersonal skills, as well as a new confidence in their ability to work together to make a difference.

The Washington Ireland Program offers its participants a unique opportunity to understand and develop their leadership abilities through an intense leadership programme and they also participate in a leadership project that allows them to put into action the skills they have developed. This equips graduates of the programme with the skills they will need to overcome challenges presented in their future careers. More than 380 young adults from Ireland have graduated from the programme, representing 25 different universities throughout the UK and Ireland. Many graduates are emerging in important careers in politics, law, business, communications, education and community organisations. As they move into critical leadership roles, they retain their connection with the programme and continue to give back to their local communities through an active alumni network.

I would like to make a few brief observations on other sections of the legislation. Section 3 deals with maintaining both an investment and a separate matching fund account, the production of an annual report and audited accounts. Somewhat surprisingly, the Bill also provides that public money must not be classified as matching funds. I welcome these provisions. It can hardly be a surprise to anyone that an organisation in receipt of Irish taxpayer funds should have to produce annual reports, audited accounts or should have separate investment, operational and matching funding accounts etc.

[Deputy John Perry.]

In particular, the clear definition of matching funds from the private sector is important, given that the US-Ireland Alliance drawdown of further Irish taxpayer funds is dependent on the generation of private sector matching funds. Matching funds are critical given the opportunity for students' development and trade between the US and Ireland. Many Irish companies operate successfully in the US and generate many thousands of jobs. The programme will be dependent on private sector matching funds even though €20 million in funding for the programme over five years is considerable.

I also welcome the provision in the legislation that a copy of the annual report and audited accounts should be placed before the Oireachtas. This provision will bring clarity to the issues of salaries and expenses incurred by the US-Ireland Alliance in the operation and administration of the fund. I am convinced such clarity and transparency will be of further assistance to the role of the organisation. This funding is being allocated to run an educational endowment program that honours the work and the achievements of George Mitchell. In these circumstances, it would be best that this would be the primary purpose and activity of the alliance. There is risk that any contribution the alliance makes to current political issues may detract from the value of the programme.

It is paramount to take advantage of the development of the educational programme. The reassurance provided regarding audited accounts and the investment programme and the clarification of private investment funding for the continuation of the programme are important. The Washington internship programme is similar in many ways. The fund will be renewed and if private sector funding is properly channelled in an open and transparent way, it will be ensured for decades to come that scholarships will benefit those who otherwise would not get the opportunity. I compliment everybody involved and, in particular, George Mitchell on his outstanding work for Ireland.

An Ceann Comhairle: Second Stage is due to conclude at 2.50 p.m. but I understand the Minister of State is ceding some of his time to colleagues.

Deputy Seán Haughey: If the House is agreeable.

Deputy John Deasy: I thank the Minister of State. I appreciate it.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: I would like one minute to make a contribution.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I have tabled three amendments on Committee Stage but I am withdrawing one. If the House agrees, I propose that Second Stage be extended to 3.10 p.m. to facilitate the Minister of State's reply.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy John Deasy: I welcome Ms Trina Vargo to the House. She is not supposed to wave but many strange things have happened in the Chamber this week and, therefore, nobody will worry about that. I worked with Trina in the US Senate while George Mitchell was a member. We both worked as staffers. The work she has done since setting up the US-Ireland Alliance has been amazing. It is good that she is present and I congratulate her on her work.

I do not have a difficulty with the Bill. This great programme has worked well for some time and I am glad the Government is funding it. The figure of 119 students caught my eye because I have been involved in recent years in bringing American students to Dungarvan, my home town and it has been a rocky road. I was interested in Deputy Quinn's comments about

attracting US education institutions to invest in Ireland and the job the Government is doing in this regard. My experience has not been great and I have been through this process dealing with countless Departments trying to obtain State aid for an American institution, which has made it clear it wants to spend millions of dollars in this country. The level of help provided by different Departments has been poor.

In two weeks, 26 undergraduate students will travel to study in Dungarvan. The level of funding we have received to date from local or national government is €5,000. The students are coming to study for three months. The idea is that the number of students will double to approximately 50 or 55 next year. The number of faculty members will increase from six to ten next year. That is pretty significant for a town like Dungarvan. Throughout this process, I have been curious about the mantra of encouraging innovation and attracting niche ideas to Ireland. In the past couple of years, massive amounts of money have been provided in the budget to deal with this kind of stuff. I got involved in the process. The Mercyhurst College authorities explained the area in which they want to get involved. We are in competition with three other European countries. Mercyhurst College wants to base its intelligence studies campus in Europe. Frankly, there was not a great deal of interest shown. I met representatives of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Higher Education Authority, the Department of Education and Science, IDA Ireland and the Office of Public Works. I brought officials from Mercyhurst College to Dublin to meet these people. At the end of that process, they displayed a level of frustration I had not seen before. Certainly, no real effort was made to seriously examine what these people are willing to bring to Ireland. It is a niche area.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Yes.

Deputy John Deasy: It just did not happen. We had to do it all on our own. We had to do everything from scratch without Government assistance. The students in question are coming to Dungarvan, County Waterford, in two weeks' time. One of the problems that is encountered when a third level institution like Mercyhurst College comes to Ireland and seeks to apply for grant assistance is that it has to have a co-ordinated relationship with an existing Irish third level institution. In some cases, the US college or institution does not want such a relationship. Graduates of intelligence studies at Mercyhurst College are employed by bodies like the CIA and the FBI. These studies have a massive business application. This growing knowledge-based industry is booming around the world. Mercyhurst College is one of the leaders in this area in the United States. I expected that somebody in a Department would latch on to the college's booming, innovative and leading-edge involvement in this sector, but that did not happen. When I balanced that against all the talk about encouraging innovation and attracting niche industries to Ireland, I was in no doubt that it was just a bunch of baloney.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Yes.

Deputy John Deasy: The other thing I discovered is that when it comes to attracting a US college or university to this country, there is no co-ordination between the various Departments. Deputy Quinn is absolutely right about that. I know that from my own experience. Although the office of the Minister of State, Deputy Haughey, returned my telephone calls and pointed us in the right direction on two separate occasions, I cannot say that about four other State entities. The telephone call we made to the Department of Education and Science was not even returned. I remind the House that the people in question are willing to spend millions of euro in this country. As far as I can see, nobody in the Irish Government is responsible for co-ordination between IDA Ireland and third level institutions in the US who want to spend money in this country. Nobody is squaring the—

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: There is nobody in charge.

Deputy John Deasy: There is nobody in charge of dealing with all the various entities. Nobody is speaking to these people to attract them to Ireland.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Exactly.

Deputy John Deasy: Nobody understands what they want to do, to build or to achieve in Ireland. It was a miserable process, frankly. I have to say that has been my experience. I accept we are talking about the success of the US-Ireland Alliance and the George Mitchell funding, but there is something wrong at Government level when it comes to attracting US universities and colleges that want to spend money in this country and have a track record of success in the area they are trying to market.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: I appreciate the generosity of Deputies Quinn and Deasy, and the Minister of State, Deputy Haughey, in allowing me to speak on this issue for a minute or so. As a representative of a Border constituency, I have to travel through Northern Ireland most weeks of the year. I agree that we should acknowledge the huge contribution made by successive US Administrations to bringing about the peace being enjoyed in Northern Ireland at present. The former US President, Mr. Clinton, and others in his Administration were pivotal in bringing about that peace. I refer specifically to the former US Senator, George Mitchell, who was sent to Northern Ireland and patiently stayed to bring together all sides. He succeeded in what was an almost impossible task, which required the patience and wisdom of Solomon. When the history of that period is written, George Mitchell's achievements will have a central role. It is right, proper and most appropriate that a scholarship should be established in his name to attract young Americans to experience what this country has to offer. Perhaps a reverse procedure will be put in place over time. As my minute is almost up, I will conclude by saying that as a Deputy for the Border constituency of Donegal South-West, I support this scheme. If I were to find any fault with the proposal, it is that we could be far more generous. I suggest that €2 million is a very small price to pay for what has been achieved in Northern Ireland. George Mitchell's central role in that achievement will be always remembered.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): I thank all the Deputies for their contributions to this constructive debate. With the exception of Deputy Morgan, who gave it qualified support, all Deputies have welcomed the Bill. I welcome the cross-party support for the legislation this afternoon. As Minister of State, I wish to be associated with the remarks of several Deputies about the role of the President of the US-Ireland Alliance, Trina Vargo. I thank her for her work and wish her every success in her future endeavours. Similarly, I agree with what was said during the debate about the former US Senators, George Mitchell and the late Ted Kennedy. Having had the honour of meeting Ted Kennedy, I was deeply saddened by his death last year. Ireland lost a great friend with his passing.

A number of issues were raised during the debate. Deputy Hayes, supported tacitly by Deputy Quinn, wondered why it took three years to bring this legislation before the House. I remind the Deputies that agreement on the terms of the new funding and management agreement had to be reached with the US-Ireland Alliance. It was important to get the agreement right, in view of the scale of the Government commitment. Following protracted negotiations, the terms of the new agreement were finally decided on in 2009.

Deputy Hayes also asked how many additional scholars will come to Ireland. The purpose of the additional funding is to secure the long-term viability of the programme and to meet the

cost of the 12 scholarships that are currently offered. In recent years, the cost of these scholarships has not been borne by the original Irish Government endowment. It is planned that in future, the annual income from the endowment will fund the cost of the 12 scholarships and the administration of the scholarship scheme.

Deputy Hayes also looked for a breakdown of the number of scholars who go to Northern Ireland and to the Republic of Ireland. Detailed statistics on the various years can be provided separately to the Deputy. In 2009, for example, three of the 12 scholars went to Northern Ireland, with the other nine staying in this jurisdiction.

The Deputy also asked how much matching funding has been raised. I will have to confirm the present position in that regard with the US-Ireland Alliance. I understand that the current figure is in excess of \$1.5 million.

Deputy Hayes also asked how much funding is used on administration by the alliance. In response to that, detailed information is provided in the annual accounts laid before the House each year. For example, in 2008 a total of \$33,237 was expended, comprising \$5,490 on administration and \$27,747 on investment advisory fees. These fees are modest because the US-Ireland Alliance decided in recent years to minimise the drawdown on the fund. In the early years, administration costs exceeded US\$100,000. I am sure Members appreciate the improvement.

Deputy Arthur Morgan was critical of the aims of the legislation. This is a pity although I respect his right to raise the queries. He pointed out the large investment in the scheme compared to the cutbacks elsewhere in education. The €20 million payment will be made over a period of years and is conditional on matching funding being raised by the US-Ireland Alliance. A limit of €4 million has been put on the amount the Exchequer will pay in any one year. This is a strategic investment and there will be a direct financial benefit to the Irish economy. Another benefit is that Mitchell scholars will be likely to occupy positions of influence in the US. We expect their period of study in Ireland will create an enduring legacy of goodwill towards Ireland and be of significant benefit in the future.

Deputy Quinn and others pointed out the changing nature of the relationship between Ireland and the US. This was captured very well in the policy document published in 2009, *Ireland and America: Challenges and Opportunities in a New Context*. The Government fully subscribes to the views put forward on the changing and developing nature of the relationship. Deputies Quinn and Deasy referred to education in Ireland in an international context. Regarding the work of Enterprise Ireland, Deputy Quinn is aware the Government decided not to proceed with the establishment of Education Ireland because of concerns at the growth of the number of State bodies. Instead, the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe, produced a new framework for the promotion of Ireland as a centre of international education. As part of this, a high level group has been established. It is currently developing an action plan to enhance Ireland’s performance in this area. The group includes representatives from the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Enterprise Ireland and a range of State bodies. It is intended that the work of the group will enable us to develop a focused and coherent approach to international education. The presence of the principal players on the group will enable us to address problems and issues in this area in a co-ordinated manner.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: When will the group report?

Deputy Seán Haughey: In the mid-year. Work is being done in this area and the issue is appreciated by the Government, as is the need to develop policy in this area. I thank the Deputies for their contributions I look forward to further discussion on Committee Stage.

Question put and agreed to.

George Mitchell Scholarship Fund (Amendment) Bill 2010: Committee Stage.

Sections 1 and 2 agreed to.

SECTION 3.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I move amendment No. 1:

In page 4, line 10, to delete “fund manager” and substitute “Minister”.

This refers to some of the concerns expressed by Deputy Perry, although I did not anticipate them. This concerns transparency and accountability. The Minister of State has informed me there were protracted negotiations between the Department and the US-Ireland Alliance. The effect of my amendment would be that the auditor monitoring the accounts would be appointed or nominated by the Minister and not the fund manager. If this unravels arrangements made, my third amendment would meet the requirement as far as I am concerned. I am interested in the attitude of the Minister of State to my proposal.

Deputy Brian Hayes: I congratulate Deputy Quinn for tabling this amendment. At this juncture, the difficulty is understanding and accepting what has been said privately or in e-mails. Given that we are moving to a much larger investment compared to the €2 million in 1999, we have an opportunity to do this right. The suggestion made by Deputy Quinn, that the auditor be appointed by the Government or the Department of Education and Science, is good and it would give another layer of authority to the books when they are produced. There are examples in other areas where this has happened. Rather than giving the power to the third party to make a decision, it would be good if we allowed the Department to nominate. It is a worthwhile suggestion.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): The George Mitchell scholarship fund is held, controlled and managed in the United States by a fund manager, currently the US-Ireland Alliance, on behalf of the Minister for Education and Science. The current arrangement, whereby the fund manager appoints the auditor, has operated since 1999. Copies of the Irish accounts are conveyed each year to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General before being laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. Given that the fund is managed in the United States, it is considered more appropriate that a US based audit firm conducts the annual audit of the fund. It is also considered more practical for the fund manager to select the firm to conduct the annual audit in the ordinary course of events. Under the existing agreement, the fund manager is required to provide the Minister with a copy of the audited accounts of the fund on an annual basis. Under both the existing and the draft new agreements, the Minister can request to examine the records relating to all matters in the agreement. However, I am happy to consider the suggestion of Deputy Quinn further during the debate in the Seanad next week.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I do not mean to make an issue about this. Our interests are shared on this matter. I can see the practicalities if all of these operations are on the other side of the Atlantic. One would not necessarily expect the Minister or the Department to have the expertise. I suggest this after the financial turbulence we have had and the difficulties we have had with very reputable firms. This is no reflection on the US-Ireland Alliance; I am talking about the financial sector and its credibility across the world. The Minister of State could consider my amendment and may decide that the auditors should be appointed by the fund manager with the agreement of the Minister. This legislation has taken long enough and the Minister of State is big enough to work out what I am trying to get at. A rose by any other name would

smell as sweet. I will outline my concern about this provision in order that the Minister of State may realise my motivation for tabling this amendment. The work will start now for the alliance to seek matching funds. Those matching funds will be donated by people who will seek these types of safeguards in one shape, size or form, particularly if they take up Deputy Perry's suggestion to pursue Irish-based companies operating in the United State. Those people may very well want that level of comfort. I offer this amendment as a constructive suggestion, but I will not press it.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I am grateful to the Deputy for explaining his reasoning for tabling this amendment and I appreciate that he will withdraw it. We will certainly give the issue more consideration in advance of the debate on the Bill in the Seanad next week.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 4, line 30, to delete "or Northern Ireland".

I must take responsibility for having misread this provision. We thought that it should not be for us to decide what will happen to Northern Irish public moneys. I appreciate, from a proper reading of the section, that this measure is to protect the separation of the two accounts. Therefore, on that basis, my amendment is redundant and I will withdraw it.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed: "That section 3 stand part of the Bill."

Deputy Brian Hayes: The Minister said in his reply to the Second Stage debate that €1.5 million exists currently in matching funds — funds that have been obtained by the alliance. Admittedly, it is a difficult internationally to obtain funds for philanthropic purposes such as this. Am I right in assuming that if that €1.5 remains in place for the duration of this year, the only sum of money that could be drawn down from the State's perspective is simply €1.5 million on our side? In other words, I take it that the maximum objective of €4 million a year could not be realised were the matching funds of €4 million not provided this year.

Deputy Seán Haughey: It is €1.5 million plus the interest this year.

Deputy Brian Hayes: What does that mean?

Deputy Seán Haughey: It is not the figure of €4 million, it is a figure of less than €2 million.

Deputy Brian Hayes: In other words, as the Minister of State indicated in his opening remarks, we cannot deliver €4 million this year because the matching funds are not there. Is that not a fact?

Deputy Seán Haughey: That is a fact.

Deputy Brian Hayes: This is all predicted on the matching funds becoming available in the United States in an international climate where, for all kinds of reasons, it will be much more difficult to obtain such funds. At the end of a five year period where it would have been expected that €4 million would have been spent a year, only €10 million might have been spent.

Deputy Seán Haughey: The aims and objectives of the fund are set out and it is the intention of all parties concerned to achieve those.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Were matching funds not to become available and there was a deficit of €8 million, €9 million or €10 million, is there provision in the Bill, not in the context of this amendment to the principal Act but in the context of the original Bill of 1999, that those funds can be used for purposes other than those of the alliance? In other words, could they become available to other programmes in the United States of America which are not successful in obtaining the original agreement with the State? Furthermore, to where would that money revert?

Deputy Seán Haughey: The answer to the Deputy's question is "No". They can be used only in the context of the George Mitchell fund, the original fund.

Question put and agreed to.

SECTION 4.

Question proposed: "That section 4 stand part of the Bill."

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I wish to follow up on the question posed by Deputy Hayes. I assume that the commitment of €20 million is over a period of five years and it would be €4 million per year.

Deputy Seán Haughey: The period can extend beyond five years.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The commitment is to spend €20 million over a period of five years but it is not to spend €4 million per annum and the matching funds. In other words, if the funds raised on the private sector side fall short of the target, would that pull the gross amount down for that year? Is the commitment to have 12 scholars per year ring-fenced and secure irrespective of the flow of cash in any particular year?

Deputy Seán Haughey: The maximum amount we can pay out in any one year is €4 million, but the period can extend beyond five years. I am not sure if that answers the Deputy's question.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: If the alliance commits to a programme of 12 scholars and the funding is in place on our side, and it is subject to matching funds being raised on the private sector side, if for whatever reason in this difficult fund-raising climate the alliance cannot raise as much money as the target for, say, 2012, is the commitment in expenditure limited ultimately to how much the alliance side can raise?

Deputy Seán Haughey: Yes.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: If it raises only €1.5 instead of €4million, could we spend only €3 million as distinct from €8 million? That is the essential question I am asking.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I understand the question the Deputy is asking. We only give it what it raises.

Deputy Brian Hayes: There could be a significant deficit over a number of years. If the private side has raised only €1.5 million this year——

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: It was spending money that it had raised in previous years.

Deputy Brian Hayes: That is a good question. Can that money be spent this year? The House is giving the Government permission under section 4 not to exceed €20 million, although

admittedly not over a time period. There would be a concern if we asked that the money be spent in such a way but that over a number of years it was not spent because of the inability of the alliance or anybody else to obtain matching funding for that purpose.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I might put the question another way. The Minister of State said that the original €2 million was given by the State and that for a period of time money was not coming from our side. Is that correct?

Deputy Seán Haughey: Correct.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Can the alliance retrospectively get credit for money that it raised in the past towards matching funds in the future?

Deputy Seán Haughey: No. That would be provided for in the legislation. The Government is currently funding only two scholarships. The alliance has been funding the balance.

Question put and agreed to.

SECTION 5.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 5, between lines 23 and 24, to insert the following:

“(3) The Comptroller and Auditor General may, without prejudice to the arrangements for auditing of accounts under this Act, carry out an audit of the accounts of the Fund.“.”.

I briefly discussed this amendment informally with the Minister for Education and Science. It is a belt and braces proposal. The Minister of State has indicated that the accounts are already being sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General. That is information of which I was not necessarily aware. This amendment gives explicit overt recognition to a practice that is currently happening in any event. I recommend the Minister of State accepts it.

The amendment states: “The Comptroller and Auditor General may, without prejudice to the arrangements for auditing of accounts under this Act, [in other words, it is not challenging anything that we are about to enact] carry out an audit of the accounts of the Fund.” That is to protect everybody. If someone in the United States intended to mount a challenge of wrongdoing — we all have some degree of opposition about some sector — and someone was mischievous and did not have the best interests of the alliance at heart, the easiest way to cause mischief would be to query the spending or raising of money or the accounts or expenses. This amendment would be a safeguard to limit and undermine such mischief making by providing that the Oireachtas, on behalf of the Irish taxpayer, could request the Comptroller and Auditor General to put this safeguard and oversight in place to ensure there is no misappropriation or reckless spending of the money and to dampen down or remove the temptation for such mischief making. That is the intent of the amendment.

Deputy Seán Haughey: As I explained, the Bill provides a broad, enabling legal framework and this is to be complemented by a detailed agreement dealing with financial management and accountability arrangements. Both the existing and draft new funding and management agreement between the fund manager and my Department provides that where the Minister so requests, the fund manager will permit additional independent auditors to examine the records related to all matters of the agreement. This provision would allow the Minister to request the Comptroller and Auditor General to carry out an audit if considered necessary.

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

The new draft agreement also provides that the fund manager must supply an annual written statement declaring that payments from the investment and matching funding accounts are being used for the purposes of the fund as specified in the agreement and are not being used to cross-subsidise any of the fund manager's other activities.

I accept Deputy Quinn's intention but I cannot accept the amendment. I appreciate the Deputy's underlying concerns and I could consider the matter further in the context of the Seanad debate next week.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The Minister of State is being open in stating that he wants the agreement of the House in how to achieve proper oversight, which I welcome. Am I correct in assuming the detailed agreement between the alliance and the Department has not yet been reached?

Deputy Seán Haughey: There has been a draft agreement but it is subject to legislation being passed in the House.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Once it is passed, will there be a statutory instrument or will it be laid before the House as an agreement? What is its legal standing?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: They do not do that on Marlborough Street.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Do they not?

Deputy Seán Haughey: It is a legally binding agreement between two parties.

Deputy Brian Hayes: Will it be published?

Deputy Seán Haughey: We can ensure it is published.

Deputy Brian Hayes: I thank the Minister of State for being honest and open about this. It would be useful for the agreement to be published, given the scale of the funding involved and the new sections to be added. I welcome the fact the Minister of State has given a commitment to publish the agreement and it might be laid in the Library.

To return to Deputy Quinn's point, my understanding is that with any funding in the Department of Education and Science Vote which goes through either a statutory body, a college or a body with which we have an agreement, such as the alliance, those audited accounts come to the attention of the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science. We regularly peruse accounts coming from institutes of technology or a board like the National Council for Special Education etc. Will the Minister of State give some consideration to the legislation between now and its passage through the Seanad to see if he can include the right of the committee to peruse the accounts? It would be an important oversight function should the committee decide to do it.

There is probably no difficulty in the committee doing this at the moment. Under the normal framework we operate, these matters come to our table on a regular basis. It would be useful, particularly for voices in America who are sceptical of all kinds of issues I am unaware of, for an Oireachtas committee to question the accounts when they become available on a yearly basis.

Deputy Seán Haughey: They are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas so there is no difficulty in the Oireachtas committee examining them.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I suspect if the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment was drafting this legislation instead of the Department of Education and Science the culture of transparency and modern standards of accountability which permeates the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment would be different to the culture in the Minister of State's Department. It was used to administering education in this country in circular form until 1998. It is no reflection on the Minister of State or the people beside him.

Deputy Brian Hayes: It is an historical issue.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: It is a clash of administrative culture, with one emanating from the Anglo-Saxon world of accountability and the other emanating from Rome, where accountability is rather opaque. We have seen some evidence of that in the past few days.

The Minister of State said the accounts will be laid before the House. Deputy Brian Hayes and I might consider asking the chairperson of the committee, if he is in a receptive mood, to get a resolution passed at our committee formally requesting that the Department of Education and Science sends a copy of those accounts to the committee rather than just lay them before the Houses. That might get over all the problems and not ruffle the clerical feathers on Marlborough Street.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I thank the Deputy for the history lesson.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Sections 5 and 6 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment, received for final consideration and passed.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Bill will be sent to the Seanad.

Ceisteanna — Questions.

Priority Questions.

Controlled Drugs Sales.

2. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps he will take to close or regulate head shops in view of the serious public concern and the potential damage that can be caused by substances sold in these outlets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8489/10]

5. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on the proliferation of head shops here in recent months; the steps he will take to tackle the prevalence of legal highs and their mind altering effects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8488/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): I propose taking Questions Nos. 2 and 5 together.

I have voiced my concerns about the activities of head shops and substances represented as "legal highs" sold in these outlets on numerous occasions since my appointment as Minister of

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State with responsibility for the national drugs strategy. My concerns about these substances centre on the potential health hazards arising from the use of these products and the possibility that their use may act as a gateway to the use of illicit drugs. This issue is causing concern across Europe and a number of countries have taken action, each adapting their approach to reflect their own laws and experiences. However, no EU member state has come up with a comprehensive response thus far.

The National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016, launched in September 2009, includes two actions aimed at addressing the issues involved. The identification of the head shop and “legal highs” issue in the strategy is a reflection of the concerns arising in families, communities and across the general population. As provided for under the strategy, I held a number of meetings in late 2009 with the Ministers for Health and Children, Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Education and Science. I have also met with the Garda Commissioner and with senior officials of various Departments and offices. Head shops and the sale of legal highs were discussed at many of these meetings and some possibilities for addressing the activities of head shops were suggested.

Following more recent communications with the Minister for Health and Children, who has overall responsibility for the Misuse of Drugs Acts, the primary legislation through which these substances can be regulated, she has indicated that her Department is currently preparing regulations to introduce controls on a range of substances. These regulations will make the possession and sale of these substances illegal and subject to criminal sanctions. In preparing the required regulations, officials of the Department of Health and Children are consulting with the relevant authorities to ensure that any legitimate uses of the substances involved are not impinged upon. The intention is that the regulations will be drafted within a month, but a three month notification process to the EU may be involved. In this context, the advice of the Attorney General is being sought by the Department of Health and Children before the regulations are implemented.

Meanwhile, the activities of head shops are also being closely monitored by the Garda Síochána and the Customs Service, with a view to ensuring that no substances that are currently illegal are being sold. I have also been in contact with the Attorney General about other possible approaches to the matter. I raised issues in respect of public liability insurance, product liability insurance and consumer protection with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, as well as planning issues with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The matters involved are being considered by the two Departments and I expect to have their views in the short-term.

The National Advisory Committee on Drugs is carrying out some research at my request on psychoactive substances sold in head shops. The National Advisory Committee on Drugs has established a research advisory group for this project and it will report periodically to me on progress. In light of the banning of a number of substances and groups of substances in Britain and Northern Ireland in December, I am especially concerned about the possibility of Ireland becoming a dumping ground for some of these products. From the level of engagement outlined, Deputies can be assured that I am very committed to pursuing appropriate and comprehensive responses to counter the potential threats of head shops and “legal highs”.

Deputy Jack Wall: I thank the Minister of State for his detailed reply. This item has caught the attention of people in every town, village and city in the country. There are many different views on the subject. I have a similar view to the Minister of State that this must be addressed urgently, yet his former colleague Deputy McDaid said last week that it would be a mistake to ban head shops, because we would be driving the sale of these products into the black market

which would be controlled by drug dealers. We have seen head shops vandalised and burned in Dublin and Deputy Costello is so concerned that he is seeking to bring a Private Members' Bill to the Dáil on the issue.

We must not delay on this. The Minister of State has said that the legislation may have to go to the EU. When will it be ready? Will the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government be dealing with the planning aspects of this, or will the local authorities have to deal with the matter? Protest marches have taken place over the last few days in Castlebar and other places on the issue, so it must be addressed quickly. Kids from schools are frequenting these places, so every aspect of the legislation must be covered.

Deputy John Curran: I thank the Deputy for his comments, but I would like to clarify a few points. He mentioned my colleague, Deputy McDaid. I take a completely different view to Deputy McDaid on the issue. I am concerned at the proliferation of these shops and the threat they pose, due to the sale of the individual substances and the health risk involved, but also due to the fact that they could be a gateway to illicit drug use.

Under the Misuse of Drugs Acts, the Minister for Health and Children indicated at the beginning of February that the controlled list would be increased to cover everything that was done in the UK until December. That would cover a certain amount, but we want to go a little bit further. We hope to be able to include the likes of mephedrone, which is often sold as "white ice" or "snow", is one of the leading products and is quite problematic. I do not have a definitive answer on this and the advice of the Attorney General is being sought. The Minister for Health and Children will bring in that draft regulation by the end of February or the beginning of March. It may be necessary to give three months' notice to Europe before it becomes effective. That will be totally dependent on the advice of the Attorney General, but the regulation will be drafted and ready by early March.

Local authorities have a role to play in planning, but I asked specific questions of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on planning regulations. At the moment, head shops open where retail use already exists. I am wondering if the Department could look at actions we have taken to require the likes of off-licences to require specific planning regulations. If that were to be the case, the local authorities have a role to play, but I have addressed the issue to the Department.

I take this very seriously and I am not prepared to have delays on it. I would like to expand on the issue briefly.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There are many questions on this, so I would like the Minister of State to hold his fire while I let Deputy Catherine Byrne in.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I agree with the Minister of State. I do not believe that closing these shops completely will help anybody. In the long run, that will drive people into a darker corner and drive them underground to get this stuff. However, it is urgent that we bring in legislation as soon as possible. I agree with Deputy Wall in this respect.

There are very serious health risks associated with these legal highs, as has been demonstrated by many professionals. Many young people queue outside these shops on weekends to buy their products. Along with the regulation of the head shops, there must be council action on planning, because the shops have recently resembled off-licences and there is almost one on every street corner.

I know the Minister of State is seriously concerned about what is happening, just like every parent. This is particularly the case for young people, who really do not understand the consequences of what they are taking and how they take it. Young people, particularly those at

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college or secondary school, need to be informed about what they are becoming involved in. Once the analysis is complete, will the products in question be added to the list of banned substances held by the Department of Health and Children?

Deputy John Curran: Yes. To ban a substance, it must first be clearly identified and shown to have a negative and detrimental effect on health. A process must be completed to ensure the legislation is robust. Shortly before Christmas a range of products was added to the list of banned substances in the United Kingdom. While I am not familiar with the technical names, some designer cathinones such as methadone and methylone have not been added to the UK list. We hope to go a step further than Britain and include these products on the Irish list of banned substances. The products in question have brand names with which the Deputy may be familiar, for example, “Charge”, “White Ice” and “Snow Blow”. We intend to add a substantial number of products to the list of banned substances.

While planning and other regulations will have a role to play, it should be borne in mind that the primary concern relates to the substances given that a considerable number of them are available for sale on the Internet and are delivered by post. For this reason, closing off retail outlets will not be sufficient to address the problem. I have quizzed customs officials on this matter and they have indicated that if legislation is in place and products are illegal, they have the capacity to intercept these products. We are addressing this issue in a comprehensive manner.

Deputy Byrne is correct that education has a major role to play in this regard. The Health Service Executive has embarked on designing an awareness campaign which will focus, in particular, on addressing the mistaken impression that because these products are legal they are regulated. The problem is these products are not yet illegal and the message the HSE will try to communicate is that this does not mean they are safe. This will be the focus of the awareness campaign being developed.

Deputy Jack Wall: I concur with Deputy Catherine Byrne on the educational aspect of this issue. I ask the Minister to ensure the websites of his Department, the Department of Education and Science and the Health Service Executive carry warnings about these products. It would not cost much to provide information on all relevant websites, including, for example, those of local drug task forces and policing committees in each county. I hope this will be done as a short-term measure while work on analysing the products is being done.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: When will legislation on this issue come before the House?

Deputy John Curran: Deputy Wall makes a good suggestion on providing information on websites. I will ask officials in the relevant Department to take action in this regard.

I am not sure whether legislation will be necessary or if the measures can be taken by ministerial order and statutory instrument under existing legislation. It is intended to add this range of substances to the Schedule of the Misuse of Drugs Act.

Decentralisation Programme.

1. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cost involved in acquiring a permanent site for the proposed decentralisation of his Department to County Mayo; his views on the fact that this move has now been postponed until 2011 at the earliest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8487/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department's headquarters are scheduled to decentralise to Charlestown, County Mayo, under the decentralisation programme. To date, 100 staff have moved to temporary accommodation in Tubbercurry, County Sligo.

The Deputy will also be aware from replies to previous questions that issues relating to property, accommodation and costs arising are a matter for the Office of Public Works. On the Deputy's specific query regarding the cost involved in acquiring a permanent site for my Department in County Mayo, the Office of Public Works has advised me that an amount of €390,000 has been paid to date for a six acre site adjacent to Knock Airport. Additional associated ancillary costs amounted to €23,000. With regard to a site in Charlestown deemed by the Office of Public Works as suitable for the headquarters of my Department, I have been advised that no costs have been incurred to date as a contract for sale has not been completed.

The Deputy will also be aware that, in light of budgetary constraints and affordability issues, the Minister for Finance has decided to defer proceeding with permanent accommodation in Charlestown at this time. This location, along with four other deferred projects, will be considered as part of an overall review of the decentralisation programme in 2011. Clearly, the decision to defer the project has caused some disappointment, especially for the people of Charlestown and many staff in my Department who are housed at present in interim accommodation in Tubbercurry. Officials in my Department are liaising with the Department of Finance on practical issues arising from this decision.

I reiterate my commitment to decentralisation, which is an important and positive policy put forward by Government. I assure the Deputy that I will continue to seek to advance the decentralisation agenda and liaise with the Department of Finance on the relocation of my Department to Charlestown, County Mayo.

Deputy Michael Ring: Deputy McGinley and I are having great difficulty tabling questions to the Minister. This week, a number of our priority questions were again ruled out of order. This makes life difficult for Deputies who prepare for a discussion on their questions only to be informed on the day before Question Time that their questions are not in order. Some of the questions ruled out of order relate to the Minister's role. For example, one of my questions asked whether the Minister had discussed rural transport with a ministerial colleague. Surely this question should be answered in the Chamber. Deputy McGinley asked a question about masses in the Gaeltacht being said in Irish. The Minister is all over the television, frequently appearing on TG4 and Raidió na Gaeltachta, yet he will not discuss questions in the House.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I invite the Deputy to discuss this matter, which has caused real difficulties for Deputies, with the Ceann Comhairle to ascertain whether it can be addressed.

Deputy Michael Ring: I appreciate the Leas-Cheann Comhairle's suggestion.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will give the Deputy injury time.

Deputy Michael Ring: Perhaps the Leas-Cheann Comhairle will say a prayer for me in Irish.

On the decentralisation of the Department to County Mayo, people in Claremorris, Charlestown and Knock are disappointed by recent developments. While I accept that planning objections were lodged, with political will a building could have been completed. More than €1 million has been spent on decentralisation to the county. This figure includes the cost of a site, for which I do not know what are the plans, and the cost of reallocating staff to Tubbercurry. Will the Minister consider using the Cairn building in Kiltimagh on a temporary basis pending the completion of the building at the site in Charlestown? While I agree that Charlestown must

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be the number one priority, if the Cairn centre were used now, at least the Department would be located in the county, which would be a move in the right direction.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The major move in the right direction for all of us in the west was to have the Department relocated to the west. While some people may have expected me to succumb to the temptation, when decentralisation was mooted, to move my Department to County Galway, I had a clear view that, other than the Gaeltacht sections, departmental offices should be located in the region of Knock Airport. This was done for strategic reasons and to make a clear statement of the importance of the airport, which is located at the crossroads of Connacht, the point at which the N5 and N17 intersect. I am very committed to the project. Perhaps it is my east coast upbringing but the most important issue is to ensure these offices move to the region. Whether they are five or ten miles up the road is not a crucial issue.

As the selection of accommodation is a matter for the Office of Public Works, the Deputy should address questions on that issue to my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Martin Mansergh. At present, the Department has temporary accommodation in Tubbercurry and staff have moved to the west. The building in question has been leased until 2012 which means there is a commitment to that location for that timeframe. I hope we will have a permanent headquarters by the time the lease expires.

Deputy Michael Ring: Has the Minister engaged in discussions with the Minister of Finance on lifting the embargo and advancing the decentralisation project? The Minister is one of the exceptions in the Cabinet in that decentralisation of his Department reached the planning stage before being held up by objections. If the delay continues, I am afraid decentralisation to Claremorris and Charlestown will not take place.

A site has been identified and I believe planning permission will be given on this occasion. I am aware, however, that an objection was made to the planning application for the previous site. More than €1 million has been spent on the project to date. The Department can sell the site it acquired for decentralisation at a cost of €390,000. As it will be unable to use this site, it should move to the other site it has identified. The Minister now has another site he can sell for which he paid €390,000 that will not be used for decentralisation.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Government is committed to decentralisation. We have already decentralised a considerable number of people throughout the country. Within my own Department we have decentralisation go dtí na Forbacha. We are proceeding now after significant difficulties — tá a fhios ag an Teachta McGinley faoi seo — go Gaoth Dobhair. Throid mé agus throid mé, nuair a bhí chuile duine ag dul i m'aghaidh do sin, and people thought I would never succeed in doing it. We kept pushing the Gaoth Dobhair one. We have people in Clifden and in Tubbercurry. The Government's commitment to decentralisation is clear.

The Deputy's party seems to speak with one voice in the west and another voice in the east. There has been significant opposition within the Deputy's party towards the concept of decentralisation——

Deputy Michael Ring: No.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: ——which I believe is wrong.

Deputy Michael Ring: No. We were in favour of planned decentralisation, not the political stroke the Government pulled with McCreevy. That was a political stroke.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: With planned decentralisation it is decided who——

Deputy Michael Ring: It did not happen because of the nonsense with the stroke politics.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It did happen. I have found that when people want to oppose something, they always tell me I am right but I am doing it the wrong. My attitude towards life is to just get on and do it, and that is what we did.

The current position is that we are in Tubbercurry. I will continue my discussion with the Department of Finance and will continue to press that in the 2011 review we would proceed with this project as planned. The Deputy and I both know that this would be long built if it were not for an individual living in Dublin 6 — I do not know why it concerned him but it is his democratic right within the laws of this country — who chose to put in a single objection.

Deputy Michael Ring: That is right.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I remain baffled by the decision taken by An Bord Pleanála in the case. I have never understood the logic of it but I have to bow to its will.

We have spent money in Tubbercurry but that must be offset by the significant saving in the cost of rents here in Dublin, which are much higher than in Tubbercurry. It is not just a question of how much one spends in Tubbercurry. That must be offset against the vacation of space here in Dublin that is saving us a considerable amount of money.

Tax Code.

3. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the representations he has had from rural groups on the introduction of the carbon tax on rural Ireland; the discussions he has had with regard to the need for flexibility on the way this tax is imposed on rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8279/10]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: To date, I have received two representations on this issue — one was referred to my colleague, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, for his consideration and the other was handled through the appropriate channels in my Department.

As the Deputy knows, the economic and social implications of climate change are immense and it is the responsibility of Governments everywhere to change behaviour to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide. The most effective way to do this is to put a price on carbon which will encourage innovation by incentivising companies to bring low carbon products and services to the market. This tax is designed to change consumption patterns and encourage fuel efficiency leading to better air quality.

It is estimated that the carbon tax, inclusive of VAT, will yield approximately €250 million in 2010. The revenue will, among other things, be used to boost energy efficiency, support rural transport and alleviate fuel poverty.

I understand it is the general practice for the Department of Finance not to ring-fence revenues for specific purposes but rather to take an overall view on priorities in the context of expenditure decisions which are dependent on Exchequer revenues. In this regard, I understand that revenues from the carbon tax will facilitate investment in the aforementioned areas.

I understand the application of the tax to coal and commercial peat will be subject to a commencement order to allow a robust mechanism be put in place to counter the sourcing of coal and peat from Northern Ireland where lower environmental standards apply. A vouched fuel allowance scheme will be developed to offset the increases for low income families dependent on such fuels. I can inform the Deputy that work has already commenced on this matter within the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

As the Deputy will appreciate, carbon taxes will become a feature of economies across the world in the coming years. They demonstrate our commitment to reducing emissions from carbon dioxide and send a positive signal about Ireland's capacity to show leadership to those working for agreement on global climate change.

Deputy Michael Ring: I was surprised that the Minister, as a member of the Cabinet, allowed rural Ireland to be attacked in the form of carbon tax. This tax is a penalty on rural Ireland. We do not have Dublin Bus, Luas, other public transport or the infrastructure in rural Ireland.

Second Stage of the Finance Bill will be taken next week. I ask the Minister to contact the Minister for Finance. There should be an exemption for farmers from this tax in respect of home heating oil and diesel for farmers because this tax will impose great hardship on them. It will increase their costs and will have a major effect on rural families.

I know the Government is trying to keep the Green Party happy but it turned yellow when it let the Green Party Members get away with this. This tax is wrong. It is a tax on rural Ireland. Fine Gael is in favour of a carbon tax but there are better ways to do it than taxing people out of their livelihoods and making it more difficult for those living in rural Ireland. I am disappointed that the Minister allowed the Green Party Ministers to dictate policy on rural Ireland at the Cabinet table. We do not have the infrastructure or the services. People in rural Ireland need their cars. If they do not have a car, they cannot get from A to B. This tax is just another revenue earner for the Government.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I do not agree with the Deputy in this case. As he is aware, we have international commitments in regard to emissions and we must tackle this issue.

Living in rural Ireland, I see a wide range of possibilities for rural people to reduce their carbon emissions. First, it is much easier for a person in rural Ireland to install solar panels. Many of the houses, particularly one-off house, face in a southerly direction. Second, with the development of new technologies there is the possibility that small wind turbines will become viable in the future and so on. I see significant possibilities for people in rural Ireland to be very carbon efficient. They might pay a little extra for petrol but that will be offset by the possibility of using technologies because many people live on sites with space, which is not the case in the city.

On the idea of having a small turbine or any other device providing energy for one's house in rural Ireland, as the Deputy is aware, the Western Development Commission has done considerable work on wood energy as a source of energy in Ireland and because it is a renewable source of energy, it is not subject to carbon tax.

There are substantial possibilities if we have the creativeness to opt for them and use them. In fact, rural Ireland has a great capacity to reduce the impact of this tax by adopting all of the resources available.

Deputy Michael Ring: Would the Minister consider discussing the matter with the Minister for Finance this week with a view to getting a derogation in regard to home heating oil, particularly for farmers? Farmers' incomes are down 30% this year.

I want to give the Minister another figure. Fifty per cent of people in rural areas report difficulties in accessing rural transport compared to 11% in urban areas. We need our cars. We must have them. We are all in favour of reducing carbon emissions but we should not start with the poor people in rural Ireland. The Minister should take on the multinationals that

create more carbon in half an hour than anyone in rural Ireland. China and America would create more emissions in two minutes than this country would in the next thousand years.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There is a slogan, “Think local and act global”. The reality is that China or any of those major countries are also made up of little neighbourhoods, and each neighbourhood will say the other neighbourhood should do it. This is a global issue and no country is exempt from doing their bit. Even if our bit is small in global terms, we should do it.

The Deputy mentioned farmers. Farmers are in a fantastic position to provide themselves with wood energy, which is a sustainable form of energy. The Western Development Commission has done a good deal of work on that and therefore they can offset the extra costs.

As the Deputy is aware, the tax will be introduced in April. Farmers would normally buy a full tank of oil. Looking at farmers’ accounts and so on, the amount of energy used by the west of Ireland farmers I represent — perhaps the big farmers are in Mayo — is small per portion of their input costs because of the low intensity of the farming.

Deputy Michael Ring: There are no farmers left. They are all gone.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There are farmers in my area but they are small. They do not use a large amount of energy. They are very energy efficient on the farms and they do not have the high intensity costs.

Security of the Elderly.

4. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the commitment to the community supports for older people scheme in 2010; his views on whether older persons are not being adequately supported to live independently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8287/10]

Deputy John Curran: My Department has funded and operated the scheme of community support for older people since mid-2002. Grant aid provided under this scheme allows for the installation of socially monitored personal alert systems and other items of home security and has supported more than 100,000 older people in recent years. This scheme was reintroduced last October after being suspended for a period while my Department carried out a review of its operation. That review is now complete and I hope to be in a position to publish the report before the end of this month, once I have received the input of other relevant Departments and organisations working with older people.

My Department is also at an advanced stage in finalising arrangements for the implementation of several innovations to the scheme to address matters raised in the review. The revised scheme will seek to streamline its operation in order to make it easier for community groups to access grant support and to broaden coverage to ensure older people who are unable to provide this equipment from their own resources have access to grant aid.

Even with the suspension of the scheme in 2009, 432 community groups received total funds of more than €2.1 million in 2009 with 6,523 older persons being provided with security equipment. The vast majority of these received grant support for the installation of socially monitored alert systems. I have made arrangements to keep the existing scheme open and my Department is accepting applications for grant support. The arrangement will continue until such time as revised arrangements are in place. Information on the grants paid is updated monthly on my Department’s website at www.pobail.ie.

[Deputy John Curran.]

On a broader front, Government policy is to support older people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. To underpin this commitment, the Government has created the Office for Older People to support the Minister of State with responsibility for older people and health promotion to bring a more co-ordinated approach to issues relating to older people across the range of Departments and agencies. In particular, the Minister of State is developing a new national positive ageing strategy in respect of which my Department is having an input.

Responsibility for ensuring that older people can live independently and securely in their own homes, through the delivery of the necessary services, is spread across several Departments and State agencies, including the Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive, as well as the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. With respect to my own Department, our focus is on assisting older people through ensuring community organisations and volunteering are supported in order to address gaps in service delivery, where this is best done via local responses, and to ensure older people are included in local activities and community life.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: I thank the Minister of State for his comprehensive report, but it does not answer the original question I submitted for priority, on another issue to do with elderly people. The Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív, has commented widely in the media in recent days and weeks on this issue, which affects elderly people living alone. It is inexplicable that I am unable to pursue it with the Minister in the Dáil when he has replied to questions on this issue ag deireadh aifrinn an Domhnaigh ar Raidió na Gaeltachta. I have tried twice to receive answers, by submitting a question to the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and to the Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív. Both were ruled out of order.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There is nothing that can be done if the question was ruled out of order. The Deputy cannot raise the issue that has been ruled out of order in the guise of a supplementary question.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: I know many elderly people living in their homes who dress on Sunday mornings to listen to mass on Radio na Gaeltachta.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I have given the Deputy latitude.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: They dress up to listen to that mass.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy must find another way to raise the matter, whether by means of an Adjournment debate or otherwise. He cannot address it now.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Like the Leas-Cheann Comhairle, I have been here a long time and am simply trying to do my best to find another way of raising this issue.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am suggesting a very useful way for the Deputy to raise it.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: I will be absolutely delighted to hear it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am suggesting that he submit a request to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: This is an issue that affects elderly people throughout the State.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a supplementary question in respect of the question that was responded to by the Minister of State?

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Yes. I welcome the reintroduction of the community supports for older people scheme, which is needed now more than ever. This would be a terrible time to reduce funding for the scheme given that the CSO has indicated a 51% increase in the number of aggravated burglaries involving people in their homes. Will funding be made available in the current year to cater for all the applications that have been submitted for assistance under the scheme? Can the Minister of State give any indication at this stage of the extent of such funding?

Deputy John Curran: I will try to be helpful as possible to the Deputy.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: In respect of his relevant questions.

Deputy John Curran: I am sure it is all relevant to the Deputy. In regard to the question ruled out of order, the Minister advises me that if the Deputy has a word with him quietly at the end of Question Time, he will advise him on how to put down a question on that issue that might be in order.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: There you are, Deputy McGinley.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: I appreciate that, but I assure the Minister of State I was very careful in formulating the question, with assistance from my colleagues. However, it was rejected by the Office of the Ceann Comhairle.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I would be obliged if the Minister of State would answer the question that is properly before us.

Deputy John Curran: As I said, we provided funding for more than 6,500 individuals last year under the community supports for older people scheme. We expect a greater number to apply this year and a new scheme will be implemented shortly. One of my main concerns in regard to the scheme is that there are rural areas which are not adequately covered under it. In other words, we must actively promote the scheme in those areas and seek appropriate groups to administer it. The scheme is based not on the individual but on community groups. We must strengthen that connection between the activity of the community group and the engagement with the older person.

Deputy McGinley asked about the level of funding. I anticipate that this year's allocation will be in the region of €3 million. As I said, some 100,000 people have availed of the scheme, with more than 70,000 monitored alarms being provided. A concerted effort must be introduced in regard to recycling. Thousands of units are in the ownership of community groups, although they are in the possession of individual households, and we must work with those groups to promote recycling.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: I understand a review has been carried out into the effectiveness of the scheme. When can we expect that report to be published?

Deputy John Curran: Before the end of the month.

Question No. 5 answered with Question No. 2.

Other Questions.

Community Service Programmes.

6. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the allowances and grants which participants of the rural social scheme can claim; the specific criteria, payment and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8309/10]

7. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the changes made to the materials grant to cover ancillary costs such as travel, health and safety equipment for participants of rural social schemes; the monetary effect same has on participants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8305/10]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I propose to take Questions Nos. 6 and 7 together.

In general, participants on the Department's rural social scheme, RSS, can apply for adult and child dependant allowances, depending on their family circumstances, and also for the free fuel allowance. All of these allowances are payable directly by my Department and the qualifying criteria are generally in line with those applied by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Other allowances and grants may be payable to RSS participants by other Departments and agencies in certain circumstances — for example, the back to school clothing and footwear allowance and higher education grants. The qualifying criteria for such allowances and grants are a matter for the relevant Department or agency.

Since the introduction of the RSS in 2004, a materials grant to cover ancillary costs such as travel and health and safety equipment has been paid to the implementing bodies that administer the scheme at local level on behalf of my Department. This grant was paid at the weekly rate of €15.24 per participant per week up to the end of 2008. In 2009, in the context of the availability of resources, the materials grant was set at €11.63 per participant per week. Guidance was issued to the implementing bodies to prioritise essentials such as health and safety requirements with the materials funding made available to them. This can include safety clothing and boots for participants, where appropriate.

Deputy Michael Ring: The rural social scheme is an excellent programme. I hope the Minister will contact his colleague, the Minister for Finance, to seek additional funding so that more places can be provided on the scheme. Rising unemployment has led to increased demand and I hope the scheme will be allocated its fair share of funding.

As the Minister pointed out, allowances in regard to health and safety, clothing and so on have been reduced. I am pleased to hear that the Minister has written to the implementing bodies to emphasise that health and safety requirements should be prioritised within the available materials funding. Will the Minister follow that up to ensure recipients retain their current funding levels and do not endure further cutbacks in allowances for clothing and other health and safety requirements? I hope the Minister will write to the implementing bodies.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I thank the Deputy for his support for the scheme. It is a success on the ground and I thank those participants in the scheme who did such Trojan work during the bad weather at the start of January.

We can be clear about one thing, we have been paying €11.63 per week since 2009. Of that, €4.63 goes directly to paying PRSI, leaving €7. If we multiply that by 50 and add €14, it amounts

to €364 per year for participants. That should be more than enough to buy all the rainwear, safety boots and direct, personal paraphernalia someone would need.

I had the choice to reduce the number of participants or to reduce slightly the money for materials. I still believe €364 is quite adequate to provide personal safety equipment. We must also recognise that many of these workers are working for local committees, for sports clubs and Tidy Towns organisations. If a voluntary committee has access to free labour, it is a huge head start on the old days when it had to provide the labour and the materials. It is not unreasonable to expect community groups, if they need some cement or some blocks, to come up with the money as a community. That is the spirit of rural Ireland. One of the amazing things I find in CLÁR and Gaeltacht areas that community groups are queuing up with money, telling me they have the funds if I can match them, far more than was the case during the heyday of the Celtic tiger. Perhaps they realise there is no more free lunch. The right decision in all my policies is to keep participants on the schemes.

Deputy Jack Wall: I also support this scheme. How many participants are there at present and what is the geographical spread?

The proactive nature of the groups in terms of funding is fine in some areas but not in all. It is a matter the Minister must keep under review. The positive nature of the scheme should not distract from the need to examine it constantly. Small changes make a difference and if it is possible to secure an increase in funding, every group will welcome that. The positivity of the people involved is great but it is up to the Minister to keep an eye on it and to try to increase funding and participation numbers.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: If I got extra funding tomorrow, I would leave the materials grant as it is and I would create more positions on the scheme. Everything must be focused for people on the ground. For many communities getting the labour is the major bonus. They can come up with the money for materials if they need it. Often it is not a major requirement because the clubs spend much more per week on materials than the €4 we have cut and they are delighted to have someone who turns up every day to line the pitches, put up the nets and open the grounds.

In terms of geographical spread, Kildare, for instance, would have a small number. The reason is that the scheme mirrors the number of people on farm assist when the scheme started. We established schemes telling each area to keep applying until we hit 2,600.

I am concerned, however, that things have changed with the downturn in the economy. If there were to be more places, we would have to ensure those areas with small numbers would get an increase. There is no prospect of extra places at present in case people get the opposite idea.

Almost 80% of participants, if a line was drawn from Derry to Cork, would be west of that line. Deputy Ring's county has the highest number on the scheme of any county, which reflects the high number of farm assist recipients.

Deputy Michael Ring: I agree with Deputy Wall that it is a great scheme. Perhaps some of the funding the local authorities get should be diverted to the rural social scheme. In some cases they are doing better work than the local authorities. Perhaps the Minister might discuss that with his colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, so local authority schemes have their funding put into the rural social scheme, which is then given more authority to do work that local councils do not do.

[Deputy Michael Ring.]

The opening of drains is damaging more roads. This is very simple work that local authorities cannot do. It would save the taxpayer a fortune if those on the scheme were let do this.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The scheme is particularly cost effective. It costs approximately €7,000 more per annum than participants would have received on social assistance. That allows for these all having home income, so a fair number were not getting the full farm assist, which is a means tested scheme. It is a small premium to pay for the extra work we are getting.

I note the Deputy's remarks. If local authorities, however, were encouraged to lay off staff, the Deputy's party would be quick to tell us we are causing more unemployment. As funds become available in future, I will endeavour to secure them. It has been my priority in the cutbacks to keep numbers on the schemes intact. We secured that and did the same in the community services programme, where the numbers are higher this year than they were last year. I cut back the materials grant because the number one priority is to keep people working.

8. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on whether the level of community supports provided by community service programme organisations across the country will be hindered by the reduction in 2010 financial allocation from his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8314/10]

13. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if cuts in the allocation from Pobal to community groups will be reversed. [8244/10]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I propose to take Questions Nos. 8 and 13 together.

During 2009, over 80 different organisations were approved for grants from my Department's community services programme, supporting an additional 300 employment opportunities in the provision of services. As Deputies will appreciate, the pressure on the public finances has significantly impacted on resources available for initiatives delivered by my Department with funding of €46 million available for the CSP in 2010, compared with over €50 million in 2009.

Of the 450 or so organisations approved to deliver services under the CSP, an increase of 80 on the January 2009 position, contracts in respect of some 320 projects expired at the end of 2009. In the current economic climate, I am keen that the current levels of employment in these organisations are maintained. However, given the reduction in overall funding for the programme, I can only do this by abolishing the non-wage grant that was previously payable. I have, however, provided a review process where an immediate examination of the impacts of the reduction in support to organisations is being undertaken.

It should be noted that organisations providing services under the CSP are required to develop non-public forms of income by way of charging fees, trading or fund-raising, as the programme is not designed to cover the full operating costs of supported organisations.

Deputy Michael Ring: A number of groups have made representations to me about this scheme, including many women's groups, active retirement groups, security services for the elderly, rural transport, community development and enterprise and local radio stations. They are concerned that following the cutbacks they will not be able to meet their health and safety criteria or cover their insurance. The schemes will not have enough money to keep going and they will close down as a result. Is there any way funding can be found for these groups, which are all deserving in their own right? They are dealing with the elderly and community groups and I do not want us to lose community feeling. During the past ten years it was extremely

difficult to encourage people to become involved in their communities. However, increasing numbers of individuals are now doing so. We need our communities now more than ever. I urge the Minister to reconsider the matter in order to see what funding he might be able to obtain for any of the groups that are in difficulty. I received representations from 13 to 14 such groups.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: As already stated, there are many more people employed on the scheme now than was the case on 1 January. In light of the budgetary position, I faced a decision whereby I could either reducing the number of people in employment, which I was extremely reluctant to do, or cutting the non-wage grant. If my Department had been obliged to examine the 450 projects involved to assess their ability to do without the non-wage grant, this would have taken a great deal of time. What we did, therefore, was to notify the groups that the non-wage grant had been discontinued. We then stated that those on which this would have a serious impact, create a risk in the context of health and safety implications, prevent compliance with any law or affect the viability of a project would have the right to put a case to the Department.

We imposed a closing date in January on the making of applications in order that matters might be progressed. As I informed the CSPs, however, I will not refuse late applications. We imposed the closing date in order that groups experiencing the type of problems to which the Deputy refers might make applications which could then be dealt with rapidly. Of the total of 450 projects, 320 were notified of the change I have outlined. Some 50 of these have sought reviews. I understand that before the end of February a further ten may seek reviews.

The review taking place at present is immediate in nature and is meant for those projects that are in serious trouble. My Department informs me that I will be receiving proposals from next week onward in respect of those groups which have sought reviews. It is not my intention to allow good projects to be lost. I stress, however, that the nature of community service or social economy projects is that groups are expected to try to generate their own income streams.

Deputy Jack Wall: I agree with the Minister in respect of the review and the fact that good projects should not be allowed to fail. I am of the view that if, in the context of the core goal of a project, there is an inventiveness of the part of group involved to try to create income, the Minister should look positively on its efforts. I accept that such inventiveness might involve a slight divergence from that original core goal. Community projects are at the heart of social development in many areas. I was extremely critical when the boards of management of the community development programmes, CDPs, were removed because such groups are at the centre of communities. If they can display inventiveness in creating additional income that will make a difference, the Minister should welcome this. He should reward these groups by awarding them whatever additional funding is at his disposal.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Absolutely. When we assumed responsibility for the programme and carried out the initial review, it emerged that a significant variety of groups were involved. There are some groups in RAPID areas which will find it extremely difficult to create their own incomes. Some others are operating quite substantial tourism projects and have extremely good sources of income. There are still others which have enormous reserves of income because they have been making good profits.

If, in a time of scarce resources, projects are making good profits which can be sustained, would it not be much better for me to continue to devote funding to the creation of additional employment rather than giving grants to those who do not really need them? The projects

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

under discussion are meant to operate in the middle economy that is located between 100% funded community groups and the 100% commercial service. There is a fantastic example of such a project in Deputy Wall's constituency, namely, Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park. Visitors are willing to pay hard-earned money to gain entry to this park.

Some of these projects are what I would term serious loss leaders in the context that they draw in visitors, who frequent shops, public houses, etc., and help create wealth. However, there are known sources of income within some of these projects and we are trying to see how we might use the funds that exist to create further employment. There are some very good projects in RAPID areas which do not have ways of earning money. These will be treated very fairly in the review process. I have kept in reserve a small amount of money that can be allocated to groups which are acting in good faith, which are making genuine efforts and which require funding.

I chose to act in this way because if I had been obliged to review the 320 projects and then put in place an appeals process, progress would have been too slow. Only 50 groups have requested reviews — this number may eventually rise to 60 — and this is obviously because the remainder, although they may not be happy about it, are in a position to stretch their resources that bit further. They have informed me that they are willing to do the latter. In such circumstances, we will look after the groups which are experiencing problems.

Departmental Expenditure.

9. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount, extent and value of budgetary cutbacks in his Department in 2010; the degree to which it has affected the various services provided by his Department directly or through subsidiary agencies; the number of persons affected as a result thereof in terms of loss of personnel through cessation of schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8377/10]

32. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which decisions announced in budget 2010 will impact on the operation of his Department or agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8391/10]

41. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement on the Estimate for his Department for 2010. [8390/10]

42. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which operation of the CLÁR and RAPID schemes have been affected by the current economic climate; if consideration has been given to the substantial increases in such schemes to compensate for the downturn in the economy and the needs arising therefrom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8376/10]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I propose to take Questions Nos. 9, 32, 41 and 42 together.

As the Deputy is aware, as part of its strategy to manage its way through the current severe economic crisis and to return the country to prosperity, the Government decided, in budget 2010, to reduce spending on public services by almost €1 billion in 2010 compared to the pre-budget Estimates. To the greatest extent possible, savings have been sought through efficiencies rather than through reductions in services. The individual breakdown of these reductions for

my Department at a subhead level is provided in the Revised Estimates Volume for 2010, which, I understand, was published in the past hour or so.

While the allocations in most expenditure programmes are reduced for 2010, my primary concern is to make every effort to ensure that the daily front line services provided with funding from my Department, particularly those focused on the needs of the most socially deprived communities, are protected. Every saving that can be made from reducing overheads is being pursued in order that the entire range of urban, rural, Gaeltacht and island communities we serve will retain, to the greatest extent possible, the services that have been developed in partnership with them over the years.

Deputy Michael Ring: Deputy Durkan indicated to me that he would be present to deal with this question. As he is not here, I will pose some supplementaries in respect of it. What are the cutbacks affecting the Minister's Department that have been announced in the past hour? Is the Minister in a position to guarantee that he will do everything to protect the positions of staff who provide front line services.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Absolutely. The Deputy will be glad to hear that there have been no further cutbacks. In fact, the Revised Estimate published in the past hour contains a number of small adjustments that are positive in nature.

We have been examining every programme in the interests of cutting administrative costs, reducing duplication, etc. The tying up of the local and community development programme, LCDP, is a perfect example of what we are trying to achieve in the context of bringing programmes together and ensuring that two people in the same area are not replicating each other's work. I am engaged in a similar streamlining exercise in respect of organisations in the Gaeltacht. The aim of this exercise is to ensure that each Gaeltacht area will have an organisation operating within it but that there will be no area in which two such organisations are operating.

In reply to the previous question, I outlined the approach we took in respect of the CSP, namely, we removed the non-wage grant but we will assist those experiencing particular difficulties. In the past two years, the approach in respect of the rural social scheme has been to reduce funding and ask communities to do a little extra.

In the context of the Department's Vote, our approach has been to try to obtain more for less. The Deputy is probably aware that I made an announcement in the Seanad last night in respect of the payment for mná tí na Gaeltachta. The cut in respect of this payment, which currently stands at €10.50, will be 5%. That is a far cry from what Professor Colm McCarthy suggested, namely, the abolition of the scheme over two years. Deputy Ring will be aware that the Government is 150% committed to this key scheme. I accept that, in the context of the drop in the consumer price index, it will not be easy for the mná tí to cope with the cut. However, we are retaining the scheme and the tax exemption for the mná tí will also be maintained. I am of the view that these are welcome developments.

Deputy Jack Wall: In reviewing the position with regard to cutbacks in the Department's Vote, is it possible that a positive approach might be taken? As we examine this can we identify areas where we can develop aspects of the project or funding that may make a difference? The negativity of cutbacks in itself is divisive. It shows a lack of enthusiasm for what is being done. Opportunities to review each project and funding head do not come very often. Are there positive aspects? Have places been identified where the Minister feels further funding will create more employment? I gave out to the Minister because he did not fight the McCarthy

[Deputy Jack Wall.]

report initially but waited to respond to it. With this review the Minister has an opportunity to come up with the positive aspects of what is involved in communities in rural Ireland. I am asking with what positive aspects has he come up.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: With regard to the McCarthy report, if one considers the Department's Estimate now and the Government's clear statement that it is committed to a 20 year strategy for the Irish language, one will accept that the Government did not accept the McCarthy report's recommendations on the Department and has solidified the importance of the Department in the decisions taken. I was always aware that the Government's view of the Department did not mirror the slashing proposed in the McCarthy report but we must allow these processes to go forward. Without boasting, if one examines the Department's Estimate it is in line with what happened in every other Department.

I agree with Deputy Wall's point on positivity. Last year, I created extra positions in the CSP scheme against the head and maintained them this year. I will meet the Leader companies tomorrow and I will beg them to get the money approved. I kept the administration money very tight; I cut it because I want to put the money into projects. Every euro I save in administration will go into a project. I want large projects and I want the Leader programme rolled out fast. I do not want €1,000 or €2,000 projects; I want €100,000 and €200,000 projects and community projects of €300,000, €400,000 or €500,000 so that in five or ten years people will state that something was done under the Leader programme between 2007 and 2013. Wherever we can be positive we are.

I am also working on the matter of rural recreation. I met a senior executive of Fáilte Ireland during the week to see how we can invest the wealth of resources in rural Ireland into rural recreation. The RAPID programme is extremely important and we are examining new ways of improving matters under this programme on a low cost basis. Recently, I visited DIT Kevin Street which had brought in local children. This was organised by private industry, a voluntary organisation and the third level institute at a low cost.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I do not want to disrupt the Minister but I wish to allow more supplementary questions.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I am only anxious to help.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister is very helpful to the House.

Deputy Michael Ring: This House should debate where we are going and where we have been with rural development. Has the Minister introduced Gaeltacht house grants for windows, doors and roofs again this year? Is there any hope for their introduction?

I am disappointed the Minister had to cut back on the scheme where children stay in houses in the Gaeltacht. I compliment the Minister on that scheme and I supported him very strongly on it. It is big business in Gaeltacht areas and creates employment. The Minister should not worry about the McCarthy report. McCarthy is another one who wants to live in Dublin 4, Dublin 5 or Dublin 6; he does not want a rural Ireland. He wants to keep only the cities going and have us for coming down to at weekends to shoot snipe.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I have been working on where we go from here with rural development and where the opportunities exist. I am more than willing to debate it at any time in the

House. It is important that we have a clear vision of what rural development is about, what type of urban and rural societies we want, and how we see those societies developing.

Approximately €6 million in approved Gaeltacht housing grants has not yet been paid and a number of applications have not been fully assessed for various reasons; sometimes an applicant does not provide required information. I am committed to it and all of the funding available this year will be used. I heard what Deputy Ring stated on the importance of the scheme.

With regard to the *mná tí* it is fair to state that there is unanimity in the House on the importance of *Scéim na bhFoghlaimoirí Gaeilge*. It has had huge success in inculcating in young people a love of the language in a natural setting outside of the classroom. Last year, the numbers that attended were as high as ever and it is very important. In recent years I managed to substantially increase the grants to the *mná tí*. Furthermore, I require the colleges to pay €1.20 for every €1 grant paid by us to the *bean an tí*. Previously we increased the money and the college decreased the money. I stopped that for a number of years. I was reluctant to make any cut but given the circumstances of the time the 5% cut is reasonable.

The Government is looking to the future and today's Estimates contain an extra provision in the Department's Vote for *Stráitéis Fiche Bliain don Ghaeilge*. We see this as something new and positive that we must drive. We must await the approval of the Government and so on before spending that money but we are committed to the strategy.

Deputy Jack Wall: Will the Minister continue his proposals on rural recreation? The waterways in Ireland are under the control of Waterways Ireland but it is an area we have not developed to its true potential. They, along with the walkways along the banks of the canals, can be a huge tourist attraction. Will the Minister make a commitment to be in contact with Waterways Ireland to ensure that progress is made on this?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: When one travels throughout the country one can see the fantastic work done on the Shannon and Erne waterways. We have a huge length of waterway. I fully agree with Deputy Wall on the need to continue to develop these resources, not only the boating resources but also the banks. Recently, I brought in all of the State agencies that have major land holdings, including Coillte Teoranta, which has done a huge amount of work on rural recreation, Waterways Ireland, the inland fisheries agency, Bord na Mona, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Fáilte Ireland and Iarnród Éireann. We discussed how the State can use the fantastic resources it has through all of these agencies not only for their primary purpose but also in a co-ordinated way for rural recreation. Abandoned railway lines would be super for cycleways and walkways. Waterways Ireland has dry canals that would be very good for walkways. We also have the waterways themselves. Cutaway bog could be used for children from cities and towns to do things they would not be allowed to do anywhere else because we do not have ecological problems there and Bord na Móna was very enthusiastic about this.

Coillte has been particularly good at providing scrambler and mountain bike areas and it has developed several great walking routes. Building on that model, we are seeking to bring together all the State agencies which own significant amounts of land to take a more coherent approach. I look forward to Members' support in that effort.

Community Development.

10. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress made to re-instate the scheme for *áisisitheoirí pobail* for the smaller Gaeltacht areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8365/10]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: My Department is carrying out a comprehensive review of arrangements currently in place regarding the structure and funding of various organisations involved in all aspects of community development in the Gaeltacht. The purpose of the review is to ensure greater co-ordination and efficiencies in the delivery of a range of services to Gaeltacht communities by strong community structured organisations, encompassing community development, community enterprise, social inclusion and language planning. It is proposed that these organisations will operate within clearly defined geographical regions throughout the Gaeltacht.

Having regard to the Government's clear commitment to maintaining and developing the Gaeltacht and in the context of the draft 20 year strategy for Irish, language planning will be a critical element of the overall community development process in the Gaeltacht in the years ahead.

The role of smaller Gaeltacht areas such as Ráth Cairn-Baile Ghib in County Meath and Na Déise in County Waterford is being considered in the context of the overall review. It is envisaged that areas such as these will be recognised as entities in their own right and afforded the opportunity to have a community based organisation recognised for the purpose of delivering a comprehensive range of community development services, including language planning, as outlined above.

Arising from a meeting convened in Na Forbacha on 18 January 2010 to initiate the review process, the various Gaeltacht community organisations have been invited to submit their views and proposals to my Department, which will then formulate formal proposals on how the process will be advanced. It is intended that the revised arrangements for delivery of community services in the Gaeltacht will be operational by 1 January 2011. In the case of the smaller Gaeltacht areas, I understand Údarás na Gaeltachta will continue to support Comharchumann Forbartha Ráth Cairn for the remainder of this year. I understand also that an tÚdarás has approved funding to Comhlacht Forbartha na nDéise for the employment of a community development officer in the Waterford Gaeltacht to assist that company's development plan in the coming months.

Deputy Brian O'Shea: I thank the Minister for his reply. Clearly, progress is being made on the issues I have been raising. The áisitheoirí pobail were financed by MSF but that funding was withdrawn. The áisitheoirí teangan were financed by the Minister's Department on the basis of a survey and development plan for the language. Which posts are we discussing in terms of the funding available for Gaeltacht na nDéise — An Rinn agus an Sean Phobal?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Deanfaimid cinnte go bhfuil an dá phobal i gceist. Bhéinn i dtrioblóid dá ndéanfainn dearmad ar ceachtar acu. Tá deontas de €50,000 ceadaithe ag an údarás. Tá Comhlacht Forbartha na nDéise tar éis glacadh le sin. Is ceist don chomhlacht fhéin í cé mhéad daoine a fhostófar ar an €50,000 sin. An bhfuil aon foinse ag an Teachta? Is le haghaidh oifigeach forbartha pobail atá an €50,000 atá ar fáil i mbliana. Ar ndóigh, níl anseo ach rud eatramhach. De réir an phlean nua atá á chur le chéile agam, beidh comhlacht buan — maoinithe tríd an Stáit — sna Déise. Is rud eatramhach é seo, ach déanfar socrú buan ceart sa todhcháif. Beidh clúdach iomlán á dhéanamh ar Ghaeltacht na nDéise faoin bplean nua.

Deputy Brian O'Shea: An mbeidh an socrú buan in áit ó 1 Eanáir 2011?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Nuair a bhí mé sna Forbacha, bhí focal agam le muintir na nDéise. Mar is eol don Teachta, cas mé leo nuair a bhí mé i nDún Garbhán roimh an Nollaig. Dúirt

mé gur thuig me a gcás. Ó tharla go bhfuil an dá phobal sásta oibriú le chéile, agus go bhfuil na struchtúir acu, tá súil agam socrú buan a dhéanamh an-luath sa bpróiseas. Ní chaithfidh siad fanacht go dtí 1 Eanáir 2011 le socrú buan a chur in áit. Is é sin an dáta deireadh do gach ghrúpa sa tír. Má tá na grúpaí réidh le bogadh ar aghaidh le socrú buan roimhe sin, ní bheidh fadhb ar bith agam le sin.

Deputy Brian O'Shea: An mbeidh an maoiniú ar fáil?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Beidh. Tá €50,000 ar fáil ar aon chaoi. Ar ndóigh, caithfidh an socrú nua bheith níos fearr ná sin le teacht in áit roimh an dáta sin. Tá mé cinnte gur mhaith le pobal na nDéise go mbeadh socrú fadtéarmach in áit agus fios acu cá seasann siad go fadtéarmach. Déanfar cinnte de go bhfuil cúram ceart déanta dos na nDéise. Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil an-mheas agam ar phobal na nDéise. Is beag Gaeilge a bhí fágtha sa cheantar sa bhliain 1926. Tá éacht déanta acu chun an Ghaeilge a choinneáil beo. Tá iarrachtaí an-dáiríre á dhéanamh ag an bpobal áitiúil, go mórmhór na daoine óga, ó thaobh na Gaeilge de. Is féidir leis an Teachta bheith cinnte go dtabharfar aitheantas do sin sna socrúit

Deputy Michael Ring: In regard to small and large Gaeltacht areas, will the Údarás na Gaeltachta elections be held this year? Will the Minister give an undertaking to the House that he will speak to the directors general of RTE and Radio na Gaeltachta about their public service obligations to broadcast Irish mass on four Sundays every year? I ask that he restore the Sunday mass to Radio na Gaeltachta.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy made as good an attempt at the end of Question Time as he did in the beginning. Cathain an mbeidh toghcháin Udarás na Gaeltachta?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá ceist á fhreagairt faoi sinn inniú. Deputies are debating an Stratéis Fiche Bliain. Allowing that good suggestions are approved by the Government, it will be necessary to introduce new Gaeltacht legislation. I could delay the elections until October but I am not sure if there is much point in an election if we are introducing new legislation which would require us to rerun it in a changed context. I may introduce a short Bill later this year in order to postpone the election until the new legislation is enacted. That is something we should tease out in the coiste when I am invited to discuss the stratéis. I will be guided by the Deputy's opinions on how we should proceed.

I wrote to ceannaire Radio na Gaeltachta and received a reply from her. I then wrote to the stúirthóir of RTE and he wrote back. I have made the case that there was grave disappointment among older Gaeltacht people at the withdrawal of the mass. They regarded it as a lifeline.

Written Answers follow Adjournment Debate.

Adjournment Debate Matters.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie O'Connor): 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 Michael Ring — Bed capacity at Áras Deirbhle and the district hospital, Belmullet, County Mayo; (2) Deputy Brian Hayes — the new contractual arrangements for the provision of ICT in schools; (3) Deputy Joe Costello — the need for the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to sign the ministerial order to facilitate the sale of local authority flats; (4) Deputy John Perry — the need to provide a new

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national school at Carn, Gurteen, County Sligo; (5) Deputy Mary Upton — the need to award a disability payment and a medical card to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12.

The matters raised by Deputies Ring, Costello, Brian Hayes and John Perry have been selected for discussion and will be taken now.

Adjournment Debate.

Hospital Accommodation.

Deputy Michael Ring: The people of Erris are very disturbed by the rumours emanating from the HSE regarding the closure of 20 beds in the hospital in Belmullet. Erris is as big as County Louth. The people of the area depend on their hospital but the embargo on staff recruitment is creating problems. I understand Deputy Flynn stated today on local radio that the embargo would be lifted next week. I would not set too much store by her word, because she told us cancer services would be saved but they left the county as well. Therefore, I would not put much credence in what she has said about the embargo. Perhaps she has been talking to the Minister for Finance, and, if she has, I welcome that.

The hospital in Belmullet has 40 beds. There are 22 full-time nursing staff and 25 support staff. Emigrants from Erris who went to America, England and all over the world have raised funding to support the hospital, the building and equipment and their loved ones who require care. They wanted to be reassured that if their mothers, fathers, brothers or sisters got sick that they would be able to go to that hospital. That is why they supported the hospital over the years. I would be appalled if the HSE management in Mayo were to take away any of those beds because of a shortage of staff. That would be wrong. It would be an outrage. I believe the embargo has already been lifted for staff in Ballina and Castlebar.

Erris has been treated badly by all Governments since the foundation of the State. It would be outrageous if it was to be affected by the removal of 20 beds from the hospital. If 20 beds are removed, the next thing is that the hospital in Belmullet will be closed down. That would be fought every step of the way by me, Gerry Coyle, the local councillor, all elected representatives in the area and the people of Erris. The ongoing gas dispute in Erris might not have full community support but this issue would generate full community support. Any attempt to close beds in the hospital would be fought every step of the way. I say to the Minister, hands off the Belmullet Hospital. Support the people of Erris. Give them their dues and make sure that the embargo is lifted next week so that the staff that are needed can be employed.

The Government has let down Mayo in respect of cancer services. It has let down the women of Mayo in respect of cancer services. This will not happen. It will be fought every step of the way. I call on the Government, the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Mary Harney, the Minister of State, Deputy Dara Calleary, Deputy Beverley Flynn and all the elected representatives of Mayo to fight this every step of the way. It would be an outrage if Erris, which is the size of County Louth, was to lose its hospital. Patients would have to travel 70 miles to Castlebar, 150 miles to Galway and more than 250 miles if they have to go to a hospital in Dublin. That would be a shame on the Government and the HSE.

I have written to Professor Brendan Drumm. His wife is from Erris. He liked Erris when he was picking a wife. Shame on Brendan Drumm. He would be letting down his wife and her family if he takes the service out of Erris. I call on the real Minister for Health and Children,

Brendan Drumm, to ensure that this does not happen. There is no point talking to the Minister, Deputy Harney, because she has washed her hands of the health service. She would only say that it is not her responsibility; it is the responsibility of the HSE. I say to the management of the hospital that it is not to touch Erris or the Belmullet Community Hospital. That will not be allowed. It will be fought every step of the way.

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): I am replying to this matter on the Adjournment on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Mary Harney.

I thank Deputy Ring for raising this issue which provides me with an opportunity to update the House on this matter. The Government is committed to supporting people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Where that is not feasible, the health service supports access to quality long-term residential care where that is appropriate. We continue to develop and improve health services in all regions of the country and to ensure quality and patient safety.

The Health Service Executive has operational responsibility for the delivery of health and social services, including those at facilities such as Belmullet Community Hospital. Belmullet Community Hospital is a single complex, consisting of 39 acute, step-down and respite beds together with the 37 bed long-stay residential care unit located at Áras Deirbhle on the same campus. It has an approved staff complement of 78, as measured in whole-time equivalents, which includes 33 nursing posts. The annual budget provided for the hospital in 2009 was just over €4 million. The centre is managed by a director of nursing under the line management of the manager for older people services.

The Deputy will appreciate that all developments have to be addressed in the light of the current economic and budgetary pressures. The executive has been asked to make a rigorous examination of how existing funding might be reconfigured or reallocated to ensure maximum service provision is achieved. In particular, we need to ensure that the highest standard of care will continue to be provided to all patients in a safe and secure environment. Any decisions, therefore, taken by the executive must have regard to the current budgetary position and the current moratorium on the recruitment of nursing and non-nursing staff.

The local health manager has a clear responsibility to deliver services within allocated budgets, consistent with human resource directives with a view to ensuring that the highest standard of care continues to be provided to all patients in a safe and secure environment. This includes any decision on prioritising resources and the impact any decision has on the integrity of the services provided. This requires a stringent ongoing review of the application of the resources available. In this context, senior management, in association with the director of nursing, is considering the options available to it.

In recent days Belmullet Community Hospital has been the subject of speculation that there will be bed closures at the facility. The Minister, Deputy Harney, wishes to confirm to the House that at this time no decision has been made by the HSE to close beds at Belmullet Community Hospital. It has further advised that there will be no closure of beds at Áras Deirbhle. As soon as any decision is made on Belmullet Community Hospital or Áras Deirbhle, the people directly affected will be the first to be informed.

Our primary focus must be on patients. Quality care and patient safety come first and all patients should receive the same high standard of quality-assured care. It is essential to ensure

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that resources are appropriately channelled and that the changing needs of older people are suitably addressed.

Local Authority Housing.

Deputy Joe Costello: Currently, local authorities have an entitlement to dispose of their social housing, thereby allowing tenants to purchase their own homes, but local authority tenants of flats and apartments do not have the same entitlement to purchase their homes. I seek that the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government sign the ministerial order permitting the sale of local authority apartments and flats. I understand that this must be done by the Minister and that the Minister of State with responsibility for housing does not have that power.

This proposal has been a long time in gestation. It has been discussed since I first became a member of a local authority. It was supposed to happen on numerous occasions but it did not happen. Finally, the proposal is near completion. There is not much sense in putting the legislation in place without the order being signed. That is necessary before we can get on with business. In a way it is unfortunate that we did not get around to introducing this legislation in the heyday of the Celtic tiger when people had money and could afford mortgages. The mortgage situation now is getting worse by the day. Nevertheless, it is important that the same entitlement would be given to those people who are tenants of local authority flats as well as local authority houses. I always felt that was discriminatory.

I hope the ministerial order is accompanied by a circular and a mechanism to generate information and awareness of the entitlement throughout the length and breadth of the country so as to encourage the take-up of the scheme, which is a right and entitlement. I would also welcome an incentive scheme. In 1998 we had the great housing sale, the millennium scheme. On that occasion, the State made a particularly generous contribution in terms of reducing the value of the houses to encourage people to purchase their own homes. People are still talking about the millennium scheme. An initiative of this nature regarding apartments and flats is unprecedented but it should be accompanied by a similar approach. It would be great if the local authority could be forthcoming on the matter and could provide funding to encourage people to avail of the units in their possession. I hope the Minister of State will outline a reasonable deadline for the operation of this new facility. There are many apartments and flats in my constituency. Given the difficulties with local authority maintenance, it would be beneficial if the tenants had the opportunity to take charge of their own homes and maintenance of same.

Deputy John Curran: I thank the Deputy for raising the matter, which I am taking on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The enactment of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 is a milestone in the development of social housing policy in this country. The Act will improve housing services and their delivery by giving effect to a range of reform measures and establishing a framework for a strategic approach by housing authorities to the delivery of a diverse range of social housing options. Part 4 of the Act represents a major step forward in the evolution of tenant purchase policy and practice with the introduction of a scheme for the sale of local authority apartments to tenants.

This legislation takes account of the difficulties experienced with previous attempts to introduce tenant purchase of apartments in areas such as the management of apartment complexes,

insurance, the cost of maintenance and the transfer of legal title. While the new scheme tries to build on best practice in the private sector in the management of multi-unit residential developments, it also has to incorporate new arrangements to reflect the movement from social renting to private ownership. The transition from a rented social housing complex to a mixed tenure of privately-owned and social-rented accommodation adds an extra dimension to the legal and practical problems that can arise in private apartment complexes and this is reflected in the Part 4 provisions.

The details of the apartments sales scheme must now be set out in regulations to be made under the Act. Matters that will be covered by the regulations include the conduct of the tenant plebiscite to gauge support for the sale of apartments in particular complexes, as well as the discounts to be granted to tenant purchasers and the circumstances in which they are allowable. The regulations will also prescribe matters relating to the annual service charges to be levied by the management company in designated complexes and the operation by the housing authority of the support fund to assist the management company in carrying out major works to preserve and improve the complex. The form of the conveyancing documents giving effect to the three transfers of property ownership involved in the apartment scheme will also be prescribed in the regulations.

Apart from the regulations, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government must also prepare what may be termed a “model memorandum and articles of association” for the management companies that will assume ownership of apartment complexes designated for tenant purchase. The arrangements that need to be put in place for this purpose are being considered. In addition, guidance and advice must be prepared for housing authorities on all aspects of the operation of what is, of necessity, a complex scheme. While preparatory work for the apartments sales scheme is proceeding in the Department, the complexity of some of the issues involved precludes the setting of a firm date for the introduction of the scheme. However, the Minister is hopeful the necessary commencement order and regulations will be made, and guidance issued, this year in order that the scheme can be brought into operation as quickly as possible.

Computerisation Programme.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The Smart Schools = Smart Economy report was published in a blaze of glory on 16 November 2009. Nobody can disagree with the need for this initiative, given the ICT system in our schools is of Third World standard and is nowhere near what is needed to support a knowledge-based economy. The strategy launched in November has been a long time coming but the fact that the Minister is finally paying attention to the ICT deficit in our schools is welcome.

A number of matters have been brought to my attention regarding the contractual arrangements surrounding this plan and I would like the Minister to clarify a number of issues. Given the current economic position, funding for all sectors within the education sector must be spent wisely. Many schools are frustrated because they say they were not consulted on what they needed in terms of ICT before the framework was drawn up by the Department. I would like the Minister to clarify whether any of the schools benefiting from this money were consulted before he announced the ICT grant for a teaching lap top and digital projector. The most recent comprehensive information I have available regarding ICT provision in our schools goes back to 2005. Has a review of ICT in schools been carried out since then or was the Minister using the provision of a digital projector and laptop as an initiative he chose to announce last November?

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Value for money is another important issue. Added to the frustration schools are experiencing about a lack of consultation is the apparent lack of flexibility that they have in spending the ICT grant they have drawn down. Many schools have reported that they do not need a digital projector or teaching laptop and would gladly use the money for other areas of ICT provision. Can the Minister assure schools that they have the flexibility to buy the ICT equipment they need assuming the money is spent in a full year and it meets their individual needs?

I would also like clarity on the resources being allocated to the National Centre for Technology in Education, NCTE, to oversee the implementation of this project. A sum of €150 million is significant and it must be spent wisely. Will the Minister outline whether the NCTE is properly resourced to do so? How many people are working on the implementation of the framework?

Another issue of concern that has come to my attention is the fact that small Irish ICT companies, some of whom had arrangements with schools going back years, have now effectively been cut out of the market due to the introduction of this strategy. The companies involved in supplying schools with the infrastructure promised in the strategy were involved in compiling the report and they are represented on the advisory group established by the Minister. Can the Minister of State outline whether a contractual agreement to supply schools with infrastructure was drawn up with specific companies prior to the introduction of this strategy? Furthermore, is he concerned that small Irish ICT companies may not be able to pitch for business on a level playing field under the terms of this strategy and are in danger of going out of business?

The Minister said in his statement of 16 November 2009 that this €150 million investment would go towards ensuring that, within three years, each classroom in Ireland would have a teaching laptop and digital projector. I would like the Minister to clarify a number of issues. First, how will the remaining money be spent? Will secondary schools be able to obtain funds? Second, how much does it cost to equip each classroom? It is estimated to be €1,600 on average. Will this meet the needs of every classroom? Third, how much has been drawn down to date?

The most worrying aspect of this strategy is that the Minister is spending money that should have been spent over the past number of years. He has not checked what schools need. He has not conducted a vigorous value for money audit in respect of this investment and there is no accountability for this expenditure on a school by school basis. Serious issues have been raised by this strategy and the Minister needs to clarify this matters in his reply.

Deputy John Curran: I am taking this matter on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Education and Science. I thank the Deputy for raising this matter, as it provides me with an opportunity to outline to this House the way in which the ICT infrastructure grant for primary schools, which was issued last November, may be utilised. In November last year the Taoiseach launched the Smart Schools = Smart Economy report, which is the new action plan for integrating ICT in schools. The report, which was produced by the joint advisory group established by the Minister earlier last year, builds on the earlier strategy group report, Investing Effectively in ICT in Schools. As a first step in implementing the recommendations of the report, €22 million in ICT grants was issued to primary schools in November last. In order to ensure value for money and to make the procurement process easier, schools were instructed to use the national framework agreements for the supply of ICT equipment, where such agreements are in place. Four distinct agreements for the supply of specific categories of ICT equipment to schools have been set up by the Department of Finance. The categories in question are PCs,

laptops, mono laser printers and colour laser printers. In addition, the National Centre for Technology in Education has set up a framework for the purchase of digital projectors. Frameworks can facilitate greater flexibility in the acquisition of goods and services and support more responsive pricing mechanisms that deliver better value for money. The major features of the frameworks are the lowest price guarantee, the simple and cost-effective procurement process for customers, the public service terms and conditions and the centralised contract management and monitoring of vendor performance. In all cases, the suppliers were selected following an open competitive tendering exercise in compliance with EU and national procurement rules. The process was open to all companies.

In the interests of achieving best value for money, schools were asked by letter to use the framework agreements for the purchase of ICT equipment under the relevant categories. Schools can run a mini competitive tendering process by sending a simple request for quotation, setting out their requirements, to a single central e-mail address. In addition to the core products, schools can also request quotations for associated products and services, such as docking stations, batteries, USB keys, hard disks and unpacking and installation of equipment. The frameworks deliver competitive prices and are covered by a three-year, on-site, next-business-day system of warranty and support. The operation of the frameworks is governed by the vendor participation agreements, through which schools are able to benefit from a range of favourable terms and conditions, as agreed in the aggregate for eligible non-commercial public sector bodies. Framework agreements are generally set up for a period of three years, with an option of an extension for a further year, at the sole discretion of the Department of Finance in conjunction with the ICT frameworks steering group. The current framework for PCs will end on 30 April 2010. This includes the one-year extension. The three-year framework for laptops will end on 7 December 2012 with an option for extension until 7 December 2013. In forms of procurement where framework agreements do not exist, schools are required to carry out normal competitive tendering processes under general public procurement rules.

A number of schools have indicated in feedback that in certain circumstances, it may be possible to achieve better value from non-framework vendors. Therefore, it has been decided that in such situations schools may include non-framework vendors when issuing a request for quotes. However, schools must ensure they comply with public procurement procedures at all times and carry out this process in an open and equitable manner. Quotes must be sought from framework and non-framework vendors simultaneously and for an identical specification. All bidders should understand the key criteria against which their bids will be assessed. All quotes received must be evaluated against these criteria to identify the preferred bidder. Schools must keep confidential records of this process. Information for schools on this option is available on the NCTE website. Information on the evaluation process is available on the Centre for Management and Organisation Development website. I thank the Deputy.

Schools Building Projects.

Deputy John Perry: I was delighted to hear Deputy Hayes speaking about the new contractual arrangements for the provision of much-needed ICT systems in schools. I am sure the Minister of State will agree that the issue I am about to raise is light years behind that.

Carn national school in Gurteen, County Sligo, is a three-teacher school with a current enrolment of 72 pupils. The pupils are crammed into two small classrooms in the old school building and a prefabricated classroom, which houses the infant classes. The condition of the older building is extremely poor — it has old slate roofing and neither the walls nor the ceilings are insulated. The school toilets are damp and run down. The school playground has numerous

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hazards, such as an old and uneven tarmac surface and broken grates and gullies. It is an appalling set of circumstances. The space in which the school bus and the parents' cars have to be parked when dropping off pupils is extremely limited. This is a cause of huge concern, especially as the school is located beside a T-junction on the primary road between Tubbercurry and Boyle. There are major safety concerns when the school bus and many cars arrive at the start and end of the school day. Carn national school does not even have a staffroom facility. The school office is just four feet wide.

The immediate prospect for the school is that its enrolment is set to increase following the recent announcement by the Minister, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, that the neighbouring Annaghmore national school is to close in June of this year. The board of management of Carn national school has submitted site details, title deeds and Ordnance Survey documentation to confirm that Gurteen parish has donated a suitable site, in an excellent location, for the proposed new school. The education of our children at primary level must be to the fore in the Minister's future policies. In light of the level of economic growth experienced by Ireland over the past decade, it is a shameful indictment of this Government's failure that children in 2010 continue to avail of primary education facilities of a 19th century standard. The Minister for Education and Science has been there. Many young pupils are forced to attend school in third world conditions. That is how bad it is.

Gurteen parish and the school's board of management are clearly willing to proceed with the construction of a new national school. Gurteen parish and Sligo County Council, under its chairman, Mr. Gerry Murray, have spent almost €90,000 on purchasing additional lands for the school site and constructing an access road for the school. Having personally viewed the site, the Minister will be aware of its suitability and familiar with the work and expenditure that have taken place at local level to provide a site. He will appreciate that the site is highly favourable in terms of its proximity to ESB, water, sewerage and ancillary services. The Department of Education and Science has the ball at its feet with regard to this project. The site is in place and the need for this project has clearly been established. Funding is required so the children of Carn national school can have access to a fair and equitable primary education in conditions that are acceptable to teachers, parents and pupils. It is no more than any child deserves. In light of the totally unacceptable conditions at the school and the increase in pupil numbers, it is essential for the Minister to give this project the highest level of priority.

I call on the Minister of State, Deputy Curran, to state when funding will be provided for a new building at Carn national school. I hope he will indicate a timeframe for the construction of this building, which is needed as a matter of the utmost urgency and in the interests of the health and safety of pupils and teachers. I am delighted that the Minister of State is here to deal with this situation. During my 13 years as a Member of this House, I have been all over my constituency and the region. This school is the worst I have ever seen. It is an appalling indictment of the Government that in this day and age, 90 children attend a school that has not received any funding since the 19th century. If a health and safety audit were to be carried out on the school, it would be closed. It is an accident waiting to happen. I have a high regard for the good job that the Minister, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, does in his portfolio. I sincerely hope the Minister of State will give us good news, or some ray of hope, this evening. When will the commitment of the teachers and the community of Gorteen be rewarded?

Deputy John Curran: I am happy to respond on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Education and Science, who cannot be present, unfortunately. I thank Deputy Perry for raising

this matter and giving me an opportunity to outline to the Dáil the Government's strategy for capital investment in education projects and the current position in respect of Carn national school, Gurteen, Ballymote, County Sligo. As the Deputy will be aware, all applications for capital funding are assessed in the planning and building unit of the Department. The assessment process determines the extent and type of need presenting, based on the demographics of an area, proposed housing developments, condition of buildings, site capacity, etc. It ultimately leads to an appropriate accommodation solution. As part of this process, a project is assigned a band rating under published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects. The criteria were devised following consultation with the education partners. Projects are selected for inclusion in the school building and modernisation programme on the basis of priority of need. This is reflected in the band rating assigned to a project. In other words, a proposed building project moves through the system commensurate with the band rating assigned to it. There are four band ratings overall, of which band 1 is the highest and band 4 the lowest. Band 1 projects, for example, include the provision of buildings where none currently exists but there is a high demand for pupil places while a band 4 project makes provision for desirable but not necessarily urgent or essential facilities. Each band rating has a number of sub-categories that more specifically describe the type of works needed and the urgency attaching to them.

The school to which Deputy Perry refers has a current staffing level of a principal and two mainstream teachers. The school also has the services of one learning support resource teacher. In 2009, the school had 66 pupils, which represents a 16% increase in enrolments in the past five years. The board of management of Carn national school applied for a new school in 2006. The application for major capital funding was assessed and assigned a band 2 rating. The Minister, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, met a delegation from the school in late 2008 and undertook to review the band rating. In that context, a re-examination of the banding was recently conducted. However, the proposed project at Carn national school remains at a band 2 rating under the published prioritisation criteria for large scale projects available on the Department's website.

In December 2009, the Department contacted the school regarding the proposed site for the new school. Clarification was sought on site ownership, size and issues concerning title deeds and access. The school authorities responded, clarifying the site issues. The next step in the process will be a site visit. The Department's technical staff have been requested to schedule a site suitability assessment.

The Department has operated a summer works scheme for the past six years, which gives schools an opportunity to address issues such as upgrading electrical and mechanical elements, window replacement, roof replacement, toilet upgrade, disabled facilities, upgrade to play facilities, etc. Carn national school has only this year made an application for works under the summer works scheme. The application identified window replacement as the priority. Following an assessment process, projects will be selected for funding from all valid and approved applications on a top down basis in accordance with the prioritisation criteria published with the scheme. The timetable for the summer works scheme 2010 has also been published as part of the governing circular letter for the scheme. This circular letter is available on the Department's website. In accordance with the timetable, it is my intention to publish a list of successful summer works scheme applicants in March.

Modernising facilities in our existing building stock as well as the need to respond to emerging needs in areas of rapid population growth is a significant challenge. The Government has shown a consistent determination to improve the condition of our school buildings and to ensure that appropriate facilities are in place to enable the implementation of a broad and

[Deputy John Curran.]

balanced curriculum. However, the level of demand on the school building programme is such that all projects cannot be carried out together. They will have to be carried out over time in a structured and coherent manner and this is the reasoning behind the Department's published prioritisation criteria. The project for Carn national school will be carried out consistent with this approach. I thank Deputy Perry for raising the matter and I assure him the Minister is committed to advancing the project for Carn national school.

The Dáil adjourned at 5.25 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 23 February 2010.

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 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Substance Misuse Strategy.

11. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the frustration of community based drug services with delays in response and delays in funding since the demise of the national drugs strategy committee and the subsuming of its powers and decision making capability into his Department; the loss of the expertise the NDSC had built up over the years; the steps he will take to speed up the delivery of services to the community drugs groups. [8247/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): The Office of the Minister for Drugs (OMD) was established under the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 to facilitate greater cohesion in policy-making and service delivery. All financial matters are now overseen by the OMD, which includes the allocation of annual budgets to the Drugs Task Forces and associated payments.

The OMD formally approved funding to the Drugs Task Forces in regard to their 2010 allocations on 22nd December 2009. As part of the approval process, the relevant funding agencies were also advised. In this context, the Deputy should note that payments do not directly issue to projects from my Department. Rather, funding is channelled through various Departments and agencies which reflect the focus of the project(s) in question and those bodies have ultimate responsibility for the release of my Department's funding to the projects on the ground.

The timing and value of payments issuing from my Department to the relevant funding bodies is, of course, inextricably linked to the timing and value of their respective claims to the Department. In this regard, I would like to assure the Deputy that every effort is made to process and expedite payments in the timeliest manner. Payment is predicated on claims being made in the prescribed format and with all the requisite supporting information being provided.

Of the completed claims received up to last Friday, 12th February, I understand that, with the exception of one claim, all payments have issued. Claims are being received on an ongoing basis and are being processed accordingly.

[Deputy John Curran.]

The Deputy will, of course, appreciate that there are several factors that determine the release of funding, e.g. number and timing of payment runs and the subsequent transfer of funds through the Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) system. While the EFT system represents significant benefits in terms of speed, there are set working days required to affect the transactions.

My Department is very aware of the significance of funding being with the projects as early as possible in the year to obviate any undue hardship. To support this, arrangements were made in December 2009 to provide salary advances for the first two weeks of January 2010 to those projects, identified by the Drugs Task Forces, that might have been under financial pressure.

While every effort is made by my Department to facilitate timely and prompt payments to drugs projects, it must be pointed out that this is also contingent on the co-operation and engagement of the other stakeholders involved. In all cases, cognisance is taken of due process while also respecting all appropriate and requisite financial parameters.

I fully acknowledge the work carried out by the former National Drugs Strategy Team (NDST) over the years. However, I do not believe that the expertise and knowledge garnered over the years has, in any way, gone to waste. A number of the former NDST representatives — from across the different sectors — now serve on the Drugs Advisory Group which was established under the new Strategy. The role of Group is to advise me on operational matters relating to the Strategy.

Finally, the Deputy will wish to note that, as previously indicated, it is my intention, during 2010, to review the funding procedures in place in relation to drugs initiatives to see whether any adjustments are necessary.

Community Development.

12. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the commitment to the community supports for older people scheme in 2010; his views on whether older persons are not being adequately supported to live independently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8287/10]

45. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement on the implementation to date of those areas of the revised programme for Government, for which his Department has responsibility. [8397/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 12 and 45 together.

My Department has funded and operated the Scheme of Community Support for Older People since mid 2002. Grant aid provided under this Scheme allows for the installation of socially monitored personal alert systems and other items of home security and has supported over 100,000 older people in recent years. The Deputy will recall that this Scheme was reintroduced last October after being suspended for a period while my Department carried out a review of its operation. That Review is now complete and I hope to be in a position to publish the report before the end of this month, once I have received the input of other relevant Departments and organisations working with older people.

My Department is also at an advanced stage in finalising arrangements for the implementation of a number of innovations to the scheme to address matters raised in the review. The revised scheme will seek to:

- streamline its operation and make it easier for community groups to access grant support; and
- broaden coverage to ensure that older people who are unable to provide this equipment from their own resources have access to grant aid.

Even with the suspension of the Scheme in 2009, 432 community groups received total funds of over €2.1m in 2009 with 6,523 older persons being provided with security equipment. The vast majority of these received grant support for the installation of socially monitored alert systems. I have made arrangements to keep the existing Scheme open and my Department is accepting applications for grant support. The arrangement will continue until such time as revised arrangements are in place. Information on the grants paid is updated monthly on my Department's website at www.pobail.ie.

On a broader front, Government policy is to support older people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. To underpin this commitment, the Government has created the Office for Older People to support the Minister for Older People and Health Promotion to bring a more coordinated approach to issues relating to older people across the range of Government Departments and Agencies. In particular the Minister is developing a new National Positive Ageing Strategy and my Department is contributing to that work as well.

Responsibility for ensuring that older people can live independently and securely in their own homes and the delivery of services needed to ensure this is spread across a number of Departments and State agencies. An Garda Síochána and the Health Services Executive, as well as the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. With respect to my own Department, our focus is on assisting older people through ensuring community organisations and volunteering is supported to address gaps in service delivery where this is best done by local responses, and to ensure that older people are included in local activities and community life.

Question No. 13 answered with Question No. 8.

Gaeltacht na nDéise.

14. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cén cinneadh atá déanta aige i leith mhaoiniú an Phlean Forbartha Teanga do Ghaeltacht na nDéise; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [8362/10]

21. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cathain a chuirfear áisitheoir pobail in áit i nGaeltacht na nDéise; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [8363/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Tógfaidh mé Ceisteanna Uimh 14 agus 21 le chéile.

Ar mhaithe le héifeacht agus comhthathú seirbhísí sa Ghaeltacht, tá cinneadh polasaí déanta agam aitheantas a thabhairt do phríomh-eagraíochtaí forbartha pobalbhunaithe a mbeidh ceantair fheidhme shoiléire acu sna ceantair Ghaeltachta éagsúla. Is iad na príomh-chúraimí a bheidh ar na heagraíochtaí pobalbhunaithe seo ná cláir oibre a fheidhmiú ina gceantair a chuimseoidh forbairt pobail, fiontraíocht phobail, an cuimsiú sóisialta agus an phleanáil teanga. Is é bunspríoc an pholasaí seo ná go mbeidh eagraíocht phobalbhunaithe amháin i ngach ceantar aiceanta Gaeltachta ag feidhmiú go héifeachtach agus á maoiniú ag an Stát dá réir. Ar ndóigh,

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

beidh an Ghaeilge fite fuaite leis na réimsí éagsúla seo agus beidh earnáil na pleanála teanga criticiúil sa phróiseas i gcoitinne.

Maidir leis Na Déise, tháinig deireadh le scéim phiolótach pleanála teanga a bhí i bhfeidhm i nGaeltacht na nDéise agus maoinithe ag mo Roinnse ag deireadh 2009. Tuigim go bhfuil maoiníú ceadaithe ag Údarás na Gaeltachta do Chomhlacht Forbartha na nDéise mar chúnamh dóibh chun Oifigeach Forbartha a fhostú i nGaeltacht Phort Láirge chun plean forbartha an chomhlachta a chur i bhfeidhm sna míonna amach romhainn.

Mar atá a fhios ag an Teachta, tá an dréacht-Straitéis 20-bliain don Ghaeilge foilsithe ag an Rialtas agus faoi bhráid an Chomhchoiste um Gnóthaí Ealaíon, Spóirt, Turasóireachta, Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta faoi láthair. Cuimsíonn an dréacht-Straitéis forbairt na pleanála teanga ar bhonn córasach agus cuimsitheach ag leibhéal pobail sa Ghaeltacht agus moltar ann go mbeidh stádas na Gaeltachta sa todhchaí bunaithe ar chritéir teanga. Tá sé i gceist, sa chomhthéacs sin, go mbeidh plean teanga ag gach ceantar Gaeltachta, Gaeltacht na nDéise ina measc, a thabharfaidh tosaíocht do ghníomhaíochtaí pleanála teanga a bhfuil gá leo le háit na Gaeilge mar theanga an phobail a chinntiú. Nuair a bheidh obair an Chomhchoiste curtha i gcrích, tá sé i gceist agam an dréacht-Straitéis a chur faoi bhráid an Rialtais le ceadú go críochnaitheach. Déanfar tuilleadh forbartha ar an bpróiseas pleanála teanga sa Ghaeltacht i gcoitinne i gcomhthéacs na Straitéise sin amach anseo.

Community Development.

15. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on re-establishing a community partnership for the Dublin 12 area. [8246/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): Following on from the winding-up of the former local development company for the Dublin 12 area, KWCDT Ltd, my Department has continued its commitment to the area by identifying and supporting the transfer of a number of key projects to Rathmines/Pembroke Partnership on an interim basis. An initial allocation of some €0.3m in additional funding has been provided in this regard under the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) for 2010.

My Department, together with Pobal, is working to ensure the maintenance of essential front-line services in Dublin 12. I understand a proposal on the future delivery of supports for the area is being prepared but I have no plans to establish a new local development company in the area.

State Agencies.

16. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil nascadh foirmeálta idir Údarás na Gaeltachta agus Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta i bhfeidhm anois; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [8360/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Tá nasc foirmeálta idir Údarás na Gaeltachta agus MFG Teo cheana sa mhéid is go bhfuil ceathrar comhalta agus feidhmeannach amháin ag an Údarás ar Bhord MFG Teo. Mar chuid de phróiseas chun a chinntiú go bhfuil gníomhaíochtaí Údarás na Gaeltachta agus MFG Teo araon á gcur i bhfeidhm ar an mbealach is éifeachtaí maidir le seirbhísí a sheachadadh do phobal na Gaeltachta agus luach ar airgead a thabhairt, shocraigh mé na cúraimí a bhí ar MFG Teo i ndáil leis an Scéim Shóisialta Tuaithe sa Ghaeltacht a aistriú go dtí Údarás na Gaeltachta i mí Iúil 2009.

I láthair na huaire, tá athbhreithniú cuimsitheach a dhéanamh ag mo Roinnse ar na socrúithe reatha atá i bhfeidhm maidir le struchtúr agus maoiniú na n-eagraíochtaí difriúla atá ag plé le gnéithe éagsúla den fhorbairt pobail sa Ghaeltacht, ar a n-áirítear ach go háirithe an fhorbairt pobail féin, an fhiontraíocht phobail, an cuimsiú sóisialta agus an phleanáil teanga. Tá ról MFG Teo i ndáil leis na gníomhaíochtaí seo sa todhchaí á meas sa chomhthéacs seo.

Údarás na Gaeltachta.

17. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the Údarás na Gaeltachta elections will be held. [8250/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): As the last Údarás na Gaeltachta elections were held on 2nd April 2005, the next elections must, according to the provisions of the existing legislation, be held on a date between 1st April 2009 and 1st October 2010. Due to the ongoing work in relation to the draft 20-year Strategy for Irish and the possible implications for the functions of an tÚdarás, I am not yet in a position to make a decision with regard to a date for the next elections. If necessary, however, I will consider bringing a Bill before the House with a view to extending the term of office of the current members.

Straitéis 20 Bliain.

18. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Brian O'Shea** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta Chun a fhiafraí den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil sé sásta go bhfuil díospóireacht leathan phoiblí ar siúl i leith na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh [8358/10]

20. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Brian O'Shea** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cén clár ama atá aige maidir leis an dréacht deiridh den Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge a fhoilsiú; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [8357/10]

27. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta Chun a fhiafraí den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil aon chinneadh déanta aige leasúithe a dhéanamh ar an Dréacht-Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [8359/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Tógfaidh mé Ceisteanna Uimh 18, 20, agus 27 le chéile.

Mar is eol do na Teachtaí, tá an dréacht-Straitéis 20-bliain don Ghaeilge foilsithe ag an Rialtas agus curtha os chomhair an Chomhchoiste Oireachtais um Ghnóthaí Ealaíon, Spóirt, Turasóireachta, Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta le breithniú.

Tuigim gur pléadh an dréacht-Straitéis ag cruinniú den Chomhchoiste ar 20 Eanáir 2010, nuair a tugadh cuireadh d'eagraíochtaí áirithe Gaeilge a dtuairimí a chur in iúl. Tuigim freisin go mbeidh cruinniú eile den Chomhchoiste á tionól i nGaeltacht na Gaillimhe ar 26 Feabhra agus go bhfuil cuireadh tugadh d'eagraíochtaí Gaeltachta teacht os a chomhair.

Is é mo thuairim ná gur céim shuntasach eile í seo sa phróiseas leathan comhairliúcháin atá curtha ar bun maidir leis an ndrúacht-Straitéis seo. Go nuige seo, reáchtáladh dhá shraith de chruinnithe poiblí ar fud na tíre, chomh maith le suirbhé ar-líne agus teagmhálacha díreacha le páirtithe leasmhara sna hearnálacha poiblí agus deonacha. Tuigtear dom gur féidir teagmháil a dhéanamh leis an gComhchoiste go díreach má tá tuairimí nó moltaí ag eagraíochtaí nó daoine maidir leis an ndrúacht-Straitéis.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

Mar a thuigfidh na Teachtaí, go dtí go mbeidh an próiseas breithnithe tugtha chun críche ag an gComhchoiste, ní bheadh sé cuí domsa aon chinntithe a ghlacadh maidir le leasuithe ar an ndrúacht-Straitéis a mheas, ná clár ama a shonrú maidir le foilsiú na Straitéise féin.

Departmental Expenditure.

19. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the savings in his Department's payroll bill for 2010, arising from cuts in public sector pay announced in budget 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8392/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The anticipated savings in my Department's payroll bill for 2010, arising from adjustments in public sector pay announced in Budget 2010, are of the order of €880,000.

Question No. 20 answered with Question No. 18.

Question No. 21 answered with Question No. 14.

Community Development.

22. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the next phase in his Department's rationalisation programme now that he has finalised the closure of community development programmes. [8245/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department was established in 2002 against a background of concern at the multiplicity of structures and agencies through which local and community development schemes and programmes are delivered. It inherited a number of local and community programmes with diverse structures, which had been operated under the aegis of several different Departments. Clearly, there was an inherent danger of fragmentation of services and the diffusion of resources.

The cohesion process initiated by my Department a number of years ago to address these issues resulted in a significant reduction of local delivery structures for a range of rural and local development programmes. Until last year, there were almost 100 Partnerships and LEADER companies operating and the cohesion process has resulted in that being reduced to a total of 53 entities providing full county-wide coverage across the country. Notwithstanding that achievement, my Department still has a significant reform agenda to advance. The next phase, which is underway, concerns improving and 'joining up' the outputs of programmes, as well as further advancing the consolidation of community and local development structures.

In the context of the latter, my Department has seen the need to re-design its community development/social inclusion programmes, particularly the Local Development Social Inclusion (LDSIP) and Community Development Programmes (CDP), drawing on good international practice and to support the ongoing evaluation of the programmes. Both programmes had a community development element and were delivered through separate local delivery structures. These programmes came to an end on 31 December 2009 and have been superseded by a new programme, the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP). Funding of €67.5m has been made available in 2010 for the LCDP, which will provide more efficient and streamlined social inclusion service to those people in the country who need it most.

There is no rationalisation programme as such. As I have explained in the House on previous occasions, the decision not to continue the funding of a relatively small number of community

development projects was made on foot of my Department's review of the CDP/LDSIP programmes. The new integrated LCDP require integrated service delivery and structures. In this regard, an implementation process involving community development projects and local development companies, supported by my Department and Pobal, is now under way.

As I have previously indicated, my primary concern is to make every effort to ensure that the front-line services provided by, or supported through, my Department — especially those providing tangible benefits for the most disadvantaged communities — are protected.

23. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the community development programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8388/10]

25. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement on the report of the independent community development programme appeals board. [8389/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 23 and 25 together.

As I outlined previously to the House, my Department has seen the need to redesign its community development/social inclusion programmes, particularly the Local Development Social Inclusion (LDSIP) and Community Development Programmes (CDP), drawing on good international practice and to support the ongoing evaluation of the programmes. Both programmes have a community development element and were delivered through separate local delivery structures. These programmes came to an end on 31 December 2009 and have been superseded by a new programme, the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP).

Funding of €67.5m has been made available in 2010 for the LCDP, which will provide more efficient and streamlined social inclusion service to those people in the country who need it most. I am pleased to have been able to ring-fence funding for community development projects for 2010 and to maintain it at 2009 levels. In few other areas of public spending has it been possible to do this.

The aim of the new programme is to tackle poverty and social exclusion through partnership and constructive engagement between Government and its agencies and people in disadvantaged communities. It will preserve elements of good practice from the CDP/LDSIP Programmes and will enable groups to objectively demonstrate the positive impacts they are securing for local communities. An implementation strategy, involving the stakeholders, is underway in preparation for LCDP roll-out over the course of 2010. Under the new programme, local development companies will be able to identify and meet the needs of communities and I have asked that particular attention be given to RAPID areas and to those areas where a CDP is no longer operating. My Department and Pobal will be providing a range of supports to ensure the process is successful.

In advance of proceeding to establish a single programme across CDPs and Partnerships, my Department undertook an evaluation of individual community development projects. Many of these projects span across two decades, with quite diverse activities. The objective of the review was to identify those projects that produce tangible, appropriate benefits for the communities they serve. The vast majority of projects fell into this category and have been provided with funding under the new programme in 2010.

[Deputy John Curran.]

Where projects were not recommended for continued funding, an appropriate appeals mechanism was provided and a CDP Appeals Board established. The Appeals Board completed its work on 29 January 2010 and, as the Deputy is aware, its report has been published on my Department's website at www.pobail.ie. Following the initial review by my Department, 29 projects were deemed non-viable. Of these, 24 projects submitted an appeal to the CDP Appeals Board, of which 10 were successful.

The Deputy will appreciate that it is now a matter for the voluntary boards of management in each case to decide the future strategy for their companies in light of the decisions of the Appeals Board. My officials have been in contact with each of the projects concerned and have indicated that if the company decides to cease operations and to wind-up, my Department will, without prejudice, seek to assist the directors in discharging their statutory responsibilities. While such assistance could include limited financial assistance in appropriate circumstances, due account would have to be taken of the nature and extent of any net liabilities incurred by the companies and the financial and regulatory limitations applicable to my Department.

It is intended that the new programme will be implemented nationally on an integrated basis and through new integrated structural arrangements involving the 53 local development companies and the remaining CDPs. As I have previously indicated, my primary concern is to make every effort to ensure that the front-line services provided by, or supported through, my Department — especially those providing tangible benefits for the most disadvantaged communities — are protected.

Substance Misuse Strategy.

24. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on the publication by the Health Research Board of research showing the number of deaths indirectly caused by drugs over the eight year period between 1998 and 2005; the number of such deaths in this period; the steps he is taking to address this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8394/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): I welcome this report by the Health Research Board. It is a follow-on publication from the National Drugs Related Deaths Index (NDRDI) which was completed in late 2008. The NDRDI identified deaths in the 1998-2005 period that were directly and indirectly related to drug-taking and the recent publication goes into more detail on the indirect deaths.

The data presented shows an increasing number of deaths that are indirectly related to drug-taking, rising from 63 in 1998 to 167 in 2005. The total number of deaths over the period was 885. These deaths arose from traumatic and from medical causes and I extend my deepest sympathy to everyone affected by them.

I hope that this publication will serve to re-emphasise the message of the dangers of drugs. Apart from being a direct cause of death, drug-taking can cause heart attacks, strokes, seizures, chest problems and mental health problems, as well as leading to deaths involving accidents, hangings and violence.

Finally, the Deputy should note that work is underway on the drawing up of a National Overdose Prevention Strategy, as part of the response to tackling drug-related deaths, in line with Action 40 of the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016.

Question No. 25 answered with Question No. 23.

Rural Development.

26. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps he will take to facilitate the draw down of Leader funding from the integrated development companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8243/10]

44. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps he will take to address the red tape associated with the draw down of Leader funding from the integrated development companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8242/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 26 and 44 together.

Funding of the order of €425m is available over the lifetime of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-13 and all expenditure is subject to EU rules and regulations. In this context, a number of Local Action Groups (LAGs), formerly known as LEADER Companies, have been contracted by my Department to deliver the RDP and they must do so in compliance with those EU regulations.

The RDP Operating Rules which govern the day-to-day operation of the programme are, in turn, based on EU regulations and are subject to the same audit and verification requirements in Ireland, as in every other Member State.

The Deputy will appreciate that my Department is charged with ensuring that there is no misappropriation of funds and that all expenditure under the RDP is in line with the regulations as set out by the European Commission.

My Department is fully committed to making programme payment processes as efficient and effective as possible. In this regard, a robust system is already in place to ensure that payments are made to promoters as soon as all the relevant checks have been carried out.

All LAGs were fully aware of the regulatory environment that would operate when they submitted their applications to deliver the RDP in their areas of operation and all agreed to abide by the relevant rules in the contracts they signed in 2009. When I met the representatives of the LAGs last autumn, I invited them to make a submission to me in relation to any difficulties they had in relation to the implementation of the RDP. That submission is still awaited.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department is working closely with each LAG in order to streamline all required processes and to assist in maximising the impact of the RDP in their respective areas.

Question No. 27 answered with Question No. 18.

Substance Misuse Strategy.

28. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the efforts that are being made by drugs task forces in communities to highlight the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse at regular information evenings; the way taskforces promote such events; the way they inform the wider community, not just persons already involved in drug addiction services; if such events are organised on a scheduled or ad-hoc basis; his views on making such public events a requirement for each taskforce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8410/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): As the role of the Drugs Task Forces is to facilitate greater local/regional focus

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on drugs issues and provide a more co-ordinated response to them, I recognise that raising awareness is a key element of their work.

The Deputy will be aware that each Drugs Task Force has an annual funding allocation from my Department for community-based drugs initiatives. From that allocation, each Task Force has the discretion to allocate funding to projects and initiatives based on the priorities it has identified for its respective area.

There are a significant number of projects being funded through the Task Forces which aim to create greater societal awareness about the dangers and prevalence of substance misuse. Many of the funded projects focus specifically on drug awareness, ranging from local drug awareness events to other initiatives such as “Awareness Weeks”. Such measures have proven to be effective as many of them focus on the issues particular to their own localities.

As I have stated above, each Task Force can opt to fund various initiatives and I have not been prescriptive on how awareness raising should be addressed. The nature, format, extent and frequency of such activities fall for decision by the individual Task Force. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that there is a variety of media through which the Task Forces disseminate information and promote the different activities and programmes. These range from website notices, local advertising, linkages with community fora/councils, through Task Force members, notices on community focussed websites, etc.

The Deputy should note that dedicated funding was also provided by my Department to the Task Forces to run cocaine awareness campaigns to dovetail with the HSE’s National Cocaine Awareness Campaign. A wide variety of activities was used to promote the campaign in the respective areas, including notices on public information events and information evenings with guest speakers. These included, amongst other media, leaflet drops and newsletters.

I would, of course, always encourage Task Forces to promote and link in with any relevant national campaigns and adopt an all-encompassing approach to reach the appropriate target audience.

Proposed Legislation.

29. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement on the opening hours of head shops; if there is legislation regarding their opening hours; and if an age limit will be enforced on entry to such shops. [8400/10]

38. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement on the issue of head shops. [8401/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 29 and 38 together.

I have voiced my concerns in regard to the activities of headshops and substances represented as “legal highs” sold in these outlets on numerous occasions since my appointment as Minister of State with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy.

The problem of “legal highs” is not unique to Ireland and headshops are causing concern across Europe. A number of countries, including the UK, have taken action, each taking their own approach to the matter in line with their own laws and experiences. However, no EU Member State has come up with a comprehensive response thus far.

The issue of headshops and the substances they sell has been raised at a various fora and a number of avenues are being explored to ascertain what actions might be pursued to minimise any negative impact of the activities of these shops.

My colleague, Mary Harney, T.D., Minister for Health & Children — who has overall responsibility for the Misuse of Drugs Act, the primary legislation through which these substances can be regulated — has indicated that her Department is currently preparing regulations to introduce controls on a range of substances. These regulations will make the possession and sale of these substances illegal and subject to criminal sanctions. In preparing the required regulations, officials of the Department of Health & Children are consulting with the relevant authorities to ensure that any legitimate uses of the substances involved are not impinged upon. The intention is that the regulations will be drafted within a month but a three month notification process to the EU may be involved. In this context, the advice of the Attorney General is being sought by the Department of Health & Children before the regulations are implemented.

Meanwhile, the activities of headshops are also being closely monitored on an on-going basis by An Garda Síochána and Revenue's Customs Service with a view to ensuring that no substances that are currently illegal are being sold.

In addition, following correspondence with the Attorney General regarding other possible approaches to the matter, I have raised issues around public liability insurance, product liability insurance and consumer protection with the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment, as well as planning issues with the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government. The matters involved are being considered by those Departments and I expect to have their views shortly.

Planning Authorities may, when granting planning permission, attach conditions in relation to opening hours, if they consider that this is in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area involved. However, in the case of many headshops, I understand that planning permission was not required as significant alterations were not involved in many cases and as a retail outlet usage continued to be involved.

I share the concerns of the Deputy regarding the degree of accessibility to headshops, and the opening hours involved, but I can assure her of my determination to pursue appropriate and comprehensive responses to counter the potential threats of these shops, and of “legal highs” more generally.

Substance Misuse Strategy.

30. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the commitments have been made by the Office of Minister for Drugs by leading Departments to tackle the drugs problems in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8299/10]

31. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress to date in 2010 regarding the implementation of the national drugs strategy. [8395/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 30 and 31 together.

I am confident that the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy (NDS) 2009-2016 will provide a comprehensive response to problem drug use in Ireland, and good progress is being made on its implementation.

The Strategy seeks to tackle the harm caused to individuals and society by the misuse of drugs through a concerted focus on the five pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research. This pillar approach has been retained from the previous NDS as (i) it has proven effective to date, (ii) it was widely supported during the consultation process

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on a new Strategy, and (iii) it dovetails with the EU Action Plan on Drugs 2009-2012. I believe that the actions set out in the Strategy will facilitate a planned and monitored approach to achieving the overall strategic objective.

As part of the NDS, I will be meeting twice a year with a number of Ministers and various senior officials who are tasked with implementing various actions. I completed the first round of such meetings before Christmas and as part of that process, I stressed the need for Departments and agencies to ensure that high priority is given to achieving the objectives of the Strategy. These meetings facilitated a good exchange of views, and they also focused on the importance of the continued effective implementation of other programmes that impact on the broader issues underpinning problem drug use.

A number of the actions of the NDS focus on co-ordination arrangements for its implementation, and some changes have been made to the institutional structures involved, including the establishment of an Office of the Minister for Drugs. I believe that these changes will streamline administration and facilitate more effective co-ordination and partnership.

A Drugs Advisory Group has been set up under the Strategy, with membership from across the statutory, community and voluntary sectors. This Group, which meets regularly, advises me on operational matters relating to the NDS and oversees and supports the work of the Drugs Task Forces.

An Oversight Forum on Drugs, which I chair, has also been established and meets on a quarterly basis. The primary role of the Forum, which has met twice to date, is the on-going high level examination of progress across the Strategy and addressing of any operational difficulties and blockages that arise. Following the next meeting in April, a comprehensive report on progress across the Actions of the Strategy will be circulated to Drugs Task Forces.

The current structural arrangements in place to support the implementation of the Strategy will, I believe, provide the basis for more robust monitoring of progress. They will also provide a mechanism to identify blockages at an early stage, thus allowing any problems to be followed up. I am determined that real progress will be made across the period of the Strategy with all sectors working in a co-ordinated and targeted way to achieve the implementation of the agreed actions.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 9.

Substance Misuse Strategy.

33. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the national substance misuse strategy; his views on the primary aim of this new document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8409/10]

43. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress made regarding the production of a report on the way local drugs task forces will take over the responsibility of tackling issues surrounding alcohol abuse. [8248/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 33 and 43 together.

A Steering Group, comprising representatives of the statutory, community, voluntary and industry sectors, was established last November to develop proposals and make recommendations on a National Substance Misuse Strategy. The Group is jointly chaired by officials

from my Department and the Department of Health and Children. The third meeting of the Group is scheduled to take place later this week.

The primary objective of the Group is:

- to identify effective policies and actions to tackle the harm caused to individuals and society by alcohol use and misuse; and
- to make proposals on a combined policy that will incorporate the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016, which was published last year.

In this context, the Steering Group will review existing policies and reports, including at EU and international level, and will set out an evidence-based framework through which to address the issues identified. While the Group will also be looking at what are the appropriate structures and frameworks for the effective and efficient implementation of the combined Strategy, the possible level of involvement of Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces in this regard has yet to be considered.

The Steering Group is due to submit its proposals to the Minister for Health and Children and myself by the end of October 2010. The combined Strategy will then be submitted to Government for consideration.

Finally, it should be noted that my Department has received 60 submissions from a range of organisations and individuals following the placing of an advertisement in the national newspapers in December last. The submissions are currently being reviewed and the issues arising will be considered by the Steering Group as part of its ongoing deliberations.

Care of the Elderly.

34. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement on the community support grants for older people; his views on the inclusion of a house alarm as part of the scheme; and if a person can apply directly to his Department for the scheme. [8402/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): My Department carried out a review of the Scheme of Community Support for Older People in 2009. I hope to publish the review before the end of this month, once I have received the input of other relevant Departments and organisations working with older people.

My Department is also at an advanced stage in finalising arrangements for the implementation of a number of innovations to the scheme to address matters raised in the review. The revised scheme will seek to:

- streamline its operation and make it easier for community groups to access grant support; and
- broaden coverage to ensure that older people who are unable to provide this equipment from their own resources have access to grant aid.

The scheme is currently focused on the provision of monitored personal alert equipment and it is not proposed that this will be extended to cover house alarms. Personal alarms bring greater ease of mind to the user as they allow for direct two-way interaction with the monitoring station in the event of any concerns being raised by the user.

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The scheme continues to accept applications for grant support and will remain open until such time as revised arrangements are in place. Information on the grants paid is updated monthly on my Department's website at www.pobail.ie.

Community Development.

35. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement on the area of volunteerism; his views on whether there has been an increase in volunteerism; and if he will allocate extra funding to this area. [8403/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): The Government continues to advance a range of measures that support volunteering and active citizenship.

In line with the recommendations of the Task Force on Active Citizenship, this year my Department will provide funding of over €2.5m to 22 volunteer centres around the country. Two of these centres — in Clare and Longford — are being funded for the first time.

In 2009, the volunteer centres registered over 13,000 volunteers and over 870 volunteer-involving organisations. The figures represent an increase of over 70% on the numbers registered in 2008. It may also be noted that 61% of registered volunteers had never volunteered before and 69% were aged 35 years and under.

My Department also provides core funding for Volunteering Centres Ireland, which plays a central role in facilitating and supporting the development of the network of local volunteer centres.

In addition, other activities being supported included the following:

- Last year, a cross-border volunteering initiative involving three groups — the GAA, Voluntary Arts Ireland and the Church of Ireland — was launched. These organisations, which have a strong network of local volunteers across Ireland, are using this network for the benefit of the whole community, and especially marginalised and disadvantaged groups on both sides of the border.
- The Young Social Innovators Initiative involves transition year students identifying social needs and developing strategies to address them, requiring their engagement with local, community and statutory organisations. The key objective is to develop volunteering among young people and grow a cadre of volunteers for the future.
- Funding is provided for Focus Ireland to support the placement of social science graduates, within the organisation, who wish to gain experience and to develop skills in working with people who are marginalised.
- Support is also provided for Boardmatch, an organisation which aims to support the development of the voluntary and community sector in Ireland by strengthening boards of management and management committees of non-profit organisations.

Departmental Funding.

36. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he has requested or instructed organisations that are funded by his Department to cut the pay of employees along the lines provided for in the Financial Emergency Measures in

the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009, although such employees are not public servants within the meaning of the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8393/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I have issued no such request or instruction as I am not the employer of the persons concerned. Employees of non-public service organisations do not come within the scope of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009.

Reductions in programme or scheme allocations provided by the Exchequer may mean that the boards of local development companies or other similar entities form the view that pay reductions may be necessary in the context of the level of income available to them. This would be a matter for the companies or entities themselves as employers, in consultation with their employees.

Ministerial Appointments.

37. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the way it is intended that the board of Udarás na Gaeltachta or Udarás na Gaeilge will be appointed or elected following the promised legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8364/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Any changes regarding the powers and functions of Údarás na Gaeltachta or its Board structure will fall to be considered at the appropriate time in the context of the 20-year Strategy for Irish. As the recently published draft Strategy remains under consideration by the Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Sports, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, it would be premature of me, at this stage, to predict either the type of governance structure that will be put in place to oversee the operations of the organisation or the method of selection of members to same.

Question No. 38 answered with Question No. 29.

Substance Misuse Strategy.

39. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement on the position regarding the dial to stop drugs campaign; the effectiveness of same; and if extra funding will be allocated. [8399/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): As the Deputy will be aware, the Dial to Stop Drug Dealing campaign ran in three phases — across 15 Local and Regional Drugs Task Force areas — in 2008 and 2009. To the end of last week, there were 5,845 calls made to the confidential line, with 1,627 reports being generated to the Gardaí.

Calls are spread right across the country, including areas that have not directly run a campaign, which highlights the fact that the confidential number is open to all to use regardless of the area one comes from. I understand that, in some cases, calls from areas that have already run campaigns are still being made to the confidential line.

The campaign has been well received by operational Gardaí deployed in the area of drug policing. I understand that the information received has led to seizures and is expected, ultimately, to lead to a number of prosecutions. It has also corroborated existing intelligence with regard to individuals and organised criminal networks. As such, the campaign provided a consistent channel for information to be passed from concerned members of the community right to the desk of those responsible for investigating drug offences.

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A secondary consequence of the campaign, is the “silent effect” which must also be given due recognition. From a supply reduction perspective, those involved in the sale and supply of controlled substances take cognisance of how such campaigns increase their vulnerability and the likelihood of them coming to the attention of Gardaí. Though difficult to gauge, there is no doubt that this effect reduces open drug availability.

Due to the success of the campaign, I have again made funding available in 2010 to keep the phone line open. Over the coming months, I will be reviewing various options for further promotional campaigns, perhaps through a more centralised approach or through potential linkages with other campaigns and fora.

State Agencies.

40. D’fhiafraigh **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cathain a bheidh reachtaíocht foilsithe faoi Údarás na Gaeilge nó Údarás na Gaeltachta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [8361/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Beidh aon leasuithe a bheidh le déanamh ar chumhachtaí agus ar fheidhmeanna Údarás na Gaeltachta le meas i gcomhthéacs an dréacht-Stráitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge a foilsíodh le déanaí. Mar go bhfuil an dréacht-Stráitéis sin fós á meas ag an gComhchoiste um Ghnóthaí Ealaíon, Spóirt, Turasóireachta, Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta, ní féidir liom ag an bpointe seo amscála cruinn a shonrú le haghaidh Bille nua a thabhairt os chomhair an Tí.

Questions Nos. 41 and 42 answered with Question No. 9.

Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 33.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 26.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 12.

Departmental Funding.

46. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will make a statement on the availability of grants for community organisations to upgrade their community facilities, in view of their importance to community life. [8408/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to the continuing pressures on the public finances, the Programme of Grants for Locally Based Community and Voluntary Organisations was suspended at the end of February 2009. My Department has no plans to re-open the Scheme to new applications at present and, accordingly, organisations may wish to pursue alternative channels to secure grant support for the upgrading of community facilities.

One possible alternative is the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-13, under which funding of €425m is available to improve the quality of life in rural areas and facilitate the diversification of the rural economy. Under the RDP, Local Action Groups (LAGs) distribute funding to community groups and individuals in rural areas for a range of activities. One of the measures funded is the provision of ‘Basic services for the economy and rural population’ for which nearly €50m has been made available over the lifetime of the RDP. The objective of this measure is the identification and provision of appropriate cultural and leisure facilities for local communities.

Interested community organisations should contact their local LAG which may be able to assist. Contact details for all of the groups are available on my Department's website by following the link. <http://www.pobail.ie/en/RuralDevelopment/RuralDevelopmentProgramme2007-2013/ContactsforLocalActionGroupsforLeader2007-2013/>

Ministerial Correspondence.

47. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 13; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8468/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): In the time available it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Job Creation.

48. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the job opportunities her Department have for the towns of Mohill and Ballinamore in County Leitrim; if all such towns are part of the focus for State agencies in seeking employment giving enterprises. [8473/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): In the time available it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Community Employment Schemes.

49. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the grounds on which the basic pay rate for community employment participants has been reduced by €12.70 per week; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that this represents a reduction of 5.7% compared with the 4% general reduction in social welfare payments; her views on whether it is equitable that CE participants should be subjected to a higher reduction in rates than social welfare claimants; if she has instructed FÁS to make such reductions; the steps she will take to restore the relativity between social welfare claimants and CE participants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8475/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): The Social Welfare linked allowances paid to participants on Community Employment (CE) programmes were reduced in Budget 2010 in line with the Budget reductions to Social Welfare recipients. The FÁS additional allowance paid to CE participants has been reduced from €24.40 and €48.80 per week to €20 and €40 per week respectively. These adjustments, along with a reduction in funding in respect of training and materials for those on CE programmes from €1,500 to €750 per head per annum, are necessary to fund increased activation measures in 2010 including an additional 500 CE places to bring the total number of places to 23,300.

This Government will continue to support the positive role of CE in meeting the needs of long-term unemployed persons while at the same time providing essential services to communities.

FÁS Training Programmes.

50. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if she will support a matter (details supplied). [8482/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): FÁS and my Department are in regular contact concerning the provision and enhancement of a range of supports and services to the unemployed, including graduates, to assist them into employment. This includes the provision of job search services and a wide range of training and work experience interventions designed to provide unemployed individuals with the opportunities to upskill and enhance their employability.

This year my Department will fund the provision of approximately 147,000 training and work experience places for the unemployed. This compares to the 66,000 places provided in 2008. In addition, this year FÁS will be placing a strong focus on providing training to priority cohorts of the unemployed including those who are under 35 years of age.

Included in the 2010 provision for the unemployed is the FÁS Work Placement Programme. Last year, the Tánaiste and her colleague Minister Hanafin jointly launched the programme to provide unpaid work experience opportunities for the unemployed. There are two streams under this programme, one of which is exclusively for unemployed graduates. Individuals volunteer to participate in the programme and if they have been in receipt of social welfare payments they may retain these payments subject to the normal social welfare rules applying. However, individuals who are unemployed and not receiving social welfare are also free to participate in the programme.

In addition, I should point out the new Labour Market Activation Fund is specifically intended to assist in the creation of substantial training and education provision targeting specific priority groups among the unemployed, namely — the low skilled, and those formerly employed in declining sectors — such as construction, retail and manufacturing sectors, with particular emphasis on the under 35's and the long-term unemployed.

Ministerial Correspondence.

51. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if she will support a matter (details supplied). [8484/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): In the time available it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Departmental Staff.

52. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment her policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8513/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department encourages staff to donate blood in the following ways. Arrangements are made periodically with the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) to transport staff by bus — during working hours — to the IBTS donation clinic. Emails issue to staff advising them of the arrangements and appointments are made for staff wishing to donate blood. Staff are required to clock out when leaving the office to donate blood but may subsequently be credited (by their line manager) for the time involved.

Redundancy Payments.

53. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employ-

ment when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12 will receive their statutory redundancy from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8523/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): My Department administers the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) in relation to redundancy matters on behalf of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. There are two types of payment made from the SIF — rebates to those employers who have paid statutory redundancy to eligible employees, and statutory lump sums to employees whose employers are insolvent and/or in receivership/liquidation.

I can confirm that my Department received a statutory lump sum claim for the individual concerned on 1 December, 2009 claiming inability to pay on behalf of the employer. In respect of lump sum payments paid directly to employees, such as in this instance, the Section is, in general, processing claims dating from July 2009.

Given the unprecedented increase in Redundancy Payment claims lodged with my Department since late 2008 it has proved impossible to maintain the customer service targets that previously obtained. The scale of the challenge is evident from the statistics that show incoming redundancy claims with a cumulative figure for 2009 of 77,001. This figure exceeds the claims lodged for 2008 (40,607) by 90% and 2008 was, of itself, an exceptional year as compared with earlier years when claims received were of the order of 25,000.

Efforts continue to be made by my Department to deliver more acceptable turnaround processing times for redundancy payments given the difficulties that this gives rise to for both individual employees and the business community. Measures already taken include:

- the reassignment of 26.7 additional staff (full time equivalents) from other areas of the Department to the Redundancy Payments area since early 2009 with ongoing review of trends and demands. The current number of staff serving in the Redundancy Payments Section in terms of full time equivalents is 52.5;
- the prioritisation of the Department's overtime budget towards staff in the Redundancy Payments Section to tackle the backlog outside normal hours;
- the establishment of a special call handling facility to deal with the huge volume of telephone calls from people and businesses who are naturally concerned about their payments, using the facilities and cooperation of the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA). This centre has received an average of 12,500 calls per month this year with an estimated 60% relating to redundancy payments;
- The provision of better quality information relating to current processing times on the Department's website;
- Engagement with the Revenue Commissioners to facilitate the offset of redundancy rebate payments by employers against outstanding tax liabilities with the Revenue Commissioners.

It is clear that these interventions are having an impact in that for example the numbers of claims processed and paid by the Redundancy Payments Section in 2009 and 2010 respectively amounted to 29,802 and 50,664.

The Tánaiste and I are monitoring closely the impact of these changes against the continuing influx of redundancy claims. However, it is clear that additional measures are required to help reduce the backlog of claims, which currently stands in excess of 40,000. The Department is

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currently actively engaged in efforts to secure up to 16 additional staff resources deployed to the area in the first quarter of 2010.

54. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the position regarding an application for statutory redundancy in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8548/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): My Department administers the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) in relation to redundancy matters on behalf of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. There are two types of payment made from the SIF — rebates to those employers who have paid statutory redundancy to eligible employees, and statutory lump sums to employees whose employers are insolvent and/or in receivership/liquidation.

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- the reassignment of 26.7 additional staff (full time equivalents) from other areas of the Department to the redundancy payments area since early 2009 with ongoing review of trends and demands. The current number of staff serving in the redundancy payments section in terms of full time equivalents is 52.5;
- the prioritisation of the Department's overtime budget towards staff in the redundancy payments section to tackle the backlog outside normal hours;
- the establishment of a special call handling facility to deal with the huge volume of telephone calls from people and businesses who are naturally concerned about their payments, using the facilities and co-operation of the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA). This centre has received an average of 12,500 calls per month this year with an estimated 60% relating to redundancy payments;
- The provision of better quality information relating to current processing times on the Department's website;
- Engagement with the Revenue Commissioners to facilitate the offset of redundancy rebate payments by employers against outstanding tax liabilities with the Revenue Commissioners.

It is clear that these interventions are having an impact in that for example the numbers of claims processed and paid by the redundancy payments section in 2009 and 2010 respectively amounted to 29,802 and 50,664.

The Tánaiste and I are monitoring closely the impact of these changes against the continuing influx of redundancy claims. However, it is clear that additional measures are required to help reduce the backlog of claims, which currently stands in excess of 40,000. The Department is currently actively engaged in efforts to secure up to 16 additional staff resources deployed to the area in the first quarter of 2010.

Job Creation.

55. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment her plans for the provision of extra jobs in Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon. [8612/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): In the time available it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Computerisation Programme.

56. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the cloud computing systems that are in use in her Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8632/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): There is no formal definition of cloud computing. However, in the widely used context of systems which allow organisations to outsource computer applications which are used to manipulate and store data, my Department does not use any cloud computing systems.

Flood Relief.

57. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Finance if the Office of Public Works has carried out an investigation on the recent flooding along the River Shannon and Suck; the terms of reference; and when this investigation will be completed. [8504/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Office of Public Works (OPW), in conjunction with Galway and Roscommon county councils, is currently undertaking an inspection of the River Suck and its tributaries in order to identify practical measures to reduce the flood risk in the short term. This inspection, which commenced in January of this year, is expected to be completed by April 2010.

The OPW has requested local authorities to identify for 2010 their prioritised minor flood relief works, which, subject to compliance with certain criteria, may be funded by OPW.

As regards the long-term, the OPW has commenced the process of commissioning consultants to carry out a comprehensive flood risk assessment and management (FRAM) study of the river Shannon catchment. The study is expected to commence by mid -2010, and a draft long term flood risk management plan will be produced by the end of 2014.

The OPW will lead the Shannon FRAM, but will undertake the study in partnership with the local authorities, and will involve all stakeholders in assessing the flood risk, constraints

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and objectives, and in developing long-term solutions aimed at mitigating all significant flood risk factors in the Shannon area.

Public Service Contracts.

58. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a number of proposals (details supplied) which would see small local companies apply for and construct State funded projects. [8617/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): National guidelines for contracting authorities in relation to minimum standards for suitability criteria for construction contractors interested in tendering for public works projects are being developed by my Department and, when available, will be published on the Department's construction website *www.constructionprocurement.gov.ie*. These guidelines will take account of the principles of transparency, proportionality and fairness under the EU treaty.

It should be noted that about 60% of all capital expenditure on public works projects is spent on projects that have a value of €500,000 or less and this percentage is increased to about 80% when the project threshold is raised to €5 million. It is evident therefore that there are already a significant number of projects available in the market place to suit small to medium sized businesses including local businesses. However, I do recognise that there is need to improve transparency and provide greater access to these contracts and to this end my Department has issued guidelines under the Government's Capital Works Management Framework requiring that all public works projects valued at €50,000 or more be advertised on *eTenders*, the national public procurement website.

As regards the inclusion of a local labour clause in public works contracts contracting authorities must be mindful of their obligations under EU law in awarding public works contracts in excess of €5 million. In this regard the European Court of Justice has indicated that contract conditions relating to the employment of long-term unemployed persons is compatible with EU directives if it has no direct or indirect discriminatory affect on tenders from other member states. Any conditions of this kind must be made known to all potential tenderers.

State Property.

59. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance the capital value for the property portfolio of the Office of Public Works for the year 2009; the basis on which this has been computed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8493/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Capital value of property portfolio of the Office of Public Works has not been finalised for the year 2009. The capital value, as attributed for the purpose of the appropriation account, of the OPW property portfolio at 31 December 2008 was €2.9 billion approx. *Basis of Portfolio Valuation:* For the major part of the portfolio, valuation estimates are based on building cost norms and standard land values have been used. Prestige buildings such as Dublin Castle, Leinster House and the National Gallery are valued differently given their unique status.

Departmental Staff.

60. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Finance his policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood;

the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8515/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Department does not have a formal policy in relation to staff donating blood during normal working hours. However, a number of the Department's staff have been donating blood to the Irish Blood Transfusion Service on a regular basis for many years. Subject to meeting the business needs of the areas concerned, the Department is happy to facilitate this ongoing practice.

Complaints Procedures.

61. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the options available to a person who wishes to seek redress for poor delivery of services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8531/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Department maintains a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided. Similarly, a simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services is maintained.

Complaints about our standards of service delivery addressed to our Quality Customer Service Officer, (via standard mail or e-mailed to the customer feedback area of our website) are examined in conjunction with the relevant QCS liaison officer. If the customer is unhappy with the outcome, he or she can have the case reviewed by a more senior officer or an officer from a different division of the Department. Complaints are dealt with promptly, confidentially and sympathetically, with due regard to the sensitivities of the complainant and the rights of the person against whom the complaint has been made.

It should be noted that recourse to this complaint procedure by a member of the public will not infringe upon his/her right to approach the Office of the Ombudsman.

Electronic Payments System.

62. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for Finance when he will adopt the new single euro payments areas scheme; when he plans to end domestic schemes; the transition phases involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8537/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Payments systems deal with the transfer of money (funds) between bank accounts. While each member state has effective payments systems at national level, the integration of the single market in financial services has been hindered by the lack of cross-border interoperability between national payments systems. For some years now the payments industry has been working to improve the dynamics of cross-border business activity by developing a pan-European electronic payments system for payments in euro. It is called SEPA (the single euro payments area).

SEPA will be an area where consumers, companies etc can make and receive electronic payments in euro in Europe — whether between or within national boundaries, under the same basic conditions regardless of location.

The key components of SEPA are the new payments systems for:

- SEPA Credit Transfers (SCT), that is, making payments electronically from or into bank accounts, including the use of internet or telephone banking and which was launched on 28 January 2008;

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- the SEPA Cards Framework, also launched on 28 January 2008; and
- the SEPA Direct Debit Scheme (SDD), which was launched on 2 November 2009.

SEPA relates only to electronic payments and industry has a key role to ensure that competitive SEPA-compliant services are placed on the market. The Irish Payments Services Organisation, which administers domestic payment schemes on behalf of Irish banks, has put in place a national SEPA migration plan for the industry here. I look forward to the industry's roll out of each of the above components of SEPA.

Notwithstanding this, Government policy is to promote the increased use of electronic payments throughout our economy. In promoting this policy objective, I have reduced stamp duty on combined ATM cards from €10 to €5 in budget 2009, building upon changes in the previous year's budget. I also increased stamp duty on cheques, from 30 cent to 50 cent per cheque, to further disincentivise cheque usage.

In relation to my own Department's involvement in the SEPA project, the Deputy may be aware that the Payment Services Directive (PSD) provides the necessary legal framework to support the implementation of SEPA. It came into effect on 1 November 2009 and my Department transposed it through the European Communities (Payment Services) Regulations 2009 (S.I. No. 383 of 2009) to enable Ireland to apply the PSD's provisions by that date.

As regards plans to end domestic schemes and transition periods, there is currently no specific end-date for SDD and SCT migration. Notwithstanding this, the Deputy may be aware that the ECOFIN Council Conclusions of 2 December 2009 considered that establishing definitive end-dates for SDD and SCT migration would provide the clarity and the incentive needed by the market and asked the Commission, in collaboration with the ECB and in close co-operation with all bodies concerned, to carry out an assessment of whether legislation is needed to set binding end-dates for SDD and SCT and to come up with a legislative proposal should this assessment confirm the need for binding end dates. My Department is monitoring the position and will assess any such proposal in due course.

Flood Relief.

63. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding an application for assistance towards a housing relocation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway in view of the fact that their home was flooded; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that it has been decided by the Office of Public Works and Galway County Council that there is no obvious method of drainage which would alleviate future flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8558/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The evaluation of housing needs is primarily a matter for the relevant housing authority, in this case Galway County Council.

OPW officials carried out a preliminary, visual inspection of the subject property, in relation to the flooding problems, and will undertake further surveys to identify whether any practical alleviation measures can be taken to reduce the flood risk in this situation. Completion of this work will inform further decisions in this case.

Public Sector Remuneration.

64. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will support a matter (details supplied). [8561/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The reductions to the pay of all public servants, including teachers, announced in my Budget Statement of 9 December 2009 were legislated for through the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No 2) Act 2009, and were implemented with effect from 1 January 2010. Section 3 of the Act provides that in calculating the pension entitlements of those in receipt of public service pensions or those retiring before 31 December 2010, or a later date specified by ministerial order, the pay reductions provided under the legislation will be disregarded.

I do not consider it appropriate to speculate on future measures that may impact on public servants' income.

Tax Code.

65. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of property based tax reliefs for 2007, 2008 and 2009; the estimated cost for 2010 and 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8602/10]

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 each of the property and area based tax reliefs is based on personal income tax returns filed by non-PAYE taxpayers and corporation tax returns filed by companies for the year 2007, the latest year that this information is available. These are set out in the following table:

Scheme	2007
	€m
Urban Renewal	109.3
Town Renewal	34.6
Seaside Renewal	8.0
Rural Renewal	48.5
Multi-storey car parks	9.6
Living over the Shop	3.0
Enterprise Areas	2.8
Park & Ride	1.4
Holiday Cottages	12.4
Hotels	118.0
Nursing Homes	18.3
Housing for the Elderly/Infirm	2.6
Hostels	0.72
Guest Houses	0.02
Convalescent Homes	0.5
Qualifying (Private) Hospitals	12.0
Qualifying Sports Injury Clinics	1.8
Buildings used for childcare purposes	9.8
Psychiatric Hospitals	0.1
Mental Health Centres	0.0
Student Accommodation	42.0
Total	435.4

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I am advised by Revenue that they are not yet in a position to provide data for 2008 in respect of tax costs of area and property incentives, as all tax returns filed for that year have not been processed. For the same reason, I am not in a position to provide the data requested by the Deputy for the year 2009.

As regards projections for 2010 and 2011, 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 projected cost data requested by the Deputy for the years 2010 and 2011 in relation to the above-mentioned reliefs.

66. Deputy Joan Burton asked the Minister for Finance the expected end date for investment and expected end date for each of the property based tax reliefs that is the final year in which relief can be claimed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8603/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the termination dates for the various property-based incentive schemes vary depending on the scheme and are set out in the following table.

These termination dates are the dates by which the construction or refurbishment work on a building has to be carried out if the expenditure that is attributable to that work is to qualify for tax relief. Where a building is not completed by the termination date the expenditure attributable to any construction or refurbishment work that takes place after this date cannot qualify for tax relief.

In the case of nursing homes, convalescent homes, hospitals and mental health centres, two alternative termination dates have been included in the table. The earlier date relates to projects where no planning permission is required. The later date relates to projects where planning permission is required. There are also two alternative dates for the scheme for child care facilities that is being terminated by the Finance Bill 2010.

There are no set dates by which a person has to acquire a tax incentive property in order for tax relief to start to be claimed. Tax relief can only start to be claimed after a building has been completed and the building leased or owner-occupied for the purpose required by the particular scheme.

Once a building has been leased or owner-occupied and is in use for the required purpose, tax relief can be claimed over varying periods. In the case of capital allowances, tax relief is given over a set period depending on the particular scheme. For example, capital allowances for nursing homes are given at the rate of 15% of the qualifying expenditure for the first six years and 10% in year seven, whereas the allowances for commercial buildings under the rural renewal scheme are generally claimed over a 14-year period. In the case of residential accommodation, owner-occupier relief is given over a ten-year period, whereas 'section 23' relief for rental accommodation may be given either immediately or over an indefinite period as it depends on the investor having sufficient taxable rental income to absorb the relief.

From the foregoing, it will be clear that it is simply not possible to provide an indication of the final year in which tax relief under these schemes will be claimed as the start year for relief can vary from building to building and the relief period applicable likewise can vary within some of the schemes.

Schemes	Termination Date
Urban Renewal 1994	30 April 1999
Temple Bar Area	31 December 1999
Seaside Resort	31 December 1999
Islands	31 December 1999
Customs House Dock	30 June 2000
Enterprise Areas	31 December 2000
Countrywide Refurbishment	31 July 2008
Urban Renewal 1999	31 July 2008
Town Renewal	31 July 2008
Rural Renewal	31 July 2008
Multi-storey Car Parks	31 July 2008
Living over the Shop	31 July 2008
Park and Ride	31 July 2008
Third Level Buildings	31 July 2008
Qualifying Sports Injury Clinics	31 July 2008
Hotels continue to qualify for capital allowances but over 25 years instead of over 7 years.	31 July 2008
Holiday Cottages	31 July 2008
Student Accommodation	31 July 2008
Nursing Homes	30 June 2010 or 30 June 2011
Housing for elderly/infirm	30 April 2010
Convalescent Homes	30 June 2010 or 30 June 2011
Hospitals	30 June 2010 or 30 December 2013
Mental Health Centres	30 June 2010 or 30 June 2011
Mid-Shannon Corridor Tourism Infrastructure Scheme	31 May 2013
Childcare Buildings	31 March 2011 or 31 March 2012 (Finance Bill 2010)
Specialist Palliative Care Units	Scheme awaiting Commencement Order

67. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the remaining legacy Exchequer cost of property based tax reliefs, up to 2020, on the basis of investments already made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8604/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the information provided in tax returns on the annual amounts of claims for property based tax reliefs is not sufficiently detailed to provide a basis for deriving an estimate of the remaining legacy cost to the Exchequer. I am not therefore in a position to provide the information requested by the Deputy.

68. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of hotel capital allowances to date; the total cost for 2007, 2008, 2009; the expected cost for 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8605/10]

69. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of hotel capital allowances to date in 2010; the total cost for 2007, 2008, 2009; the expected cost for 2010; the value of accelerated capital allowances for hotels that is those that are still within the clawback period; the number of hotels that have given rise to these tax breaks since they were

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introduced; the number of hotels which gave rise to these tax breaks that were still in business at the conclusion of the clawback period. [8606/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 68 and 69 together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the relevant information available on the cost to the Exchequer of hotel capital allowances is based on personal income tax returns filed by non-PAYE taxpayers and corporation tax returns filed by companies for the years 2004 to 2007, the latest year for which this information is available. The relevant figures of cost to the Exchequer are set out in the following table alongside the figures for numbers of claimants:

Costs to the Exchequer of Hotel Capital Allowances

Year	Tax Cost	Numbers of claimants
	€m	
2004	37.7	611
2005	67.0	1,038
2006	106.6	1,515
2007	118.0	1,893

The estimated relief claimed has assumed tax foregone at the 42% rate for 2004 to 2006 and 41% for 2007 in the case of individuals and 12.5% in the case of companies for all years. The figures shown correspond to the maximum Exchequer cost in terms of income tax and corporation tax.

For the tax year 2003 and earlier years claims for tax incentive schemes on property were aggregated in tax returns with other claims and could not be distinguished from other reliefs claimed. Accordingly, the specific information on costs for 2003 and earlier years are not available. I am advised by Revenue that they are not in a position to provide data for 2008 and 2009 as the tax returns for those years are either being processed currently or are not yet due.

As regards projections for 2010, 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 projected cost data requested by the Deputy for the year 2010 in relation to the above-mentioned relief.

I have been informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the information requested on tax returns does not require the number of qualifying hotels to be specified or to distinguish between accelerated allowances and other capital allowances. Accordingly, the specific information requested by the Deputy in respect of these matters is not available.

It should be noted that any corresponding data returned by PAYE taxpayers in the income tax 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.

Computerisation Programme.

70. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance if the recent warning issued by his Department to other Departments with regards to the purchase of cloud computing services stems from any particular incident; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8625/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): On 4 February 2010 the National Public Procurement Operations Unit (NPPOU) through the eTenders system issued a message to members of the eProcurement Network (public sector buyers on eTenders) stating that where the use of cloud computer systems are being considered, that it is essential to obtain prior legal advice due to the risk of liability to the State in areas of data protection, confidentiality and security.

The NPPOU considers this to be prudent advice to any prospective buyer of software or any other data management systems. Ensuring that the data is protected is a legislative requirement on all public bodies.

71. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8634/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): No public cloud-based systems are used by my Department as all systems are hosted and operated internally.

Medical Cards.

72. **Deputy Edward O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application for medical card renewal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [8483/10]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances.

73. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average cost of a hearing aid; the average production cost of a hearing aid; the average mark-up for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8495/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Medical Cards.

74. **Deputy John O’Mahony** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be awarded their primary medical certificate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8496/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As the Deputy’s question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

75. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8506/10]

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.

Departmental Staff.

76. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Health and Children her policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8517/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) arranges dedicated time slots during normal working hours intermittently throughout the year for staff of my Department to give blood donations. All staff are made aware of arrangements by Office Notice and are encouraged to donate blood. In addition when blood stocks are low or when there is a shortage of a particular blood type staff are advised and encouraged to attend the IBTS clinics. Staff on flexi-time are awarded any working time lost while donating blood.

Medical Cards.

77. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8522/10]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities.

78. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the percentage of the Health Service Executive disability fund that has been used to purchase services from private for profit disability organisations; the providers used to provide these services and the amount each service provider received in payment for the services; the planned spend by the HSE on such services for 2010; the service agreements required to be entered in to by the providers; if they are required to provide annual audited accounts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8528/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Service Allowances.

79. **Deputy Edward O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will assist in having a person (details supplied) in County Cork assessed for a specific allowance. [8546/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Pension Provisions.

80. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the legal instrument which allows a distinction to be drawn on the application of the pension levy for employees of voluntary bodies with pension schemes on the basis of whether or not those voluntary bodies receive funding for core Health Service Executive services or non core HSE services; and if

she will set out the position in respect of bodies who receive funding for both core and non core HSE services. [8550/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Section 1 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act, 2009 states that a “public service body” includes:

(i) a body (other than a body specified or referred to in the Schedule) that is wholly or partly funded directly or indirectly out of money provided by the Oireachtas or from the Central Fund or the growing produce of that Fund and in respect of which a public service pension scheme exists or applies or may be made,

This section covers service providers covered by section 38 of the Health Act 2004. In such cases employees are considered public sector employees; the employer adheres to public sector pay scales and numbers and employees have access to public sector pension schemes as defined in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009.

However the above section does not cover bodies that are grant-aided by HSE under section 39 of the Health Act 2004. Employees of such bodies are not public sector employees and therefore do not have access to public sector pension schemes as defined in the Act. The pension related deduction therefore does not apply therein.

The Department of Finance, as the sponsoring Department of the legislation, makes the final decision in any case where there is ambiguity or uncertainty about the status of a body for the purposes of this legislation.

Medical Cards.

81. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will be awarded a medical card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8557/10]

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.

Hospital Services.

82. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will ensure that resources needed for additional beds and staffing at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin, for the kidney transplant unit will be provided in order to maximise the number of transplants which can be performed; if all kidneys that become available here are used here. [8620/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

83. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children the level of co-operation there is between the health systems in the North and South of Ireland with regard to kidney transplants; if there is scope for further co-operation; the discussions she has had with her counterpart in the Northern Executive on this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8621/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply

Computerisation Programme.

84. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cloud computing

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systems that are in use in her Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8636/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Currently there are no cloud computing technologies in use by the Department of Health and Children. My Department continues to make extensive use of the Government Network facilities to provide external connectivity where required and currently have no plans to make use of cloud computing technologies.

Departmental Staff.

85. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Transport his policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8520/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department organises periodic visits to the Irish Blood Transfusion Service at their Blood Clinic on D'Olier St, Dublin 2, for any staff who wish to donate blood.

Staff who have to leave the office during working hours are required, in principle, to clock out and clock back in on returning. A manager may however authorise staff to leave the building without clocking out for official purposes.

All staff in my Department are e-mailed periodically to encourage them to give blood. My Department considers blood donation to be a commendable individual undertaking and facilitates staff to donate blood by way of an authorised absence during office hours.

Job Creation.

86. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport if he has had discussions with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment regarding the failure by the State and the Dublin Airport Authority to secure 500 jobs at Dublin Airport; the discussions he has had with the Dublin Airport Authority regarding this matter; the action he will take to ensure that such difficulties do not occur again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8600/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I have of course kept in close contact with the DAA and my colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment on this matter. As the Deputy knows, the Tánaiste met the Ryanair chief executive earlier this week. Despite the disappointing outcome of that meeting, I can reiterate the assurances given by the Tánaiste regarding the willingness of the DAA to facilitate Ryanair investment at alternative sites to Hangar 6.

The jobs referred to by the Deputy are “in the gift” of Ryanair. All relevant State Agencies have been and continue to be more than willing to facilitate that Company in the provision of a site or hangar facilities to accommodate those jobs. The insistence of Ryanair on the use of Hangar 6 which is leased to another company despite alternatives being available and offered to Ryanair is very regrettable.

Computerisation Programme.

87. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal infor-

mation and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8639/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): There is no agreed formal definition of cloud computing. However the term is often used to encompass systems which allow organisations to outsource computer applications used to manipulate and store data. My Department does not use such systems.

Visa Requirements.

88. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his views on the recent comments by the chief executive of the Coach Tourism and Transport Council that the State is losing significant jobs and revenue in the tourism industry due to visa requirements for countries such as China and India; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8624/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): While promotion of tourism in Ireland is primarily a matter for the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and associated agencies, I am aware of recent media coverage of comments by the Chief Executive of the Coach Tourism and Transport Council (CTTC). In fact, officials of my Department have already met with the Chief Executive of the CTTC to discuss matters of mutual interest and lines of communication in this important area will be kept open.

As with all visa services in all countries worldwide, the central concern is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country's vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime, while at the same time not placing unnecessary or unreasonable obstacles in the way of those who intend travelling for legitimate purposes and who are likely to abide by the terms of their visa. Each visa application is decided on its own merits and I believe that, in most cases, my Department achieves this balance. Visa approval rates for some of the countries mentioned in recent media reports and, in particular, in some of the countries mentioned by the Deputy, bear this out. Approval rates for visa applications of all types processed through some Irish overseas Visa Offices in 2009 were:

- New Delhi (serving India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal) — 90%.
- Beijing (serving China, Cambodia, Mongolia) — 86%.
- London (serving all visa required nationals based in the UK) — 98%.

Anti-Social Behaviour.

89. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of behaviour orders that have been handed down to children each year to date in 2010 in the context of anti-social behaviour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8207/10]

90. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of civil orders that have been handed down to adults each year to date in 2010 in the context of anti-social behaviour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8208/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 90 together.

Part 11 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006, which provides for civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by adults, was commenced on 1 January, 2007. Part 13 of the Act, which relates to anti-social behaviour by children, was commenced on 1 March, 2007. These provisions

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set out an incremental procedure for addressing anti-social behaviour by adults and children. With regard to children, these range from a warning from a member of An Garda Síochána, to a good behaviour contract involving the child and his or her parents or guardian, to referral to the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme and finally to the making of a behaviour order by the Children's Court. With regard to adults, they include a warning and the making of a civil order by the court.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that, up to 31 January, 2010, 1,461 behaviour warnings were issued to adults and 1,103 to children. Thirteen good behaviour contracts were issued to children. In addition, three civil orders (in respect of adults) and three behaviour orders (in respect of children) have been issued by the courts.

In setting up the regime the intention was that these interventions would address the problem behaviour. If they succeed, there will be no need to apply to the courts for an order. It is only if they fail to lead to a behaviour adjustment by the person in question, that a court order will be applied for.

Citizenship Applications.

91. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding an application for naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied) and if the application be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8466/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Registration of Title.

92. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when two cases (details supplied) before the land registration authority will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8470/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I can inform the Deputy that under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) was established as and from 4 November, 2006. The PRA replaces the Registrar of Deeds and Titles as the registering authority in relation to property registration in Ireland and, subject to the above Act, is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Deputy will be aware of the service to TDs and Senators which provides information on the current status of applications, such as the subject of this question, which was introduced in May 2006. The service provides a speedier, more efficient and more cost effective alternative to submitting Parliamentary Questions. It is operated by the PRA and is available all year round.

I can further inform the Deputy that his query has been forwarded to the PRA for attention and direct reply via the above mentioned service.

Child Abduction.

93. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will establish the EU wide 116000 telephone hotline for missing children; his views on amalgamating the response to calls to the number with an existing service; if he has discussed this with his UK counterpart; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8499/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed that the telephone number to which the Deputy refers has been reserved by the European Commission as a common missing children telephone hotline for the entire EU. It is made available by national telecoms regulators to organisations capable of providing such a service. This is therefore a matter primarily for the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg).

The Deputy may wish to note that following my request to the Garda Síochána Inspectorate to assess the need to establish a dedicated Missing Persons Unit within An Garda Síochána, including a response similar to Amber Alert, and to report their findings to me, the Inspectorate published its report earlier last year. One of its main recommendations was that an emergency alert system for missing children, similar to the Amber Alert system in place in other countries, should be established.

I gave the go ahead for the implementation of this recommendation. An Garda Síochána is committed to its implementation, and they are currently exploring options to achieve the most appropriate structure to give effect to the recommendation, taking account of progress at international level in the development of alert systems for missing children.

Crime Prevention.

94. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he is satisfied with the criminality guidelines applied in the matter of vetting by the Private Security Authority in deciding whether to grant licences under the appropriate legislation with particular reference to qualification criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8502/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Private Security Authority (PSA), established under the Private Security Services Act 2004, is the regulatory body with responsibility for regulating and licensing the private security industry. The Authority is an independent body under the aegis of my Department. My Department is therefore not involved in the day to day running of the Authority and the processing of licence applications is a matter solely for the Authority.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the vetting of applicants is an integral part of the licensing process. In the case of contractor licensing, all directors of a company, the partners in a partnership, all sole traders and any shareholder in a company with a shareholding of 20% or more are vetted, on the Authority's behalf, by An Garda Síochána. All applicants for individual licences also go through the vetting process.

With regard to the Authority's criminality guidelines, as referred to by the Deputy, I am informed by the Authority that when deciding whether to grant a licence to a person with a relevant conviction, it will take the following into account: nature and seriousness of the offence(s) involved; the length of time since completion of sentence; overall interests of the public good; relationship of the crime to the purpose of requiring a licence; age of person before and after offence; conduct of person before and after the offence; and evidence of rehabilitation.

I am further informed by the Authority that although written guidelines are used to assist them in making a decision, they are in no way bound by these guidelines and may decide, where it deems the conviction(s) renders an applicant unsuitable to hold a licence, to refuse an application.

Departmental Staff.

95. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his

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policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8518/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): My Department encourages staff to donate blood and ensures that staff who do so are at no disadvantage (time-wise) as a result.

Garda Investigations.

96. **Deputy Charlie O'Connor** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he has received a report from the Garda authorities into their investigations into last week's fire in Capel Street, Dublin 1; his views on whether the matter has consequences for head shops generally. [8538/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am advised by the Garda authorities that the Garda investigation into the incident referred to by the Deputy is ongoing. This investigation team is based at Store Street Garda Station and is being assisted by specialist units from under Assistant Commissioner, National Support Services, including the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation, the Criminal Assets Bureau and Garda Technical Bureau. The investigation is ongoing and it is, therefore, inappropriate to comment further on it at this time.

Garda Vetting.

97. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the procedure for a contractor to apply for Garda clearance when they are working in a number of schools on an ongoing basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8555/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) provides employment vetting for a large number of organisations in Ireland registered with the Gardaí for this purpose and which employ persons in a full-time, part-time, voluntary or training capacity to work with children and/or vulnerable adults. All schools in this jurisdiction are registered within the established systems to receive Garda vetting services in respect of applicants for positions in schools, including contractors who, by virtue of their employment in such positions, may have substantial, unsupervised access to children and/or vulnerable adults.

The system in place is that a registered organisation sends applications in respect of applicants directly to the GCVU for processing. Such applications are made with the consent of the vetting subject. The results are then transmitted directly from the GCVU to the registered organisation. The employing body then makes its own decision in respect of the suitability of an applicant or contractor for the position in question.

Visa Applications.

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a travel document will issue to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8575/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

Residency Permits.

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress to date in the application for residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8576/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if and when family reunification will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8577/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will review the progress to date in determination of application for residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8578/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress to date and the expected outcome in determination of application for residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8579/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress to date and likely outcome in the matter of application for residency and family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8580/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress to date and the expected outcome in the determination of residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8581/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress to date and the outcome in the determination of residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8582/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress to date in the matter of the determination of residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8583/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will progress the residency process in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8584/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my detailed Reply to his earlier Parliamentary Question, No. 263 of Tuesday, 13 October 2009, in this matter. The position in the State of the person concerned is as set out in that Reply.

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if stamp four will be renewed in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8585/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress to date in respect of an application for residency in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8586/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

Citizenship Applications.

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress to date in respect of an application for citizenship and family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8587/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Residency Permits.

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform

the progress to date and expected outcome in the matter of application for residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8588/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my detailed Reply to his earlier Parliamentary Question, No. 688 of Wednesday, 16 September 2009, in this matter. The position in the State of the person concerned is as set out in that Reply.

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding a residency application in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8590/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress to date in determination of residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8591/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

Citizenship Applications.

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a certificate of naturalisation will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8592/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily to hand. The information sought will be provided at a later date.

Visa Applications.

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a travel document will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8593/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

Residency Permits.

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if and when residency will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8594/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. The information sought by the Deputy will be provided at a later date.

Garda Deployment.

117. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when gardaí will be replaced at a location (details supplied) in County Mayo. [8597/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Responsibility for the allocation of all personnel within the Force rests with the Garda Commissioner, in consultation with his senior management team. Resource levels are constantly monitored, in conjunction with crime trends and other demands made on An Garda Síochána and the situation is kept under continuing review. I will write to the Deputy with any updated information that becomes available to me on the location referred to in the question.

Residency Permits.

118. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if will ensure that the Irish born child residence permit holders rendered temporarily undocumented due to the breakdown in communication between the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service and the Garda National Immigration Bureau are not penalised for this mistake by having this period of time deducted from their reckonable residency for naturalisation purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8622/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Registrations under the IBC renewal process will not be backdated by the Garda National Immigration Bureau so it is in the interests of all persons renewing permission to ensure that they have no gaps in their residency.

Tourism Employment.

119. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his views on the recent comments by the chief executive of the Coach Tourism and Transport Council that the State is losing significant jobs and revenue in the tourism industry due to visa requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8623/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): While promotion of tourism in Ireland is primarily a matter for the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and associated agencies, I am aware of recent media coverage of comments by the Chief Executive of the Coach Tourism and Transport Council (CTTC). In fact, officials of my Department have already met with the Chief Executive of the CTTC to discuss matters of mutual interest and lines of communication in this important area will be kept open.

As with all visa services in all countries worldwide, the central concern is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country's vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime, while at the same time not placing unnecessary or unreasonable obstacles in the way of those who intend travelling for legitimate purposes and who are likely to abide by the terms of their visa. Each visa application is decided on its own merits and I believe that, in most cases, my Department achieves this balance.

Computerisation Programme.

120. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8637/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): My Department does not use cloud computing systems.

Departmental Staff.

121. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8516/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Approximately every three months, my Department's Human Resources Section circulates a notice to all staff to encourage them to make blood donations. These notices normally follow calls by the Irish Blood Transfusion Service for donors. The Blood Transfusion Service provides transportation for Dublin-based staff members of my Department who attend Blood Donation Clinics.

My Department does not deduct clock time from staff who donate blood during normal working hours.

Passport Applications.

122. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will support the case of a person (details supplied). [8534/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Passports Act 2008 sets out the legislative basis for the regulation and issuing of passports. In accordance with the Act, the Minister may specify how a passport application may be made (Section 6). The Minister may require an applicant to provide such information and documents as he or she considers necessary (Section 7(2)). A statutory declaration or sworn affidavit as to the accuracy and correctness of the information supplied may also be required (Section 7(3)).

General information on the application process is set out in the notes accompanying the application form and also on www.passport.ie.

The various requirements of the application process must be complied with before a passport may issue. Particular attention should be paid to the requirements to produce all necessary documentation to establish citizenship and parental/Guardian consent. Resolution of such matters following the birth of a child born in a location which is not the normal place of residence of both parents and in which Ireland has no permanent representation may take some additional time. Ireland's Honorary Consul's in Thailand, either in Bangkok or Phuket, will assist in every way possible to expedite an application for a travel document.

I would advise that the person contacts the Passport Office in advance of travel to clarify the documentary evidence that would be required in order to ensure the timely processing of the application.

Computerisation Programme.

123. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8635/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): My Department does not currently use any cloud computing systems.

Swimming Pool Projects.

124. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding a swimming pool (details supplied) in County Roscommon. [8611/10]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): I understand that a revised Feasibility Report was approved for Ballaghadereen pool in October 2007, leaving Roscommon County Council to proceed to the next stage, the preparation of the Preliminary Report, which is still awaited by the Department.

Sports Funding.

125. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8503/10]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): As I have previously informed the House, special funding of €2.5 million was allocated from the dormant accounts fund for the appointment of Sports Inclusion Development Officers (SIDOs) in 20 Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) in 2008. The SIDOs were appointed on two-year contracts to provide opportunities for persons with a disability to participate in sport and physical activity.

A network of 33 LSPs have been set up throughout the country by the Irish Sports Council (ISC) to coordinate and promote sport at local level especially amongst specific target groups such as older people, girls and women, people with disabilities, unemployed people, and those who live in identified disadvantaged communities. The special dormant accounts funding was in addition to the annual funding provided to the LSPs by the ISC for programmes and initiatives aimed at increasing participation in recreational sport.

Of the €2.5 million allocated from the dormant accounts fund for the SIDO scheme, €800,000 was provided through my Department's Vote in 2008 and over €1.3 million in 2009. The final provision of €395,000 from the dormant accounts allocation is included in the 2010 Vote of my Department.

The continued funding of the SIDO scheme is being considered by the ISC in the context of the distribution of its budget for 2010.

Departmental Staff.

126. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8508/10]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): The Department participates in various blood donation campaigns organised by the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS).

Information in relation to the blood donation campaigns is circulated periodically in the Department in Dublin and transportation to the D'Olier Street clinic is organised by the IBTS for staff of the Department who wish to donate.

Posters and flyers supplied by the IBTS are displayed and circulated in the Department's building in Killarney in advance of blood clinics arriving in the area to encourage staff to donate blood at the clinics.

Staff who donate blood during normal working hours are not required to clock out.

Tourism Industry.

127. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the discussions he has had or plans to have with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the loss of jobs and revenue in the tourism industry due to visa requirements for countries such as China and India; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8624/10]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): As the Deputy will be aware, immigration policy is primarily a matter for my colleague the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and its implementation is a matter for the relevant authorities, including the Garda National Immigration Bureau and the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service.

New and Developing Markets, such as India and China, are potentially of significant importance to Irish tourism. Tourism Ireland, which is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas, conducted a review of New and Developing Markets (including India, China and 17 other markets) that was completed in late 2007. This review found that visitors from these markets stay twice as long as the average holidaymaker, have the highest spend per visit, have a higher propensity to travel throughout the island of Ireland and make significant economic contributions to many elements of the tourism sector. It also highlighted the potential for increased tourism from Asia and the Middle East and set significant targets — to attract a total of 475,000 visitors from New and Developing Markets by 2013. While these targets were set in a very different global economic context, they highlight the long-term potential of these markets.

Obviously, to fully exploit the opportunities presented, Ireland needs to be competitive on all fronts. Visitors from these countries typically require visas to enter Ireland. I am advised that the ability of potential visitors to secure the necessary visas in an efficient and cost-effective manner, when compared with our competitor destinations, is an important element of our competitiveness. In that context, the Recovery Actions recommended by the Tourism Renewal Group in its Framework for Action put forward a number of options to explore, having regard to the complexity of immigration policy and administration.

My Department has engaged with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in relation to these and related issues on an ongoing basis, most recently while following up on the Report of the Tourism Renewal Group.

The Deputy will appreciate that migration and border controls are complex and sensitive, affecting not only tourism of various kinds but also labour market policies and inward investment, within the overall context of sovereignty. However, I am confident that, working in partnership, the immigration authorities and the tourism bodies can ensure that the visitor experiences of Ireland compare with any of our competitors.

Computerisation Programme.

128. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8627/10]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): My Department does not employ cloud computing systems.

Substance Misuse Strategy.

129. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the names of all community organisations based in Dublin 8, 10, 12 and 20 receiving funding under the national drugs strategy; the funding received by those organisations in 2009; the funding allocated for 2010; the source of this funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8494/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): I am arranging to have the information sought by the Deputy compiled and it will be forwarded directly to her as a matter of priority.

Departmental Staff.

130. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8510/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): While there is no formal policy in place in my Department in relation to the donation of blood by staff during normal working hours, I can confirm to the Deputy that staff who wish to donate blood during normal working hours are facilitated. For health and safety purposes, staff members on the flexitime system must clock out on leaving my Department's buildings. However, those leaving to donate blood can claim back the time it takes (of the order of 1-2 hours generally) to make the donation.

While my Department has facilitated group donations by staff in the past, and maintains a positive approach in this regard, it has no specific measures in place to encourage the donation of blood as the issue is considered to be essentially a matter for personal decision by individual staff members.

Community Development.

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the expenditure by his Department on a county basis in each of the past three years and to date in 2010 under the RAPID programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8565/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I am arranging for the information requested by the Deputy to be compiled and it will be provided directly to him as a matter of priority.

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the expenditure by his Department on a county basis in each of the past three years and to date in 2010 under the CLÁR programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8566/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Expenditure by my Department on a county basis under the CLÁR Programme for the period 2007-10 (to date) is set out in the following table.

Expenditure by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs by county under the CLÁR Programme for the period 2007-10 (to date)

County	2007	2008	2009	2010 (to date)	Total
	€	€	€	€	€
Carlow	96,632.90	133,935.36	—	—	230,568.26
Cavan	1,044,000.83	721,885.34	243,889.13	2,080.00	2,011,855.30
Clare	1,010,825.82	2,112,053.08	1,555,133.83	—	4,678,012.73
Cork	1,740,705.59	2,563,896.86	1,537,061.68	23,455.06	5,865,119.19
Donegal	1,974,962.70	1,669,662.64	2,535,214.14	6,000.00	6,185,839.48
Galway	1,200,589.03	2,399,486.91	1,277,348.29	21,511.32	4,898,935.55
Kerry	1,671,757.81	2,125,042.48	868,204.11	—	4,665,004.40
Kilkenny	216,170.81	51,293.50	—	—	267,464.31
Laois	109,067.04	149,763.33	26,000.00	—	284,830.37
Leitrim	1,587,227.03	1,514,200.35	1,257,700.48	5,995.25	4,365,123.11
Limerick	264,996.56	443,205.46	89,860.95	—	798,062.97
Longford	563,690.76	277,893.93	50,219.17	—	891,803.86
Louth	220,943.42	110,590.78	8,000.00	—	339,534.20
Mayo	5,434,527.33	4,297,180.68	2,290,647.64	223.34	12,022,578.99
Meath	71,248.93	102,434.50	16,100.28	—	189,783.71
Monaghan	817,111.96	1,022,568.43	167,113.96	—	2,006,794.35
Offaly	35,244.12	294,233.79	47,300.33	—	376,778.24
Roscommon	1,993,496.38	2,309,019.02	1,101,104.41	15,000.00	5,418,619.81
Sligo	459,783.05	1,088,932.32	277,123.97	—	1,825,839.34
Tipperary	364,786.95	307,055.82	120,162.58	44,000	836,005.35
Waterford	310,474.16	277,351.07	3,401.25	—	591,226.48
Westmeath	126,118.40	177,538.71	126,659.91	—	430,317.02
Wicklow	15,000.00	25,000.00	—	—	40,000.00
Total	21,329,361.58	24,174,224.36	13,598,246.11	118,264.97	59,220,097.02

Drugs Task Forces.

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of funding disbursed by his Department to or through the various bodies involved in combating the drugs problem; the number of placements and-or rehabilitation programmes provided for in this context in each of the past four years and to date in 2010 throughout County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8567/10]

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of funding disbursed by his Department to or through the various bodies involved in combating the drugs problem; the number of placements and-or rehabilitation programmes provided for in this context in each of the past four years and to date in 2010 on a county basis. [8568/10]

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent of funding provided by his Department to various groups involved in the fight against drugs throughout County Kildare in each of the past four years and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8569/10]

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent of funding provided by his Department to various groups involved in the fight against drugs throughout the country on a county basis in each of the past four years and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8570/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 to 136, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the majority of expenditure allocated to community groups through my Department for drugs initiatives is channelled through the Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces (RDTFs). The areas covered by the Task Forces are detailed below. The annual funding allocations are not made on a county basis but rather on a Task Force basis. As a result, while some of the projects funded may be county specific, others provide benefits broadly across the Task Force region as a whole.

In excess of €31m is being made available to fund the activities of the Task Forces in 2010, of which €21.045m is being allocated to the Local Drugs Task Forces and €10m to the Regionals. This funding will support nearly 500 initiatives in the Task Force areas in 2010. Of this funding, in the region of 50% will support projects with a treatment and rehabilitation focus. This is broadly similar to the ratio in 2008 and 2009 where total funding allocated was €34.6m and €32.5m respectively. The Deputy should note that these sums include additional dedicated funds, originally approved in 2008, to support rehabilitation initiatives in Task Force areas. In 2006 and 2007, the funding allocated was over €26m and €29m respectively. In the case of this funding, the ratio for treatment and rehabilitation focussed projects was over 30%. In addition to the Task Force monies, funding of €425,000 in 2010 will be provided to support three homeless-related rehabilitation projects in Dublin City.

Under the Premises Initiative Fund, which addresses the accommodation needs of community projects in Task Force areas, over €5m was approved in the period 2006 to 2009 in respect of 37 capital projects, a number of which focus on rehabilitation. In addition, reflecting the priorities set out in the new National Drugs Strategy, particularly in the area of treatment and rehabilitation, dedicated funding of over €1.4m was provided for eleven large scale projects across the country in 2009. The majority of the funding covered refurbishment works, including a number of HSE treatment clinics in key targeted areas where methadone treatment waiting lists were the most problematic. Furthermore, Dormant Accounts funding of €1.56m was approved in 2009 for 80 substance misuse projects with a family support focus in the Task Force areas, building on the recognition of the key role that supportive families play in the rehabilitation process.

In relation to County Kildare, which forms part of the South West Regional Drugs Task Force (SWRDTF) area, the SWRDTF allocations to projects for the years 2006 to 2010 is set out in the following table. The Drugs Education and Prevention Initiative (SW 1) has a regional brief but focuses on the Kildare area. The Counselling Services (SW 2 and SW 3) and the Diversionary Fund (SW 6) figures are specifically for Kildare (with the exception of the 2010 figures, this is the project's full allocation for 2010 and has not been allocated to date). The ARAS (SW-8&11) project is funded by the SWRDTF with bases in Newbridge, Celbridge, Maynooth and Athy. The Under 18s project focuses on the Kildare and West Wicklow areas. In addition, capital premises funding of €22,354 in 2007 and €25,000 in 2009 was provided for the Kildare area. I am also informed the SWRDTF has not had any specific rehabilitation projects.

SWRDTF Budget Allocations — SWRDTF — Kildare Specific

Code	Project Name	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 Alloc.	Comments
		€	€	€	€	€	
SW-1 1	Regional Drugs Education & Prevention Initiative	101,734	155,106	146,634	144,524	108,724	Regional Brief — Kildare Focus
SW-2	Community Counselling Pool	24,444	12,000	12,000	87,620	62,539 (Regional)	Counselling Pool — Kildare areas
SW-3	JLO Counselling Pool	15,996	0				
SW-4	Task Force Budget	160,000	113,000	184,000	160,000	160,00	Task Force Operational Budget — Regional Brief
SW-6	Diversionsary Fund	126,800	45,099	37,740	36,448	15,000 (Regional)	Innovation Fund — Kildare areas
SW-8	CAT Kildare West Wicklow		203,000	340,112	523,700	415,747	ARAS Project, Newbridge, Celbridge, Athy Bases — Regional brief, excluding Dublin
SW-11	Abbey Project			66,301			
SW-9	Under 18s		20,000	58,221	104,459	150,000	Under 18's Project based in Naas, hosted by ARAS — Regional Brief, excluding Dublin

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Dormant Account Funding

Cocaine Awareness funding received in 2008 — 20,000.

Family Support applications — 3 Projects receiving funding in October 2009 — ARAS, Cuan Mhuire and KCEP €63,700 (Kildare)

Capital Premises Funding

Capital Premises Funding — 2007 — €22,354 (Kildare)

Capital Premises Funding — 2009 — €25,000 (Kildare)

Once-Off Funding

SW-10 Harm Reduction Research — 2008 — €40,000 (Regional)

Local Drugs Task Force areas

- Ballyfermot
- Ballymun
- Blanchardstown
- Bray
- Canal Communities
- Clondalkin
- Cork City
- Dublin North East
- Dublin 12
- Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown
- Finglas-Cabra
- North Inner City
- South Inner City
- Tallaght

Regional Drugs Task Forces	Area Covered
East Coast Area	Dun Laoghaire/ Rathdown & East Wicklow.
North City Dublin and Co.	North Dublin City and Fingal.
South-Western Area	South Dublin City, South Dublin, Kildare & West Wicklow.
Midlands	Longford, Westmeath, Offaly & Laois.
Mid-West	Clare, North Tipperary & Limerick.
North-Eastern	Monaghan, East Cavan, Meath & Louth.
North-Western	West Cavan, Donegal, Sligo & Leitrim.
Southern	Cork County and Kerry
South-Eastern	Wexford, Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary South & Waterford.
Western	Mayo, Roscommon & Galway.

Community Development.

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of funding provided by his Department other than under the headings of RAPID or CLÁR schemes throughout County Kildare to voluntary or statutory groups, bodies or agencies in the past three years and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8571/10]

138. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of funding provided by his Department other than under the headings of RAPID or CLÁR schemes on a county basis to voluntary or statutory groups, bodies or agencies throughout the country in the past three years and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8572/10]

139. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the value and number of grant applications received in his Department under various headings from various community groups in County Kildare in respect of schemes operated by his Department and eligible for payment in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8573/10]

140. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the value and number of grant applications received in his Department under various headings from various community groups throughout the country in respect of schemes operated by his Department and eligible for payment in 2010 on a county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8574/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 to 140, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware, my Department administers and delivers a wide range of programmes and measures, descriptions of which are available on its website at www.pobail.ie. In addition, details of payments made from subheads part-funded from the National Lottery are listed on my Department's website.

My Department's provisional gross expenditure outturn for 2009 is €458.863m and the following table provides a breakdown for each programme area.

Provisional Outturn 2009 (€m)

Programme Area	Expenditure
	€m
Developing Communities	160.832
Tackling Drugs Misuse	39.377
Rural Development	92.691
Gaeltacht and Islands Development	86.745
Promotion and Maintenance of the Irish Language	8.935
North-South Co-Operation	52.880
Administration	17.403
Total	458.863

While expenditure under these programme areas takes place countrywide, it is not possible to give a full county-by-county breakdown of this expenditure. For example, a number of my

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Department's programmes are delivered through agencies and other intermediary bodies that operate across county boundaries and in respect of which there is no comprehensive or detailed breakdown on a county basis held by my Department. In addition, groups and organisations that receive grants directly from my Department are not necessarily constituted on a single-county basis.

In view of the wide range of my Department's schemes and programmes and the large volumes of applications received thereunder on an ongoing basis, I am not satisfied that the work involved in compiling and collating the breakdown of expenditure sought by the Deputy would be feasible or justified. However, if the Deputy has any specific queries relating to a particular scheme, I would be glad to seek to provide him with relevant information in that regard.

Computerisation Programme.

141. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8629/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): My Department does not use any cloud computing systems.

Social Welfare Benefits.

142. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when jobseeker's allowance will be restored to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [8458/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

143. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 13; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8460/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals.

144. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an appeal against the discontinuance of a disability benefit claim in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8469/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

145. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a decision will issue on an application for family income supplement in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8465/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals.

146. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when an appeal will be considered in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8467/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

147. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if she will expedite a disability allowance claim in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8471/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

148. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8474/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

149. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs her views on whether those who complete third level education with the assistance of back to education allowance have better employment prospects thereafter; and if research is available confirming this. [8491/10]

150. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of students who are in receipt of the back to education allowance who are in third level education. [8492/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149 and 150 together.

A range of studies, both Irish and international, have shown the importance of third-level education in enhancing an individual’s prospects of obtaining sustainable employment. Participation in the third level strand of the Back to Education Allowance, which has a second and a third level strand, affords people the opportunity to obtain a qualification that they would not otherwise acquire. At the end of December 2009, there were 20,808 participants in total on the scheme and, of these, 10,351 were in the third level strand.

A comprehensive evaluation of the scheme, published in September 2005 as the “Report of the Working Group on the review of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) Scheme” stated, inter alia, that the objective in setting up the scheme was to help unemployed social welfare recipients, by way of education and training, to improve their prospects of acquiring sustainable employments and that, in line with government policy, this remained the primary objective of the scheme. The effectiveness of the scheme was also considered in the Report which concluded that the evidence, from the various surveys and analyses studied, indicated

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that two thirds of participants progressed to employment or further education and that the majority of participants in the scheme who obtained a third level qualification were engaging with the labour market.

As there is a continuing need for people who are welfare dependent to be given a route into education, and subsequent sustainable employment, I am satisfied that the Back to Education Allowance Scheme continues to meet its objectives. The qualifying conditions are designed to target available resources at those most in need of support.

151. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for rent allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8498/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Departmental Staff.

152. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs her policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8519/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department encourages and supports staff wishing to make blood donations. Staff donating blood usually do so through group donations, which involve a staff member volunteering to act as liaison with the Blood Transfusion Service to display promotional material and arrange transport to donor clinics. Any time loss incurred by individuals in the arranging or donating of blood may be claimed as a time credit. The Department's Personnel Branch is available to advise managers on any issues concerning the facilitation of blood donation. In addition, one of the Departmental staff publications published an article from the Blood Transfusion Service last August with information on becoming a platelets donor. Group donations in my Department are on-going and in 2009 I understand that there were 8 such donations from 3 of the offices in Dublin alone, which resulted in 46 donations.

Pension Provisions.

153. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if an application for State pension has been received in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; when a decision will issue on this application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8521/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

154. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for illness benefit in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8532/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

155. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when an application will be processed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8539/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

156. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding persons who have lost their job and are unable to obtain their P45 or P60 from their former employer; the way in which they can claim their social welfare entitlements. [8545/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Any person who becomes unemployed should attend their local social welfare office immediately. It is not necessary to have either a P45 or a P60 to make a jobseeker's claim. However, the person should bring some documentation from the employer confirming the termination of employment. In some cases the P45 and/or P60 may be necessary for the purpose of obtaining details of PRSI contributions paid but the local office staff will advise the customer if that is the case. No customer who has paid PRSI contributions while working will be disadvantaged by any delay by the employer in providing either a P45 or P60.

If it is the case that an employer has failed to collect or make a return of PRSI contributions to Revenue, then the matter will be investigated by a Social Welfare Inspector to establish entitlement. In such cases it may be possible for the person to receive jobseeker's allowance — a means-tested payment — until the entitlement to jobseeker's benefit has been established.

157. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding a jobseeker's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8553/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when supplementary welfare allowance will be reinstated in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8563/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8564/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals.

160. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a decision will issue on a carer's allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8595/10]

163. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a decision on domiciliary care allowance appeal will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary. [8607/10]

167. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a decision will issue on a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8619/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160, 163 and 167 together.

Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

161. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a decision will issue on an application for child benefit in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8596/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Pension Provisions.

162. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a decision will issue on a contributory state pension application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8598/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Question No. 163 answered with Question No. 160.

Pension Provisions.

164. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8608/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Departmental Correspondence.

165. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs further to previous Parliamentary Questions (details supplied) in regard to the previous replies which in each instance stated that due to staff action currently being taken the information sought is unable to be provided, when a full answer will be available on each of the referenced questions. [8609/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to industrial action currently being taken by the Public Service Executive Union and the Civil and Public Services Union, I am unable to indicate when a full answer will be available on these questions

Social Welfare Benefits.

166. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of persons on disability payments who are engaged in rehabilitative employment; the percentage of these persons of the total number of disability payment recipients; the number of persons who engaged in rehabilitative employment each year respectively since 2005; the numbers who returned to work each year respectively following successful rehabilitative employment; the percentage of persons who successfully return to work following rehabilitative employment; if she conducts reviews and so on of the success of rehabilitative employment as a means of getting persons off disability payments and returning to work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8618/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Question No. 167 answered with Question No. 160.

Computerisation Programme.

168. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the cloud computing systems that are in use in her Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8638/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): There are no cloud computing systems in use in the Department and no current plans to deploy any.

Departmental Staff.

169. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Defence his policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8511/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): My Department is fully supportive of the Irish Blood Transfusion Board (IBTB) and the important work that it does. There is an ongoing commitment by my Department to facilitate and organise groups of staff to donate blood at the IBTB clinics about twice a year. Health and Safety regulations require staff to clock out when away from their place of work. However, when clinics are scheduled during normal working hours, the time taken by staff when giving blood is subsequently credited to their clocks.

IBTB promotional material highlighting the importance of blood donation is regularly displayed in my Department and distributed to staff to encourage more people to donate blood.

Departmental Expenditure.

170. **Deputy John Cregan** asked the Minister for Defence the reason the application dated 5 January 2010 for permanent instructors allowance for instructors of a company (details supplied) in County Cork has not been sent forward to the director of training for authorisation from the date they qualified as instructors up until the date they were paid on a full-time basis with effect from 10 November 2008 despite a previous application being signed off by the director of training from the day they qualified as instructors. [8540/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): The military authorities advise me that an application for payment of the instructors allowance has been received. The basis and circumstances of the application are currently under investigation.

Defence Forces Allowances.

171. **Deputy John Cregan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will ensure that an issue relating to the single men living on rations payment will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8541/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): A claim has been received from the Permanent Defence Force Other Ranks Representative Association (PDFORRA) in relation to this matter. In accordance with normal procedures the Association’s claim is being dealt with under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme (C&A Scheme) for members of the Permanent Defence Force and is the subject of correspondence between the Department and the Representative Association. The Deputy will appreciate that as discussions under the C&A Scheme are confidential to the parties involved it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter at this time.

Computerisation Programme.

172. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Defence the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8630/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O’Dea): There are no cloud computing systems in use in my Department.

Social Welfare Benefits.

173. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the target he has set for 2010 for the transfer of persons in receipt of rent supplement to the rental accommodation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8547/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): A provisional target for 2010 of 8,000 households to be transferred from rent supplement to the Rental Accommodation Scheme and other forms of social housing has been agreed between my Department and the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Planning Issues.

174. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the possible Exchequer and EU funding avenues for local authorities’ development and servicing of allotments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8462/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I am not aware of any specific Exchequer or EU funding available for local authorities for the operation of an allotment scheme. Given the absence of primary legislation governing the provision or management of allotments, I am considering introducing amending provisions in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2009 to give planning authorities the discretion to include objectives in their development plans which will facilitate the establishment and regulation of allotments in their areas.

Departmental Staff.

175. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8514/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Staff have in the past been facilitated to attend blood donation clinics in Dublin as a group during normal working hours to provide blood donations, and on an informal basis time was allowed for this. My Department's Dublin offices are close to the D'Olier Street blood donation clinic which is open from 9.30 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. Monday to Thursday and 9.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on Friday.

Planning Issues.

176. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding a matter (details supplied) and the concerns expressed to him regarding this appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8526/10]

177. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding a matter (details supplied); if his officials undertook a site visit in respect of this appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8527/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 176 and 177 together.

As Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, I am generally precluded under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 from exercising any power or control in relation to any individual matter with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned. My role in relation to development applications is confined to that of statutory consultee under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2006 where a proposed development may impact on the built or natural heritage. The planning application for a mixed use development in Drogheda, referred to in the Questions, was submitted to me in that context.

In the context of my role as statutory consultee within the planning process, the observations of my Department were communicated to Drogheda Borough Council prior to its decision of 18 May, 2009, to grant planning permission with conditions for the proposed development. Having reviewed the decision of the Council, my Department took the view that the observations made on the development were not adequately addressed by the conditions attached to the grant of planning permission and an appeal was lodged with An Bord Pleanála on 12 June, 2009, against the grant of permission.

The determination of the appeal is a matter for An Bord Pleanála and a decision by the Board is awaited. My Department undertook two inspections of the site area on 16 April 2009 and 26 May 2009. Further to the decision of Drogheda Borough Council to grant planning permission for the development, a third site inspection was undertaken on 17 December 2009.

Professional Bodies.

178. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he is satisfied with the manner in which the Building Control Act 2007 has been implemented regarding the registration of non-Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland architects; if the new registration process will be fully completed before officially launching a register

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of architects; his views on whether the premature launch of this register will have significant consumer choice or market distortion effects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8530/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Responsibility for implementation of the registration provisions of the Building Control Act 2007 in respect of architects, including the official register, is a matter for the Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland (RIAI), as registration body. I am currently examining a submission from the RIAI on all registration fees under the Act in respect of architects and I hope to reach a decision on that submission shortly. The ongoing implementation of the Act is kept under review by my Department.

Departmental Correspondence.

179. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will respond to correspondence from a person (details supplied). [8535/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I refer to the reply to Question No. 222 of 11 February 2010. A response to the representations made by the individual concerned will issue shortly.

Social and Affordable Housing.

180. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will provide the data available to him in relation to rents charged under the rental accommodation scheme by each local authority with a breakdown by bedroom number and by housing type. [8549/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) tenants are charged rents based on a housing authority's differential rent scheme and the rent payable is calculated mainly by reference to household income. The differential rent schemes vary from authority to authority. The making and amending of rent schemes for social housing are the responsibility of local authorities as an integral part of their housing management functions.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

181. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when funding will be allocated to local authorities for the housing aid for the older people scheme, the housing adaptation grant for people with a disability and the mobility aids housing grant scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8552/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 339, 340 and 341 of 3 February, 2010. The position remains unchanged.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

182. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding a sewerage scheme in respect of a village (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8562/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Spiddal Sewerage Scheme was included for funding in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007 — 2009. My Department is currently awaiting the submission of Galway County Council's revised Preliminary Report for the scheme.

Further progress on this scheme awaits the finalisation of the Water Services Investment Programme for 2010 to 2012, taking into account the priority attached to the scheme by Galway County Council in its recent assessment of needs. In July 2009, local authorities were asked to submit an assessment of needs for water and sewerage services to my Department by 23 October 2009. My Department is currently considering these assessments, which form a key input to the development of the 2010 to 2012 Water Services Investment Programme. In conducting their assessments, local authorities were asked to prioritise schemes and contracts for progression over the coming years based on key environmental and economic criteria. I expect to publish the Water Services Investment Programme 2010 to 2012 early this year.

Computerisation Programme.

183. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8633/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Cloud computing systems are not deployed in my Department.

Departmental Staff.

184. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8509/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I regret that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Computerisation Programme.

185. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8628/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Cloud computing is one of the fastest growing IT sectors and offers significant benefits to users by allowing access to high level business applications and reduced costs. I am keen to see the development of such benefits in the management of information services within my own Department. In the development of such a new approach we would of course carry out the necessary due diligence to ensure data protection, confidentiality and security. Our paper outlining technology actions to support a knowledge society sets out some of the benefits that could accrue to the state from the development of cloud computing services here. I am now working within my own Department and with other Government Departments to ensure that we realise some of these opportunities.

Grant Payments.

186. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive his payment; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8480/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Due to industrial Action by staff in my Department, I am not in a position to provide a reply to this question.

Departmental Staff.

187. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8507/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My Department enables and encourages all staff to donate blood during normal working hours. Those staff who donate blood during office hours do not lose time on their monthly flexitime balance.

Grant Payments.

188. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the single farm payment issued in each year in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon; the value of entitlements on the holding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8554/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The person named was allocated 19.48 Single Payment entitlements to the value of €53.40 each in 2005. The EU Regulations governing the Single Payment scheme provide that a farmer must use his/her entitlements at least once over a three year period otherwise they are lost to the National Reserve. A farmer uses entitlements by declaring one hectare of land per entitlement per year on a Single Payment application form. The person named did not declare any land on a Single Payment application form in the years 2005, 2006 or 2007 therefore her entitlements were surrendered to the National Reserve in 2008. The person named does not currently hold any Single Payment entitlements.

189. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when application forms will be available for the 2010 single farm payment national reserve; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8556/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): A meeting of the Single Payment Advisory Committee will take place shortly with a view to making recommendations on the arrangements for the 2010 National Reserve. Applications forms will then be made available with a closing date of 17 May 2010.

Computerisation Programme.

190. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8626/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The Department has no cloud computing systems.

Departmental Properties.

191. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of privately run preschool or Montessori facilities in buildings or on lands owned by his Department on which no rent is paid; if this practice exists and if his attention has been drawn to it; the number of tenancy agreements in place between his Department and private preschool providers on which rent is paid and where formal legal arrangements are in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8459/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I am advised by my Department that a central list is not maintained of the agreements referred to by the Deputy. This reflects my Department’s understanding that such practices do not generally occur on sites under my ownership. My Department is aware of a long standing agreement to allow a Montessori school occupy a portion of a school building in Dublin. It is my Department’s intention to formalise the necessary legal arrangements in the coming months.

Special Educational Needs.

192. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science to state the number of special needs assistants on the payroll in February 2010 in comparison to February 2009. [8464/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The information requested by the Deputy is provided on a quarterly basis. Some 8,541 special needs assistants were employed in primary schools in March 2009. Some 8,392 special needs assistants were employed in primary schools in December 2009. In March 2009, some 2,012 special needs assistants were employed in all second level schools including VECs. Some 1,950 special needs assistants were employed in such schools in December 2009.

Schools Building Projects.

193. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the 78 projects announced as commencing construction in 2009 which have completed the tendering process; the number on which construction will begin in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8472/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The current position with regard to the 78 projects I announced is as follows: 11 projects have been completed and handed over to the school authorities; 25 projects are under construction; 28 projects are at tender stage; and 14 projects are at pre-tender stage. I expect the 28 projects at tender stage to progress to construction in the first half of 2010. The 14 projects at pre-tender stage will proceed to tender and construction as soon as possible.

School Staffing.

194. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to Question No. 319 of 20 January 2010, when a reply will issue. [8476/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The National Council for Special Education has advised my Department that a response will issue to the Deputy within the coming week in relation to the matter raised by him.

Higher Education Grants.

195. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will grant the appeal for third level maintenance grant for tuition fees for the 2009-10 academic year in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8477/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): A reply has issued from my Department to the correspondence referred to by the Deputy.

School Accommodation.

196. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he has received a request from a school (details supplied) in County Cork regarding the need for a new classroom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8478/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I wish to inform the Deputy that the school to which he refers has made an application to the Department for additional accommodation for September 2010. The application is under consideration by the Department and a decision will issue to the school in due course.

Schools Building Projects.

197. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to Question No. 234 of 11 February 2010, if the tender report has been completed; if the preferred contractor has been chosen; and if so, when the contractor will be on site. [8490/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The tender report has been received by my Department and is being examined. When the tender process is complete and assuming there are no issues arising the project will progress to construction. It is envisaged that the completion contractor will be on site before Easter.

Local Contributions.

198. **Deputy Seán Power** asked the Minister for Education and Science the way the local contribution is calculated when school building projects are being assessed for their monetary contribution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8497/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): Under the general funding arrangements for school building projects, the amount of the local contribution for extensions or refurbishments is 10% of the total project cost with the contribution being capped at €31,500. The level of the local contribution for schools with disadvantaged status is 5% of the project cost subject to a maximum amount of €12,500. The local contribution for new school buildings is 5% of the cost up to a maximum contribution of €63,000 or €12,500 in the case of special or disadvantaged schools.

Schools Building Projects.

199. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding an extension for a school (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8505/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Department is in receipt of an application for major capital funding for an extension to the school referred to by the

Deputy and it is currently at an early stage of architectural planning. The application has been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects and has been assigned a band 2.5 rating. The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction phase 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 the Department, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

Departmental Staff.

200. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science his policy regarding staff who donate blood during normal working hours; if staff are required to clock out when giving blood; the measures that are in place to encourage staff to donate blood; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8512/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): As part of our corporate social responsibility, and mindful that maintaining the blood donor panel is a major challenge, my Department has for many years supported the efforts of the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS). The IBTS normally contacts my Department on an annual basis appealing for voluntary blood donations. The personnel section e-mails all staff setting out the proposed date for blood donations and asking for those who wish to donate to inform personnel and indicating their preferred time. Personnel then co-ordinates this information and informs the IBTS of the number of staff members who have volunteered. Staff are facilitated to attend the IBTS on the day and, where appropriate, credit is given to staff on the flexi system.

School Enrolments.

201. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some post primary schools require a deposit when a student's name is being considered for admission; if this is legal practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8524/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): At post-primary level, it is a fundamental principle of the Free Second Level Education Scheme that no charge be made in respect of:

- (a) instruction in any subject of my Department's Programme for Secondary Schools;
- (b) recreation or study facilities where all pupils are expected to avail themselves of them as part of the school programme.
- (c) any other activity in which all pupils are required to take part.

Voluntary contributions by parents of pupils in recognised schools are permissible provided it is made absolutely clear to parents that there is no question of compulsion to pay and that, in making a contribution, they are doing so of their own volition. The manner in which such voluntary contributions are sought and collected is a matter for school management, however their collection should be such as not to create a situation where either parents or pupils could reasonably infer that the contributions take on a compulsory character.

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I am aware that some schools do charge a booking fee when considering applicants for enrolment and where this is done it should be for no more than a nominal amount and refundable following a decision on enrolment.

Departmental Offices.

202. **Deputy Mary Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Science the plans being advanced by his Department or its agencies to utilise office space in a town (details supplied) in County Meath; the stage of these plans; the services that are to be provided to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8525/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): I understand that this particular issue refers to the possible use of the office space in question for the delivery of adult education provision.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department funds adult education provision through annual grants to Vocational Education Committees (VECs) which deliver provision locally. The procurement of accommodation and organisation of courses is a matter for each VEC which, subject to its budget, decides the nature and extent of the adult education provision to be delivered in its area.

In relation to this particular issue, I understand from the relevant VEC that discussions with the local authority in the town are at an exploratory stage.

School Staffing.

203. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will confirm that a gael scoil or Gaeltacht school can obtain an administrative principal post with 158 children while other national schools require 179 children; the reason this distinction is made in terms of the staffing schedule; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8533/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The key factor for determining the level of resources provided by my Department at individual school level for any school year is the pupil enrolment at the previous 30 September. The enrolment is applied to a staffing schedule which issues annually from my Department.

Administrative principal status in primary schools applies on the appointment of the 7th mainstream class teacher. Under the current staffing schedule for ordinary and Gaeltacht schools the enrolment warranted for the appointment of the 7th mainstream teacher is 179 pupils. The corresponding enrolment under the staffing schedule for Gaelscoileanna is 158 pupils.

The Deputy will be aware that there are a range of measures in place in the education sector to promote Irish which includes a more favourable staffing schedule in Gaelscoileanna. The relevant staffing schedules are available on my Department’s website.

Primary Education.

204. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will investigate an issue raised regarding a primary school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8536/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The issue to which the Deputy refers is currently being investigated and an official from my Department will be in touch with the school shortly.

Public Sector Pay.

205. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will reply to correspondence (details supplied) in relation to exemption from pay cuts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8551/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): For the purposes of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009, Universities are public service bodies. A public servant is defined in the Act as a person who is employed by, or holds any office or other position in, a public service body. Consequently, employees of Universities including the person referred to by the Deputy are comprehended by the Act. Remuneration payable by or on behalf of a public service body to its employees, irrespective of funding source or employment status, falls to be reduced in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

School Accommodation.

206. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding an application for a school refurbishment grant in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8610/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): My Department has received an application for additional accommodation from the school to which the Deputy refers. The application is under consideration and a decision will issue to the school authority in due course.

State Examinations.

207. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science if the project work for the technology subject for the junior certificate examination could be completed by December every year so as to ensure that students can concentrate in January and February on the written aspects of the upcoming mock examinations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8615/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations including organising the holding of examinations, determining procedures in places where examinations are conducted including the supervision of examinations and making arrangements for the marking of work presented for examination. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

208. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science if the Examination Commission, in consultation with his Department, can release junior examination results to students at the same time as the leaving certificate examination so that students can select their subjects for the leaving certificate based on performance in the junior certificate exam; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8616/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations including organising the holding of examinations, determining procedures in places

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where examinations are conducted including the supervision of examinations and issuing the result of examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Computerisation Programme.

209. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Science the cloud computing systems that are in use in his Department; the safeguards that are in place regarding personal information and public data on those systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8631/10]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): In response to the Deputy’s question, there are no cloud computing systems in use in the Department.