



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

Tuesday, 30 March 2010.

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 30 Márta 2010.
Tuesday, 30 March 2010.

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

Paidir.
Prayer.

Ceisteanna — Questions.

Departmental Committees.

1. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if his Department is represented on the national emergency response committee; if so, the level at which it is represented; if he is satisfied with the role played by his Department and his Department's representative on the committee in responding to the recent weather crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1469/10]

2. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if his Department is represented on the national emergency response committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3470/10]

3. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach the role of his Department in the national emergency response committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12958/10]

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

My Department was represented on the national emergency response co-ordination committees, established each time on an *ad hoc* basis, with regard to the two severe weather situations of recent months. The committees were chaired by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government as the lead Department. The committee responding to the flooding crisis included a principal officer from my Department and members of the Government Information Service. The committee responding to the snow and sustained freezing conditions included these officers and an assistant secretary from my Department. I am satisfied with the role they played in both situations.

My Department is specifically nominated in the framework for major emergency response with regard to the co-ordination of information for communication to and through the media. This role was managed by the Government Information Service, which among other activities organised daily briefings for journalists with the relevant Ministers. I am glad to take this opportunity to express once again my and the Government's appreciation of the work of local authorities, the Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive, the Defence Forces, Civil Defence and other statutory bodies, as well as Departments, in responding to the two severe

[The Taoiseach.]

weather events. I am also glad to recognise the very valuable contribution made by voluntary organisations and individuals in providing assistance to their fellow citizens during those events.

Deputy Liz McManus: While I thank the Taoiseach for that reply, I am concerned it shows a disconnect between his perception of the experience Ireland underwent in the period around Christmas and the reality. Is the Taoiseach seriously suggesting the response was satisfactory and that the damage that has been done does not need further investment? What are the lessons that may now be learned from what was, generally speaking, an issue of a loss of confidence among the public that the Government cared? It did not help that the Minister was in another country where there was not such a crisis.

In terms of the lessons learned, does the Taoiseach accept we cannot have a repeat of this in the future? For example, what is he doing to ensure we have adequate supplies of sand and grit? What discussions have been held with the committee and the local authorities to ensure supplies are available, should there be a recurrence of such severe weather? Who convenes this committee? Why was there such an inordinate delay in calling the first meeting of that committee when it was clear to people on the ground, who were experiencing very extreme problems as a result of the weather, that an exceptional response was required from a Government that did not seem to care?

The Taoiseach: I do not accept that. Flooding arose from exceptional rainfall in a short period following very heavy rainfall throughout the year. Local authorities responded to the emerging position using the co-ordination and inter-agency arrangements set out in the framework for emergency management. As I saw for myself, there was excellent co-operation between local authorities, the Health Service Executive, the Garda Síochána and other statutory agencies and voluntary bodies.

The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has already pointed out to the Joint Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government that his Department was aware of difficulties in areas of County Cork following contact on Thursday, 19 November from an assistant county manager indicating that flooding problems could emerge. He asked the next morning that a national emergency response co-ordination committee be convened, and that meeting was convened at 3 p.m. that day. It met daily initially and on 11 occasions in total in November and December up to 8 December, when it was stood down.

Over €16 million was given to 19 local authorities last December to meet exceptional costs in response to the flooding in their areas and €50 million has been allocated to the Office of Public Works for 2010 flood protection activities. The roads allocation for this year is approximately €411 million. Quite exceptionally and rightly, the Minister for Transport has given full discretion to local authorities to identify or utilise those funds in a way that meets the priorities they set as a result of what has happened over the winter. When one considers the estimated cost is in the region of €180 million in respect of those roads that were identified, the allocation can and should come from that funding. Councils are prioritising those works because this is sensible. If it means other works of a lesser emergency nature need to be deferred for this year, this is what should happen. This was an exceptional situation. I agree people were inconvenienced. However, people worked at community level to address practical concerns. There were many examples of good neighbourliness and local community groups taking action. These are well documented and many people are aware of them from personal experience.

Regarding the question of salt replies, thankfully, the local authorities never ran out of such supplies but one cannot salt every road every day. The maintenance of the main roads was the priority as they carry the majority of road transport. It is the case that rural areas were more

affected. However, the local community effort convened to address the situation — as it must because there was such a sudden and widespread problem — and was brought into play.

Issues arise in the context of any emergency situation which need to be addressed and not every issue is covered as would be the case in normal circumstances — this is the definition of an emergency. Local authorities responded in December but the period of inclement weather continued after Christmas and the problem of supplies of salt for the roads became evident. Given the unusual prolongation of the severe weather, the cumulative effects of the extended freeze and the implications of the return to normal activity levels by businesses and schools after the Christmas period, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, whose Department had been monitoring that situation at local level, convened a committee to co-ordinate the multidimensional emergency response. The Department of Transport and the NRA had also been monitoring the roads situation and the two Departments were already engaged in a combined response to the situation.

It has to be borne in mind that the prolonged severe weather was the worst for many years. The co-ordination and emergency plans work on the basis of local co-ordination to deal with local issues. The centralised effort is to do with ensuring there are adequate supplies of the necessary material. The bad weather affected here, Northern Ireland and the UK and there was a significant demand in those jurisdictions for salt supplies. It was a difficult situation but one that was managed quite well in the circumstances, given the amount of salt available and the very considerable amounts needed to be used on the roads daily in the initial stages. However, as the situation became prolonged, the strategy had to be adapted.

Deputy Liz McManus: I agree with the Taoiseach that the community response was magnificent, as indeed was the work of local authorities' staff. The work of the staff of the local authority of my own county of Wicklow was exemplary during very difficult circumstances. Does the Taoiseach accept the reason we did not run out of salt is because the secondary roads were not made passable? When the snows subsequently thawed, we had a serious legacy of impassable roads. The Taoiseach used the term "inconvenienced". Does he agree it is unacceptable that school buses were unable to collect children from school because road surfaces had disappeared and farmers could not get to their cattle? This was the reality faced by people during those times and it needs to be recognised as requiring a proper response instead of a grossly inadequate one. Will the Taoiseach tell the House the shortfall between the amount of money allocated for all road works and the amount of money sought by local authorities to carry out the repairs and the reinstatement of roads, bridges and water supplies?

The Taoiseach: On that specific point, county councils have estimated the considerable damage done to part of the road network in various parts of the country came to a total of approximately €180 million. In a year of tight public finances, the Minister allocated €240 million to local authorities, for which they will have full discretion. As the Deputy will be aware from past experience, in normal circumstances various tags are applied to the grants and funds, be they for maintenance or surface dressing, provided by the Department of Transport to local authorities based on the submissions made by the latter as part of the Estimates process. In this situation, the practical response was to forget about the allocation in that respect for this year because we had an exceptional problem. As a total of €240 million was being allocated to local authorities and the amount of money they believed they required to solve the problem was €180 million, our solution was to give them full discretion. That would mean enabling them, where a road had broken up or a major problem had arisen, to solve the problem as an emergency while deferring for the year fresh surface dressings planned on roads that may have been dressed five or six years ago. The condition of the latter roads would not be as bad as those affected by frost.

[The Taoiseach.]

By being given full discretion, local authority members had sufficient money to prioritise repairs required because of the exceptional nature of the freeze and the flooding. In my locality and elsewhere, I am glad to say, they are using that discretion. The public fully accepts that, for example, expected maintenance work on roads in parts of my county will not proceed because other roads closer to the Shannon were completely overrun and have to be repaired as a matter of urgency. This is being done.

Giving local authorities discretion is preferable to handing out allocations in the usual way and then trying to find money we do not have to deal with the problem, which would have been a rather ineffective way of proceeding. The best way of using resources is to give that discretion to the local authorities.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Did the emergency response committee discuss whether the ability of local authorities to deal with the flooding and the freeze was impaired by the ban on local authority recruitment? Local authority workers are already under pressure because of the jobs embargo, pay cuts and, in many cases, overtime bans. Last April, the local authority professional officers branch of SIPTU stated that the overtime ban and recruitment embargo would potentially have a devastating impact on professional engineers and other local authority employees engaged in the production and distribution of drinking water and protection of existing water quality. We saw an indication of this during the emergency. The branch also pointed out that temporary engineers were let go due to the ban on renewing temporary contracts.

An Ceann Comhairle: Has the Deputy a question?

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I ask the Taoiseach whether he is aware of this issue and if the emergency response committee considered it. If we are to experience another emergency, we will be relying on these very grades and people. What was the committee's response to the issue of public health and safety of our water supplies, which are threatened because of the shortage of engineers? Experienced engineers are retiring and temporary engineers are not being retained. This threat is not solely the result of the recent emergency and would arise again in the event of another crisis.

The Taoiseach: To the credit of local authority workers and front line staff, certain industrial relations issues were deferred, postponed or disregarded for the duration of the emergency. We were all grateful for that and it showed the civic-mindedness and good public-spiritedness of workers who simply sought to help neighbours as well as doing their job. That was indicative of the overall community spirit in areas of particular difficulty and efforts to ensure no problems or industrial relations issues that might arise in the context of an ordinary situation would impinge upon the effectiveness or availability of qualified staff to alleviate hardship where possible. That should be placed on the record.

I refer to the question of the effects of the moratorium, which was necessary in an effort to control public expenditure. We have the prospect of dealing with some of those issues now in the event of the ratification of agreements which were concluded overnight. This is a public sector wide agreement. The sectoral arrangements in place will enable a redeployment mechanism to exist that will overcome many issues in this respect.

I refer to the question of water supply. There has been a great investment in the past ten years in the improvement of water services and the provision of water infrastructure. We are aware of the effects on reservoir levels and the provision of safe water as a result of the exceptional level of flooding in some areas. The public notification of difficulties was taken up

and communicated in a competent way. People were aware of the dangers in particular areas. Efforts were made through mobile means such as tankers etc. to supply people. Some communities were in an exceptionally difficult position not only in terms of drinking water, but in terms of sanitary services in their homes for days and, in some cases, weeks. The local co-ordinating emergency response used the local knowledge and expertise available. People met and worked on a daily and hourly basis to alleviate what would otherwise have been a very difficult situation for communities. There was an ability to cope and to deal with the situation despite very serious pressure on service needs in many areas. I acknowledge that many people had to put up with a less than optimum service because there was a time period during which people had to get in, sort out pumps, bring back electricity to public supply systems and enable water to be put back on call and back into the system. It is important to acknowledge all of this.

The Deputy may well point to a situation which, were we in different times, could have been dealt with in the way he has suggested but given our circumstances economically and financially, the response to the difficulties we had during that period was exemplary in all cases. I am not aware of any area where there was a less than civic or community-minded response. Credit is due to everyone for this, including many of the voluntary services as well as those in the statutory services.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will take a brief supplementary question from Deputy Ó Snodaigh.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: It will be brief. What lessons have been learned such that we can deal with any further emergency in terms of water supplies? I refer to the salt and grit levels. Have stocks been fully replenished and has there been a full evaluation of whether the size of the supplies and the stock on hand is large enough to deal with another bad winter? What steps have been taken to ensure this is the case? No criticism of local authorities or voluntary services was intended in my earlier question. The question was whether we could deal with another crisis in terms of water if the engineers were not available because of the public service embargo.

The Taoiseach: I did not suggest that there was an implied criticism by the Deputy in respect of any of the efforts being made. I just made the point that perhaps the agreement, subject to ratification, could form the basis upon which a greater degree of redeployment will be possible. I refer to the flexibility that will be needed, quite apart from the obvious flexibility in emergency situations to which I have already referred. The structural changes that could be envisaged as a result of a ratification of the agreements reached would greatly assist in covering particular service needs to which the Deputy would refer under existing arrangements.

On the question of salt supplies, local authorities generally maintain ten days' supply for gritting the priority roads and in most years such a stock is more than adequate. It will be necessary for the Department of Transport and local authorities to consider the costs and benefits of maintaining a supply to sustain gritting work for a longer period. Extra stocks of salt and the necessary storage facilities would cost extra and this must be measured against anticipated requirements.

The question of harnessing community effort by, for example, local authorities supplying salt to local communities and business partners can be examined. Another area that will be considered is the question of householders and businesses in urban areas clearing snow and ice from footpaths outside their premises without incurring a legal liability which might expose them to claims for negligence. The Department of Transport has a review group looking at all of these matters, and covering both the flooding and the cold weather period.

On the question of water services and water conservation, there is a number of issues that arise from which lessons can obviously be learnt during this period of which we speak. Much

[The Taoiseach.]

of the problem during the cold weather arose from people letting water run continuously from fear of pipes freezing. That is not an acceptable practice. Freezing can be avoided by good insulation of pipes. There is much work that can and should be done. The emphasis on energy efficiency and savings in that area using existing schemes, some of which are directed to local authority estates, would all give an opportunity for county councils to think creatively about how they can ensure that some of these practical problems are avoided in the future.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I have two questions for the Taoiseach, primarily following on our experience of flooding in Cork on 19 November last. I agree with what he had to say about the response by local authority workers and many voluntary organisations, which, in some cases, was heroic. However, there are lessons to be learnt.

Will the Taoiseach commission an independent inquiry into the flooding of Cork city at that period? There has been an internal inquiry in the ESB. There have also been reports by Cork City Council and Cork County Council, and the all-party Oireachtas committee is looking at it. However, the Taoiseach's Ministers and backbenchers in Cork have supported calls for an independent expert inquiry into how the flooding occurred and how we can ensure, through management of water flows through Iniscara dam, in particular, and further upstream, we can reduce the likelihood of it recurring. Everyone agrees that the 540 tonnes of water a second coming through the dam at its peak during the flood period is what caused most of the damage in Cork city. Will there be an independent inquiry? The Minister of State, Deputy Kelleher, in particular, has been vocal on this issue?

A failing occurred with regard to the information flow between the ESB and Cork City Council and, most importantly, between those bodies and the public. Technology provides interesting solutions which are being adopted elsewhere, in particular, in the UK in a number of towns where flooding is a problem. The Office of Public Works has recently begun a tendering process to examine a new system whereby people could be warned via mobile telephone about flooding. However, the tender is limited to flooding. Has the national emergency response committee discussed broadening the response to include other emergencies? Will the Taoiseach consider broadening it to general emergency responses?

The Taoiseach: The Office of Public Works is the lead agency for dealing with flooding problems. It has had much success with considerable investment, approximately €150 million over the past several years, in flood relief projects.

Regarding what further matters need to be examined as to what happened in Cork in November, as Deputy Coveney said, consideration is being given by the Oireachtas environment committee to various reports and the internal reports from the Cork local authorities. There is also a Lee Valley catchment area review to be done by the Office of Public Works to see what occurred in November. While I am not as familiar with the events as the Cork Deputies would be, the November floods there were regarded as an unusual event to have taken place. However, in no way should that minimise the reality for the people on the ground as a result of what happened.

Lessons will be sought to be learned from the events. As to whether any further investigation is warranted, we should await the outcome of the ongoing considerations. A similar question addressed to the line Minister would provide a more accurate and detailed response to this as I do not have the information requested before me.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: During the recent severe weather emergencies, there was talk for a while on local and national radio about getting the Army to help out. Does the Taoiseach

believe the Army should have been brought out in certain cases during the flooding in November and the frosts in January? What lessons have been learned from these events?

In his reply to Deputy McManus, the Taoiseach referred to the damage done by frost to the road network. The Wexford local authority claims it is not getting adequate funding to restore its road infrastructure to the condition it was in before these events. Some roads in County Wexford, as a result, are impassable. I know from speaking to colleagues from other parts of the country that their road networks are in a similar state.

An Ceann Comhairle: These questions should be directed to the relevant Minister.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: A Cheann Comhairle, in all fairness the Taoiseach raised some of these matters in his reply to which I am responding. The Taoiseach comes from a rural constituency himself so will be aware of the importance of the rural road network. Has he any comment to make on the condition of the rural road network?

The Taoiseach: The Army is always available to assist the civic authorities where called upon and available. In many parts of the country in which the Army was required during the flooding, it was very good at sand-bagging operations and arranging preventive measures at danger points in many towns at risk of flooding from their rivers. I saw all of these actions taking place. Where its assistance was sought by a local emergency co-ordination committee, it provided personnel and did an excellent job. It was also an opportunity for the wider civil community to recognise the Army's professionalism in all that it does. I always have been impressed by how training, discipline and effectiveness are brought to bear on situations I have seen at first hand. It is commendable.

Regarding the roads, in exceptional situations such as this, local authorities estimated a sum of €180 million, subject to further assessment. Some €240 million was provided by the Department of Transport to be used by local authorities with their full discretion. My understanding from my area is that, on a cross-party basis, councillors were anxious to ensure the money went to those roads this year, even if it meant deferring other improvement works in other parts of the county through projects that were not of the same magnitude of importance in terms of providing a basic road network in those areas. That work has been deferred, which is sensible. We all know there is no money and when one does not have money, one must use what is there to best effect. That is a case of local authorities using their local know-how and local engineers accurately assessing where the real need exists in the course of this year. Some of these areas are coastal areas and require particularly quick attention because of the impact of frost and severe cold on the passibility of some of these roads. Not every problem can be solved overnight. Many of the more serious ones are being attended to because of the discretion being applied to spending allocations.

Deputy James Bannon: Does the Taoiseach agree the Minister for Transport let down the people of Ireland by not returning from holidays to have a more hands-on approach to the big freeze?

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Bannon to put a question. Imparting information is not allowed during Question Time.

Deputy Liz McManus: He asked a question.

Deputy James Bannon: The people of Ireland feel they were left down because there was inadequate salt and many issues were not addressed at that juncture. Does the Taoiseach agree the recruitment embargo on outdoor staff is seriously affecting the restoration of our county

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and regional roads? Some roads in the midlands, including in the Taoiseach's area, are still closed because of the big freeze and damage caused by water.

The Taoiseach: What roads are closed in my area? Deputy Bannon should name one.

Deputy James Bannon: Does the Taoiseach support the establishment of a River Shannon authority to manage the River Shannon? Over 40 bodies have a vested interest in the River Shannon. The Taoiseach must bring these bodies together to manage the River Shannon. That is not happening and all we have from the Government is a proposal to set up a committee to prepare another report. The people of Ireland know we have had too many reports with no action by the Government. I would appreciate the views of the Taoiseach on the River Shannon authority, set up by statute to deal with this problem once and for all in the midlands region.

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy Bannon for the close attention he pays to my area as well as his own. I thought he would have been kept busy enough in Longford and Westmeath but I am sure Deputy Enright is delighted to hear Deputy Bannon is down around her country to do a few jobs.

Deputy James Bannon: The Taoiseach let down the people of Longford.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Bannon should keep it up; he is not making an impact on me.

It is important to point out the work of the committee was done and nothing was left undone as a result of the presence or absence of the Minister for the few days he was on a family holiday. Political capital has been made at this stage. Many prominent Opposition politicians were not around in that period but I have not checked where they were holidaying.

Deputy Liz McManus: The Taoiseach's party is in government.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Taoiseach could have left someone in charge.

The Taoiseach: Being in Government, I ensured I was here for all of that week, as one would expect.

Deputy James Bannon: I did not see the Taoiseach in his waders around the Shannon area.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Bannon, please.

The Taoiseach: I did not head up to that part of the country.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: The Taoiseach was too busy.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy's idea of water sports differs from mine.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: The Taoiseach forgot about the people.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy raised an important point on co-ordination of management of the Shannon River, an issue upon which there have been several discussions in the past and one which cannot be easily resolved. The Deputy will be aware there are historical issues in regard to bog development in that area on which the silting impact has been considerable, a problem also not easily resolved.

I recall the former President of the Irish Farmers' Association, IFA, Mr. Tom Clinton, was at that time involved in a major review in regard to whether the Shannon could be drained, a claim often made by politicians of various hues and cries down the years. The problem is that

the drop from Athlone to Meelick is only a number of feet. If my memory serves me correctly that drop is not even 15 feet. When one considers the amount of water coming down that type of terrain the surrounding area becomes almost like a saucer. Many land reclamation projects and tributary systems have been undertaken in the area and anyone with a knowledge of it, as I have, knows that if one walks along the Shannon banks and the callows during the summer one will see houses which have not been inhabited for years, some of which are no longer habitable. This is an area in which people lived prior to that land drainage work. The problem is huge.

The suggestion from somebody on the back of a tractor every time a flood occurs that this is a problem that can be easily solved, apart from anything else, is not in line with geological reality.

Deputy Liz McManus: I presume the Taoiseach is not referring to Deputy O'Rourke.

The Taoiseach: No, I do not refer to Deputy O'Rourke. There is a particular Deputy, whom I will not name, in that general area who makes a habit of standing on the back of a tractor, on a couple of occasions with Mr. Jim Fahey, bemoaning the fact that we have a flooded Shannon.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Much depends on the back of whose tractor one is standing.

The Taoiseach: Efforts are being made to try to pull this together. There are various authorities involved, including the local authorities, the OPW and the ESB, which historically had a role in this. The role of the ESB is often questioned by locals in the area in terms of how quickly water is allowed down the river bearing in mind the Ardnacrusha situation. There are as many views on that issue as there are people living in that region. It is an issue with which I am familiar and one that I would like to see improved. I do not believe the solution is to remove from the Shannon River some people who already have responsibility in this area. We must try to pull together in a coherent manner the various interests involved. We must try to see what is possible. The view of some people on draining the Shannon is a little simplistic and does not do justice to the complexity of the issues and interests involved.

I am acutely aware of the problem and I have asked the Minister of State at the Office of Public Works to address this issue in a coherent manner and to revert to me on it.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will allow a brief question from Deputy Kenny.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I apologise to the Taoiseach for not being here earlier but I was in the Department of Finance dealing with other matters.

Perhaps I could make a helpful suggestion. Part of the national emergency response is the air-sea marine rescue service. A contract in respect of helicopters will soon be signed with a major international company. Deputy Deasy and other Members from the south-east have raised this matter with me. In view of the helpful comments by the Taoiseach last week on committees being able to do their work, perhaps that process could be considered by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport prior to signing the contract. I suggest this on the basis of Waterford not wishing to be left out in terms of a 24 hour service. There are valid reasons for delivering on that.

I understand the Air Corps is interested in examining what it can provide, in terms of cost efficiency and effectiveness for the State. A letter has been received by the chairman of the Joint Committee on Transport and it would be a very good exercise for politicians from all parties to look at a process like this and be able to do their work before there is a sign-off for a ten year period. It might be possible to deliver projects in a more cost-effective and compre-

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hensive way. I do not know all the details but it would be a very valid exercise for the Oireachtas joint committee and I would like the Taoiseach to give his support to that.

The Taoiseach: On foot of many comments from Deputies on all sides, the Minister, Deputy Dempsey is examining whether there is any way in which he can examine the matter constructively in order to see if there is a way forward. There were questions on transport last week, during which this matter was dealt with in detail. The Minister indicated he is examining whether anything can be done. I do not want to pre-empt his consideration. It is not a question of him not trying to see if there is a way forward.

Priority Questions.

Passport Security.

69. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the position regarding the use of stolen Irish passports in the United Arab Emirates in January 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13402/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The first indication we received of the use of false Irish passports in connection with the killing of Mr. Mahmoud al Mabhouh was on 4 February, when local press reports in Dubai stated that several suspects were believed to have entered Dubai on Irish passports. The ambassador of Ireland to the United Arab Emirates, Mr. Ciarán Madden, immediately contacted the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs to seek clarification as to the truth of these reports. On 8 February, the ambassador, Mr. Madden, was received at the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was informed that it had no information at that time but that the matter was under investigation by the United Arab Emirates security services.

On 15 February, the Dubai chief of police gave a news conference during which he gave the details of fake Irish passports. My Department, in co-operation with the Garda and the security services, immediately commenced an investigation into the apparent use of fraudulent Irish passports, including making contact with the Irish citizens whose passport numbers had been stolen. I have discussed the matter with the United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister and have assured him of Ireland's co-operation. The Attorney General took the opportunity presented by his St. Patrick's day visit to the United Arab Emirates to discuss the issue with the Foreign Minister.

The ambassador, Mr. Madden, has maintained ongoing contact with the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Dubai police, in addition to liaising with his German, French, Australian, Austrian and British counterparts. He met the United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed al Nahyan, to discuss the situation. The Dubai police have shared with us the details of the fraudulent passports it suspects were used and we have passed on these to the investigating gardaí.

Officials from our embassies in Paris, London and Berlin have been in contact with the foreign ministries of those countries to ensure a co-ordinated response. Senior officials of my Department have also met on two occasions with the Australian ambassador to Ireland and shared information with him. I have discussed the situation on a number of occasions with the British Foreign Secretary Mr. David Miliband and we are co-operating closely and sharing information. On Monday of last week, the British Foreign Office briefed our Embassy in London to the effect that the Serious Organised Crime Agency, SOCA, investigation had found

“compelling circumstantial evidence” of Israeli involvement in the production of false British passports. Our own investigations by the Department and the Garda are ongoing. I expect them to be completed by the middle of next month.

On 22 February I met the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr. Avigdor Lieberman, in Brussels to outline how seriously we take the misuse of Irish passports. Our ambassador to Israel also met with the Europe Director of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and registered Ireland’s serious concerns. The Israeli ambassador to Ireland was invited to Iveagh House where senior officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs stressed the seriousness with which the Government viewed the matter. It is simply unacceptable that totally innocent Irish citizens could have been endangered through this fraudulent use of Irish passports. The consequences of innocent Irish citizens being implicated in the murder of a Hamas commander could have been extremely serious.

Our primary focus in all of this has been to guarantee the security of the Irish citizens affected. There are now a total of eight false or falsely obtained Irish passports in question. We have spoken to all of the citizens who hold or have held passports with numbers provided by the Dubai authorities and we have provided them with new passports.

Last month at the Foreign Affairs Council, EU Foreign Ministers strongly condemned the fact that those involved in this action have used fraudulent EU member states’ passports and credit cards acquired through the theft of EU citizens’ identities. As stressed in the past, particularly in March 2004, by EU Heads of State and Government at the European Council, the Union has consistently opposed extra-judicial killings, which are contrary to international law.

Deputy Billy Timmins: Does the Minister agree the fraudulent use of Irish passports is an outrageous act? He has given a great deal of information, yet I am unclear about what progress has been made in our investigation. Who was behind the use of the passports? The Minister said in his talks with Mr. David Miliband that the British Foreign Minister stated that there was “compelling circumstantial evidence” Israel was involved in the fraudulent production and use of British passports. Was a diplomat from the Israeli embassy expelled from Britain? Has the Minister any indication as to who might have used the Irish passports? Is it reasonable to assume that it was probably the same source? If so, what measures does he intend to take? Is there evidence of the use of Irish passports in this manner in the past? If so, what action was taken?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I agree with the Deputy that it is outrageous that fake Irish passports were used in this murder. In six of the eight cases, they used real passport numbers that corresponded with the numbers on passports in Ireland and, therefore, the security of the citizens concerned was at risk. When I met Foreign Minister Mr. Lieberman, we made it clear how seriously we took the issue and how unacceptable such behaviour was. He said simply he did not have information relating to this.

The British Foreign Minister, Mr. David Miliband, spoke to me at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting, which was a day in advance of the statement by SOCA, and he indicated what the outcome of that would be in terms of “compelling circumstantial evidence”. We are aware of the circumstantial evidence generally regarding this event and alleged Israeli involvement. We raised that issue with Foreign Minister Mr. Lieberman and again he said he had no information on that.

The difference between the British case and our case is that in the British case the fraudulent passports appear to have been cloned from those issued to British citizens with strong links to Israel and, in some cases, they live in Israel. In our case six of the passports were fakes using existing passport numbers while two did not carry valid numbers. Unlike the British, therefore,

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we do not have an immediate line of inquiry. The investigation by the Garda and the Department is not complete. There is circumstantial evidence but given the seriousness of this situation and the grave consequences involved, we want to conclude our investigation before taking this further.

Deputy Billy Timmins: I agree with the Minister that it is important to conclude the investigation but when is that likely to occur? Was there a link between the eight fake Irish passports? If so, it should be relatively easy to trace who was responsible for falsifying them.

Will the Minister confirm that he is of the view that the finger is strongly pointing at Mossad, the Israeli secret service, as the group involved in the falsification of these passports. If so, what action does he intend to take? If the report does not come to a conclusion, what action will he take? If a country is not willing to deny the use of fake passports, does he agree it puts a serious question mark over its involvement?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I do not have an exact timeframe for the conclusion of the investigation. It will be complete in a reasonably short time from now but that is a matter for the investigating authority.

With regard to the line of investigation, the question posed by the Deputy is obvious and work has been done in endeavouring to establish whether there was a link between the six citizens involved. There does not appear to be but that was based on a preliminary assessment. One presumes the investigation has gone a little deeper.

SOCA is a credible agency and it has produced an interim report but, nonetheless, it states that there is compelling circumstantial evidence. The reason we called in the Israeli ambassador and the reason I met the Israeli Foreign Minister is that there was circumstantial evidence even then and there was clear commentary in the media. I will not pre-empt what action we might take until the investigation is concluded. One must always bear in mind in these situations that it can be quite a murky business, particularly in the intelligence world, and sometimes one should hesitate from rushing in to form immediate conclusions.

I will also be in touch with the UAE authorities who are at the centre of the investigation into the murder and we will seek their considered opinion on this.

Deputy Billy Timmins: Did the Attorney General receive any new information?

Deputy Micheál Martin: No.

Middle East Peace Process.

70. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the action he plans to recommend to his colleague ministers at the General Affairs and External Relations Council following his visit to Gaza; and the timescale for such actions in view of the urgency of the humanitarian issues involved. [13401/10]

72. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he discussed with US Secretary of State during his recent visit to Washington plans by Israel to build 1,600 homes for Jewish settlers in occupied east Jerusalem; if there are plans by the Spanish Presidency of the EU to hold an emergency meeting to discuss these recent developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13400/10]

Deputy Micheál Martin: I propose to take Questions Nos. 70 and 72 together.

My discussions in Washington with the Secretary of State Mrs. Clinton provided a welcome and timely opportunity to discuss with her the issues of the Middle East, which are high priorities for the EU and the US, both individually and as members of the international Quartet. I briefed Mrs. Clinton on my recent visit to Gaza. She updated me on the continuing US efforts to bring the Israeli and Palestinian sides together for proximity talks intended to begin a final push to reach an overall settlement between them, and we discussed how the EU can help to support these efforts. I accompanied the Taoiseach to his meeting with President Obama the following day, where I was invited to give my impressions of the situation in Gaza. I also had an opportunity later that day to discuss the situation with Vice President Joe Biden.

The announcement on 9 March of further Israeli settlement plans in East Jerusalem was an element of all these discussions. These plans, announced when Vice President Biden was in Jerusalem, led to the withdrawal of Palestinian agreement to begin proximity talks, which Senator Mitchell had announced only the day before, and attracted widespread international condemnation, including a statement which I issued on 11 March. I stated that the Israeli action called into question their genuine commitment to seek a settlement in the planned proximity talks. The United States also condemned the announcement in unusually strong language and Vice President Biden stated publicly, while still visiting Israel and the West Bank, that the action was directly contrary to the mutual trust that needed to be established to reach a settlement.

Following my visit to Gaza on 25 February, I reported to my EU colleagues at the informal Foreign Ministers meeting in Cordoba on 6 March. I stressed the unacceptable prolongation of the blockade of Gaza; the dire humanitarian consequences for its population, who cannot be held responsible for the actions of a minority of militants in their midst; and the importance of continuing international focus on these problems and on the need for a full and sustained reopening of the crossing points to human and commercial movements. I also urged other leaders, and, in particular, the new EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton, to visit Gaza themselves to see the situation and maintain the pressure on this issue. I have been pleased to note therefore that both High Representative Ashton and UN Secretary General Ban have now visited Gaza, and also that they were allowed to enter Gaza from Israel, as all political visitors should be. We are succeeding in returning a degree of international attention to this issue, but I am under no illusion that we need to keep pressing to convince Israel that its blockade of Gaza is politically counterproductive and in fact strengthens militants, as well as being morally unacceptable.

Both of these issues, the continued expansion of settlements and the blockade of Gaza, featured in the discussion on the Middle East at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on last Monday week. The main focus of EU efforts is on the political efforts, led by the Obama Administration, to commence final status negotiations. I agree with this priority, because ultimately the only complete and lasting solution to these political and humanitarian issues is to end the occupation and to achieve the goal of two states living side by side in peace and security. Despite the setbacks caused by the Israeli announcement there are still hopes that this process can be got under way in the near future, and much of our discussion in the EU has been on how we can not only help the process reach that important jumping-off point, but continue to sustain it also in the very difficult negotiations that will have to follow. It will, however, remain an important priority for this country to retain also a focus on the key humanitarian and justice issues on the ground which we believe could wreck any negotiation process, including the questions of settlements and of Gaza.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: I thank the Minister for his reply. A total of 56% of the population of Gaza are children. The Minister is aware of that. It was welcome that he visited Gaza

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and that his visit was followed by the visit of Baroness Ashton and Ban Ki-moon. A number of supplementary questions arise. I do not understand why humanitarian corridors have not been established given the degree of humanitarian urgency that exists, as outlined for example in the Goldstone report. It should be possible to deliver the basics such as food, water, cooking gas, fuel and medical care through safe corridors to the children in Gaza. It should also be possible to implement the short-term demands of the Goldstone report on electricity to enable the provision of clean water, which is not happening.

While I welcome the visit of Ban Ki-moon, it followed an ineffectual presence by his personal representative. I have been in Gaza three times since 2005. The personal representative of the United Nations was the person who was supposed to negotiate about the safe conduct of materials to UNRWA under the leadership of John Ging, which is involved in construction and the provision of housing. Those meetings did not take place and they did not succeed in ending the blockade. I was pleased with the Minister's evolution in thinking given that he appeared to say, although perhaps it is an unfair deduction, that the European Union's non-recognition of the election victory by Hamas was a mistake.

Are we now in a position where people are continually making comparisons between Northern Ireland and the situation in Gaza? What stares one in the face about Northern Ireland is that even when Senator Mitchell was there, a secretariat to the peace process existed. There is no sign of a secretariat to the peace process in the Middle East that would have provided continuity.

I agree with the Minister that the siege of Gaza is collective punishment of innocent people. I urge the General Affairs and External Relations Council to speak equally candidly. Some members of the European Union are not helpful on the Gaza issue. Having been a Minister myself I appreciate that the Minister's efforts are frequently buried between anodyne statements that come from the European Council. Last December's statement was welcome but how near we are to the ending of the siege as it affects the civilian population, in particular the 56% of the population in Gaza who are children?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I agree with much of what Deputy Higgins has outlined. The size of the population of children in Gaza is striking. The sight of children everywhere is one of the most immediately visible scenes there. What is more alarming is the number of malnourished children. In spite of the outstanding work by UNRWA the basic food supplies it makes available are not sufficient to deal with the issue. There is also a great thirst for education among families in Gaza for their children. If given half a chance society in Gaza would develop strongly and effectively.

There is no need for the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. It is an indictment of the international community that it continues. We must continue to maintain the pressure and to highlight the humanitarian situation in order to get the blockade lifted so as to allow for the provision of basic needs such as food, security and water. According to the WHO, 90% of the water is not potable. The sewage going into the sea is appalling. The list goes on. UNRWA is holding the line and doing heroic work on a range of indices, not just humanitarian but in education and civil society to maintain moderation, a secular outlook on life and to stop the spread of fundamentalism. It requires the continued and consistent support of the international community.

Deputy Higgins made a point about the importance of a secretariat or a mechanism to bank the product of earlier negotiations. The basic issues are well known for more than 20 years. Part of the difficulty is that the talks are starting afresh yet again in the aftermath of the Annapolis process and the Olmert-Abbas talks. Nothing has been banked from preceding nego-

tiations. That is not an acceptable position. Given the political volatility in the region it is a recipe for continued fragmentation and incapacity to reach a sustainable agreement. The two fundamental lessons to be learned from Northern Ireland are that first, there was a degree of continuity from the two Governments. Second, there was a political will for peace and to find a solution on behalf of all the parties at the table in Northern Ireland. It is open to question whether that exists in the Middle East in terms of all parties, but especially in terms of the position held by the Israeli Government.

Deputy Billy Timmins: Does the Minister agree that all settlement activity is illegal under international law? It is the policy of the Government and the EU that settlements that were constructed since March 2001 should be deconstructed and that there should be a freeze in settlements. Does the Minister also agree that as we speak there are continuing forced evictions in east Jerusalem? Does he further agree with the spokesperson from the White House who stated that the decision to proceed with the 1,600 houses in east Jerusalem was destructive to the peace efforts during Mr. Biden's visit? Does the Minister believe that Prime Minister Netanyahu is serious about being involved in a peace process if he carries out that activity when efforts are being made to initiate the peace process? I expect the answer to all of those questions will be "Yes".

More importantly, what people want to know is what the international community can do rather than wring its hands in anger. What steps can be taken or will someone be standing in the Chamber in 20 years raising the same issues while the humanitarian crisis and the terror of the people in Gaza and the West Bank continue?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I agree with what the Deputy has outlined in terms of the illegality of settlements which are contrary to international law. The fundamental problem is that the facts on the ground continue to feed scepticism on the Palestinian side that the Israeli Government is open to a deal. On the other hand, I put on record that when I went to Egypt, which is the subject matter of a later question, interlocutors were clearly of the view that Prime Minister Netanyahu had the capacity and was anxious to do a deal. That is the view of a number of others who are close to events in the region. Almost all are now agreed that, notwithstanding the difficulties that have been outlined in terms of the settlement announced on east Jerusalem, etc., it is preferable to get proximity talks under way under the Mitchell initiative and to have them conducted through the Mitchell team. There was scepticism about the proximity talks, including on the part of the Arab League and Mr. Amr Mussa, but they advised President Abbas to agree to them nonetheless.

One must reflect on what is happening. It seems that every time a step forward is made, there are elements in the Israeli Government who do not want any progress at all and elements who do. Certain actions, such as those taken during the visit of US Vice President Biden, seem to suggest there were even attempts to derail the commencement of proximity talks. We need to be careful that we are clear about our objectives. If we are to learn another lesson from Northern Ireland, it is that, at the very worst, there is no harm in commencing proximity talks and engagement. After commencement, the confidence, commitment and conviction of both sides can be built, thereby leading to direct negotiations over time.

The EU Ministers posed the same question as Deputy Timmins in that they asked what more the European Union can do. We were briefed last Monday by Mr. Tony Blair, the special envoy for the Quartet on the Middle East, at the EU Foreign Ministers' meeting. It was a good analysis and briefing on circumstances. The Foreign Ministers will return to the question of what the European Union can do collectively to give greater impetus to the talks process and to acknowledge the enormous contribution the European Union makes.

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Mr. Tony Blair made the point that one dividend of EU support has been the incremental achievements of the Fayyad Administration on the West Bank in terms of the development of governance, security and economic capacity under the Palestinian Authority. This has emerged directly from the aid and support of the European Union. Therefore, we should not lose sight of some positives that have emerged in recent years, although they may constitute a minority of developments overall.

Passport Applications.

71. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his plans to address delays in the passport office as a result of ongoing industrial action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13403/10]

Deputy Micheál Martin: As the Deputy is aware, customers have been experiencing disruption to passport services as a result of ongoing industrial action in the public service. The industrial action has led to a backlog of over 50,000 passport applications in the system and the application turnaround time is currently 15 to 20 working days. As a result, the Department advises it is not possible to fast-track any application other than in a case of genuine family emergency, in which case proof will be required that travel is necessitated by the death, illness or welfare of a family member. The issuing of passports in such emergencies is not affected by the industrial dispute. Furthermore, the public counters and out-of-hours services should only be used by those who have a necessity to travel for reasons of family emergency.

In the circumstances, customers are advised to check the expiry dates of passports before making any overseas travel plans and to apply in sufficient time so the new passport can be received before the intended date of travel. In response to the industrial action, the Department has temporarily suspended the requirement that applicants submit their existing passport with their application for a new passport. Where the current passport has not yet fully expired, customers may include a photocopy of the personal details pages of the current passport with their application for a new passport.

Clearly the current circumstances, whereby so many of our citizens are experiencing intolerable delays, is not acceptable. However, they will not ease until normal work practices are resumed. The passport business is seasonal throughout the world and every service must rely on the recruitment of seasonal workers and overtime. Until the current restrictions in these areas are overcome, the passport service will continue to struggle with the timely provision of passports for Irish citizens.

Without the normal flexibility, which has characterised the passport service in the past, it is simply not possible to provide these functions. I am calling on the CPSU to resume normal working arrangements as soon as possible, particularly now that there was a conclusion to the public sector talks early this morning in Croke Park under the chairmanship of Mr. Kieran Mulvey.

Following this morning's agreement, there are clear grounds for ending the current industrial action. Should this occur, my Department will move immediately to eliminate the backlog of passport applications by facilitating overtime, redeploying staff to ease bottlenecks in the process and recruiting temporary staff. With the co-operation of staff, who, let us not forget, made the passport service the efficient, customer-friendly service it was before this dispute, we can soon again have a service to be proud of.

Deputy Billy Timmins: If the Minister expects normal working practices to resume, when does he believe this will occur? Although I am aware the number of passport machines in

operation is immaterial to the difficulties currently being experienced, will the Minister tell me the number of machines nationally and their work status?

The KPMG report on the passport office, issued in 2008, requested that a value-for-money review be carried out on the passport service. It recommended also that the office consider the concept of outsourcing the facility. The services of some countries, including Denmark and The Netherlands, and part of the British service are outsourced to private companies. Has the Minister considered this option? Has he had any discussions with a view to permitting our European colleagues to facilitate Irish passport holders whose passports may be out of date? What is the legal position on airlines that request a passport for travel to Britain? I am bearing Air Ryan in mind.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Ryanair.

Deputy Billy Timmins: Air Ryan, Ryanair — maybe it is a subliminal Freudian slip.

Deputy Micheál Martin: What was the Deputy's question?

Deputy Billy Timmins: It is on the legality of airlines requesting passports.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I refer to the question before that.

Deputy Billy Timmins: The Minister is very hard on me. I am like Patrick Kavanagh in that I knew at the time I was writing it. To see it on paper——

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is on the record in that case.

As I said in my opening remarks, I call on the CPSU to call off the action immediately. We concluded the public sector talks that were under way at Croke Park. In that context, there is every reason for the union to instruct its members to call off the action. If this happened, we could return to normal activity within a matter of days.

The key issue for us would be to recruit the temporary staff. We have sanctioned the recruitment of up to 50 people. There are 50 people who could have jobs, albeit temporary, in the coming days and weeks if the action were suspended. This would benefit all those seeking passports and help get rid of the backlog. Overtime would also be available. There has been a ban on overtime in recent months. Overtime would help eliminate the backlog relatively quickly and assist in returning to the turnaround times for which the passport service was known. The passport service had a very good record prior to the industrial dispute.

With regard to the KPMG report, a value-for-money audit was carried out. As part thereof, it was recommended that a review of the question of outsourcing take place. That review is under way. That will not deal with the current issues or backlog. The review recommended in the value-for-money audit commenced prior to the industrial action.

Outsourcing gives rise to issues, principally security issues, as referred to in a previous parliamentary question. We will await the outcome of the review and inform the Deputy and House of the results.

Deputy Billy Timmins: How many passport machines are there nationally? Did the Minister seek any agreement with our EU colleagues such that the life of existing passports of Irish citizens could be extended so those citizens could travel within the European Union? What is the position on airlines requesting passports for travel to Britain?

While I agree with the Minister that the passport office has provided an excellent service, what has happened in the past few weeks is outrageous. What has happened in the past few

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weeks is outrageous. Will the Minister confirm when the review by the office that is looking into the concept of outsourcing, actually commenced?

Deputy Micheál Martin: We have about three specialised machines that are, for security reasons, unique to the country from the viewpoint of manufacture. Contingency planning is involved in the event of breakdown or whatever.

In terms of extending the validity of all existing passports, again there are standards with regard to international travel documents which limit passports to ten years, and therefore it is not possible to provide such an extension. The key issue in that regard was acceptability in the US and elsewhere. There were extensive negotiations, too, with the airlines, including Ryanair, but its security considerations did not facilitate matters. It said it could not waive the security arrangements it has in place to accommodate, for example, travel to Britain. That was a matter it had to take on board in terms of its security policy.

Deputy Billy Timmins: When did the review commence?

Deputy Micheál Martin: It was some time back. I can get the exact date for the Deputy and I do not have a date for conclusion, as yet.

Revised Estimates.

73. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs why the Revised Estimate volume published by the Department of Finance reveals that Vote 29 covering international co-operation details that spending on administration will rise by 9% in 2010 while actual overseas aid spending will be reduced by 6.4%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13399/10]

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Revised Estimate volume published by the Department of Finance last February shows a gross allocation to Vote 29 — international co-operation — of €536 million. A further estimated €135 million is set to come from other Departments which, together with Ireland's share of the EU Development Cooperation budget, brings the total 2010 estimated allocation for Official Development Assistance to €671 million. The 2010 ODA allocation therefore involves a relatively small reduction of €25 million, or about 3%, on the 2009 level. Based on current estimates this level of funding will stabilise Ireland's ODA at 0.52% of GNP. We also expect that this level of funding will ensure we exceed our commitment as an EU Member State to spend 0.51% of GNP on ODA in 2010.

Of the total Irish Aid budget, €35.2 million is allocated to the administration subheads within Vote 29. This is 2% down from the 2009 allocation of €35.8 million. The final outturn for expenditure on administration in 2009 the total spend was in the region of €32.2 million, a saving of €3 million on the estimate. This saving was delivered through prudent management of the administrative budget. We will again make every endeavour to effect further saving on the administrative budget in 2010 as we did successfully in 2009.

The administration subheads cover the management, audit, evaluation, ongoing monitoring and administrative oversight of the aid programme, both at headquarters and in the field. The administrative budget is the key instrument for quality assurance and effective delivery of the aid programme. The allocation for these subheads is the key requirement to ensure the effective delivery of the aid programme in some of the most difficult operating environments in the world. The administrative budget is essential to ensuring proper planning, audit, monitoring and evaluation of the aid programme.

Reviews of our aid programme have placed it among the best in the world. However, the importance of overall management and evaluation capacity has been emphasised, including by the Audit Committee. Therefore it is essential, even in these difficult economic times, to ensure adequate resources to manage the aid programme to the highest levels of accountability.

Deputy John Deasy: This is an issue I raised with the Minister last year, in committee. It does not sit well with the situation that some of the NGOs find themselves in, right now, when they tell us, continually, that they are laying people off in our programme countries, hundreds in many cases. They have had to slash their administrative budgets by so much while at the same time they have lost at least 20% to 25% of the income they would get from the public.

It does not sit right when one gets the figures — I got those from the Department's website — and sees that administration is going up, while at the same time the overall aid budget has gone down. I do not argue with the Minister as regards the need for planning, monitoring and auditing, which all require an administrative budget. At the same time, however, it is very hard to reconcile an increase in administration within this area. It is almost as if the Government sector was working in a different paradigm when it comes to the private sector and the NGO sector with regard to the financial cost of administration.

Deputy Micheál Martin: As a percentage of the overall budget, the NGO sector does better in this country than in almost any other within the OECD. I believe that up to 20% of our budget goes to the NGOs, which is very high. That is something that should be acknowledged.

In terms of the administrative budget here, from about 2007-10, and particularly from 2008 to date, it has been hovering around the €35.708 million or €35.8 million mark, but the actual outturn was lower. The Deputy is comparing the figures to the outturn, not the original Estimate, and we are determined to bring in the administration budget again below the Estimate for 2010, so that the outturn at the end of the year is lower than what is actually provided for.

Deputy Deasy has been one of the strongest advocates for good governance of the aid programme. One of the criticisms of our programme in recent years was the fact that it grew very significantly over the last seven to eight years without any significant corresponding administrative increase. There was an administrative increase, but not at the levels the increased budgets, perhaps, necessitated.

The administrative budget is the engine of governance as regards this programme, which is still relatively large in budgetary terms. I should also emphasise that we compare favourably to the DAC average of 4.4%. To give the Deputy an example of what other OECD Development Assistance Committee donor countries spend on administration, as a percentage of total ODA in 2008, Finland is at 6.4%, Denmark is 4.9%, Sweden is 4.8% and Norway is 5.3%. Ireland is at 3.8%, so we are well below those countries in terms of the total OFA allocation actually spent on administration.

Other Questions.

Haiti Earthquake.

74. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of personnel, including those from the Rapid Response Corps, that he has sent to assist with the relief effort in Haiti; the areas of expertise of these personnel; the length of time they will be available to continue with the relief effort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13248/10]

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Government's response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti on 12 January has been multi-faceted and effective, involving the airlifting of emergency supplies, funding for the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies, and the deployment of personnel both from Irish Aid, within the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Irish Aid-managed rapid response corps.

In the days immediately following the earthquake, my colleague, the Minister of State with responsibility for overseas development, Deputy Peter Power and I despatched a technical team of four personnel to Haiti to undertake an analysis of priority needs and to make recommendations for action by Irish Aid in the medium and longer term. The team, which comprised three officials from Irish Aid and an engineer from the Defence Forces, spent five days on the ground. Their recommendations are informing our decisions on the role Ireland should play in the relief and recovery effort in Haiti.

In addition to the Irish Aid team, the Government has deployed seven members of the rapid response corps to Haiti — the largest number deployed to a single emergency since the initiative was established following the 2004 Asian tsunami. Corps members are highly-specialised volunteers who travel to crisis situations at the request of our UN and other humanitarian partners.

Four corps members — a civil engineer, an electrical engineer, a telecommunications technician and an IT expert — have been assigned to the World Food Programme, while two logisticians have been deployed to work with Concern and Goal respectively. A seventh member, a retired army officer, is working as civil-military co-ordinator with the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA. An eighth will deploy next week to work with OCHA as a protection officer, dealing with the complex issue of sexual abuse and exploitation among the disaster-affected population. These deployments are for up to six months.

Other Corps members remain on standby and we expect further deployments in the weeks and months ahead.

Deputy John Deasy: Perhaps I could broaden the question. The Minister will be aware that many people, due in no small part to the number who have lost their jobs over the past two years, have become a great deal more interested in volunteering abroad in our programme countries for groups and organisations such as the rapid response corps and NGOs that are involved in volunteer activities in Africa and elsewhere, where we have and do not have a large presence. How successful is the Department's interaction with these groups? Should the Department become more involved with these volunteer groups? Has there been an increase in the interaction between these groups and the Department?

There are two sides to this, as I discovered since I have been involved in the aid programme. In some cases it can be a very expensive proposition to put somebody in the field. If the person has not been given the proper training, it can use up valuable resources when they arrive. I have been informed that the biggest problem in the programme countries is that it is desperately expensive to put somebody in a specialised position, be that helping a government to deal with its health programme or otherwise. We are dealing with a different issue here but a number of different groups have emerged in recent years which deal with volunteerism in our programme countries and elsewhere. Is a relationship with them evolving within the Department?

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is. To be clear, this is a different matter from the issue of the rapid response corps. The lesson learned from the tsunami was that the last thing one needs in

a disaster is hordes of volunteers, inappropriately skilled, landing at the scene. They can be as much a hindrance as a help. I do not mean that in an intolerant way but inappropriate volunteers and inappropriate equipment and supplies are the last things one needs. The rapid response corps is about developing specialists and people who can be of use, when the needs assessment has been carried out. It is also about offering complementarity and co-ordination to the other donors. I am quite taken by the French proposal that better co-ordination at European Union level is required, with perhaps a Europe-wide inventory of what specific skills each country can bring to the table so we are not all copying each other and can more effectively and speedily bring the required disciplines to bear.

In terms of the broader issue of volunteerism, the Department and Irish Aid have refined and provided for a more sophisticated approach to volunteering through the establishment of the volunteer centre and particularly through the code of practice for volunteers. This puts strong emphasis on training and places obligations on existing and new NGOs to accord with the code of practice, to be registered properly and so forth. We need to keep a constant watch on this situation to ensure that people who volunteer are treated well and have maximum security and protection, that their experience is an enriching one and that they do not become disillusioned quickly. I have been to the volunteering centre, met many NGOs and have spoken at many events and this is something that exercises Irish Aid and the Department very much.

This country is fortunate to have many people who wish to volunteer. The most exciting aspect I have witnessed in recent times is the degree to which second level schools in Ireland have become more engaged with the Irish Aid programme, the Third World and the plight of people living in the Third World. Schools are now sending students on structured programmes to visit these countries on a relatively regular basis. A number of schools are involved in the WorldWise programme. It is important that schools become involved in that programme because it guides the teachers and provides materials for them. The importance of that programme for future society is that we will create a significant community of people in Ireland who are positively orientated towards intervening effectively and on a sustainable basis in the Third World. It is one of the better things I have seen in recent times.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: I support Deputy Deasy's suggestions regarding volunteering. However, it should not be left to each NGO to structure the experience of volunteers. There is great space for an agency to identify the essential features of a volunteering experience. We might not say it, but we know the NGOs differ with regard to the experience they offer volunteers. It should not be left a casual matter.

There are areas in which we could be far more involved. In Haiti, for example, elections are due to take place. We have a very antiquated roster structure for observing elections. I am on the roster and I am regularly asked, at just a week's or two weeks' notice, to go to some country such as a Spanish speaking country. In the places I have been sent I noticed ex-county managers, ex-county secretaries, a large number of former gardaí and so forth. This community is no doubt gifted and has rich experience but they are not exclusive of all the experience that is available in our society. This could be an area of expertise. There are elections taking place somewhere on the planet every day. Observing them is a skill in which people could be trained. Canada's human rights centre produces a handbook on election monitoring for long-term and short-term observers.

Deputy John Deasy: We will not send our bankers there.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Well, there are places I could suggest.

We should examine this issue. The Minister mentioned Europe, which prompted me to ask this question. Getting on to the European roster is governed by one's presence on the Irish

[Deputy Michael D. Higgins.]

roster. Different member countries have different places, hence one encounters somebody from the European Parliament who heads a delegation, as was the case when I was in Cambodia. There are skills everywhere but this is an area of expertise in which we are very welcome. We could train people to be regularly available, and we should not confine it to the professions I mentioned and for which we all have such a high regard.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is a very good suggestion. The Institute of Public Administration, IPA, might be in a position to be of assistance in terms of the training and education aspects and developing modules that could be of use.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Yes, it could.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Even if one is a very effective county manager in managing a multi-seat election in Ireland, that is a unique experience but it might not lend itself to some of the new post-electoral situations that emerge in conflict societies. It is a very good suggestion. We must also examine civil governance capacity. One of the big problems in Haiti is that almost the entire government and its administration were wiped out by the earthquake. Hence, basic administrative and governance capacity was in short supply. Perhaps that is an area in which we and other countries could have been stronger in terms of supplying either former civil servants or seconding people to help administer the situation.

Overseas Development Aid.

75. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the way the implementation of the recommendations of the hunger task force report will be affected by the reduction of 16% in spending on global hunger initiatives in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13251/10]

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Government is committed to giving effect to the recommendations of the report of the hunger task force which we commissioned and which was launched by the Taoiseach at the UN in New York in September 2008 in the presence of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. In particular, we continue to work on the three priority areas identified, namely, increasing smallholder agricultural productivity in Africa; targeting under-nutrition, especially maternal and infant; and promoting governance and leadership action on tackling global hunger.

Combating hunger is one of the cornerstones of our development programme and our foreign policy. We are making good progress in implementing the recommendations of the hunger task force report across the overseas development assistance programme funded and delivered through my Department. Ireland's special envoy on hunger, Kevin Farrell, will report on delivery against our objectives later this year. We have undertaken to direct approximately 20% of my Department's Irish Aid budget at hunger and hunger related actions by 2012. We are firmly on track to meet this target notwithstanding the current difficult economic circumstances.

Irish Aid funding for global hunger initiatives, including pro-poor agricultural research, is expected to reach €9.7 million this year. Global hunger initiatives are just one area of the overall response to hunger. Additional resources are now being focused on hunger reduction initiatives in our programme countries, particularly Malawi and Tanzania.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

These and many other interventions in the food security and hunger areas, funded by Ireland, are clear demonstrations of our leadership on the hunger issue. This leadership has been recog-

nised internationally, including by the United Nations and other key hunger donors such as the United States.

I have said many times that it is unacceptable that 1 billion people go to bed each evening without proper nourishment. We established the hunger task force before food and hunger was put back firmly on the international agenda by the food crisis. Our hunger task force report has played a role in keeping hunger in the public eye internationally. We are doing our utmost to influence the hunger agenda internationally. Next September we will co-host with the US a major hunger event in the margins of the UN summit on the millennium development goals. This is a practical example of Ireland shaping and influencing the international response to the scandal of world hunger.

Hunger, in all its manifestations and complexity, will not be easily eliminated. We have a clear international target to halve the number of hungry people by 2015. This will be real progress if achieved. To make this happen will necessitate the commitment and will of the international community, combined with an equal determination by the governments of the developing world. The Government will ensure that Ireland will play its role in all efforts to eradicate the scourge of hunger.

Deputy John Deasy: Will the Minister elucidate where the specific cuts outlined in the budget for the hunger task force will be made in the context of the implementation of the three key measures he has just spelled out?

Deputy Micheál Martin: The main point is that we are on target to reach the target of 20% of our overall budget being spent on hunger. The other point is that it is not just in that programme that the money on hunger is spent. In Malawi, for example, the entire programme is now focused on hunger, while in Tanzania, we have been asked by all the other donors to become the lead donor on agriculture. Notwithstanding the broader reductions, hunger has been identified and prioritised as the key issue for our programme. We have a clear international target to achieve that result and we are well on the way to achieving the 20% target.

Deputy John Deasy: There is broad agreement within Fine Gael as to the direction. The Minister referred to Tanzania, which is a very good example in that we are becoming the head donor in the area of agriculture. It makes good sense for the public as well because they see it as a natural area for Ireland to lead and show direction.

What concerns me are the cuts in regard to implementation in the three areas specifically outlined by the Minister. How will we reach those targets if that kind of cut is implemented?

Deputy Micheál Martin: Those three targeted areas covered the programme country budgets as well. As I said, we have prioritised the hunger aspect. There may be other aspects of the programme apart from hunger that will not do as well as the area of hunger, given the focus on it, but increasing smallholder agricultural productivity will not suffer, for example.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: In addition to the three priority areas the Minister outlined, is much consideration being given to the role of GM foods in regard to tackling global hunger? I ask this because we are all conscious of the reality that there is a shortage in food production, so it is not simply a question of investment and funding but also a question of production. Has the Minister a view on this issue?

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Governments of each region and country have to make their decisions in regard to the issue of GM food, as does the European Union. In many underdeveloped parts of the world, by any observation, GM could very well provide part of the solution. However, our assistance concerns the more conventional form of crop production, improved

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

agricultural techniques and improving the lot of the smallholder agricultural groupings, which are made up largely of women in smallholdings across Africa. GM is a great distance from that reality. It is a wider issue that is dealt with at global level and by Governments, and each Government will take its own position on it. It is not a part of this agenda.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: I will outline a Labour Party difference on this matter. Given that the impact of GM provision in regard to Africa is usually construed in terms of its adding to the volume of food that might be available rather than the production of food, given the available evidence in regard to the climate changes between, for example, the major rains and the short rains and given the fact most communities save the end part of their seed for the future crop, it would be disastrous for many African countries if they were in possession of blind seed. It would, in fact, be a recipe for starvation.

Given the increase in food productivity in West Africa, does the Minister agree that 80% of the increase is being brought about by women who actually practice in the fields but who do not own anything? I believe the Minister will agree it is a matter for each country to be able to respect the integrity of its producing population by not having blind seed or committing themselves to patents to purchase seed, the patents of which are owned by multinationals abroad.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I agree. On this issue, I refer Deputy Creighton to the hunger task force report. In our recent discussions with the US Secretary of State, Mrs. Clinton, the focus was on how we can enhance agricultural crop production techniques for smallholders, the vast majority of whom are women. In an earlier portfolio, I commissioned the Chief Scientific Adviser to prepare a paper on GM. It is good reading.

Deputy P. J. Sheehan: What about the small farmers of this country?

Deputy Micheál Martin: The small farmers of west Cork produce a robust and resilient crop.

Written Answers follow Adjournment Debate.

Adjournment Debate Matters.

An Ceann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 21 and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Michael Ring — the proposed flood mitigation works in the Roundfort-Hollymount area of County Mayo; (2) Deputy Paul Kehoe — to ask the Minister for Social and Family Affairs to immediately reverse her decision to withdraw the State contributory pensions from self-employed spouses who were granted entitlement to a State contributory pension under section 110(1) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005; (3) Deputy John O'Mahony — the difficulties encountered by farmers on Clare Island and other islands off the Mayo coast in respect of REPS; (4) Deputy Joe McHugh — the need to revise the rules in regard to the areas in which boats of 15 m and smaller can fish; (5) Deputy Pat Rabbitte — the special report of the Ombudsman relating to the lost at sea scheme; (6) Deputy Pádraic McCormack — the HSE proposals for the future of St. Francis nursing home, Newcastle, Galway; (7) Deputy Joe Costello — the leasing of premises by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform at Wolfe Tone Street, Dublin 1; (8) Deputy Ulick Burke — to indicate the level of humanitarian support provided to date to property owners and householders three months after the major flooding of 2009; (9) Deputy Frank Feighan — the outstanding report concerning turf-cutting in designated bogs; (10) Deputy John Browne — the need for additional classrooms at Gorey community school, County Wexford; (11) Deputy Bernard Allen — the proposal to transfer

the acute orthopaedic unit from St. Mary's Hospital, Gurranabraher, to the South Infirmery with the consequent knock-on effect of down-grading St. Mary's Hospital and the potential loss to that hospital of the long-promised regional rehabilitation unit; (12) Deputy Tom Hayes — the re-configuration of health services affecting South Tipperary General Hospital; (13) Deputy David Stanton — to ask the Minister for Education and Science the action she is taking to make provision for 1,863 additional second level students in the Midleton area by 2020; (14) Deputy Deirdre Clune — the need to restore the excessive loss of teaching posts to Togher girls national school and Togher boys national school in Cork; and (15) Deputy Michael McGrath — the need to tackle the problem of litter and illegal dumping throughout the country.

The matters raised by Deputies Joe Costello, Michael McGrath, Joe McHugh and John Browne have been selected for discussion.

Leaders' Questions.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Today, we are expecting what amounts to the fourth bailout of the Irish banking sector. We had the announcement of the bank guarantee, the recapitalisation announcement and the NAMA announcement. Each of those announcements was, in the words of the Government, designed to get a wall of cash flowing, to sort out the banks and to make credit available for business and SMEs throughout the country, but this has not happened. The impact of the failure of the Government's banking strategy has been that more than 430,000 people are now out of work and we have an unemployment rate that is twice the European average.

Yesterday, the Minister for Finance said that today was the moment for the State to take decisive action to sort out the banking sector once and for all — those were his words yesterday. Will the Taoiseach confirm that the Government has backed off on its stated intention of recapitalisation of Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland today and that, in doing so, it has again prolonged and deepened the uncertainty about the future of both banks?

Second, will the Taoiseach confirm that the Government has decided today to inject a further €8.3 billion of taxpayers' commitment into Anglo Irish Bank? Can he give the House and, as a consequence, the people of Ireland a guarantee that this will be the last such injection into what is a dead bank that is not in a position to lend any money? Will he give me those two guarantees?

The Taoiseach: First, the Deputy is incorrect in what he says in regard to the main banks. I understand a briefing has been provided to the parties and I would be surprised if that is his understanding of what is about to take place. Obviously, I do not wish to anticipate the statement that will be made. The markets do not close until 4.30 p.m. and I would have thought the importance of respecting that would have been obvious to everybody.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Anglo has been closed for two years.

The Taoiseach: Second, what we are doing today is to provide, as a result of the independent Financial Regulator's requirement to have best practice in terms of the emerging capital ratios required for investor confidence in our banks, that they would be fit for purpose and that the capitalisation that is required arising from that will in fact reflect the maintenance of capital ratios which will enable us to move forward in our banking system.

What is clearly the case is that the banking policy, if one could call it that, which the Deputy has continued to espouse in regard to one of those banks would have meant having to find €65 billion of funding immediately because of his refusal to deal with the situation in a rational way. It is because of this that the Government will be coming forward at 5 p.m., through the

[The Taoiseach.]

Minister for Finance, with a comprehensive statement about putting our banking system onto a proper footing because the NAMA operation has enabled us to deal with banks in a differentiated way. It has enabled us to bring forward the losses with which the banks have to deal. As a result, the recapitalisation programme can go ahead, based on the assessment of the independent Financial Regulator.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I asked the Taoiseach two questions and he did not answer either of them. The Minister for Finance said yesterday that today, Tuesday, is the moment for the State to take decisive action to sort out the banking sector once and for all. We have been led to believe, as has the nation, and as is reflected in the activity in Bank of Ireland and AIB shares, that the question of recapitalisation and the exposure of taxpayers' commitment, was to be answered today. I understand from the briefing that this is not now the case. This is another example of having bottled it again in front of the banks. I am aware that their plans are before Europe.

In respect of my second question, the Government proposes putting €8.3 billion of taxpayers' commitment into Anglo Irish Bank today. Will the Taoiseach confirm that this is the extent of what will happen this year? I am led to believe that the Taoiseach may have to come back with a further injection of €10 billion for Anglo Irish Bank. Is this the Government's information and intention? If that is the case, this dead bank on its own will cost the taxpayer €40 billion, as a result of recapitalisation, the €21 billion from NAMA, €8.3 billion today and a further €10 billion. The Taoiseach is strangling the next generation and tying the hands of future Governments. He is imposing a levy of €27,000 on every family. This is because of the debts run up by Mr. Seán FitzPatrick and his management group in Anglo Irish Bank. Is it true that the Government intends to put in €8.3 billion today, to be followed by a further €10 billion some time later during the year? The Taoiseach committed to writing whatever cheque was necessary and this is becoming only too true, except that he has transferred the debt from Anglo Irish Bank on to the backs of the taxpayers. What is the extent of the commitment to Anglo Irish Bank at the taxpayers' expense?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is well aware that the Minister for Finance will come to the House at 5 p.m. to divulge those details to the House. The Deputy obtained a briefing for that purpose. The Deputy refuses to say that the Fine Gael policy on Anglo Irish Bank would cost——

Deputy Enda Kenny: I asked about the Taoiseach's policy.

The Taoiseach: ——more than €65 billion in funding which will have to be repaid immediately to depositors and other providers of funding at the ECB. The policies we are proceeding with are the policies necessary to make the banking system fit for purpose. That is what we have set out to do and that is what we will do.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: It is twice the bail-out of Anglo alone.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is €40 billion.

The Taoiseach: What Deputy Kenny seeks to put forward would greatly expose the taxpayer to a far greater degree of indebtedness than what he suggests.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Today is a day that will be remembered for a very long time. It is the day that crystallises more than a decade of mismanagement of our economy and bad government by Fianna Fáil. It is very easy for the Taoiseach to stand here and point across the

floor of the House and ask about the Opposition's policies. We are here today because of the Taoiseach's policies. Today is the day that the taxpayer gets the invoice for the bail-out of the banks. There will be a press conference at 4.30 p.m.. The Financial Regulator and the Governor of the Central Bank will make a statement and the Minister for Finance will make a statement in the House at 5 p.m. There has been considerable speculation in the press about what is likely to be in those statements. I reckon it will come somewhere, all told, close to €40,000 million. This will be the price that the taxpayer will have to pay for the bail-out of the banks. This is more than three times the income tax take for a full year. It will be €26,000 for every taxpayer. It would finance the primary education system for 13 years and pay non-contributory pensions for 40 years.

Fianna Fáil rode to power on the back of a promise that it would be payback time. It is payback time now. The problem is, it is the banks who are getting paid and working families who are doing the paying. For example, a family living somewhere in County Kildare would have bought a home at a high price at the height of the property boom. That family is now being asked to pay four times and in four different ways. Today they are being asked to pay a higher mortgage for a home that is now worth less than the mortgage. They are being asked to pay more in taxation over the next, probably, several decades, to finance the transfer of the bad debts from property developers to NAMA. Their pension fund is being raided to pay for the recapitalisation of the banks because the banks had it both ways; they were lending simultaneously over the odds to the property speculators on the one hand who were driving up the house prices and lending the money to the people who had to pay the high house prices in the first place. That same family is probably paying already through pay cuts, through job loss or through loss of business.

Approximately €40,000 million is a great deal of money, not counting the negative equity on homes and not counting the collateral damage caused to the economy. Instead, the Taoiseach comes in here today, has a whack again at the Opposition parties and brings in a motion later this evening about clapping the Government on the back.

It is time the Taoiseach accepted responsibility for what has happened to the banking system and as a consequence to our economy. Will the Taoiseach, today, finally take responsibility for what he has done?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy will be aware that we have had a global banking crisis for the past two years. He will be aware there are 18 EU states who have recapitalised their banks to the tune of €300 billion. He will be aware there are bank guarantees to the tune of trillions of euro in European banking. It is time we recognised that Ireland could not be immune from what happened such as the fall of Lehman Brothers and the complete meltdown in the international financial system. What this Government has been seeking to achieve since this crisis emerged has been to avoid a meltdown of the Irish financial system which would have devastated this economy completely. This Government took decisions such as the guarantee which was fundamental to making sure we did not have a disorderly failure of our banking system two weeks after the disorderly failure in Lehman Brothers in the United States and with the impact this caused. Those are the facts.

The motivation of this Government at all times is to see how we can ensure that the Irish banking system is fit for purpose. Many complaints are made here, week in, week out, about the need to put our banking system back into order. The NAMA solution, an asset management agency solution, brought forward by the Government has been referred to in the international press as a way forward for this country and an example to other countries to extricate themselves from the problems continually bedevilling the financial markets and financial institutions of other countries. It makes the banks face up to the losses. It ensures that the capitalisation

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of the banks can take place in a way that provides investor confidence to get banks functioning for the economy and to try to maintain jobs. This is what we are seeking to do.

Deputy Denis Naughten: Pull the other one.

The Taoiseach: The country will be not be immune from the €300 million in recapitalisations in other European Union countries. Trillions of euros are being placed under guarantee simply because the international financial system practically collapsed. Capital had been wiped out and we need to put the banking system back into place. At 5 p.m., the Minister for Finance will come into the House to outline in a comprehensive way how we can achieve that objective and rebuild a banking system that is fit for purpose.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: This is the fifth time we have heard this speech from the Taoiseach. When I first raised problems related to banking with him, he told the House that the Irish banking system was fine. There was no problem and it was well capitalised and fit for purpose. One of the most viewed videos on YouTube is of the Taoiseach making the same argument while standing in the New York Stock Exchange. He made the same speech in September 2008 when he told us we should pass the bank guarantee scheme and that it would not cost the taxpayer any money. Now we know, however.

The Taoiseach made the same speech when he proposed the nationalisation of Anglo Irish Bank after the Government had provided a guarantee in respect of it and again reassured us that if there was going to be a cost, it would not be significant. By my estimate, Anglo Irish Bank alone is now going to cost somewhere in the region of €22 billion.

We heard the same speech again when the Taoiseach announced the establishment of NAMA and told us the haircut would be 30%. As it is now after 4.30 p.m., I am not breaking embargo when I say the Financial Regulator and the Governor of the Central Bank advised Deputy Burton and I earlier today that the average haircut would be 47%. That is a long way in a few months from the 30% figure provided by the Taoiseach.

An Ceann Comhairle: Has the Deputy a question?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Today, the Taoiseach tells us it was all because of an international banking crisis. Yes, there was such a crisis but the problem with the Irish banking system and economy is that it has suffered a double whammy, of which the Taoiseach is the second. The Irish economy and banking system is not only affected by an international crisis which has to be addressed but it is also in a unique crisis because of the policies pursued by his Government working hand-in-glove with property developers and bankers which created the property bubble and over-priced houses. The result is that working families in this country are struggling with properties that are valued at less than their mortgages, which in turn have increased significantly. The Taoiseach is now presenting them with a massive bill of €40 billion which they will have to pay through their taxes. It is time that he acknowledged responsibility and said “sorry” to the people of Ireland.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: I have outlined the facts of the matter to Deputy Gilmore on a number of occasions even as he continued to put forward his view of the world. I have no intention today of looking back because I dealt with the issue many times in response to his repeated mantra. Had we pursued policies other than the ones we introduced when the crisis started in August 2008, when we had a total——

Deputy Joan Burton: On St. Patrick's Day 2008, when the Taoiseach was in Manilla, Anglo Irish Bank's share price collapsed.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach to continue without interruption.

The Taoiseach: When Lehman Brothers collapsed——

Deputy Joan Burton: Bear Stearns.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton, please.

The Taoiseach: I will try one more time. When the situation arose in 2008, this Government took the decisions that were necessary to deal with it. Had we pursued the policies proposed by the Labour Party, we would have seen the collapse of the Irish economy. That is a fact because Labour Party Deputies did not support the State guarantee which was necessary to avoid such an implosion of the financial system.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Anglo Irish Bank, the systemic bank.

The Taoiseach: It is a bit rich to hear a lecture from Deputy Gilmore on the matter. We put forward an estimate at that time because, as we pointed out——

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Oh, yes.

The Taoiseach: I ask Deputy Higgins to let me answer the question. We made the point that every loan would be examined on a case-by-case basis. The contention from the opposite side of the House was that it would be a sweetheart deal and the NAMA operation would not have rigour or due diligence. According to Labour Party Deputies, it was all part of a scam. We ensured that NAMA's valuations took account of subsequent reductions in property prices.

Deputy Joan Burton: The ECB demanded that.

The Taoiseach: This has also ensured that the quality of security will be reflected in any valuation undertaken. We made clear at the time that it could only be done on the basis of a loan-by-loan valuation process, which differentiated between the various institutions and the loans they held. This is very different from the Labour Party's proposal for peremptory nationalisation without State guarantee, which I am clearly stating would have brought about an implosion of the system because——

Deputy Joan Burton: They are being nationalised now.

The Taoiseach: ——without a State guarantee, we would have been unable to offer confidence that the Government was standing behind the system when it was in imminent peril. That was the situation then but, as the Minister will make clear at 5 p.m., we have made the response that is now necessary to ensure we have a banking system that provides the prospect of economic recovery and serves the economy. Despite all the revisions in which Deputy Gilmore wants to engage, the policy decisions he proposed at a critical time for this country were the wrong ones and would have been catastrophic for the economy in the context of the decisions we had to take.

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 Bernard Allen: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of local and national importance, namely, the relocation of the orthopaedic unit at St. Mary's hospital from Gurranabraher, County Cork, to South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital and the consequent downgrading of the former.

Deputy Tom Hayes: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of local and national importance, namely, the reconfiguration of health services at South Tipperary General Hospital. Approximately 12,000 people in Tipperary South attended a rally to support the hospital because the retention of the vital services it provides is a source of significant concern to people in the constituency. The hospital employs 800 people and more than €40 million has been invested over the past ten years to reconfigure the services provided by Our Lady's hospital, Cashel, and South Tipperary General Hospital. This is a busy and efficient hospital which provides essential services to a catchment area with a population of 150,000.

Deputy Frank Feighan: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the appointment by the High Court of two provisional administrators to Quinn Group. I ask the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to put the facts to the Dáil in order to give confidence to tens of thousands of Irish policy holders and, most importantly, to allay the fears of the thousands of people employed by this company along the Border.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Ba mhaith liom an Dáil a chur ar athló chun an cheist rí-thábhachtach seo a phlé, the failure of the Government to address the dangers posed to our communities by the proliferation of head shops, of which there are now more than 100. Ireland has the highest number of head shops per head of population of any country in Europe. Not only is great harm caused by the unregulated sale of toxic psycho-active substances through shops, the Internet and home delivery services but people's lives and property are also under threat as a result of the arson and pipe bomb attacks which these shops have attracted. There is an urgent need for comprehensive legislation to fast-track the prohibition of harmful and poisonous substances and establish an appropriate infrastructure for the control of all non-medicinal psycho-active substances in the interest of safeguarding public health.

Death of Former Clerk Assistant to the Dáil: Expressions of Sympathy.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before proceeding to the Order of Business, I ask the House to join me in conveying our sympathy to the family of Aidan Doyle, a former clerk assistant to the Dáil who died at the weekend. Aidan, who gave distinguished service in many areas of the Dáil from 1950 until his retirement in January 1987, is fondly remembered by Members who served here at the time and was greatly respected by the staff of the Houses for his professionalism and expertise in Dáil procedure.

Order of Business.

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 1, Finance Bill 2010 — Recommendation from the Seanad and No. a8, motion re Stability of Banking System. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. tonight and business shall be interrupted not later than 10 p.m. The proceedings in respect of No. a8 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 10 p.m. tonight and the following arrangements shall apply: the opening speech of the Minister for Finance shall not exceed 45 minutes, the opening speech of spokespersons for Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin, shall not exceed 40 minutes in each case; the speech of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case; Members may share time; and a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed ten minutes.

Private Members' business, which shall be No. 72 — motion *re* Education: Special Needs, shall be taken tomorrow at 5.30 p.m. and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after three hours on that day. Parliamentary Questions next for answer by the Taoiseach on EU matters shall be taken on the same day as the statements on EU Council meeting, Brussels, scheduled to be taken on Wednesday, 31 March and shall be moved to be taken first as ordinary Oral Questions to the Taoiseach on that day.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are four proposals to be put to the House today. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 1 agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 2, *a8*, motion *re* Stability of Banking System, agreed to?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I have a question I wish to ask the Taoiseach. My understanding was that when the arrangements were originally being made for the proposal that there would be statements on banking today it was intended that there would be an opportunity to put questions to the Minister for Finance for reply. The original proposal was that this would take place before the end of the debate. Then the Government decided to introduce a motion congratulating itself at the end of that debate and that matter must now be dealt with. My understanding is there is an arrangement for questions on the banking situation later in the week. Will the Taoiseach clarify those arrangements?

The Taoiseach: I refer to the issue about to be taken now. It was suggested that some Members might prefer a substantive motion rather than statements and we are accommodating this. If Members wish to have some part of Thursday devoted to further statements on the matter I would be glad to try to arrange it through the Whips. The possibility of a question and answer session at the end of the statements is fine but because of the market-sensitive nature of this issue we must vote tonight such that people will know a decision has been taken and is effective. While powers are already vested in the existing legislation and the initial request from the Opposition was for a statement to be brought to the House on the occasion of decisions taken by Government in this regard, the Government is trying to accommodate other views in terms of tabling a motion rather than simply making statements. Further, we are prepared to arrange a couple of hours for a debate on the statements, perhaps on Thursday, and to finalise this with 20 minutes or whatever of questions and answers to the Minister as a means of concluding the debate. That would be an offer we could make in an effort to get on with the business.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Under the legislation passed by the House, the Minister for Finance has very extensive powers in regard to these matters. The House is expected to do some business in regard to these phenomenal sums of money in a manner couched in financial language, which many people will have difficulty in comprehending. Is it intended that the Minister for Finance or other Government speakers would set out the other options considered by the Government and Anglo Irish Bank in regard to its future?

Will anyone in Government refer to the impact of putting the same resources into a jobs stimulus to deal with real, crucial infrastructure, for example, in water, broadband or renewables? Is there a proposition that the Government would spell out proposed watertight lending facilities for small business and SME's, small and medium sized enterprises? Is there to be any detail provided by the Government for the distressed mortgage payers who, sadly, are to have a further €27,000 lumped on them by this proposal?

If we are to hold a rational discussion about something this critical, the impact of which will last for years, then the House should be able to do its duty. If the people are expected to invest in these banks then we should be able to see the plan and the figures that demonstrate, from a Government perspective, how that will be paid back and recouped by the taxpayer. The Minister for Finance indicated he would pursue all these debtors for every cent borrowed.

An Ceann Comhairle: These points could be made later in the debate.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It seems the reckless procedure followed here means it is being transferred onto the taxpayer. I am making the suggestion that in the interests of a proper debate and dealing with the realities of what the Government proposes we should see those plans or hear the detail of those plans this evening in the debate.

The Taoiseach: I am not going to anticipate the terms and content of the debate. From the Government's point of view, the debate is about setting out a banking policy that is credible, that provides the prospect of confidence in our economy domestically and internationally and that enables the banking system and financial institutions to serve our economy's needs at this critical time. This is the basis of the debate and the statement from the Minister for Finance. It is for others to decide how they wish to contribute to the debate. We are making the point that the detail to be announced by the Minister follows due and careful consideration by the Financial Regulator, the Central Bank and its Governor and the Department of Finance, working with the National Asset Management Agency and the National Treasury Management Agency. This is the proposed way forward and represents the Minister's input and that of the Government. This is the way forward for us in the circumstances in which we find ourselves and for us to have a banking system that is fit for purpose for the country.

It seems there are some in this debate who wish to suggest that we can continue with the *status quo* or that there is some other option by which one can provide for the necessary credit availability in the economy on a sustainable basis without the need for the recapitalisation of these institutions. That is not tenable and the NAMA model we have brought forward provides the means by which the losses can be ascertained and, therefore, differentiated and a professional approach can be taken in respect of the decisions the Minister will announce in the course of his speech today. This is our position and it is for others to put forward their positions in respect of whether they have a policy alternative.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: Has the Taoiseach any other options for us?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: We do not agree to this motion on banking and we object to the Order of Business proposition. Once again, the Government is treating the Dáil with contempt. It is asking us to rubber-stamp a proposition as part of which we will see further billions of euro of taxpayers' money poured into a zombie bank in the first instance and into the other banks following that. This is an outrageous proposition because in return what are we getting? We are not getting the opportunity to make any intervention in respect of the setting of interest rates, which we have seen rise once again only this week. We do not have the opportunity—

An Ceann Comhairle: These points can be more than adequately made during the debate.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I am asking the Taoiseach what we are getting in return for making a decision regarding this proposition. We are not getting the opportunity to hold executives and those at the helm of these banking institutions to account, to hold them to book or to take the decision to sack them. There is no package here where we will protect the countless thousands of Irish families who do not know if they will be able to sustain the mortgage repayments on their homes over the time ahead and who run the risk, as others have already done, of losing their family home. These all are very serious matters, and yet we are being asked to approve the pouring of billions of euro in to the banking system. This Government has no mandate for this proposition. Let there be no mistake about it, the Taoiseach has no mandate—

5 o'clock

An Ceann Comhairle: Keep in mind the debate later on, starting at 5 o'clock.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: —when he was returned in 2007, to carry out these actions. The Taoiseach has no authority to do so. He is asking the Dáil, by the mechanism of Government majority, to pass a motion to give it the semblance of some notion of respect or decency. It has none of those things.

Make no mistake about it, if, as a Dáil Deputy, I were to propose, as I have done in the past, to make an amendment to a Bill that would incur an additional cost of even a postage stamp, my amendment would be ruled out of order because it would impose a further cost on the public purse. That is a fact, and yet here we are being asked to rubber-stamp a proposition that will pour billions of euro today and in the future where young people, and perhaps a generation yet unborn—

An Ceann Comhairle: This is a Second Stage speech before the debate starts.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: —will still have to bear the consequences and the results of this decision.

An Ceann Comhairle: This is a Second Stage contribution and we need to get a decision on this matter.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I must explain why I am opposing this.

An Ceann Comhairle: I accept that fully and I have allowed considerable latitude—

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: This is a serious matter.

An Ceann Comhairle: —but the Deputy is anticipating the debate.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Make no mistake about it, we are asking the Taoiseach and the Government, if they have the confidence in their formula, the only answer that they should look for is the answer of the people, not of the already sown-up majority in this Chamber.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we have some co-operation in the House?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I ask that they take their proposals to the people, call a general election and let the people decide whether this formula in which they have such belief is, indeed, the right one or the one they wish to endorse. That is what I ask of the Taoiseach. That is my challenge to him. Go to the people with this proposition instead of going through this sham here today where he is already guaranteed the outcome by virtue of the majority of Government support in this House.

The Taoiseach: I do not know how to respond to some of what the Deputies had to say. This Parliament has a duty to discharge, this Government has a duty to discharge and we will have a democratic debate on an important issue for the economic future of the country. This Government has the same and due authority as any other Government that has had the privilege to serve in this Parliament and it derives its authority precisely from the majority it enjoys in this House.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Taoiseach was not elected with a mandate to do what he is doing.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please Deputy Ó Caoláin.

The Taoiseach: With respect, I will not take a lecture on parliamentary democracy. I am simply making the point that we have to come forward here to deal with a real situation that

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must be dealt with. This country, no more than any other, must deal with it a situation which was global in nature. We must make our financial institutions fit for purpose and we must recapitalise. There is a statement to be made in the House by the Minister for Finance for that purpose and I do not wish to delay him in doing so.

Question put: “That the proposal for dealing with No. a8 be agreed to.”

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Vótáil.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputies claiming a division please rise?

Deputies Ó Caoláin, Morgan and Ó Snodaigh rose.

An Ceann Comhairle: As fewer than ten Members have risen I declare the question carried. In accordance with Standing Order 70 the names of the Deputies dissenting will be recorded in the Journal of the Proceedings of the Dáil.

Is the proposal for dealing with No. 3, Private Members’ business tomorrow, agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 4 agreed to? Agreed.

Finance Bill 2010: From the Seanad.

A message was received from the Seanad that it had accepted the Finance Bill 2010, in respect of which it had made the following recommendation:

SECTION 1

1. In page 11, line 14, to delete “one month” and substitute “three months”.

Ordered: That the recommendations be now considered.

The Dáil went into Committee, accordingly, to consider the Seanad recommendations.

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I move the acceptance of recommendation No. 1.

Deputy Joan Burton: This was originally an amendment put forward by the Labour Party on a cost-benefit analysis of tax expenditures and tax breaks which the Labour Party and I are delighted the Minister for Finance accepted.

Acceptance of recommendation No. 1 agreed to.

Message to be sent to the Seanad acquainting it that the Dáil had accepted the recommendation made by the Seanad.

Banking System: Motion.

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

- notes that the Government has taken bold and successful action to address funding problems in the Irish financial system through the introduction of the Bank Guarantee Schemes and to remove the riskiest loans from the balance sheets of the participating institutions through the NAMA process, which has the support of the IMF, the OECD, the ECB and the European Commission;

- affirms that the Irish economy needs a functioning banking system that enjoys the trust of depositors, international markets and the community at large in order to benefit from the global economic recovery;
- supports the Government in the measures it is announcing today for the final phase of the stabilisation process of the banking system;
- supports the Government in the actions it is taking to ensure that each participating institution in the NAMA process will meet the Financial Regulator’s new capital standards by the end of 2010; and
- supports the Government’s structured and measured approach to the issues facing the financial sector in general, which represents the best way to secure its interests and those of the recovering economy while keeping in mind the requirements of the EU.”

The country has come a long way since we introduced the State bank guarantee 18 months ago.

Deputy Tom Hayes: That is what the Minister thinks.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Back then, our banks were on the brink of financial collapse and our economy had gone into reverse. Revenue had fallen steeply and unemployment had risen sharply. For the first time in a quarter of a century, we were experiencing negative growth.

Economic activity remains weak and we face further difficult decisions. The crucial difference, however, is that we now have a credible fiscal position. That is because in the past two years, we have introduced budgetary adjustments of more than €15 billion. As a result, we are now in a position to stabilise the deficit and we are on a firm path to economic recovery.

This adjustment has imposed a heavy burden on our citizens. Taxes have increased, public sector workers have suffered significant reductions in their pay and social welfare payments have been reduced. It is regularly suggested in the House, and outside, that these painful measures have been necessitated by our banking crisis and the cuts in pay are funding a bailout of the banks. That is wrong. The reason we had to make substantial savings is because of the huge gap that opened up between the revenue we take in and the cost of running the State. We are borrowing for day-to-day expenses which all Members know is not sustainable.

Our determination to deal with this imbalance in our public finances through firm and decisive action has engendered real confidence in our economy on the international stage. The outside world believes in us and in our ability to work our way through our difficulties and return to growth.

Jean-Claude Trichet, president of the European Central Bank, recently said, “In the case of Ireland very, very tough decisions have been taken by the Government and rightly so”. More recently, Mr. Trichet’s colleague, José Manuel González-Páramo of the European Central Bank’s executive board, said, “The Irish measures are very courageous. They are going in the right direction”. The French Minister of Finance, Christine Lagarde said, “Ireland has set the high standard the rest of us must follow”. On a recent visit to Ireland, the German Minister for European Affairs, Dr. Werner Hoyer, said, “I think there is a deeply rooted trust and confidence in this country’s ability to sort out its problems. . . . There is a fundamental belief that the Irish are going to solve it”.

Already, we have reaped the benefits of this growing confidence. Since last April’s supplementary budget and the announcement of the decision to establish NAMA, borrowing costs have fallen and our bond spreads have halved. This trend was reinforced by last December’s

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budget which outlined the next stage of our plans to return to a sustainable fiscal position. That is why we must retain our fiscal discipline.

Having stabilised our public finances, we must move to the final phase in stabilising our banking system. There has been much criticism of the length of time it has taken us to get to this point. I reject such criticism. Crucial pieces of the jigsaw had to fall into place before we could embark on this ultimate phase of our bank rescue.

First, we are in a position to do what we are doing today because as a sovereign State we are now fiscally stable and credible. Second, we now know the extent of the losses in our banks and the scale of the damage that has been done by the excessive lending and bad practices of recent years. Through its bottom-up valuation exercise, the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA, is progressively valuing and removing the most impaired loans from the system. Third, we now have in place a Financial Regulator of international standing who has independently and rigorously reviewed the capital requirements of the Irish banking system in accordance with best international practice.

Deputy Damien English: Is he better than the last one?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The capital requirements that I will outline presently to the House have been set by the Financial Regulator and announced separately by him in the past hour. That is as it should be.

We now have in place a more stringent regulatory system overseen by the Central Bank Governor, Professor Patrick Honohan, and the Financial Regulator, Matthew Elderfield. The new fully integrated structures replacing the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland will be established in law by the Central Bank Reform Bill which I published earlier today. The new Central Bank will be responsible for maintaining the stability of the financial system, the effective regulation of financial institutions and markets and safeguarding the interests of consumers and investors.

The Bill enhances accountability of the Central Bank and oversight by the Oireachtas of its regulatory performance. I have included in the Bill a provision that gives the bank new powers to ensure the fitness and probity of nominees to key positions within financial institutions. This key provision will, from the outset, reinforce the tone of the new regulatory regime. It will help to restore confidence in the management of the banks at home and in the international markets.

A further Bill to be published in the autumn will contain additional new and enhanced regulatory powers and functions of the restructured Central Bank. A third bill will consolidate all existing statutory arrangements. Further details of today's Bill are included in the information booklet that will be circulated to Members. There will be consultation with stakeholders and the legislation will be enacted as soon as possible after Easter.

The detailed information that has emerged from the banks in the course of the NAMA process is truly shocking. At every hand's turn our worst fears have been surpassed. Some institutions were worse than others but our banking system, to a greater or lesser extent, engaged in reckless property development lending. In far too many cases there were also shoddy banking practices. The banks played fast and loose with the economic interests of this country.

Our previous regulatory system failed abysmally and it is right that the role of the regulator, the Central Bank and the Government is now the subject of independent inquiry——

Deputy Róisín Shortall: A partial inquiry.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: —but the fact remains that senior figures in Irish banking made appalling lending decisions that will cost the taxpayer dearly for years to come. As I said in this House last September during the debate on the NAMA legislation, the banks should be extremely grateful for the continued support and forbearance extended by the citizens. They must now repay that debt—

Deputy Shane McEntee: By increasing interest rates.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: —by facilitating the economic recovery widely forecast to get under way in the second half of this year. The Government will insist that they do so by supplying credit to viable businesses and households in this State.

Today, we are entering the ultimate phase in the resolution of our financial crisis. NAMA has determined the price to be paid for the first tranche of loans to be transferred to the agency, after detailed and painstaking loan by loan analysis. The Financial Regulator and the Central Bank have carried out their analysis of the appropriate capital requirements for financial institutions so as to ensure not just the bare regulatory minimum, but a prudent and adequate deployment of capital. I will outline in detail to the House the Government's response to these developments and explain the strategy for addressing the needs of the banking sector and individual banks.

The process of transferring the eligible loans from the designated financial institutions to NAMA has begun. The first tranche of loans has an original book value of approximately €16 billion. This tranche consists of just over 1,200 individual loans owed by the ten largest borrowers. This first tranche represents 20% of the anticipated total assets to transfer. The transfer of these loans should be completed for four institutions in the coming days, with Anglo Irish Bank following next week. NAMA has advised me the whole transfer process remains on target for completion by the final quarter of the year.

NAMA's work has enabled us to estimate with greater accuracy the overall discount to be applied to each institution and the likely total amount of loans to be transferred. The original value of the loans transferred in the first tranche is €3.29 billion for AIB from a total of €23 billion in eligible loans; for Bank of Ireland, €1.93 billion from a total of €12 billion; for Anglo Irish Bank, €10 billion from a total of €36 billion; for INBS, €670 million from a total of €9 billion; and for EBS, approximately €140 million from a total of €1 billion.

The difference between what NAMA has paid for these loans and the original value attributed to them by the institutions, or the so-called haircut, is as follows: AIB, 43%; Bank of Ireland, 35%; Anglo Irish Bank, about 50%; INBS, 58%;—

Deputy Seymour Crawford: Who was involved in that?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: —and EBS, 37%. The weighted average haircut across these institutions is 47%. These discounts have been calculated following loan-by-loan assessments, including legal due diligence, detailed valuation processes and internal and external checking processes, including external audit. The doubters have been proved wrong. NAMA has carried out its valuations in a hard-headed commercial manner. The interests of the taxpayer are paramount in this exercise.

The fall in value of the transferred loans means the banks will now have to recognise these losses up front. Decisions on the appropriate capital requirements are a matter for the Financial Regulator in conjunction with the Central Bank. A robust recapitalisation exercise will ensure that the banks are not just adequately but properly and prudently capitalised so they can absorb these losses and foreseeable future losses that may arise on remaining loans. The banks will then be in a better position to attract funding. The regulator has advised me that he will require

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an 8% core tier 1 capital requirement, of which 7% must be equity. This is a prudent capital provision consistent with emerging best practice internationally. The regulator has performed a detailed assessment of the capital requirements, current and under a stress scenario, over a three-year time horizon and has determined the additional capital requirement of each institution participating in NAMA. The capital to meet these new requirements must be in place in each of the institutions by the end of 2010.

I fully agree with the regulator's view that we do not want institutions to get by on a bare minimum of capital. This only prolongs their difficulties. The capital requirements are set by the new regulator and are being imposed on the banks. I will now outline the implications for each institution of the regulator's decisions and give details of their capital needs, proposed solutions and the anticipated Government ownership for each institution.

Bank of Ireland will transfer €1.93 billion of assets to NAMA in the first tranche, which represents 16% of its €12 billion NAMA assets. NAMA has confirmed it will buy the loans transferred in the first tranche at an average discount of 35%. Taking account of this and his broader assessment of the bank, the regulator has determined that Bank of Ireland must raise additional equity capital of €2.7 billion by the end of the year to meet the new capital standards. I have been advised that Bank of Ireland expects to be able to raise private capital and is well advanced in its actions to address its capital needs, which I believe underlines the strength of the institution. I fully support the bank's objective to meet a substantial amount of its capital requirement from private sources. I believe Bank of Ireland has a strong future. In conjunction with this private capital raising and to support it, the State will commit to converting part of its preference shares in Bank of Ireland into ordinary equity. This process requires no new investment of State funds. This conversion will be executed on market terms and the State will achieve full value for its investment in the bank.

Based on the current envisaged structure, the State expects to remain a minority shareholder in the bank. In recapitalising Bank of Ireland, we will secure an institution that will maintain a presence in the international capital markets, provide loan finance to individuals and businesses and support our economic recovery. These proposals are dependent upon the agreement to the bank's restructuring plan by the European Commission. I have discussed the main elements with Commissioner Almunia and I am satisfied there is the basis for agreement between us on the overall framework of the bank's plan but further discussions are required on all the details.

Allied Irish Banks will transfer €3.29 billion of assets to NAMA in the first tranche, which represents 14% of its €23 billion NAMA assets. NAMA has confirmed that it will buy the loans transferred in the first tranche at an average discount of 43%. Taking account of this and his broader assessment of the bank, the regulator has determined that Allied Irish Banks must raise additional equity capital of at least €7.4 billion by the end of the year to meet the new base case capital standards. In view of the extent of capital to be raised, Allied Irish Banks will be required by the regulator to produce a detailed capital plan by the end of April this year.

The basic elements of this plan are already clear. Allied Irish Banks is in a position to raise capital through the sale of overseas assets. As the first step in meeting its capital needs, the bank will immediately commence the process of sale of assets in the US, Poland and in Great Britain. The sale of these assets will be completed this year, subject to regulatory clearances. The disposal proceeds will provide significant capital but it will not be sufficient to address the full requirement. To the extent that the gap is not filled by the private sector, the State is willing to convert some or all of its preference shares as required on terms to be agreed that will provide full value for the State. Depending on the structure of the capital raising and the extent of private participation, it may be that no new Exchequer funding is required but if

additional money is required it will be provided by way of ordinary equity. Any additional capital requirement will be met from the National Pensions Reserve Fund.

The private sector will have an opportunity to participate in Allied Irish Banks' capital raising. If sufficient private capital is not available, it is probable that the State will have a majority shareholding in Allied Irish Banks as a listed entity but this is much more preferable than an undercapitalised or only adequately capitalised entity. These proposals are dependent on agreement with the European Commission in the context of the assessment of the bank's restructuring plan. Finding a long-term solution for Anglo Irish Bank is by far the biggest challenge in resolving the banking crisis. The sheer size of the bank means there are no easy or low cost options, as often suggested. Winding up the bank is not and has never been a viable option. As the bank's new management and board have estimated, an immediate wind up would lead to a fire sale of assets resulting in a permanent additional and unnecessary loss of upwards of €30 billion. In addition, the State would have to provide, immediately and upfront, the large sum of €70 billion to meet the deposits, bondholders and liabilities due to the Eurosystem.

Similarly, a longer term wind down is not in the taxpayers' interest. The new management has provided me with figures, assessed by independent financial advisers, indicating that in addition to the capital losses that would be sustained, a long-term wind down of the bank over ten years could expose the State to funding obligations approaching €30 billion. I understand why many want us to close this bank. I understand also the impulse to obliterate it from the system. However, I cannot, as Minister for Finance, countenance such a course. The realisation of the costs involved and the wider disruption to the financial system would generate enormous instability for the State, with unforeseeable but potentially long-lasting damage to the overall economy. The unavoidable reality is that the bank has incurred losses from its large-scale property lending and needs substantial further capital. Unpalatable as it is, only the taxpayer can provide that capital. It is the least worst option. For this reason, I am this week providing €8.3 billion to support the capital position of the bank to take account of the bank's losses to date. Additional capital support is likely to be required depending on the NAMA discount on the first tranche of Anglo Irish Bank loans transferred to it. The bank will provide comprehensive information on its financial position in its annual report for the 15 month period to end 2009 which will be published later this week.

The bank will need further capital to cover future losses and accomplish the restructuring of the bank and its balance sheet. The current estimate is that this could be of the order of a further €10 billion over time.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Good Lord.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: There is no end to this.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: However, notwithstanding very substantial work under way on the bank's restructuring plan, there are still significant uncertainties about this figure, including the size of the discount on all of its loans transferring to NAMA, the scale of future losses on its loans that are not transferred to NAMA and the exact nature and scope of any split of the bank under its plans and the EU Commission decision on the plan.

It is because of the heavy loan losses already incurred on a loan book of €72 billion and those in prospect that the injection of resources in this bank is so large. There is simply no alternative that meets the bank's unavoidable obligations at a lower cost consistent with the maintenance of the hard-won stability of the banking system in Ireland. The bank is expected to transfer approximately €10 billion of loans to NAMA in the first tranche. This tranche will

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not transfer until early April as the valuations have not been finalised. The latest available unaudited estimate of the discount is in the order of 50%.

The bank's capital support is being provided by the State in a way which spreads the cash requirements over an extended period. I am this week injecting the capital in the form of a promissory note payable over a number of years into the future. In essence, this means the amount will be paid over a period of ten to 15 years, thereby reducing the impact on the Exchequer this year and stretching the payments into the future.

Since nationalisation of the bank on 21 January 2009 there has been a wholesale replacement of key top executives and the board. The new chief executive and new senior management team have implemented rigorous and robust risk management processes and controls. There have been cost base reductions following a detailed cost review and a voluntary redundancy scheme. As part of this recapitalisation, the bank will reduce costs further. The bank's new senior management team is working closely with my Department to update and strengthen its restructuring plan as submitted to the EU Commission last November. Following a comprehensive evaluation of strategic restructuring options, the bank has identified as its preferred option, in terms of minimising the future cost to the taxpayer, to carve out a smaller and stronger bank, leaving the remainder in the form of an asset management and recovery company.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: What about a bad bank?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The new going concern entity would be prepared for sale in due course. This option is being evaluated and holds out the prospect of reducing the impact on the taxpayer and yielding some value in the future when the bank is sold out of State hands. The bank has estimated that the new bank could become profitable over the medium term and a target exit from State hands could take place in five to seven years' time.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Wishful thinking.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: This is a complex process but I am confident that by the end of the summer we will have a clear plan for the future of the bank approved by the Commission. The bank will give more details on the likely costs of various options for its future when it publishes its results. The sums required to rescue the bank are enormous but the costs of winding it down are even greater. The current bank strategy of seeking to devise a way to realise value for the taxpayer from the remains of the old bank means the State could at least get some return in time, recouping some of its assistance. I assure the House that the bank shares my overriding objective to maximise the potential return for the taxpayer in recognition of the State support.

Traditionally, building societies have played a vital role in providing residential mortgages in Ireland. In recent years the Educational Building Society, EBS and, in particular, Irish Nationwide Building Society, INBS, became involved in non-residential lending. In the case of INBS such lending became its primary focus, comprising approximately 80% of its lending business. As a result it has incurred significant losses on speculative lending for land and development and commercial investment loans. In the case of INBS, approximately €9 billion will have to transfer to NAMA while in the case of EBS approximately €1 billion will transfer.

Both societies have passed resolutions allowing them to issue new special investment shares to the State in return for its support. Both institutions have recently been subject to the Regulator's capital assessment process to determine their capital needs. Irish Nationwide Building Society, INBS, will transfer €670 million of assets to NAMA in the first tranche, which represents 7% of its €9 billion NAMA assets. NAMA has confirmed that it will buy the loans transferred in the first tranche at an average discount of 58%. Taking account of this and his

broader assessment of the building society, the Regulator has determined that INBS will need an injection of €2.6 billion to remain compliant with its current regulatory capital requirements. This is a very large bill for the taxpayer but as in the case of Anglo Irish Bank, it is the least costly solution.

It is important to highlight that this level of capital support is required to maintain the institution's financial position in light of the large losses incurred on its loan portfolio. Without this capital injection, the taxpayer would have to shoulder the significant and immediate costs in meeting the deposits, bondholders and liabilities due to the European Central Bank. I intend to inject the necessary capital through a combination of €100 million in special investment shares in the society and a Promissory Note for €2.6 billion issued to the society, giving the society a small buffer.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: It is considerably large.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: This note will be payable over ten to 15 years, which will reduce the impact on the Exchequer this year. Following the investment by means of the special investment shares, the State will have extensive powers as well as economic ownership of Irish Nationwide Building Society. As a result, the State will control the society.

Following the transfer of €9 billion of its loan book to NAMA, Irish Nationwide Building Society, INBS, will have a small mainly residential loan book of approximately €2 billion. In such circumstances, the institution does not have a future as an independent stand-alone entity. The Government's priority will be to secure a swift sale of the society or its integration with another entity. All options will be fully examined in the institution's EU restructuring plan which must be completed within three months. Deposits in the society are secure and it will continue to have adequate regulatory capital. As in the case of Anglo Irish Bank, a new management team is now in charge of Irish Nationwide Building Society, INBS. I will insist on board changes in the changed ownership circumstances.

The EBS will transfer approximately €140 million of assets to NAMA in the first tranche, which represents 14% of its €1 billion NAMA assets. The Agency has confirmed that it will buy the loans transferred in the first tranche at an average discount of 37%. Taking account of this and his broader assessment of the building society, the Regulator has determined that the society will need an injection of €875 million to meet the target sufficient to ensure 8% core tier 1 capital. To secure the Educational Building Society's immediate capital position, the State will provide it with €100 million of capital through the issuance of special investment shares in a manner consistent with the EU State aid rules. The issuance of these shares by EBS was approved by the society at its Extraordinary General Meeting in December 2009 and will give the State extensive powers and full economic ownership of EBS. The State will, therefore, have control over the future strategic direction of the society.

The EBS is currently exploring the availability of private market capital and has had an expression of interest from a private party. Any private capital transaction will need to comply with the relevant European Commission guidelines for an institution in the receipt of State aid. To the extent that private capital is not forthcoming, the remaining capital requirement will be met partly or fully through the issuance of a promissory note from the State to the institution which will enhance the society's core capital by the same amount. If the promissory note is used, it would again reduce the impact on the Exchequer this year as the cost of the note would be paid over a period of ten to 15 years. The EBS will be required to submit a restructuring plan to the European Commission that will examine all options for the direction of the society by the end of June.

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

Whatever outcomes emerge, there is no doubt that, notwithstanding the differences between them, each society must recognise the position they have gotten themselves into. They must focus on making themselves more efficient. Their future value will be enhanced by a committed drive to improving efficiencies in the coming months. I am strongly of the view, and I am committed to ensuring, that the residential mortgage sector in Ireland is competitive. We want to see an appropriate number of participants in the market in order to meet future demand. Irish Life & Permanent is not taking part in the NAMA process. The regulator is satisfied that Irish Life & Permanent has sufficient capital to meet its needs. The regulator will continue to monitor the capital needs of Irish Life & Permanent and is in discussion with it.

The burden on taxpayers stemming from the losses incurred in our banking system is horrifying. Unless we face up to these losses now, we will not have a functioning banking system and the economy will not recover. My overriding concern throughout this financial crisis has been to get credit to viable businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, which will lead our way out of this recession. The actions I have announced today will put the banks in a much stronger position than before.

I am imposing specific lending targets on AIB and Bank of Ireland. They will make available for targeted lending not less than €3 billion each for new or increased credit facilities to SMEs in 2010 and 2011. This, in particular, must include funds for working capital for businesses. This will be a significant increase on the figures reported by the banks for 2009 and will help to sustain the economy and foster growth. They will be reviewed as the needs of the economy change. Bank of Ireland and AIB must also make available €20 million each for seed capital to be provided to Enterprise Ireland supported ventures, building on the very successful programme launched in 2009. They will each set up a fund of up to €100 million for environmental, clean energy and innovation projects, in addition to the €100 million provided under the recapitalisation last year.

Historically, Irish banking has focused too much on property-related lending. It is fair to say that our banks have not been very well acquainted with our modern economic sectors. This will have to change. For that reason, I am requiring the banks to commit resources to work with Enterprise Ireland and the IBF to develop sectoral expertise in the modern growth sectors of the Irish economy; to explore with Enterprise Ireland and the IBF how best to develop the range of banking services that Irish enterprises trading internationally will need; and to develop expertise and bring forward new credit products in areas where cashflow, rather than property or assets, is the basis for business lending.

In line with the renewed programme for Government, the two banks will be required to submit SME lending plans by geography and sector for 2010 and 2011 in light of the €3 billion target. These plans are to be submitted to my Department within six weeks. They will be reviewed by Mr. John Trethowan, an experienced banker with a demonstrated commitment to public and social service who will be examining bank lending policies as part of his remit as credit reviewer. It is important to stress that credit can only go to viable businesses. The last thing we need is for the banks to incur high losses on risky loans. That sort of imprudent lending must be a thing of the past. The Government will decide, following Mr. Trethowan's review, whether further action on lending targets is needed, and what action should be taken.

AIB and Bank of Ireland will also be subject to a credit review process, headed by Mr. Trethowan, which will allow individual enterprises, sole traders and farmers who have had credit refused or withdrawn to apply for an independent review of the bank's decision. Where the reviewer recommends that credit should be granted, the bank is required to comply with the recommendation or explain why it will not do so. This process will also provide me with

an accurate assessment of banks' lending policies and procedures. The administrative arrangements are in place and the statutory instrument is being laid before the House today. Accordingly, applications for a review will be accepted from today. The credit review process will give viable businesses in all sectors an opportunity for an independent second opinion, where credit is refused or withdrawn. The review will ensure that the banks, which have been supported by the State and the taxpayer, comply with their responsibilities to our economy. Mr. Trethowan will outline his work in this area later this week.

The prospect of a family losing its home is one the most appalling vistas in any recession. Those who find themselves in this position are likely to have lost their jobs as well. I do not need to tell anyone in this House the havoc and trauma such events can visit on the lives of those affected. The Government has taken a number of initiatives to support those having difficulty with their mortgages. It has introduced the statutory code of conduct on mortgage arrears for all lenders; extended the six-month moratorium on legal proceedings to 12 months; refocused mortgage interest relief on those who bought their homes at the peak of the market with extensions up to the end of 2017; provided financial help to over 15,000 families through the mortgage interest subsidy scheme; and increased the advisory services provided through the Money Advice and Budgeting Service.

In addition, the Irish Banking Federation has said where a satisfactory arrangement is reached and adhered to, its members will not take legal action against borrowers. The number of mortgage holders in arrears is still increasing, although more slowly than before. In general, repossession rates in Ireland remain extremely low. The guaranteed institutions told us that last year they sought and obtained orders for repossession through the courts in just 28 cases.

The question that has been asked in this House and outside is how banks that have been rescued by the State can be allowed to pursue homeowners experiencing difficulty with their mortgages. I acknowledge the anger and frustration of those who ask this question, but the Government's measures have been successful in minimising the number of repossessions and the institutions which have had most recourse to the courts are not covered by the guarantee. We must be careful that our efforts to help home owners do not store up more problems in the banking sector that will require further calls on the taxpayer. The revamped mortgage and debt group, which I announced recently, has started its examination of the extent of the problem of mortgage default and will report to me on a rolling basis on the most sensible and effective way to deal with this problem.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: When?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: We have reviewed arrangements for the State's management of its investments in the banking system in anticipation of the potential changes in the State's interests in the banks. At present, the State's preference share investments in AIB and Bank of Ireland are funded and held on my behalf, as Minister, by the National Pensions Reserve Fund Commission. I have decided that it will be given the ongoing role of managing the State's financial investment in AIB and Bank of Ireland, as two banks listed on a stock exchange and operating at arm's length.

As Anglo Irish Bank is no longer listed, it is in a different position. Its shares are held directly and the NTMA will manage the State's ownership through a relationship framework. As they are not listed, I propose to hold directly any special investment shares in EBS and Irish Nationwide, and the NTMA will manage those interests on the basis of relationship frameworks which will ensure that each institution's board and management team will continue to run its business on an arm's length basis.

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

In September 2008, in response to the international financial crisis, Ireland introduced a two year blanket guarantee scheme for certain liabilities of covered institutions. A new, more targeted, scheme was introduced in December 2009 in order to facilitate the ability of credit institutions to issue debt securities and take deposits with a maturity post-September 2010 on either a guaranteed or unguaranteed basis. A key feature of the new scheme is access to longer-term funding, which is in line with the approach adopted elsewhere in the European Union and is expected to contribute significantly to supporting the funding needs of the banks and to securing their continued stability. In addition, banks can access unguaranteed funding under the new scheme.

Although the capital injections I am announcing today will greatly strengthen the position of the banks and serve to reassure their depositors, I am satisfied that it would be prudent to seek an extension of the guarantee in a more limited form until this confidence has been reliably restored. I will be seeking the Commission's agreement for a modified extension of the guarantee, consistent with a phasing out over a realistic period of time. As with the extended guarantee scheme, any new scheme will not cover subordinated debt. The existing subordinated debt guarantee will lapse at the end of September. This scheme is due to be reviewed by the Commission before 1 June and I intend to make an announcement about the future of the guarantee in advance of that date. I want to stress that the ordinary deposit guarantee scheme which covers €100,000 per depositor per institution is in place and will continue on a permanent basis. Nothing in today's announcement changes that position.

This evening, I have necessarily concentrated on the costs of resolving the banking crisis. There are upsides for the taxpayer who is funding these measures. First, we now have a clear path to fix the banking system and because of that we have safeguarded our economic future. Second, the aggressive valuations conducted by the National Asset Management Agency increase its prospects of securing a reasonable financial return for the taxpayer. Third, the NPRF will hold valuable shares in our two main banks which can realise gains for the citizens of this country. Fourth, there is the proven gain of €1 billion which will accrue to the taxpayer in six month's time from the bank guarantee scheme, and, finally, if a smaller and good bank can be carved out of Anglo Irish Bank's current loan book, we will recoup some of the taxpayers' assistance to that bank.

I began my statement by pointing out the widespread international confidence engendered by last December's budget. The citizens of this country have shown grit and determination in facing up to our severe budgetary difficulties and it has paid off.

Deputy Damien English: They had no choice.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: We are facing up to our banking difficulties. We have acknowledged the scale of our problems and we have taken the necessary actions to solve them. The banks have been forced to recognise their losses and this Government, on behalf of the taxpayer, has committed the capital that will ensure we have a banking system to serve this economy as it recovers.

The steps we are taking today will provide certainty to the people from whom we must borrow; certainty among our trading partners; and certainty to investors, both at home and overseas, who look to this country for opportunities. This certainty will further boost international confidence in our ability to recover. Others believe in us. We must now begin to believe in ourselves.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: No clap today.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: We must believe it ourselves.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I move amendment No. 2:

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

“noting the complete failure of Government banking policy to support the provision of credit to personal and business banking customers;

suspends the transfer of toxic loans from all banks to NAMA and subsequent recapitalisations until:

- a costing of Fine Gael’s alternative ‘good bank/bad bank’ plan for Anglo Irish Bank is commissioned from independent economic experts at the OECD;
- the detailed costings of other options that have been considered by Anglo Irish Bank and the Government are published;
- the merits of using the same resources for a new investment plan for the Irish economy in the areas of broadband, energy, water infrastructure and re-training are also assessed;
- all these options are assessed by independent experts and their findings are presented to the Oireachtas for debate;
- any further recapitalisation commitments to AIB, Bank of Ireland and EBS includes a watertight agreement on additional lending for small businesses and mortgage applicants; and
- greater tangible financial support is provided to existing mortgage holders from different providers experiencing financial difficulty.”

The decisions we are taking today will at one stroke double the national debt. What the Government is asking us to decide today is of truly horrendous proportions. The evidence has not been offered by the Government to sustain the decisions we are being asked to make, which will convert the loans that were recklessly run up by the bankers into sovereign debt. This debt will now be on our generation and future generations. Today’s decisions will bring to €40 billion the amount the taxpayer will be asked to put into Anglo Irish Bank, which was run in a truly buccaneering way by Seán FitzPatrick and his colleagues. This is real money; this is mortgaging our futures. This is the final bill for the reckless economic management we have had to put up with for ten years.

Today is not the day for allocating blame among those who caused this. I do not disagree with the Minister’s statement that bankers must take enormous responsibility for what was done there, but I also believe he should have the grace to recognise that regulators and the Government parties failed dismally and that they pursued a strategy in which there was an interlocking embrace between the regulator, the banks and the Government which saw no evil, spoke no evil and heard no evil. That was how those who warned of this impending crisis were treated. They were treated with contempt by Ministers. The Minister and his colleagues in government must look to their own stewardship as well as pointing their guns at the banks on this momentous day.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Richard Bruton: We are today crossing the Rubicon. There can be no turning back from this decision. It is a final step in the journey the Government has taken and it is of truly huge proportions. We have to reflect on the advice we have regarding the earlier steps along the road. When the guarantee was introduced, we were told this would be the cheapest bailout of a banking system of any country. How hollow those words look now. When the first €11 billion in recapitalisation funding was introduced in the House, we were told this would result in credit flowing. How hollow those words have been. When NAMA came along, we were told there would be a wall of money in the banks available for lending and within weeks we heard the chief executive officers of the banks explaining the reality to us.

The Government, therefore, does not have a record of success as it asks us to accept on trust that these decisions today should be taken without evidence being presented that stands up to independent scrutiny. This is a huge gamble. We are being asked to accept that this is the least worst of the options available, but where is the analysis to show that? As Colm McCarthy, a Government adviser, said regarding prudent spending of public money, the onus is on the Minister to demonstrate to the House that this is the least worst option and, to be brutally honest, while his script mentioned many numbers, it did not confront the root issue and it has not demonstrated that.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The doubling of the national debt today is significant. A total of €11 billion has been put in to recapitalise the banks and later we will vote on NAMA spending €43 billion to acquire toxic loans. The Minister stated €11 billion will be used for recapitalisation, most of which will go to Anglo Irish Bank, and a further €10 billion will be paid to that bank later. We are, therefore, being presented with a debt of €75 billion. People outside the House are flabbergasted by the scale of what is happening and they have worry heaped upon worry. Today, bad practices in the Quinn Group have resulted in the new Financial Regulator going to court to put two of its companies into administration. This is another worry for taxpayers and another potential bill that will come home to them to pay.

These are troubling times and the onus is on us in the House to take great care about the decisions we take. That is what we must do in undertaking scrutiny of what is before us. Our economy is in deep crisis and recovery depends on the choices we make today. I believe the Government is choosing to nurse along the bad decisions of the past to protect professional investors whose risk capital helped to protect them from any loss and that choice will put a huge squeeze on the capacity of the Government, or any future Government, to carve out a recovery strategy. A sum of €75 billion, of which €40 billion will go to Anglo Irish Bank alone, will dramatically constrain our freedom of manoeuvre to invest in our future and that has to be acknowledged.

It is important that the debate be conducted on the basis of hard evidence and not on myths. I am appalled that I still hear myths from the Government, which I would like to nail now. I have heard it argued time and again by Government spokesmen that failure to protect bondholders in the banks would amount to a default by the Irish people on its obligations. That is simply not true and even the Taoiseach repeats that myth time and again in the House. The debts run up by Seán FitzPatrick in creating his buccaneering bank are not taxpayer commitments. They were not borrowed by the taxpayer.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Richard Bruton: They are commitments made by a dysfunctional bank, which was not properly regulated and which was encouraged in its folly. The guarantee we offered in 2008

will expire next September and, therefore, we offered bondholders a temporary guarantee while the banks got their affairs in order. It is simply wrong for Ministers to come into the House and pretend the taxpayer has an obligation to pay off all that money.

I want to nail another myth peddled by Government spokesmen, which is that this is a paper transaction that does not involve real money — it is ECB money or Monopoly money or soft money — and it is not part of our debt. It is no such thing. It is hard cash that our grandchildren will be obliged to pay. It is not cheap money. It is being borrowed at a short-term rate, which is the same as, if not greater than, the rate at which the Government is able to borrow. We hear this time and again, as if the additional €64 billion we are putting in today is soft money. This is real hard cash and we have to get that into our heads. The decisions we take later will reduce our capacity to do many things to which our people rightly aspire. Now is the time to be clear about what it is we the taxpayers want from the banking system and what we are willing to pay for. We want a good banking system capable of lending. We want banks of systemic importance to the economy to emerge from the crisis cleansed of their toxic loans. The Minister did not answer the question of why Anglo Irish Bank is regarded as being of systemic importance to this country.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Exactly.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Where is the evidence that it is of systemic importance that would now justify injecting an additional €36 billion to add to the €4 billion we have already contributed? The appalling unwinding of Anglo Irish Bank has been revealed again today by the new figures. We now hear there is €36 billion of toxic developer loans, which is 25% more than we were led to believe just a few months ago. The quality of those loans is now being written down by 50%, which is 66% worse than we were led to believe a few months ago. The State's injection, which up to a week ago we were told would total €10 billion, will now be €22 billion for the required recapitalisation. That is 120% more than we were led to believe. Anglo Irish Bank will absorb 70% of the recapitalised money the Minister is investing to try to get our banks going. What will that produce? Will it deliver any lending? Will that 70% of the recapitalisation get credit flowing? Will it put someone back to work or help with a person's mortgage? It will not. That is the reality. The money has gone into a black hole.

Rapid deterioration is evident. The Minister has admitted that the details on Anglo Irish Bank get worse every day. Despite that rapid deterioration the policy remains the same. There is no budging in the Government's policy, which is that the taxpayer should be the first over the hill to rescue the bank, not those who invested in it. That is the essence of the policy. I cannot understand why the policy is not changing as the evidence emerges on what an abnormal bank Anglo Irish Bank was, to the extent that it is jeopardising our future as a nation. I heard spokespersons on behalf of the Government say this morning that Anglo Irish Bank is systemically important to the country. It is no more systemically important to this country—

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Seventy billion euro.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Minister is investing €40 billion in cash into the bank.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Find it by the end of the week.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Minister has not considered the options.

Deputy Shane McEntee: It is treachery.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Bad decisions in Anglo Irish Bank have been responsible for bringing this country to its knees. Its banking model is utterly broken and will not be revived. It is

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

undertaking no lending to the sectors that can drive our economic recovery. Not one new loan or new job will be created by Anglo Irish Bank. The only purpose of putting money into the bank will be to repay the professional investors. I cannot see a sound economic or moral argument for turning to taxpayers and asking them to do that.

We have heard from Anglo Irish Bank that it believes closing the bank down in an orderly way over a decade or more would be more expensive. Let us be honest. It has not costed that approach. The only strategy that has been costed is one in which all the bond holders would be rescued and have to contribute nothing. There is another strategy with respect to Anglo Irish Bank, namely, what normally happens when a company of no systemic importance to the taxpayer gets into trouble, that its creditors take over and try to recover as much as they can from the debts, loans and assets of the company. That is what happens in capitalism. When people make investments that go sour, they take the consequences. That is not an option that was considered by Anglo Irish Bank, or if it was neither the Minister nor the bank presented the analysis to us. We need to see such an analysis and it has not been presented by the Minister to the House today. That is the nub of the decision we are being asked to make — whether, as the Minister indicated in his speech, this is the only way. I do not believe it is. I can understand how the management of Anglo Irish Bank would not cost that option, because at the end of the day it wants to see the bank as a going concern and to look after the bond holders. The question is whether taxpayers want to see that and if it is in their interests.

Deputy Shane McEntee: We cannot afford it.

Deputy Richard Bruton: While I understand why Anglo Irish Bank did not cost that option it is inexplicable why the Government did not do so and explain to us in clear terms why it has chosen to bail out all those people rather than allow the normal principles of capitalism to apply in a bank that no one other than a few people in the Government parties believes is of systemic importance to this country. I repeat what Mr. Colm McCarthy said, the onus is on the Minister and the Government to explain why this is the right decision.

As far as I can see the calculation is that the bond markets looking at Ireland Incorporated would take a view that it would be far worse to invest in a country that decided a busted flush bank such as Anglo Irish Bank was not important. The implication is that investors would worry about a country that faces reality and says a bank run in a buccaneering way is of no importance. I believe the bond markets would not look on matters in that way. They would recognise that the country had accepted it had commitments to the people and to the future of the nation, not a busted flush bank, and that it wanted to put its scarce €40 billion, if it could pull it together, into building strong arteries for economic recovery. This is not a normal bank and these are not normal times. This is a bank that has behaved recklessly and does not deserve the commitment of the taxpayer for which, as the Minister indicated, the banks should be grateful.

We should not offer Anglo Irish Bank that cover. A different case could be made for the other banks, namely Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland. I recognise that they are systemically important. They run our ATMs, pay our mortgages, keep bank accounts going and business flowing. I recognise that we have to do special things to face up to the difficulties experienced by those banks. There is an assumption that the Government should not apply the rules of capitalism and that we should bail out this bank. The Minister will cite learned bankers who would say that is correct but it is worth saying that the people who recognised the oncoming juggernaut of the property collapse are not on-side. Those who saw and issued the warnings do not believe this is the way to deal with Anglo Irish Bank. It is important that we take on board that view, which was not listened to at the time it was made. The fear of the

contagion from not supporting Anglo Irish Bank and all its bond holders should be put under severe scrutiny.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: Hear, hear.

Deputy Richard Bruton: It has not been put under severe scrutiny in the Minister's speech. There was not even a reference to the possibility that the €2 billion of subordinated bond holders in Anglo Irish Bank might lose in this event. Why would we pay back that €2 billion? I do not understand why that has not been addressed in the Minister's speech.

I welcome the tough regulatory capital requirements that the new regulator has set in respect of the other banks. It is crucial that we are not continually coming back to the banking crisis and that we half cure it. The regulator is right to apply rigorous stress tests and to expect the banks to be able to fulfil them. The stress tests look convincing, although I am surprised there has been no reference to the impact of rising interest rates on the potential stress on the loans. Perhaps that is for us to take up another day.

I was surprised to read in the newspapers at the weekend that the attitude the Minister was taking to the banks was take it or quit, that he was going to confront them and firm decisions would be taken, that this was the moment of truth and that they would have to make their decisions at the same time as the taxpayer was facing up to the matter. That is not what has happened today. No decision has come forward from the banks that they are definitely disposing of non-core assets, that they intend to turn to other investors in their banks and expect them to bear some of the losses or that they will offer new shares for subscription.

I believed these were the subject of hard talking by the Minister and that he would bring across the line a package involving everyone making an effort together, even within Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland. Instead, the issue is being kicked down the road like a can being kicked a bit farther. We will have to wait some more months before we see exactly what the banks will do. It will be the end of the year before we find out how the banks will meet their capital requirements. What will happen the banks and the banks' credit while we are waiting for decisions to be made? The banks will try to hoard every bit of capital and ration every loan they can to protect their independence from the Government.

I took heart when the Minister faced up to the take-it-or-quit approach. However, there is now a slow bicycle race that could extend right until the end of the year, at which time the banks will be freezing out people who depend on a flow of credit. Those individuals behind bankable business projects that perhaps could revive this economy will be refused credit by the banks, which will claim they are concentrating on meeting their capital requirements. The banks will say it is too bad they cannot talk to them. This is a real worry. I was misled by the headlines claiming we were finally facing up to this issue.

Let nobody be under any illusion that what we are doing today does not have implications for our capacity to get out of this economic difficulty. Deliberately overpaying for toxic assets is still at the core of the strategy. We have not heard today what the long-term economic value will be or the extent of the uplift over and above the market value. We will deliberately overpay for bank shares considering their value in the marketplace to avoid the majority shareholding. We are to set up a massive State monopoly, the biggest property company in the world, to manage a property portfolio. These decisions will undermine our capacity to do so many things this country needs. The Government's approach is not some inspired stride away from the brink but a step closer to it. The taxpayer will carry all the load for these bad decisions.

I welcome what the Minister has to say about lending but we must question whether we can believe what is now being said about it. When the Minister announced the recapitalisation plan

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

in February last year, he told us the Government had decided on a new recapitalisation plan that would “reinforce stability” and “facilitate banks involved in lending to the economy” and get credit flowing again. He also stated, “The recapitalised banks have agreed to work closely with the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and with State agencies to ensure the supply of appropriate finance”. The very same elements that were presented today as part of the credit agreement were presented in February of last year as if they were to be delivered between then and now. No one would agree with the Minister that the commitment of last year has been honoured. Can we believe the commitment of today will be honoured?

While I admit there is a statutory power and that the Minister has the power to issue directives if there is a failure, there is also the reality that the banks will hoard capital to try to defend their position over the coming months and avoid the State taking over. I am grievously worried about what is occurring.

NAMA was mentioned least of all in the Minister’s speech today. We are creating the largest property management company in the world. The IMF has warned that State-run asset management companies are fraught with difficulties and that there is a real problem associated with their recovering money, because they become politicised.

We did not hear today about the Oireachtas oversight committee we were supposed to have to oversee the operations of NAMA. We are well past the deadline on which NAMA was to have produced protocols on risk management, its credit management function and its disposals policy. It was committed to providing all those by the end of March, yet none of them has been provided although we almost at the end of that month. We expected to see them so we could have confidence that NAMA, which was moving to take over all the loans, would be managed in a way that would protect the taxpayer. This has not occurred.

There is a genuine worry that NAMA, having paid too much for the assets, will freeze the property market. It will be scared out of its wits to dispose of any property that would show a loss. It is probably worried that the European Union will look over its shoulder stating that if it incurs a loss, it constitutes State aid. Is this a formula for getting the property market back into shape? This issue still has not been addressed.

We do not have the NAMA business plan. Most people who looked at the last version of the NAMA business plan would regard it as a work of fiction. It purported that 80% of the loans transferred to NAMA would perform fully and that everything would be paid back. Who believes that? The belief that the loans would perform fully underpinned the last business plan. We need to see the revised business plan because we are now crossing the Rubicon. There is no coming back or means of repairing our model or finding a new way of proceeding. We will have this on our balance sheet.

This is a time to be hard-headed in this House, a time to demand evidence from those who thrust this course of action upon us. Thus far, evidence has been in short supply. We need to see the revised business plan and the assessment of all the options, not just those preferred by Anglo Irish Bank. We need to see the independent audits of the various assessments being carried out and to see the risk governance in NAMA. We need to see the Oireachtas committee being established, with clear terms of reference, and a role for the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General that would protect us.

I agree there is no risk-free approach. This is a difficult time. It is superficially attractive for any Government to throw its arms around everyone and tell them it will look after them and that they need not take a loss. However, we are not in a position now to take that approach. The decisions being taken are mortgaging the future of Irish taxpayers. The decisions are

pretending the dream can continue such that we can in some way sort out the dreams of the past. Today's decision on where we go as a nation is very important.

The sum total of the Government's strategy seems to involve retrenchment in fiscal policy and writing whatever cheques are necessary to get the banks back in order. This is not a sufficiently good choice. It involves looking back at the mistakes we made, nursing solutions along and battenning down the hatches to see whether we will get by. This is the time when we need to have the vision to strike out for a very different future and invent a different future for the country.

Today is a momentous day because the commitments we make, including today's doubling of the national debt and the investment of €4 billion in Anglo Irish Bank, restrict our capacity to reinvent ourselves as a nation. We must be very careful in scrutinising the evidence before we give the pass to them. I do not see the evidence and am gravely worried about what is proposed. We must rethink our approach.

Deputy Joan Burton: I propose amendment No. 2. Today will be regarded as an infamous day in Irish history. It is the day on which the costs and consequences of crony capitalism, Irish-style, have come home and on which the burden is to be laid on the shoulders of every man, woman and child here, in addition to future generations not yet born. Today is a day about socialism for bankers and developers. It is not for ordinary people because they will be the ones who will carry the €22,000 per head of taxpayer debt for the Anglo Irish Bank arrangement. Today is the day our national debt is likely to be doubled, thanks to the phrase first used by Dr. Peter Bacon, which the Minister for Finance employed last St. Patrick's Day in his *Financial Times* interview when he confessed that crony capitalism was inherent in Irish society. The *Financial Times* carried the headline on its billboards around the world, "Irish Minister confirms crony capitalism as part of the cause" of our banking collapse.

On Sunday, the *Sunday Independent* published an Irish rich list of several hundred, perhaps 1,000 rich. One person looking out from the bottom end of the rich list was "Mr. Fingers", Michael Fingleton, who was said to have about €30 million. Around the country a farmer, a doctor, a housewife, secretary or a low-paid civil servant will be conscious tomorrow that he or she is taking on a massive burden of debt gifted by Fianna Fáil while people such as "Mr. Fingers" can be on the published rich list. I do not know where now stands Mr. Seanie FitzPatrick. We know, however, that Mr. Derek Quinlan, who was a partner in the ill-fated Irish Glass Bottle site venture, is in Switzerland. We understand that Mr. David Drumm, the recent and former managing director is in somewhere such as Cape Cod in the north-eastern part of the United States. Mr. Johnny Ronan, after the rumble in Ranelagh, went for a pricey weekend to Marrakesh — €60,000 or €80,000 — and he announced afterwards that he was going to disappear out of view for a while.

Does the Taoiseach understand why people feel angry? Unlike other jurisdictions we have seen no justice in terms of the taxpayers taking the burden. Everybody in Ireland understands that our legal processes are slow. They have to be slow and thorough. However, how can the Taoiseach stand over what is being announced for these people today, in terms of a confirmed bail-out and at the same time we are giving up our schools and hospitals of the future? There is so much opportunity lost in terms of the fraction of the money we should like to have seen available, on this side of the House. That, in a way, is the tragedy of today's announcement. Like a Shakespearean tragedy it began in hubris and this has carried on — only in this case it has not destroyed the main characters, the bankers and developers. It is, however, helping to destroy so many ordinary people, and this is a peculiar Irish tragedy.

The Taoiseach may suggest that this is a tragedy for every country in the world and is due to failures of international capital, new financial instruments, derivatives and so on. However,

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

it is not, rather it is due to an old-fashioned bust stoked by a series of Fianna Fáil Ministers. I understand and accept that he inherited a train that he could not stop when he was Minister for Finance, and indeed, when he became Taoiseach, but it is painful for ordinary people.

In a previous Budget Statement on an emergency budget, I recall the phrase which was popular among British and Irish soldiers during the First World War, namely, “lions led by donkeys”. This is the sixth time today that the donkeys in Fianna Fáil have asked the lions of Irish taxpayers to leave the trenches to go over the top, face the withering fire — as Irish soldiers did in the First World War — and take on the chin the mess that Government has made of the banks and the economy.

This is not a formal Budget Statement, but let us be in no doubt that Deputy Brian Lenihan has today set the parameters for every budget for years to come, perhaps for as much as a decade. Every autumn from now on, whenever a Minister for Finance has to frame a budget, that will incorporate the true year by year cost of today’s and previous announcements. Here is an example of one small thing that will pop up on the agenda of every Minister for Finance. Some €8.3 billion is going into Anglo Irish Bank today, as provided for by a 10-year promissory note. That means that every year for ten years a Minister for Finance will have €830 million as a given item being taken out of current spending and reserved for Anglo Irish Bank. If the later €10 billion the Minister talked about has also to be provided, that will mean an extra €1 billion a year. This means that within a few years a Minister for Finance will face an annual current transfer for Anglo of €1.8 billion a year for ten years, or €18 billion.

We will also have taken out €36 billion of its bad loans, at an average discount, yet to be confirmed of 15%. All this for one small bank which specialised in lending to developers and builders. It is not a systemic bank, and has very few branches around the country. It is now a fantasy bank, with a fantasy plan that will be re-resurrected for small and medium enterprises.

It would be better if we could move into levels of honesty as regards what the future is likely to hold. There is no future for the brand, Anglo Irish Bank. It is a destructive brand, which destroyed itself through greed, weak regulation and lack of compliance. Forget the fairy stories, there is no bright future and the people there are intelligent enough to know that.

What about Irish Nationwide Building Society? That is going to get €2.7 billion, again by promissory notes, in tranches of €270 million a year for ten years. Therefore, if I am an incoming Minister for Finance I shall see €830 million a year for Anglo Irish Bank and €270 million for Irish Nationwide for ten years. That is more than €1 billion a year and if the extra €10 billion the Minister has jotted in for Anglo Irish Bank is true, that will mean another €1 billion a year. This will be €2 billion a year. In addition to all the other costs, we are also facing annual costs of €5 billion from this year for payments because of increased interest costs along with the other elements of the packages that have to be financed.

Bear in mind that as a country this year Ireland hopes to take in something like €30 billion in revenue. This means that the Minister for Finance will find that some €7 billion has gone out of that €30 billion before the Government can even think of building a hospital or school or providing for old age pensions. That is the level of the financial depredation we are in.

The figures are awesome. We heard about “shock and awe” as regards the Iraq war, but these figures are on the same level, and I am shocked and awed. I did a table of the figures earlier as we were being briefed — €16.83 billion is being transferred in the first tranche involving ten developers. That is an average of €1.6 billion for each of them. Between the ten they have 1,200 loans, an average of 120 loans per developer.

The total transfer to NAMA will be €81 billion. It was originally estimated to be €77 billion but because of the rise in the Anglo Irish Bank figure and some small falls in the AIB and

Bank of Ireland figures, it is now €81 billion. At an average transfer of 47%, that is a write-down, loss in value or black hole of roughly €40 billion.

Then there are the capital requirements listed by the Minister. I totted them up at €23 billion. It is €7.4 billion for AIB, €2.7 billion for Bank of Ireland, €8.3 billion for Anglo Irish Bank, €2.7 billion for Irish Nationwide Building Society and €875 million for EBS. Then there is the footnote that the Minister expects another €10 billion to be required later for Anglo Irish Bank. That is a total of €33 billion in addition to the losses of €40 billion on the NAMA transfers. The figures resemble monopoly money, and not just for Irish people. The Taoiseach spoke about levels of bank debt throughout the European Union and mentioned a figure of €300 billion. This is a small country among 27 and the Taoiseach should be aware that the figures we are discussing today are actually colossal in European terms for a small country. The Taoiseach suggests that Ireland is hardly a blip in the grand scheme of things. He should think again; he is simply not correct. I beg to differ with him.

This will be the top item in every budget for the next ten years. I expect that with future budgets there will be an inspector from the European Central Bank sitting in the Minister's office saying with a grim smile what can and cannot be done. If the ECB and the European Commission have acceded to this, it is only because they know that realism has finally begun to strike about the values. The Germans want their money back. They might have been foolish in lending to Irish banks but Frau Merkel wants her money back. That is what today is about. Frau Merkel wants her money back and this is Brian's arrangement to give it back. There will be a historical loss of national financial sovereignty that will infuriate all who value with pride the independence of our nation. One thing everybody in this House shares is a love of our country.

Greed has brought us to the point where recovering from this is possible but it will mean that every man, woman and child in the country will have to put their shoulders to the wheel. We will have to devise a political social framework that offers the little people something, as well as the bankers and the developers. It is all gain, care and consideration for the latter, with the little people left to shoulder the burdens. Recall the €4 billion adjustment last December. The Minister said he did not want a reference to that, but the adjustments today are multiples of that figure, regardless of whether they are in current spending, in banking, on balance sheet or off balance sheet.

The State is now the hapless and reluctant owner of dominant shareholdings in all the main financial institutions in the economy. "I own the banks" is a hollow boast. Every extra percentage of ownership is an admission of policy failure and, in their hearts, the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance know this is the truth. It will be acknowledged internationally as a bitter truth. They do not own the banks, however. The truth of today is that the banks own them. They dictate every element of policy, their interests take precedence over everything else and financial resources that ought to be challenged into economic recovery are directed instead in particular at protecting two rogue institutions, the Irish Nationwide Building Society and Anglo Irish Bank. Consider that a tuppence ha'penny little building society has €9 billion in bad loan transfers and requires a €2.7 billion capital injection to be paid for each year from our annual budget.

Since late 2008 the Minister has thrown billions of precious public savings into bailing out these institutions from the consequences of their reckless casino operations. He did not spend much money rescuing indebted homeowners or indebted manufacturers or offering a lifeline of credit to small businesses. The announcements made by the Minister have been made in every budgetary statement. Of course, they are welcome but this is about the fifth time we have heard most of them. We heard in the last two Budget Statements about arrangements for

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people from Enterprise Ireland and so forth to meet with the bankers and tell them how to get credit flowing again. We have heard several times about the €100 million for innovation and the €100 million for green projects and so forth. This is recycling; we have heard it before.

The Minister has devoted the entire stock of family silver, even the curtains and carpets, to these banks because they told him they were too big to fail. He was panicked into believing them by their sinister threat to unleash Armageddon should he refuse to give in to them, particularly Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society. Today is end game day. The end game in chess occurs when there are only a few pieces left on the board and the remaining pawns take on a special importance. We are certainly close to the end game in this protracted chess game, which has gone on for two full years since the fateful St. Patrick's Day massacre of Anglo Irish Bank share values in March 2008. That event triggered the unwinding of that bank's business model, with all the consequences we now experience to our cost.

On St. Patrick's Day 2008, the Taoiseach was in Vietnam, on one of the annual St. Patrick's Day trips. Afterwards, he travelled to Malaysia. At that time, the country, and presumably Fianna Fáil, was intensely embroiled in considering the future of the then Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, and whether he could continue in politics. Was that the reason the current Taoiseach took his eye off the ball on that St. Patrick's Day and afterwards? The share price of Anglo Irish Bank had collapsed. That was the time for the regulators to go in and sort out the bank. Had the Taoiseach done that, the collapse of the other banks might still have happened but not to the same degree. The Taoiseach lost a valuable six months. He will recall that he became Taoiseach-designate and then Taoiseach, after which people went off to celebrate. We then segued into the night of the guarantee.

In many ways the downfall of Anglo Irish Bank lay in a complex series of transactions. The Quinn family group took a 28% position in Anglo Irish Bank shares through contracts for difference. Two years earlier the Taoiseach and I had a rather bad tempered exchange about contracts for difference when I warned him about turning the Irish Stock Exchange into a casino for casino capitalism. However, it seemed like good business and the Taoiseach would not even put a 1% stamp duty on it. He withdrew the notice about the stamp duty which the Revenue Commissioners had drawn up.

I remind the Taoiseach that, according to the public record, on 24 April that year he went to a dinner at Heritage House on St. Stephen's Green, the then, and perhaps current, headquarters of Anglo Irish Bank. He cannot have been unaware that the shares in Anglo Irish Bank had collapsed in value. People in the Department of Finance, the Financial Regulator and the Central Bank had to know. They are not incompetent. They might not have great knowledge about banking in some cases but they had to know that the share price of the third largest Irish bank, bidding perhaps to be the first or second largest, had collapsed. We have no explanation yet as to who knew what when and to what extent the Minister was briefed and knew about it. However, the Minister is a clever person and a diligent politician; he had to know and the organisations that reported to him as Minister for Finance had to know.

We had the guarantee on 29 September and then the nationalisation of Anglo Irish Bank. The third event was the €7 billion recapitalisation for AIB and Bank of Ireland and another €4 billion then went into Anglo Irish Bank and was lost. We then had NAMA and everything to do with that. Following that, we had the recent announcement concerning the preference shares, which I remember those like Deputy Fahey sold on television and radio stations as being a wonderful investment because the preference shares carried a dividend or coupon rate of 8%. Those of us who suggested this was a bit of a chimera were laughed out of court. What has come to pass today? All of the preference shares are being held in reserve for use in the tier 1 capital of AIB and Bank of Ireland, which shows the truth of that suggestion. While the

Minister tells us the promissory notes might carry a rate of interest of 4%, I suggest we will wait and see whether we will ever achieve that 4%.

Today, we have Fianna Fáil's final solution. One question stands out: is there the slightest shred of credibility left in this Government's banking policy? Today's massive bailout announcement is the natural consequence of decisions made that fateful night of 29 September 2008. We are exactly 18 months and one day on from that fateful night. That night, the Minister was surrounded by bankers and he took advice only from bankers. He meekly promised to jump through whatever hoops they put in front of him, and the Taoiseach even went on radio to say no cheque would be big enough for him to sign if it was necessary to meet the insatiable demands of the banks.

The "too big to fail" doctrine, applied with no economic justification even to Irish Nationwide and Anglo Irish Bank, has taken a savage toll on the economy according to the raw evidence highlighted in the Central Statistics Office information last week. This was supposed to be the cheapest bank rescue in the world. The Taoiseach said that no cheque was too big to write to save our banks. Today, we are beginning to get a more rounded picture of the cheque he is proposing to write today and over the next ten years — a €36 billion bank bailout package on top of NAMA, which is €50 billion plus or perhaps a little less because the discounts are higher, although we do not yet know.

Mr. Jim Kemmy, the late Labour Party Deputy, once joked that while politics might seem easy to some, others had to come by the scenic route. Fianna Fáil are certainly taking the scenic route to nationalisation, via a mega-NAMA bailout, as taxpayers look set to be full or majority shareholders in the four institutions listed today. All nationalisation projects are not created equal, of course. We had the panic nationalisation of Anglo, and now we have the belated nationalisation or part nationalisation of the rest.

The Labour Party proposed a different approach. Following the model of the successful Swedish bank rescue, and as articulated by Bo Lundgren when he spoke in Dublin, the Labour Party proposed taking our key banks — I repeat, our key banks — into temporary public ownership before cleansing their balance sheets for return to the private sector. The key attraction of this approach was that it would have eliminated the valuation risk and the bailout element of NAMA. That still stands. It is not too late to rethink NAMA. There would not have been any need for the fantasy of long-term economic value. There would have been a much higher prospect of an uplift and gain for the taxpayer at the end of the process, which is what happened in Sweden, as the Minister for Finance has confirmed on many occasions.

Having taken the scenic route, we will now be left with the worst of both worlds — a nationalised banking sector alongside the risky NAMA bailout. Not only was the scenic route the longest route, wasting 18 valuable months, it was also the most costly.

The failures of our financial system demonstrate the more general failures of our entire economic system. It is inevitable that changes will come from the events of recent years and the decisions of the new regulator are the first examples of a tighter regime that will move us into line with the more general regime that will now follow the new Basel approach. Nevertheless, there remains one fundamental issue that is only partially treated today. The Government has worked on the assumption that the banks are favoured institutions that must be secured at any cost, even when they become insolvent by their own decisions. This House will have to set out new rules in law for future bank collapses, and these laws will need to be among the toughest ever brought to this country. We have endured enough from bad banking behaviour in the 1980s and 1990s. I would not now take on trust anything the banks promise.

Ireland has paid and, from today's announcements, will go on paying an horrific price for the banking policy disasters of the Government. Youth unemployment in Ireland has risen

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170% in the past two years. There are more than 85,000 people under the age of 25 on the dole. When he visited Dublin some time ago, Professor David Blanchflower, who was on the Bank of England monetary policy committee but who is also an expert on youth unemployment, spoke very feelingly in public, to me privately and possibly to the Government about youth unemployment. He suggested that all the research shows that for young men in particular — young women are not affected to the same degree — who become unemployed for more than six months and remain so for one or two years, the effects are not temporary but last for the rest of their lives. Young men lose intrinsic confidence, belief in themselves and the ability to get up and go if they face a prolonged period of unemployment. In many ways, the young men of Ireland are the principal victims of the banking disaster, not just now but into the future.

The Labour Party has offered a series of suggestions from different Labour spokespersons on, for example, internship schemes, training schemes and graduate employment schemes — anything to give the young people who are in this country, particularly young men facing long-term unemployment, an opportunity to get up and not have to give in to a kind of despair and loss of confidence that will affect them for two or three decades. The offer is still there. The Labour Party is willing to work with the Government to see that happen but it is getting very late. We are now two years into the building bust. So many young men who lost their jobs in the building industry, unless they had a chance to go abroad, which some had, are reaching a crisis because they have nothing to do other than collect unemployment assistance. Our country has had to experience an horrific recession involving lost jobs, lost pay, lost taxes, lost investments in infrastructure, lost prosperity and lost personal happiness for tens of thousands of our citizens.

The Minister began his contribution on the bank bailout today by referring to complimentary and encouraging remarks made by various international figures in regard to Ireland. In the eyes of market analysts, however, the announcements today exacerbate the fiscal problems faced by the Irish State. One question I have for the Minister, Deputy Brian Lenihan is: what is the impact of today's statements on the entire strategy agreed with the European Commission to reduce the deficit to 3% by 2014? For all practical purposes, the Government is about to issue bonds amounting to one third of our entire GDP for distressed bank assets of dubious or no intrinsic value. The Taoiseach may have negotiated an arrangement to keep this off the formal balance sheet but markets and rating agencies are not that easily misled. While the Minister, understandably, wanted to refer to people who were encouraging to Ireland in their public statements, key articles have been written in the past month, particularly by Simon Johnson, the former deputy head of the IMF, advising America not to become like Ireland. The Taoiseach must have seen this article because it was doing the rounds when he was in the United States. Paul Krugman wrote an article which was very understanding in a certain sense. He wanted to be favourable towards Ireland but he pointed out the serious difficulties we have inherited through the bank bust. He warned other countries to avoid being like us if possible. People in the ECB and in the European Commission want to encourage Ireland but we must be realistic about the impact of today. Ireland's sovereign debt to GDP will be over 100% during 2011. The Minister did not say but it is a fundamental indicator.

We have been very smug about Greece's problems and many commentators have been smug about the fact that we are not Greece. The interest rate we pay on our national debt is the second highest in the eurozone, higher than Spain, Portugal and Italy. The Taoiseach will know that Greece is one of the few good things to happen to Ireland. Because of the difficulties in Greece, the euro has been under pressure and has fallen somewhat against the dollar and sterling. One of the best things that can happen to Ireland would be a fall in the euro so that our exports and export of services would gain.

There is evidence of anxiety in the markets about Ireland's debt exposure, therefore, new borrowing and any debt that has to be re-financed may face higher interest rates. This will add to our day-to-day spending. I do not know if the Government has been open and up front about this aspect of today's decision.

What will be the long term impact of today's decision on the international rating of Irish sovereign debt? It begs the question as to who calls the shots in Irish public policy. All the banks, but in particular, Anglo and Nationwide, looked after the developers. In turn, the developers looked after Fianna Fáil, in the classic manner of crony politics. A powerful lobby of these same developers, the investors who bought the bank bonds and Government politicians with links to the failed developers, have conspired to have our taxpayers rather than the bank creditors, carry the cost.

I understand from the briefings we received today that the tier two subordinated debt is about €10 billion; €2 billion in the case of Anglo Irish Bank and possibly €4 billion each in the case of Allied Irish Bank and Bank of Ireland. Tier two subordinated debt is risk. These are investors looking for high rates of return with a very high level of risk. Yet, the Government guaranteed them all and €10 billion is outstanding. Why do we hear nothing about a negotiation with them?

Mr. Alan Dukes said to me the other night on television that a negotiation with the Anglo Irish Bank tier two subordinated debt of €2.4 billion would only save €1 billion. What is the crazy economics whereby €1 billion no longer counts as a saving? What is the rationale? Is this discussed between the members of the Government? As for the other €8 billion, the Taoiseach has not explained why it is not possible to sort out that tier two subordinated debt at a very heavily discounted rate. He has not told us whether the senior tier one bonds are €30 billion or €40 billion. Has he even attempted to suggest a negotiation with the senior bond holders?

If there is improved international sentiment towards Ireland, today's measures could put it all at severe risk as people wonder how a country facing so deep an economic crisis can casually add a vast sum to its national debt.

No details of the administration are as yet known, other than the legal announcements about the Quinn group. The Quinn group owes a possible €2.5 billion to Anglo Irish Bank. What happened in the case of the Quinn group was central to the fall of Anglo Irish Bank which in turn was central to the fall of the other banks. What are the consequences of the announcement today of the administrative process with regard to that €2.5 billion? Anglo Irish Bank will transfer €36 billion to NAMA. The €2.5 billion of the Quinn debt may be as much as 10% of Anglo's loan portfolio remaining. The Quinn group was trying to suggest it would pay Anglo over an eight to ten-year period. This was reported in the media and it was not denied so presumably there is some veracity to it. What is the Taoiseach's analysis of this situation? Is this another Pandora's box? The Financial Regulator indicated that half a billion was at issue with regard to the fall in the value of investments in the Quinn health and insurance group and has looked for administration. It is ironic that just as the Quinn group was involved at the start of the story its administration comes today as we hear the Government's final solution yet there has been no comment from Government. Perhaps this will happen tomorrow or on Thursday. The Taoiseach should make a detailed statement to the House about the Quinn group. It is an important employer with 5,000 or 6,000 employees. Several thousand of those jobs are in the insurance-related companies which are primarily affected by today's announcements.

The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Eamon Ryan, spoke on radio last Saturday. He suggested that Ireland could be asked to leave the euro. Deputy Ryan is the link person for the Greens in the Cabinet group dealing with banking. Is this what the Cabinet group is suggesting to Fianna Fáil backbenchers? I do not think the

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average Fianna Fáil backbencher would believe that because it is not provided for anywhere in the treaties. That is economic illiteracy from the Green member on a Cabinet sub-committee dealing with the banks. I think we are entitled to know what the various Government parties believe to be the Irish situation.

We heard about hair cuts today. In the material given to us today we saw a new concept called CoCo — special instruments which may or may not be part of this rescue deal. I wondered if it was not so much a visit to a barber for a hair cut as a visit to a head shop that inspired some of the people judging by some of the fantasy economics we heard today and continue to hear. However, it is ordinary people of this generation and the next who will bear the brunt.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I wish to share my time with Deputy Ó Snodaigh, by agreement.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I thank the Minister for Finance and his officials for the useful and practical briefing they gave to Opposition parties this morning. It is unfortunate that the Government does not demonstrate this type of constructive and practical approach more often because it would be more conducive to the work we do in this House. Had the Government brought forward a reasonable and practical plan to deal with the banking crisis and the broader economic problems we face, Sinn Féin would have been happy to support it. Unfortunately, that is not what we have this evening. We can demonstrate a record of supporting Government initiatives such as the guarantee scheme. We set terms and conditions for our support of that measure but because the Government did not meet them we were left with no option but to withdraw our support. I am glad we did so. The Government always has the opportunity to approach the House in a democratic manner and make it work more effectively in the interest of our public.

This afternoon the Minister for Finance told us once again that he is presenting us with the least worst option. That is patently untrue, however, because the measures he proposes represent the worst option possible. My party has proposed a substantial plan of action around nationalisation of the two major banks which would have been substantially less costly to the taxpayer than the option chosen by the Government. The Labour Party's plans contained broadly similar proposals to ours and should at least have been considered. Perhaps I should implore the grace of God when I say that even the Fine Gael option would have been substantially better than the Government's proposals for curing the banks. Again, however, we face a steamroller which the Government calls democracy. Democracy my backside. We certainly are not holding the proper parliamentary deliberations which would allow us to tease out these matters or holding a rational debate on how we can do what is best for the public and the taxpayers whose money is being shovelled into these dysfunctional banks.

The Minister does not have the authority to implement a bank bailout of this scale. Technically, he could argue in the same way as one could for a half legal moneylender who is squeezing his her victims, that a narrow technical point allows him to proceed but there is no moral basis for his course of action. If the Government has any confidence in the proposal, it should put it before the people as its election platform in a general election. These proposals would impose a huge financial burden on Irish people for generations to come and that is grossly unfair even if it is technically legal in a parliamentary sense.

The Minister is introducing the harshest cuts in decades in an attempt to reduce a €20 billion deficit while simultaneously adding hugely to Government borrowing for this bank bailout. The financial ramifications of what is happening today will be felt by generations to come. Why

is the Government spending all its energy on the banking crisis when so little effort is being put into getting the rest of the economy back on track? Why is so little being done to tackle unemployment? We are spending hours on a discussion of the Government's mishandling of the banking crisis instead of debating solutions to unemployment. For the economy to get back on track we need a functioning banking system but 18 months after the bank guarantee scheme we are no nearer to achieving this objective. The Minister admitted that we face many more years of pouring billions of euros of taxpayers' money into these banks. The Government opposed nationalisation and, as many predicted, is now being forced to nationalise by stealth.

During the past 18 months it has completely taken its eye off the ball when it comes to job creation and stemming the rise of unemployment. During that period Sinn Féin put forward a range of proposals to retain and create jobs. In recent weeks we put forward a specific set of proposals to deal with unemployment among the under 25s on the live register. This fully costed and constructive plan would offer hope to members of our population who are essential to future economic growth and stability. Instead, however, the Government is set on a disastrous course for employed and unemployed citizens.

Think of the productive use that could be made of the money the Government is throwing into the black hole that is our banks. The €22 billion being spent on the banks could purchase a youth jobs fund to create 20,000 or more jobs; the delivery of key infrastructure such as universal broadband, the western rail corridor, cancer centres north of the Dublin-Galway line and class sizes of 20 or fewer; a reversal in the pay cut for public sector workers on low and average incomes and cuts to social welfare, including the Christmas bonus; some 10,000 new community employment places; investment in key sectors of the economy such as information technology, tourism, agri-food and green technologies; a free preschool education system; an end to social housing waiting lists; conversion courses for graduates; a future in their own country for the young unemployed; and a functioning health system with adequate numbers of doctors, nurses and other front line staff to meet patients' needs.

The scale of the mess that Fianna Fail must take responsibility for is astounding. It should not be forgotten how vociferously Ministers rejected criticisms from those of us who warned that the economy was not built on solid foundations, that a property bubble was developing and that the Exchequer was overly dependent on taxes from construction and consumption. There was time to act and to turn things around but there was no will to do so. If we could see these issues, how can those who were in Cabinet during that period claim not to have known? Why did they turn a blind eye to the actions of bankers and developers? Does a party that has such close ties to many of those at the top of Anglo Irish Bank really expect us to believe it knew nothing of what was going on?

It is time to overthrow a culture that has existed in this State for far too long. A wealthy elite have been pandered to by successive Governments and has for decades enjoyed a position of privilege and undue influence over Government policies. People want answers to how and why the Government policies which fuelled the property bubble were allowed to continue when the damage they were doing was obvious. This is not about a rogue group of bankers and developers; it is about a parasitical section of our society wedded to the two largest political parties in this State and Fianna Fáil in particular. We will not get rid of this culture of exploiting ordinary people, like those who were injured or killed on the unsafe building sites owned by Liam Carroll as he lined his own pockets, until we get beyond Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael led Governments. Let us be absolutely clear: the elite, those who made up the golden circles and stuffed their pockets at the expense of ordinary workers, are now in self preservation mode and have the Government doing their dirty work. This is what NAMA and the bank bailouts are all about. Nothing has changed. The people this Government pandered to when it implemented policies that created the current crisis are still

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being pandered to. This is the true reason the Government would rather cut dole payments than introduce a wealth tax. Will Liam Carroll experience life on the dole or live in one of the sub-standard, shoe-box flats he sold to desperate first time buyers? Those at the top of the Civil Service are part of this elite group as well, such as Rody Molloy who, despite wasting vast amounts of public money, will never pay any price for his actions. In fact, he has been further rewarded for his actions.

The Dublin Docklands Development Authority is an example of the rot that existed in the State during the Celtic tiger years. Fianna Fáil cannot distance itself from this debacle and it must be held to account. Among those involved in the debacle relating to the Irish Glass Bottle Company site was Joe Burke, one of the closest associates of the then Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern. The authority is a microcosm of all that went wrong in this economy, comprising a toxic mix of Fianna Fáil and cronies around the then Taoiseach such as Mr. Burke and Bernard McNamara and Anglo Irish bankers such as Seán FitzPatrick and Lar Bradshaw, who were co-opted on to the board of the authority.

We have yet to get the full information regarding the murky goings on in these affairs but in all of this one thing should not be forgotten: a productive business, the Irish Glass Bottle Company factory, could have been saved with Government intervention. Jobs could have been saved. Now, having paid a much higher price than it would otherwise have had to pay to save those jobs, the State has a plot of derelict land which is worth a fraction of what was paid for it. The former Taoiseach should be forced to make a statement to the House outlining exactly what he knew about all of this. I challenge the Taoiseach to instruct Deputy Ahern to make such a statement without further delay. What took place at the Dublin Docklands Authority is the reason we are where we are and in the mess in which we find ourselves today. Almost half a million people are out of work and billions of euros in taxpayers' money is being put into the banks while public services and welfare are being cut. This is crazy.

It has taken the Minister too long to resolve the banking crisis, which first came to the fore in the summer of 2008. Since then, the real economy has plummeted and the banks have played no small part in this as a result of their refusal or inability to extend credit. Businesses have closed their doors and householders face repossession. The only action banks have managed to take is to hike up charges and interest rates and to fight off calls for cost-cutting among their higher paid staff members. The 0.5% mortgage interest increase from AIB yesterday, at a time when the ECB's rates remain stable, is testament to that. The bank may be borrowing at a higher rate on the wholesale market but what has it done to ensure security for its customers? When people referred to the State taking a higher stake after recapitalisation, all of a sudden the bank suggested it could sell its foreign assets. Should it not have done so before push came to shove? The failure of the Government to put a stop to the rate increase is shameful.

The banks may be borrowing at a higher rate on the wholesale market but if they squeeze already under-pressure mortgage holders, we will be looking at another tranche of bad loans in the residential property market further down the line. This domino effect will grip the Irish financial sector and taxpayers will be hit doubly for the failures of the Irish banking system. This will take place not only through the cost of recapitalisation, but through the increase in mortgage interest rates and personal loan and overdraft rates. What fruits will be borne on the other side? Will there be a nationalised State bank capable of offering individuals and businesses credit at a fair rate? Only partially. The people will be offered more or less the same. Slowly the system, if left to commercial devices, will slip back to its old unregulated ways. The banks will continue to refuse to accept responsibility for what they have done. The only stakeholder that should be given due consideration is the taxpayer. Whatever the banks wish for is

completely irrelevant at this point. In any other sphere of business these banks would be in receivership or liquidated at this stage. The attitude of self-importance is the same as that which prevailed in the lead up to the crisis and there is no basis for it to be allowed to continue.

Let us consider what the banks did to bring us to this point. They were not alone; the Government and the regulators, which effectively looked the other way, were cheerleading them. The details emerging now reveal a banking system where lenders had casual and personal relationships with borrowers, where documentation was frequently incomplete or ignored and where basic financial calculations were overridden by bank strategies based on winning market share. For example, during a court action last year Bernard McNamara claimed he was actively pursued by banks to borrow money from them on exceptionally generous terms. The financier Niall McFadden, who is facing judgments running to tens of millions of euros, claimed in court that National Irish Bank accepted a personal guarantee for a €6.3 million loan without ever meeting him. Personal guarantees were the currency of Irish borrowing during that time.

These incidents highlight the lackadaisical approach the banks took in respect of security for loans. Most of the big property deals were funded by groups of banks and now total confusion is emerging over which bank controls which assets. This emerged today in discussions with the Department. This is clear from NAMA and one of the reasons the agency has not functioned up to this point. It simply has not been able to get down to the root and branch details of where responsibility for these loans rests. During the boom AIB lent €550 million to Liam Carroll with only a solicitor's letter and the deposit of title deeds as security. Let us imagine what business people who approach the banks these days must be thinking when they hear that. Court actions have also exposed flaws in the valuation of property assets by basing transactions on a loan-to-value ratio that was too high. The banks did not allow themselves any wriggle room in case property values fell.

The Government has bent over backwards to prevent the nationalisation of the two larger banks. Given the guarantee, the initial recapitalisation, the establishment of NAMA and further recapitalisation now, we have almost spent the past two years witnessing the Department of Finance create policy the sole intent of which is to prevent the banks being nationalised. The only bank the State leapt to nationalise is the only bank that nobody wanted nationalised. There can be no doubt that the speed with which Anglo Irish Bank was dealt with was a reflection of the Government's desire to hide the machinations at the bank, which would have come to light a good deal quicker and in greater detail had the bank been allowed to fold. Instead, we are getting a drip-feed of information from a bank no longer functioning as such but which is costing the State billions of euros. The bank could require a further €9 billion in recapitalisation in the coming months, twice what the Government attempted to cut from the deficit last December. It was disgraceful when the Government chopped social welfare payments and mercilessly took away the Christmas bonus from pensioners but this is what it gives to its bailout friends.

The Minister for Finance stated that the country is in a better financial position now to deal with the funding needs of the banks, which is astonishing. The State is carrying a €20 billion plus deficit, which the EU has ordered us to reduce dramatically. According to the Government, we do not have a red cent for investment purposes, but we can use the National Pension Reserve Fund, NPRF, to recapitalise the banks after NAMA takes the bad loans off their books at an even sharper deal. At the last count, the NPRF had a value of approximately €13 billion and a further €7 billion has already been taken from the fund by the Government to recapitalise AIB and Bank of Ireland. If the Government has its way, the entire National Pension Reserve Fund will be made up of bank shares. It would be ironic if the State, after all its procrastinating, is forced to fully nationalise the banks but the largest shareholder to get burned at that point would be the Irish taxpayer.

[Deputy Arthur Morgan.]

These banks are not being hard-balled by the State. They would be defunct had the State not stepped in. They have a Government content to do everything to help them while allowing them to remain in private ownership, a Government willing to socialise their debts while allowing them to continue to privatise their profits. This is the Government that lifted the bank levy, that allowed regulation to become lax. It is the political system that bailed out AIB in the 1980s and turned a blind eye again in the 1990s. Some 70% of AIB is a majority stake in that bank, but it is not full nationalisation. How much influence the State will use while holding that stake is unclear. Certainly, we got no more clarity from the Minister this afternoon. To date, the Government has shown nothing but reluctance to interfere, as they call it, in banking conduct.

Over the past three weeks we have seen revelations that the Government's convoluted and complicated approach to the banks is also mired in secrets and unfairness. The revelation that 78 employees of Anglo Irish Bank had been awarded pay increases is the second of its kind in the past few weeks. This news comes against the backdrop of a 70% pay increase for the chairperson of the board of NAMA. When the public servants all across this land, front-line workers, are having their salaries slashed, there is this 70% increase and significant increases for other board members. Simultaneously, the Government is pushing through pay cuts and attacks on public services. It is clear that the Government values the work of the banking sector over the work of other front-line public sector workers such as gardaí, nurses, teachers.

We must look now at what reform we will get. For example, the Financial Regulator has waived capital rules for EBS, allowing the building society to fall below the threshold dictating the minimum amount of capital that a financial institution must hold in reserve. The so-called new, improved and harder-headed regulation has granted the building society a temporary derogation until 31 May, allowing it to hold less than the minimum core tier 1 capital ratio of 1%.

Any literature on the financial crisis points to the absence of these thresholds as central to the magnitude of the collapse of the banking system. This seems to be the first step in a clawback to the old system. Some might say it is only a temporary measure, propagated by the need to discount the loans. However, when the Government and the Minister for Finance signed Ireland and each and every person of this State to NAMA and bank recapitalisation, reform was promised. Now it seems reform has been short-lived.

The worst of it is that we do not have the full facts of what this will all end up costing us. The loans being taken by NAMA have received an even further discount since the legislation was announced, in recognition of the falling property values. They are falling, which means there is no guarantee that this is the best deal for the State. The Minister is pushing the State down a path of debt and we do not know where it will end. The Minister is opening Pandora's box. Today will go down in history, and the Minister and the Government will not come out of this well.

I do not know what it will take to completely overhaul the culture that persists here. It is not fair, reasonable or rational that at the biggest crisis of generations the Government simply comes in here with a proposal on a banking crisis largely ignoring all of the other fault lines in the economy to bail out these banks in this fashion. It is time the Government at least listened to some of the debate, took on board some of the points that were being made by the Opposition and we all tried to ensure that there is a proper system put in place which will not cost future generations billions of euros through the disgraceful bailout of these bankers and their friends, the developers.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta Morgan as a chuid ama a roinnt liom chun déileáil leis an cheist ríthábhachtach seo. Ceist é nach bhfuil tacaíocht ag an Rialtas: níor sheas sé i dtoghchán, agus níl sé sásta seasamh i dtoghchán chun tacaíocht a fháil don chinneadh atá sé tar éis glacadh agus atá sé ag glacadh inniu. Is scannal é sin, agus tá sé ag tógáil céim mhídhaonlathach inniu, go háirithe toisc go bhfuil an Rialtas ag ceangal an oiread sin de thodhchaí an Stáit seo le dul chun cinn na mbanc agus leis an sealúchas atá tar éis dul isteach i NAMA go dtí seo.

It is rare that I speak on finance motions. In a way, like many other citizens, I found it difficult to get to grips with the full scale of the horror that emerged when the banking crisis began to unfold.

Like many others on the left, I raised the fact that the State and its economy was dependent upon the property bubble continuing and that such was not a position that could be sustained. Two years on from the initial emergence of the crisis, I want to give the two Brians, Deputies Brian Cowen and Brian Lenihan, a lesson in the real world to put into context the giveaway or present that they are giving to bankers and property speculators. The sum of what is intended here is that they are bailing out the banks, through a nice present of taxpayers' money, to help them recover from speculation.

I remember when people invested in eircom shares and many of them got burnt and there were cries for bailouts and help at the time. I was not one of those who believed that a bailout was realistic in that case because I, and the thousands and others who bought eircom shares, had gambled. We took a punt on shares on a market and as one is always told, there is a possibility of losing money or of gaining money. The same can be said about everyone who gambled in the property market and on bank shares and who are now looking to be bailed out. The Government is bailing them out and giving them guarantees. I will deal with one such group, for instance, the subordinated bondholders in Anglo Irish Bank.

The debts of Anglo Irish Bank include the investments of subordinated bondholders. Anglo Irish Bank, and hence the taxpayer, owes that group €2 billion at a conservative estimate. Those bondholders took a risk when they invested, of which they were fully aware and which they had taken day in and day out in other institutions for many years, and they earned high rates of interest during the so-called good times. They gambled, they lost and they should have dealt with it, but the Government stepped in and gave them a guarantee. When that guarantee is up in September, I believe that is the end of it. They should suffer the consequences of their loss. They should have suffered it when the loss occurred, but rather than that, we gave them a guarantee. That is an ongoing scandal, but there are many others.

The Chair of Anglo Irish Bank, Alan Dukes, thinks that it is alright to hand out taxpayers' hard-earned money to those risk takers who, themselves, helped create the financial mess we are in. He also suggests that it is alright for the Government to pay increases to selected employees in that bizarre dysfunctional bank. It is bizarre considering that this is the bank that should have been closed, lock, stock and barrel, two years ago, and it should still be closed today. There is no reason for us to bail out a dysfunctional bank.

Nobody in the Government called a halt at any stage, or even attempted to rein in the obscene property speculation that went on for many years. The Government facilitated it by giving tax breaks and reliefs to those gambling with the economy's future. It facilitated the banks gambling on a three-legged horse. When that horse fell at the first hurdle, the Government expected us, the taxpayer, to suffer the consequences. Those in banking circles and the Government, meanwhile, were too busy congratulating themselves on the so-called success of the Celtic tiger to care about the ordinary people and their future.

[Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh.]

Their future now is repossession. I have heard Members on the Government benches claim home repossession is not occurring when Dublin City Council recently made repossession orders against people in its affordable housing scheme who cannot meet their repayments. Banks are calling in clients telling them they will repossess their property unless they start to pay off their arrears. Those are arrears they have been landed in because the Government has no job creation policy. Up to 500,000 people are unemployed and cannot afford their mortgage repayments. Where is the bailout for those who are paying over the odds on interest rates for fixed-rate mortgages on what were overpriced houses? Where is the protection and bailout for those in arrears? Their future and that of the many young people who will leave university later this year and the unemployed will be poverty and emigration.

It is a pity the Minister for Finance is not in the Chamber to tell us what his representatives in AIB were doing yesterday when they gave the two fingers to mortgage holders and small businesses with loans with an interest rate hike. Now with its majority shareholding in the bank, does it actually suit the Government to get more money out of the taxpayer this way? Does the Government intend to oppose any future interest rate increases by AIB and the other banks it controls? Or will the taxpayer get the dividends he is due in worthless bank shares?

The Government is seeking another blank cheque for the banks. Earlier, the Minister for Finance gave this and that vast figure, figures more like those used in Monopoly and difficult to comprehend. He finished his speech with a promise that even more taxpayers' money, not just that announced today, billions of euros, will be used to bail out the banks.

We must also look back at the some of those property transactions in question. The Irish Glass Bottle Company site in Ringsend, before the Dublin Docklands Development Authority became involved, contained a viable and functioning company which made an annual profit of €40 million. The workers at Ardagh Glass created the profit for the company, who earn a wage on which they pay taxes and spend in the local economy. Yet all those workers were sent to the dole queue, a signal of what was to come.

The Minister of State with responsibility for housing, Deputy Finneran, is in the Chamber. He will know Bernard McNamara was mentioned earlier. Many people in Dublin city had much hope in Bernard McNamara because he bid for many of the local authority housing scheme regeneration projects. He was also one of the speculators who has had to step aside with the crash. The Government has not stepped into his place to recreate the hope many inner city communities in wasteland estates such as St. Michael's, Inchicore, Dominick Street, St. Teresa's Gardens and Dolphin House, had of a return to what they once were — thriving communities with businesses and homes. The Minister should visit the wasteland with no hope that is South Hill in Limerick because he and his Government have dashed the hopes of regeneration for thousands of families.

The Government refused to step in to nationalise SR Technics, a viable company making millions of euros which had previously been a State company thereby guaranteeing 500 jobs. It would have been saved at a fraction of the cost of some of the bailout paid for the minor banks.

Since this crisis began two years ago, we have been presented with an opportunity to create a State bank to support small and medium-sized enterprises. To date this opportunity has been ignored. Every day small businesses across the country go to the wall with their employees becoming dependent on the State. A simple economic lesson from this is that if people get back to work, they earn money, pay taxes — even at the penal rate the Government has in place for the low paid. They also spend money which boosts employment in the retail sector and means the Exchequer wins with increased VAT and employee tax returns. This, in turn,

allows more money to be invested in public services which means everyone wins in the long term.

Instead, the Government's model is to have fewer people in work with less income to the Exchequer while giving more money to the banks. This creates a cycle whereby more unemployment is created. Unless this cycle is broken, we will go further down the hole the Minister and his cronies have dug.

The economy needs to be refocused on policies of equality, job creation and investment in education. If we want to come out of this recession, we must create a sustainable and viable knowledge-based economy. We never properly invested in education. Doing so now will give a return of a knowledge-based economy. Such investment also needs to be coupled with investment in broadband infrastructure, our public services and in repairing the roads and water services networks. Investment must also be made in energy security. We can no longer depend on imported energy, particularly when our natural resources in the Corrib gas field are sold to a foreign company, making us bid for them against England and the rest of Europe. We need a solid base and proposals have been made in regard to the Spirit of Ireland. If invested to the hilt, this proposal would cost less than what the Minister proposed today to bail out Anglo Irish Bank.

We talk about the property crisis in Ireland. Apartment blocks and estates are in receivership up and down the country. These are now in the State's possession yet people are homeless and thousands of people are on local authority housing lists. There is no logic to having apartment blocks sitting empty for two or three years when people are in overcrowded, cramped and unsuitable accommodation. The economic model is wrong and the Minister needs to change it. This needs to happen now; otherwise, the Minister will send us further and further into the black hole he has dug.

The Taoiseach: Today we take a tough but necessary step to recovery as a nation. The work done in the past year and a half on Ireland's public finances has greatly improved the world's view of Ireland. The cost of borrowing to fund our day-to-day enterprises has reduced markedly and we are now in a position to recover and grow the economy on a more sustainable basis. Many prominent commentators on the world stage see our efforts as being the model for others to follow. For example, the influential *www.bloomberg.com* notes today that Ireland's bonds are poised to outperform those of every other eurozone member except Austria this quarter, as investors have confidence that Ireland will be more successful than other European countries in cutting its budget deficit. Furthermore, Ireland's bonds are the second-best performing of all EU countries this quarter, returning 3.5%. External confidence in Ireland is returning. It is the same confidence shown by those who invest in our capacity as a country by buying Government bonds. We need this confidence to attract investment and to raise money on the international market. The international community has positively noted the measures we took to restructure our economy. This point was strongly made to me in recent visits to the United States, when the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, praised the difficult but essential decisions Government is making.

The measures we have outlined will set our banking system on the road to recovery. While the cost of facing up to our problems is very significant, the alternative is a recipe for stagnation and decay. In addition, the lending targets outlined today will provide a welcome boost to the productive sectors of the economy. Allied to that is the proposal that banks will be required to realign their business practices with the needs of the modern Irish economy. We are restructuring our economy so that in future Ireland will grow through the hard work and innovation that will come. The improvements we are making to our banking system will facilitate growth and bolster the advances made to date.

[The Taoiseach.]

Just as a stable banking system is crucial to our economic renewal, so too is industrial peace. I warmly welcome the outcome of discussions between the Government and public sector unions. It is good news for the Irish economy and for our country. It can send a very strong signal at home and abroad that we will work together to come through these difficulties. I thank those involved for their positive and proactive contribution and I especially thank the two facilitators, Mr. Kieran Mulvey and Mr. Kevin Foley. They all put in long hours of negotiation to achieve a consensus that will help underpin economic recovery. This agreement is good news because it will help restore stability to the public service after a period of uncertainty. I look forward to and hope for its ratification by the constituent unions concerned. This agreement will mean no further reductions in pay rates for public servants, flexible redeployment within the public service and changes in work practices that will deliver savings and help to make the public sector more efficient. It will give us a public sector fit for purpose in the 21st century and will provide better and more effective public services to the public we serve. I urge all public servants on the basis of this good agreement — all our doctors, teachers, nurses, gardaí, those who do much day in and day out to provide people with essential services — to give this agreement their careful consideration. Everyone must judge the proposals on the benefits they will bring to themselves and to the public in the long term. I have made the point previously that in order for Ireland to prosper we must transform our public services. This agreement has the potential to do that.

I have also made it clear that for Ireland to prosper again, we must get our public finances back on a sustainable basis. Those foundations are being put in place by the resolute action of the Government. Revenue and expenditure measures amounting to 5% of GDP were taken to improve the 2009 deficit. The recent budget for 2010 contained spending adjustments amounting to 2.5% of GDP. As a result we have stabilised the deficit at 11.25% of GDP this year, a fact no amount of distortion or spin can undermine. We have a credible multiannual framework to restore order to public finances, which has met with strong international approval. The European Commission, the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD and respected international commentators are among those who welcomed Ireland's fiscal consolidation framework. The ECB president, Jean-Claude Trichet, described the measures as bold and courageous decisions taken to put the economy back on its feet in difficult and demanding circumstances. Our strategy has attracted praise because it is working and will meet our target of restoring our deficit to a sustainable level by 2013-14. The Minister for Finance has outlined the Government's detailed course of action in this debate. The crisis in banking has taken up much of our time as a Government and we have had to take momentous decisions. We are one of the first Governments to introduce a state guarantee of the banking system, one of the first to set up an asset management agency in the current banking crisis and we know that without a healthy and functioning banking system, our businesses and service providers will not be able to grow and develop products for our main markets and sustain employment, which is what it is all about.

We need credit to flow for business and jobs and that is why today we are imposing specific lending targets on AIB and Bank of Ireland. They will make available to SMEs not less than €3 billion each for targeted lending through new or increased credit facilities in 2010 and 2011. Those working capital arrangements, provided for in the legal framework announced by the Minister of Finance, are in addition to the EIB situation, which speaks about new projects. We are ensuring existing credit facilities to businesses are catered for in this situation. From the outset, I have said our motivation in establishing NAMA was to provide credit to small businesses in order that they can grow and thrive. We are taking a further step on that road. The simplistic argument will be made that today is about bailing out banks. It is about bailing out

the economy and creating the right environment for enterprise and employment, facing up to problems and dealing with them decisively and firmly. While no one would wish that these steps would be needed, I am proud the Government I am leading has shown the resolve to do what is necessary in leading the battle for public solvency and prosperity for families in Ireland.

As has been made clear, the Government is committed to recapitalising each of the institutions involved in the NAMA process so the system as a whole can return to its rightful role as provider of credit to the real economy. This course of action will necessarily involve a substantial investment by the State and the taxpayer in the institutions. We will structure our payments in a way that eases the burden on taxpayers. We are forcing the banks to recognise their losses upfront and once and for all rid the system of the scourge of speculative loans and mismanagement in the banking system. It is right we should approach the issue in this way, as all other courses of action would not result in a swift return by the banking sector to its function as a provider of finance to productive enterprises. While the State is committed to making up any shortfall in the capital needs of the institutions, it will not be called upon until other avenues of private capital raising have been explored.

Our new Central Bank legislation, which was outlined today, offers greater protection to the economy from the reckless practices of banks in recent times. The combined regulator and Central Bank will scrutinise more closely the work of banks in our economy. It will have stronger powers and will be set up to use them more often than in the past. In turn, the Central Bank will be subject to enhanced Oireachtas scrutiny. The newly appointed Governor, Professor Patrick Honohan, and the new head of the Financial Regulator, Matthew Elderfield, have shown their independence and commitment to putting the financial system here on a sounder footing. While it cannot be denied there are large costs to resolving our banking crisis, there are significant benefits to the State and its taxpayers from these moves.

As the Minister has already explained, our economy is likely to grow faster as we have now set the banking system to rights again. It is likely that NAMA will in the end deliver a net gain for the taxpayer owing to the robust valuation process it has pursued. The National Pensions Reserve Fund, NPRF, will have in the two main banks valuable investments that have the potential to realise gains. There is a proven gain of €1 billion which will accrue to taxpayers in six months time from the guarantee schemes put in place. Reforming Anglo Irish Bank into a reduced but sound credit institution which can be sold to private investors at a later date and carving out a good bank from what currently exists will go some way towards recouping the taxpayers' assistance to that bank at this time.

The steps we are taking today will provide certainty to the people from whom we must borrow, certainty among our trading partners and, as the Minister stated, certainty to those who will invest in the country. This certainty will further boost international confidence in the country, our people and the economy and will inevitably smooth our path to recovery. Our actions here today mean that we can now begin to live up to a renewed promise for growth and success in the Irish economy, which is the key objective of Government and one that we are resolved to achieve.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I had thought the Taoiseach would come in here this evening to spell out in clear and understandable English the reason the Government has chosen to put a further approximately €20 billion into Anglo Irish Bank. The announcement made today measures approximately 8.5 on the financial Richter scale. The epicentre of this financial earthquake is Anglo Irish Bank on St. Stephen's Green under an incompetent Fianna Fáil Government in Merrion Street for the past number of years. I have no doubt but that the officials advising the Taoiseach today are the same officials who were advising him when Minister for Finance that our economy was heading in the wrong direction and into a bubble, a bubble which burst under

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

his stewardship. These people who are advising the Taoiseach today are in charge while the public servants of whom he spoke — I welcome the conclusion of the public sector talks — are having their salaries cut and will be forced to pay for the actions of the Government for many years.

The financial after shock of today's announcement, with particular reference to Anglo Irish Bank, will be felt not for one or two years but for a full generation. This is the result of an incompetent, careless, mismanaging Government of which the Taoiseach was formerly Minister for Finance and is now Leader. This doubling of the national debt with the stroke of a pen has pauperised a rising generation. The figures bandied about today are so large they pass over the heads of the vast majority of people in this country and are couched in financial language which will ensure they will not come home to roost until the lack of infrastructural facilities, cuts in pay and increases in taxes for which they will have to fork out, becomes evident.

The banks continue to stand, systemic or otherwise. The Government has put €40 billion into a dead bank. For this House to do its job properly the Government would have had to have come into this House to explain to the nation the justification for this plan. If one asks a person to invest €1,000 in a project and then returns six months later seeking a further €1,000 investment and a third time seeking another €1,000 such person would want to see the plan which would ensure a return on his or her investment.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Enda Kenny: There is no plan from the Government. The banks have sent their plans, with Government input, to Europe. What is the justification for this €40 billion investment in Anglo Irish Bank, including €8 billion today, a further €10 billion in the future and €18 billion that will go into NAMA? I would have thought the choices here are pretty stark. I do not understand why in respect of the subordinated loans, of risk-takers who invested because they knew the risk existed, the Government has given a cast iron guarantee that it will write whatever cheque is necessary. That cheque whether or not we like it will come out of the pockets and salaries of Irish workers. That is what will happen. This is not mythical money, it is real. Anglo Irish Bank is not a systemically important bank; it does not have a network around the country, it has no ATM machines and it does not lend money.

What is happening now in terms of the allocation made today with a further €10 billion to come is money over the cliff. This money is to cover the losses in Anglo Irish Bank with no return to the Irish taxpayer. The Taoiseach in his current capacity or previously as Minister for Finance had to decide on the equation of using €18 billion to buy out or pay for the bad, reckless management systems of Anglo Irish Bank or to put it to some other use such as the NewERA programme costed and put forward by the Fine Gael Party which would result in the creation of 100,000 jobs in the areas of renewables, broadband, water services and delivery of telecommunications, an opportunity to ensure the provision of real jobs with real money and real careers, but it blithely swept it off the end of the table into the black hole of Anglo Irish Bank which will never result in the return of one single job, salary or career opportunity. That is the choice the Government made.

I accept we need a strong working banking system. When the Minister for Finance telephoned me early on the morning of the announcement of the bank guarantee scheme to ask if I would support it, I agreed I would support it under certain conditions. Obviously, business needs a banking system that works. We have been told on three or four occasions by Government that every decision it took from the guarantee scheme to recapitalisation and NAMA would provide a wall of cash and credit moving through the system. The Minister for Communi-

cations, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Eamon Ryan, publicly stated last Saturday that if Ireland did not pay its bond holders it would be forced out of the euro. I have never before heard such nonsense. Perhaps the Minister got carried away when down around Reginald's Tower in Waterford.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: It was the horses that did it.

Deputy Enda Kenny: No bank manager in the country is in a position to authorise the lending of money. Bank managers at Allied Irish Bank or Bank of Ireland cannot and do not have the authority to lend money. A constituent of mine seeking to top up by €5,000 an €18,000 loan already in place was refused that loan despite his business having had a €500,000 turnover less than 18 months ago. The Government has come in here and boasted about the extra money being loaned to the banks. Allied Irish Bank and Bank of Ireland were last year lending €2.5 billion each. The Government says they will lend an extra €1 billion this year, which is fair enough. We will wait and see what happens on a regional basis in terms of what is actually approved.

In respect of loans below €5 million which are not going into NAMA, the banks are now beginning to liquidate many of these using the same criteria as applies when an entity fails and is wound up. The banks, in particular Anglo Irish Bank with its massive black hole, are not being wound up but are getting a bail out from the taxpayer despite the fact that the same principle applies, namely, a commercial entity that does not measure up must close.

The position in respect of distressed mortgages will worsen. Allied Irish Bank recently announced it is to raise its mortgage interest rates. The European Central Bank may raise its rates by the end of this year. The Bank of Ireland will probably follow this practice fairly soon. This will put more pressure on thousands of people around the country yet there is but a fleeting reference to distressed mortgages in the Minister's speech. The Government is putting €40 billion into Anglo Irish Bank, a vote in respect of which will take place in the House tonight. Tomorrow those Deputies who vote in support of this motion will walk up the steps of this House and vote to take special needs assistants from children with special needs. The public are seeing nothing but destruction. In cases where families have been focused since their children were born on attempting to deal with their special needs, they now see the Government being able to raise without difficulty €20 billion for Anglo Irish Bank and a further €20 billion for NAMA, with no plan to have a job stimulus in order to provide opportunities and careers for their sons and daughters in this country, if that is what they want to do.

Tomorrow evening the Government will, by vote, will take away special needs assistants from schools all over the country and children who need them. The Taoiseach knows this. As the former Minister for Finance, the Taoiseach failed to act on the advice which was undoubtedly given to him, namely, that our economy was heading down a one-way street, that we were losing our sense of competitiveness, our focus on exports and our capacity to keep our costs down and that we were heading into the bubble room of development which burst and now has serious consequences for hundreds of thousands of people.

The end result is that, whether we like it, the Government has the numbers *pro tem* and will force this through. I understand the Financial Regulator has to do its job and Mr. Matthew Elderfield can be very good. He set down his standards and principles. It is about time there was some regulation of the banking system which became reckless and crazy, and which led to the destruction of so many lives in Ireland.

There was and is a better way. I do not accept that, with \$80 trillion to lend internationally by bond investors, we should get hung up on a situation whereby the Taoiseach is now allowing subordinated bond holders to be given a guarantee, as happened in the case of Anglo Irish

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

Bank. Last year \$80 trillion was available for investment worldwide. Yet, we now have a situation whereby the Government will screw Irish taxpayers, workers and people by imposing a serious levy on every one of the 1.6 million families in the country.

Anglo Irish Bank has proven to be a cancer in the financial world. It has links to the disruption of Quinn Direct and persons on the board of Anglo Irish Bank were also on the board of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority, which had consequences for the Irish Glass Bottle site. The Taoiseach approved the measures for borrowing——

The Taoiseach: I did not approve anything. That is a scurrilous statement.

Deputy Enda Kenny: ——in a very short period of time, right up to the limit. There are consequences for the Irish Glass Bottle site and what it means for the taxpayer.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, we are heavily into borrowed time.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is indicative of the way the Taoiseach has allowed Anglo Irish Bank to be saved, without explaining to the House or the nation, how he can justify it in the interests of the taxpayer and the Irish people. He will rue the day this decision was made in respect of Anglo Irish Bank, in which the taxpayer is made to take all the pain and those who invested in the knowledge that they were taking a risk have been given a cast-iron guarantee.

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): This is the worst market failure in the history of the State. It is not the first in the banking area. We had ICI, the DIRT scandal and the Rusnak scandal, and perhaps there was a moral hazard in the failure of the banks to learn that such scandals would not be tolerated or accepted and led them and us into this crisis. We now have to face up to the problem, take control of it and deal with it. We do not serve the Irish people if we try to ignore it. If one examines the international experience, in terms of how one handles property crises and bubbles which lead to banking crashes — there have been many — it is clear there is a standard procedure which is followed in most cases.

One puts in place a guarantee to try to stabilise the banks, one has to have some vehicle to manage the assets which are the problem and one has to solve the capital problem of the banks. It is a fairly standard set of procedures which we saw in the United States recently and in any other similar banking scandal. It is what we have been doing. It is not popular or easy, but it has to be done for the sake of the future of this country.

Deputy Kenny used the word “cancer” and he is correct. Anglo Irish Bank has done that level of damage to this country. Shame on the people involved. The sense of regret and anger is palpable and correct, in particular because Anglo Irish Bank is such a small bank and the crisis happened in a short period of time and grew quickly in recent times when the real damage was done.

Deputy Bruton asked about the term “systemic importance”. The first time I heard the term used was when the Treasury Secretary in the United States of America, Mr. Henry Paulson used it October last year in reference to, I understand, Wachovia bank. There was a possibility it would go bust and a realisation by the United States authorities that they could not allow that to happen. Obviously they had learned a lesson from Lehman Brothers, which accounted for some 4% of American GDP. Anglo Irish Bank comprised approximately 50% of Irish GDP. They had learned the lesson that a bank the size of Lehman Brothers was of systemic importance for the overall economy. The size of Anglo Irish Bank is unfortunate and deeply

regretted. It should never have been allowed to grow that big and was a false, fraudulent banking model.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Regulation.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: When one examines it, it clearly is systemic within the definition given by Mr. Paulson, and that is why something had to be done about it. How mutual building societies such as Irish Nationwide could have engaged in such fraudulent banking practice is beyond belief. Deputy Kenny can point, but there are people on all sides who bear responsibility. I remember in 2006——

Deputy Enda Kenny: Only some contributed.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: ——at the height of the property bubble politicians on all sides said we had to do something, the market fundamentals were right, we had to keep the property bubble going and cut stamp duty and so on. There were political failings.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: That was to give people a break from their mortgages.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The political system let us down but we need to move on now and examine how we can solve the problem.

The figures today are shocking because they show a very sharp discount and show up the nature of the fraudulent banking which went on. They also give us a certain comfort. Deputy Bruton said the Irish people will recover from this. It will require us to make sure we change society for the better as we do it——

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: It takes money. You have spent it.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: ——in order that we learn the lessons from history.

We took a very harsh approach and examined the banks, and said we said we do not accept their figures any more, that we are giving the figures, in terms of what we see as the potential losses, and are using a much sharper discount than anyone expected. The figures show that our two main banks, namely, AIB and Bank of Ireland, are truly of systemic importance. While they may have made terrible mistakes, in particular AIB, they can survive this. By putting in capital we can get them working again. It is of fundamental economic importance to this country that the two banks which are the bedrock of our economic system can be turned around and get out of their current situation.

While the figures for Anglo Irish Bank are, understandably, shocking, the international perception will be that its assumption of the figures for AIB and Bank of Ireland were far worse. When they hear the regulator, who has real authority and independence, or the Governor of the Central Bank, who has real expertise in this area, say it is worst case scenario in our two main banks it will restore a certain amount of confidence in this country.

We could have, should have and did examine other options. The first thing I did when I went to the Minister for Finance a year and a half ago was tell him we had to nationalise all the banks. I am now glad we did not, because we were not in a fit shape to do anything at that time as we were grappling with such a difficult situation regarding the funding of finance for the State. We did not know what the situation was. It was far better to go through the process we have gone through, whereby we got loan valuations in order to know what was going on.

There are differences between the situations in Bank of Ireland and AIB. Had we gone in and nationalised everything, as some people at the time argued we should, we would not have had a true sense of the reality. Under European regulations, we would have had to go in and

[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

do the valuations which we have done over a recent period of time and for which we have legislated. I do not believe a blanket nationalisation would have served this country well. It would have cost us more in higher interest rates, among other problems I have mentioned.

In terms of the default option, I will explain to Deputy Kenny what I said at the weekend because I have examined the issue in detail. I have no love of bond holders or the capitalist system which it underpins. However, it exists and it is the reality within which we as a country must operate and trade. I am concerned about that and I want to be careful to get it right.

Last weekend I referred to going to the bond markets and saying we will not pay our debt on the senior bonds. The subordinated debts are different. Those who hold them have taken a hit and they will take a further hit. However, if we default on senior debt, which is effectively money on deposit in our banks, as seems to have been suggested by some Members——

Deputy Damien English: The Government should negotiate. There is a difference.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I refer to David McWilliams's argument about doing that and giving up on our reputation in that sense but we might as well go the whole hog, leave the euro and use the opportunity to devalue to get out of the economic difficulties.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Minister is mixing up Anglo Irish Bank and Ireland.

Deputy Damien English: He cannot even understand this himself, which is scary.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The certainty of that as an approach is driven by an analysis which does not consider the fact that the European Central Bank is one of the main depositors or bondholders in Anglo Irish Bank. If we take the option of defaulting on those who have money on deposit in Anglo Irish Bank, we would have to say to the ECB that we will not pay it back.

Deputy Enda Kenny: That is absolute nonsense.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: One cannot differentiate between bondholders and the ECB in that section of the balance sheet.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The senior bondholders are hedge funds.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: It would be difficult legally to differentiate between them and say we will not touch the ECB but we will touch Deutsche Bank or whichever bank is involved.

Having examined this inside out and having tried to determine what is the easiest way for us to get out of this, the default option is the more expensive and risky. It would require us to take the hugely risky step for which David McWilliams argues. While I respect his opinion and I understand his analysis — he has a certain credibility having called some of the problems in the first place — I do not agree with him that this is the right approach for the country because our problem is on a scale we can manage. It is a lower cost solution, as shocking as it is and as difficult as the figures are, to managing this in the way we are.

Deputy Damien English: A total of €80 billion.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: No other country has taken the default option and the ECB has set itself against banks of this scale defaulting in any member state.

Deputy Damien English: At what cost? No more schools and so on.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: That is what I tried to say at the weekend and it may have been misunderstood in certain quarters.

I am proud of the Green Party's role in trying to do the right thing in the past year and that we introduced a risk sharing component in order that the banks would take the hit on subordinated debt.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: It equates to only 5% and the Governor of the Central Bank said it should have been higher.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I am also proud that we insisted on and pushed for the highest haircut possible to make sure we reflected——

Deputy Damien English: The EU ensured that happened.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: It was not just the EU. If people had cared to listen, all along we said we would insist on a loan by loan valuation, we would not do favours to the banks, we would force them to recognise their losses and that is what has happened today.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The Anglo Irish Bank losses are only an estimate.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I am proud we have consistently recognised that the culture and people within our banking system are culpable and we called for them to be cleared out from the very start, particularly at board level, where they had responsibility for the strategic errors made.

Deputy Damien English: And gave them wage increases.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I am also proud we pushed for further support for the taxpayer through the introduction of a levy on the banks to cover any losses incurred. In addition, we pushed for the Government to give support to those who have been caught in this downturn with debt problems. It is important that we look after particular groups within our country who have been left in serious debt difficulties.

Deputy Damien English: What is the result of that? There is nothing there.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The Green Party has engaged in several difficult actions. First, we faced up to this problem and we have tried to take control of it in a way we think is the least costly for the taxpayer. However, it is more important that we learn lessons to change the culture in the banking system and in our markets in order that such failures do not happen again and that the State is not left with the task of holding the country together when the market fails and we can move on to recovery.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I wish to share time with Deputy Noonan.

The Minister is living on a parallel universe. He is trying to see what he wants to see rather than the reality. Anglo Irish Bank will cost the taxpayer more than €40 billion. The bank will receive €22 billion in recapitalisation and it will account for 70% of the €32 billion set aside for recapitalisation of the banks.

Senior bondholders are professional investors and they took the risk. Senior debt is not like deposits and it can be traded. How can the Minister justify voting for something that will cost the taxpayer €40 billion?

Deputy Eamon Ryan: How has the Deputy arrived at that figure?

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: By adding €22 billion through recapitalisation and €18 billion in loans transferred to NAMA.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Those loans now have the value they should have.

Deputy Damien English: Following a 65% discount.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The figures relating to Anglo Irish Banks are estimates. The loans have yet to be audited and discounted.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: There has been a 50% discount.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: What has been proposed is an estimate.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: This was done by the Regulator, who is an independent international expert.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Can the Minister justify putting €22 billion into Anglo Irish Bank? It is equivalent of the health and education budgets rolled into one. Deputy Kenny asked whether the Minister would go through the lobbies tomorrow evening to vote against a motion regarding SNAs who will no longer be provided for children with special needs.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Every Member deeply regrets it but we should not confuse the people by saying the cost of this is €40 billion when it is closer to €20 billion.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: We have no idea how much NAMA will make. We all want a banking system that works. Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland have been given time. Their losses to date have not been crystallised. If the Government wants private investors to put money into these banks, it should have outlined earlier their losses to date and how they will come up with funding. However, we will not know that for another six months. That would have encouraged private investors. We have had no justification for putting €8 billion into Anglo Irish Bank today or for putting in a further €10 billion down the line, which is extremely regrettable.

The Minister referred to sovereign debt. International capital markets will see the Government parties dealing specifically with a non-systemic bank such as Anglo Irish Bank when they should be encouraging lending into the economy going forward. Instead, for the next ten years, almost 25% of our annual tax take will be used to fund banks with €2 billion going into Anglo Irish Bank and INBS annually and the taxpayer will never secure a return. A sum of €4 billion will be paid in interest on the money borrowed to fund NAMA and the recapitalisation of the banks. Every year €6 billion of the more than €30 billion taken in in taxes will go into a black hole. How can the Minister vote in favour of that?

The Taoiseach said what the Government proposes will not result in stagnancy and decay. The Government parties have sat on this for the past year. No credit has been extended and all they have secured from AIB and Bank of Ireland is a statement that they will examine targets. They have made no firm commitments on lending. The banks have provided €500 million in additional lending, which is grossly inadequate. We need a proper, revised and updated plan for NAMA and we need to see the Government's advice on putting money into Anglo Irish Bank. The draft plan for NAMA states that more than 80% of the loans involved are performing, which is impossible. We need a proper debate and value for the taxpayer. Recapitalising Anglo Irish Bank to the tune of €22 billion does not represent value.

Deputy Michael Noonan: It is an appalling debate in which to be involved. The situation is far worse than any of us thought even a week ago. It is difficult to find anything optimistic to say or to support the Government in its difficulty. It is good that Bank of Ireland is not in deep trouble. It looks as if it can be helped out of its difficulty fairly easily without much cost to the taxpayer. Bank of Ireland has always been a bulwark of the economy. Allied Irish Banks, through mismanagement, followed the lead of Anglo Irish Bank. It came to property speculation late but when it did get involved it did so with a vengeance. It has found itself in a difficult situation and it is a costly rescue. We should congratulate Irish Life & Permanent for not being involved at all and not making any call on taxpayers' money tonight. Beyond that, the situation of Anglo Irish Bank is an absolute disaster.

In the various banking debates in the past two years, we in the Opposition have been generally supportive of the Government's difficulties. We supported the guarantee in the first instance. However, I have lost faith in the Government's ability to provide us with the facts. Ministers no longer have credibility. The reason is that when the guarantee was made on 30 September 2008 we had a new Minister for Finance who had no background in finance or economics. He has learned fast and has proven to be effective since but at that time he was new to the area. We should consider who were his advisers — the then Governor of the Central Bank, the then regulator, and the then senior officials in the Department of Finance, all of whom were incompetent. They did not protect the public interest and on the night when they were advising the Minister, they were hiding their mistakes.

Then the Minister invited in the key bankers who gave him financial advice. Who were they? Mr. Seán FitzPatrick, and the then chief executive and chairman of Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland and Mr. Fingleton was on the telephone. Their advice was to give the banks a guarantee to rescue them and they said that everything was fine. It was only three weeks previously that both the regulators and the senior bankers assured committees of the House that they had tested the loan portfolios in their banks and that they were the soundest banks in Europe. They said there was no problem. There was no question of insolvency. The Minister was caught in a situation where everyone advising him had a vested interest, to say the least of it. If lying was an Olympic sport we would win gold every year if we togged out four bankers. There would be no problem in that regard. On that night the truth was not being told in Merrion Street by the senior bankers. The Minister, Deputy Martin, knows that well.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We would have to hand back the medals in due course after the doping tests.

Deputy Michael Noonan: The Minister is agreeing with me. That was the situation. At every step of the way we have got false information. Reference was made to the valuation and the fact that the haircut was originally to be 25% and then 30%. That was in the business plan for NAMA. The Oireachtas Library & Research Service produced a paper in the same week as the NAMA business plan was published. It had four different ways of valuing assets and each of them pointed to a haircut of at least 40%. If the resources of the Oireachtas Library & Research Service in Leinster House was able to come up with a figure, what were the regulators, the Central Bank and officials in the Department of Finance doing when they came up with those extravagant figures? Even as late as last week the suggested liability that was being leaked to the newspapers was a great deal less than we are faced with tonight. This is an appalling situation.

On that night on 30 September the guarantee to the bond holders should not have been given. It was sufficient to guarantee the depositors. That was the mistake and since then the Government has been chasing itself. It has been tardy in acting as well. The guarantee was made approximately 18 months ago. A similar crisis was evident in the United States. The US

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

Government moved to sort it out and the banks are trading profitably now and supporting a growing economy. A similar problem occurred in the United Kingdom. The result was absolute trauma. It looked for a time as if the UK Government of Mr. Gordon Brown would collapse but it moved quickly to recapitalise the banks in the first couple of months and got them trading again. Now they are underpinning a growing economy.

We have been horsing around with matters for too long. The Government is still doing it. Deputy Bruton made a key point today. In the Opposition we often vote because we have to vote but I will vote with conviction tonight because no one on the Government side has answered the question. No one has made the case for why we have to rescue Anglo Irish Bank when all we are doing is putting money into a black hole. It will never operate as a bank again or lend to anyone again. It will never put up an ATM machine again, not that it had them anyway. It will not open further branches. It is not a bank that is necessary. Why mortgage our children and our grandchildren for the next 15 to 20 years by pouring money into that black hole? It all runs from the original decision. The Minister was misled on the night and action should be taken. Dawn raids by the Garda before a serious Dáil debate is not an answer to an intensive inquiry by the fraud squad into the activities of Anglo Irish Bank.

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I wish to make a number of comments. Much has been said in the debate. I concur with the comments of the Minister for Finance who described the figures involved as horrifying. The steps the Government has taken and those proposed by the Minister today represent policy of substance in leading our way out of the banking crisis. I have been disappointed by the quality and substance of the response from the Opposition today.

Deputy Damien English: The Minister does not like the message. Deputy Bruton's contribution was excellent.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The overall NAMA solution has received significant national and international endorsement. Commissioner Almunia, in his previous role as Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, stated that NAMA should be approved as quickly as possible. That was in October last. In his current role as Competition Commissioner he approved NAMA last Friday. Of the investment community 80% of respondents to a Bloxham survey agreed that NAMA has and will continue to improve sentiment towards the Irish economy. The European Central Bank has approved NAMA and will be an integral stakeholder in its operation. The Secretary General of the OECD indicated that we must stabilise the financial system and take out the toxic assets that are eating the good credit and put those aside, then we can recapitalise the banks so they can continue to lend to businesses. The recent comments of the Governor of the Central Bank, Mr. Patrick Honohan, not the previous governor but the present one, were that he had said all along that NAMA is an essential part of the strategy, that it does a number of things; provides the banks with capital as a buffer against future risks and provides them with liquidity so that if they want to make loans they can do so.

Deputy Damien English: In his first speech he said NAMA needed to have the right haircut. He said it was very important how much it paid for the loans.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The list goes on. The International Monetary Fund, for example, was supportive of the efforts to restructure the financial sector, including the decision to establish the National Asset Management Agency. Other leading commentators who have stated their support include Mr. Kevin Gardiner of Barclay's Wealth who said, contrary to what Deputy Noonan indicated, that the Government has acted speedily in comparison to other

governments. The economist, Mr. Philip Lane, said on “The Last Word” yesterday that the Government’s approach to resolving the financial crisis is an internally coherent approach. He said there was much concern a year and a half ago about the Government’s financial stability but that the Government has more capability in terms of dealing with the banks. He said that the fact that we have stabilised our fiscal situation allows the Government to be more confident that the separation between banks and the Government can be kept.

There is a range of solid opinion from policy makers, economists and institutions who have endorsed and supported the NAMA approach.

Deputy Damien English: With respect, there are as many on the other side as well.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I did not interrupt anyone from across the floor.

Deputy Damien English: There are as many commentators on the other side as well. Let us not kid ourselves.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Seán Ardagh): Deputy English. Fine Gael has its own time. It is the Minister’s time now. The Deputy should explain his point to the next contributor and he can respond in that way.

Deputy Damien English: The Minister can handle it. He is a big boy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I pose the question to the Opposition spokespersons. Have all of those people got it wrong in terms of the correct solution to the banking crisis? What has been absent from the Opposition has been any substantial policy alternative to the NAMA vehicle.

Deputy Damien English: That is untrue.

Deputy Kieran O’Donnell: That is not true.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I listened extensively, without interruption, to Deputy Bruton’s contribution.

Deputy Damien English: It was guillotined.

Acting Chairman: Deputy English should mention his point in Deputy Naughten’s ear.

Deputy Damien English: The Minister is rising us. He wants to be interrupted.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I hope I get extra time. This tactic is going on and on and it is ridiculous.

Deputy Damien English: The Minister is asking for it.

Acting Chairman: I always give injury time.

Deputy Michael Noonan: If the Minister does not like the heat he should get out of the kitchen.

Deputy Kieran O’Donnell: We could all do with injury time.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The only comfort in the interruptions is the knowledge that what I say rings true and is hurting. I listened to both Deputy Bruton and Deputy Burton. Deputy Bruton focused on the situation in Anglo Irish Bank. Fine Gael needs to recall it supported the State guarantee at that point and did so as it saw a need for safeguarding. Considering that

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

it supported the guarantee and voted for it, it should realise, as the Minister for Finance pointed out today,——

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: We did not support the recapitalisation of Anglo Irish Bank.

Deputy Micheál Martin: ——that any immediate wind-up would lead to a fire sale of assets resulting in a permanent additional and unnecessary loss of upwards of €30 billion. In addition, the State would have to provide a large sum of cash in the order of €70 billion up-front “to meet the deposits, bondholders and liabilities due to the Eurosystem”. That is a fact.

Deputy Damien English: That is not a fact.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The guarantee is in place until September.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is the one fact Deputy Bruton avoided in his contribution. In his entire contribution, he ignored the reality——

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The guarantee is in place until September.

Acting Chairman: The Deputy should not try to shout the Minister down.

Deputy Micheál Martin: ——of what would happen if today——

Deputy Damien English: He has not got a clue what he is talking about.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The critique is about today's proposals——

Deputy Damien English: One negotiates one's debt with the bondholders.

Deputy Micheál Martin: He studiously avoided the core point, namely, the cost of winding up Anglo Irish Bank, forgetting it and endeavouring to pretend one can go on——

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: No.

Deputy Micheál Martin: ——apart entirely from the default situation.

Acting Chairman: I ask the Minister to address the Chair rather than the Opposition.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: He is being disorderly.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am addressing the Chair and am looking at the Acting Chairman intently.

Economists have known since the Great Depression of the 1930s that the meltdown of any bank, a large bank in particular, can have catastrophic effects on the economy and citizens' welfare.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: They did not tell us that when it was going wrong.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Anglo Irish Bank was much larger relative to the Irish economy than Lehman Brothers was relative to the US economy. The disorderly failure of Lehman Brothers brought the global financial system to its knees——

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Anglo Irish Bank is a property company.

Deputy Micheál Martin: —and the disorderly failure of Anglo Irish Bank two weeks later would have had the same effect on the entire Irish banking system. The President of the European Central Bank, Mr. Jean-Claude Trichet, stated on numerous occasions that allowing Lehman Brothers to collapse was a critical mistake in the global financial crisis. The president of the Bundesbank, Mr. Axel Weber, said on a recent visit to this country that in the aftermath of the collapse of Lehman Brothers, allowing a large bank to fail in Europe would have been catastrophic for the entire economy. The French Finance Minister, Ms Christine Lagarde, who has praised Ireland's fiscal policy, called the decision to let Lehman Brothers fail horrendous and a genuine mistake as it triggered panic in its markets and brought banks to the brink of a 1929-style financial meltdown.

I endorse what the Minister said today. While we all understand the impulse to obliterate Anglo Irish Bank from the system, the Minister said he could not countenance such an action. He was telling the truth and stating the honest position.

Unfortunately, Deputy Burton's contribution was 90% critique and she said very little about solutions. The advices we have received show temporary nationalisation would have been the wrong option at the time in question. The Deputy's speech was about political sloganeering and political felon-setting, which is no substitute for a substantial policy option.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Felon-setting.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Absolutely.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Felon-setting, get off.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Deputy Stagg knows all about it.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: What will Anglo Irish Bank do?

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Felon-setting.

Acting Chairman: This is not Question Time.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: What will we get for the €22 billion?

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Felon-setting.

Acting Chairman: I am sorry, the Minister wants to respond to Deputy Stagg.

Deputy Damien English: We are all sorry.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Perhaps the Minister will withdraw his stupidity about felon-setting.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Through the Chair, I would like to continue my speech without interruption. I listened for a good hour to Deputies Bruton and Burton and did not interrupt.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Minister is lucky she is not here.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We are all lucky in that respect.

The point I am making in terms of felon-setting and political sloganeering is that there is a lovely political line coming from the Labour Party that is popular, about electoral appeal and winning votes but not grounded on an honest assessment of the situation—

Deputy Emmet Stagg: We learned a lot of lessons from Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Micheál Martin: —or on viable solutions to the banking crisis.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Minister would not do anything like that.

Acting Chairman: Order, please.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is the charge I would make. The guarantee was the beginning of the rot for the Labour Party in terms of policy of substance.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Minister was criticising Fine Gael for agreeing with it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Perhaps it was fine from the perspective of electoral politics but, from the perspective of creating solutions, it was the beginning of the rot. The Labour Party bottled it on the guarantee and did the easy thing in the days and weeks after it was given, namely lump everything together on popular grounds, including property speculation and tax reliefs.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: The Minister cannot have it both ways. He criticised Fine Gael for supporting it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: If one wants to talk about tax reliefs, one must remember it was its Government that introduced the seaside resort relief. The argument that the property market was stoked by a Fianna Fáil Government is erroneous.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Minister’s time is up.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Nobody gave Mr. Sean Dunne a tax relief to buy certain hotels on the south side of Dublin to try to make a profit. We had a free market and the fundamental flaw was with regulation.

Deputy Kieran O’Donnell: The Government had control over it. It was its responsibility. Does the Minister accept that?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I will deal with that.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Minister’s time is up.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy O’Donnell allow the Minister to continue without interruption?

Deputy Micheál Martin: The problem with regulation in any crisis concerns who guards the guards.

Deputy Damien English: The Government does. The regulator would be the Government.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The point is that the conventional wisdom for decades was that politicians should be kept—

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Yes, from Deputy Bertie Ahern.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Irrespective of who was in Government, the conventional wisdom was that politicians should be kept out of regulation and that there should be independent regulation that could not be compromised by the political system.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The Government introduced the legislation.

Deputy Damien English: That is what went wrong. Deputy Bertie Ahern in Government——

Deputy Micheál Martin: The bottom line was that the independent regulatory system collapsed and failed abysmally, as I have acknowledged.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The current Taoiseach is using the term “build on”.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I do not accept the simplistic propositions of the Opposition in regard to this entire crisis.

Deputy Damien English: They are very well thought out. The Minister knows that.

Deputy Micheál Martin: There are many underlying factors. As the Taoiseach said today, we have witnessed the worst global recession since 1929. The challenge is to chart the right pathways out of that recession.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Ours was created primarily by a collapse in the building industry.

Deputy Micheál Martin: As Minister for Foreign Affairs, I know international opinion suggests Ireland has demonstrated the capacity to take itself out of the fiscal crisis.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Minister has exceeded 15 minutes.

Deputy Micheál Martin: In terms of NAMA and the special purpose vehicle, the international opinion is that Ireland has created a pathway to enable the country to come out of the banking crisis and help economic recovery.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The Government is doubling the national debt.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The third pillar relates to the enterprise economy, the indigenous sector, which is still quite resilient in terms of export orientation and inward investment. There is still investment coming into the country. We need some positive thinking. The Government is at least focused on a pathway out of the crisis.

Deputy Damien English: Out of office.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Opposition is focused on electoral gain to the detriment of sound policy.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Are the slots now 13 minutes?

An Ceann Comhairle: No.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: That one was.

An Ceann Comhairle: There has been a slippage on both sides of the House.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: No.

Deputy Micheál Martin: If one had an orderly Opposition, there could be ten-minute slots.

Deputy Michael D. Higgins: I will be very glad to achieve an equivalence of slippage for the Ceann Comhairle.

I want to make some points of public economy. The Minister for Foreign Affairs referred specifically to the Labour Party. Last Thursday, we launched a policy document about a strategic investment bank that would be funded with €2 billion from the National Pensions Reserve Fund. The document specified a number of ways in which we could create employment. This is relevant to the speeches I have heard because the real issue is the question of what we could have been doing with money the State could have guaranteed and provided.

Last Sunday week, in another capacity, I was presenting medals at a soccer final attended by a couple of hundred children. Their community had built an all-weather pitch for €900,000. The cost of running it is approximately €20,000 and the income is approximately €97,000. Instead of charging, those who run the facility make sure it is available to all the local schools for free. Effectively, the cost was less than €1 million. This creates a capital provision for a facility. Since the annual cost of running the facility is €20,000, there is a surplus of €70,000 or €80,000, which can be used for other purposes. A free facility is provided for schoolchildren that addresses the national problem of obesity.

There are dozens of such projects that could benefit from immediate investment. Lest people believe we are not real in the Labour Party, they should note that every €1 million spent in construction creates 9.1 jobs of full-time equivalence. This is relevant because the Government is transferring what it accepts are astronomically large sums to keep in existence Anglo Irish Bank, the case for whose systemic status has never been made. Consider the Labour Party's position last September when we argued against a blanket guarantee that regarded Anglo Irish Bank as systemic. One did not need to be a genius to see the difference between the gamblers' club that was Anglo Irish Bank and Bank of Ireland and AIB. I challenge the Ministers to say in their replies whether it was not the case that the documents prepared by the Department of Finance to brief the Minister acknowledged that difference and the Department had prepared alternative strategies for the future of Anglo Irish Bank.

I have listened to the Minister for Finance talk, in effect, about the great things they supposedly are saying about us around the world. This type of *Ireland's Own* approach to the Irish economy is very interesting because they were not saying great things about us when the Government was flying. A friend of mine describes the reputation that Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide had in London as the building societies on crack cocaine. The Government is rightly concerned about reputation management, but can it answer this question. If it were to calculate the consequences of the different decisions available to it on that September night, did it not take into account the difference of allowing Anglo Irish Bank to be phased down and the calculated reputational responses?

If one believes one must not frighten anybody, even those investors taking a high yield from subordinated debt, one has to justify it by saying, in effect, that such investors are so nervous and highly tuned on their high yield that the slightest action from the Irish Government would upset them. If that is what the Government believes, it is a genuine position. It may be compared with other positions, however, for example, the fact that such investors have regularly taken discounts.

I am glad the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Ryan, has returned because I want to address something else to him. I regret that he was not in the Chamber for my previous example of what investment will not take place because we have had to give such a high proportion of our income towards keeping the ratio right in the banks. That is the choice. The flexibility we had in terms of the proportion of borrowing relative to gross

national product is, in fact, the flexibility one has, and that is where the politics plays a part in how to do something different. That is the argument in Greece as well, and it is a political one.

Let us discuss it in a sane manner in that regard. One of the documents floating around today from the National Asset Management Agency suggests that the agency has secured a combined investment of €51 million from three institutions, €17 million each for a 51% shareholding in National Asset Management Agency Investment Limited, the NAMA special purpose vehicle. I was in the House during the long night when we debated all this and one of the points the Minister for Finance seemed to accept was the social dividend. In the loans being transferred and the heavy discount being applied to those, where precisely is the social dividend? Going back to the example I gave about the all-weather pitches, this could be achieved with lighting, security and management for about €900,000. If these were to be on public lands, where is the transfer of assets to build all those facilities — the community halls, libraries and schools — and the social dividend that was at the heart of the argument we made when we were debating this issue in the House during that night?

How can this be squared with the three bodies I have just mentioned and can it be put on the record of the House that there is not the slightest suggestion of a conflict of interest between these bodies and, for example, Allied Irish Banks investment managers and the banks that are being released by taxpayers' money? These are basic issues that are very important, rather than getting the lecture we have just had to the effect that we are going to bring Ireland back to 1929. I am glad the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Martin, mentioned 1929. Had he remained in the Chamber, I would have reminded him that in May 1929 the concept of rational markets was introduced by an economist in Chicago. Two weeks later the crash happened and he died many years later in poverty, getting food vouchers through his relatives. The debate about rational markets went on and on through many different distinguished economists. Towards the time just before the most recent crash, it was suggested that there was no such thing and if sufficient resources were fired into the system — a continual expansion in a cosmic-type manner — a type of order might emerge. That is what has gone down.

If the Ministers, Deputy Martin or Deputy Ryan want to do something, they can promote the Tobin tax which the Green Party favoured along with me a long time ago. They can deal with the international side of things, but at the moment the Minister for Foreign Affairs is just travelling the world picking up opinions to the effect that they said in France we are great. In this manner, when it comes to explaining the cuts where special needs assistants posts should be created, more carers employed, etc., the Government will be able to say they think we are great in Germany too. Such mantras may be kept up, but they are nonsense. The fact is that there are political choices to be made.

It is necessary to be real in a way that anyone can understand. I believe I am being fair to every ministerial speech I have heard in saying that the only construction to be taken from what they said is, in effect, that when the banking system is stable, we shall then get on with the other matters, that the demands of the real economy are somehow residual to all this. Meanwhile, small retailers throughout the country are having their arrangements with local banks changed. Why should the banks do otherwise, since they can take Government bonds, exchange them for real money with the European Central Bank and get about 2% above anything that may be had in the national economy? There is neither compulsion nor attraction for the banks to put any money into the Irish economy, so let us get real.

We are always being told this about Labour's practical proposals. These entail recognising the liquidity needs of the real economy, having a strategic investment bank and using some of the National Pensions Reserve Fund before it is eroded in the mad caper that was Anglo Irish

[Deputy Michael D. Higgins.]

Bank. At the same time the real economy should be restored to the banking sector, as should a version of political economy that recognises real political choices.

Every speech today on the Government side had the same message, to the effect that they are all impressed abroad at the grief we have been able to visit, fairly silently, on the people at home. That is a miserable argument. It is Dickensian and is illiterate in its economics. What we are listening to is, in fact, the justification of the consequences of a bad night at the casino.

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: I wish to share my time with Deputy Paul Gogarty, with the permission of the House. As the famous saying goes, those who do not learn from their mistakes are condemned to repeat them. This is, without doubt, the most serious financial crisis in the history of the State, brought about by a combination of factors which all occurred in a relatively short period of time: an international financial crisis, an international recession, a property bubble in Ireland, the failure of financial regulation in Ireland, and a completely reckless spending spree carried out by some of our banks. That is why I welcome the banking inquiry which has been set in train by this Government and which is now in its first phase. I understand that first phase, which is doing the preparatory work, will report some time during the summer. The second phase of that inquiry will be a fully sworn commission of inquiry under the commission of inquiry legislation. I believe such an inquiry is extremely important. The people deserve to know exactly how this crisis came about. That is the least we owe them.

The figures given today by the Minister for Finance were truly horrendous. There is up to €18.3 billion for Anglo Irish Bank, which does not include the €4 billion already given, €2.6 billion for the INBS, the money already invested in Bank of Ireland and AIB and the further moneys that might have to be invested in those companies. These are extraordinarily large amounts of money. The public is correctly concerned about this and has every right to be concerned. The Minister echoed that concern in his speech. However, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs said, there must be a proper pathway out of this crisis and, in fairness to the Government, it has produced that pathway.

If one examines in detail the legislation passed by the Government since September 2008 when the crisis first started, one will notice that the preamble to each measure sets out clearly that the background to each Act is the severity of the economic crisis. In rough chronological order the measures taken were the bank guarantee announced on 30 September 2008, various budgetary cuts, the pension levy, the NAMA legislation, the recapitalisation of the banks and the banking inquiry which I have mentioned. Earlier, I heard Deputy Michael Noonan chastising the Minister for Finance for being tardy. I reject that.

Deputy Damien English: He was right.

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: Given the amount of legislation, the complex nature of the problems the State is grappling with and the depth of the recession, the Minister for Finance and the Government have done exceptionally well in this area. I sat through the Second and Committee Stage debates on the NAMA legislation, as Deputy Higgins can testify, and although some good and genuine points were made by the Opposition, there was a great deal of time wasting by the Opposition throughout that process as well.

Deputy Damien English: We do not agree with it. Get that into your head.

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: The Opposition cannot have it both ways. It cannot expect the State and the Government to act quickly yet delay and hobble it at every opportunity and in every procedure in the Dáil. That is inconsistent. What has the Opposition proposed? Fine Gael at least supported the bank guarantee but inconsistently does not support the NAMA

process. The Labour Party is consistent. It does not support NAMA, nor did it support the bank guarantee. In fact, Deputy Joan Burton, when responding to the budget in 2004 said all the money in the National Pensions Reserve Fund should be used on existing projects.

I strongly commend the Government's actions. I welcome the Minister's speech today. This is a very difficult day but, to echo the famous quote, this is perhaps the end of the beginning.

Deputy Paul Gogarty: In September 2008, the Irish banking system was about to be rolled over as a result of bad business decisions, lax banking practices particularly with regard to lending, a related political system unduly influenced by vested interests at both national and local level, to which I have alluded in previous contributions, as well as poor regulation. It was brought to the brink by its incapacity to deal with what was, admittedly, a global recession. Opinion still differs as to whether Anglo Irish Bank could be described as a systemic bank. The risk was that if Anglo Irish Bank fell, the rest of the Irish banking system would collapse. The Minister for Finance made a judgment call that Anglo Irish Bank needed to be protected, first by inclusion in the bank guarantee scheme and, later, through its nationalisation. It was an educated decision because the risk in letting Anglo Irish Bank fail was far greater than the risk in trying to manage its debt portfolio in an incremental manner through a national asset management agency.

Others both inside and outside these Houses may seek solace from the comforting security of inconsequential responsibility. The suggestions put forward have ranged from pulling out of the euro through letting the banks collapse to nationalising them. That would all be at a much higher cost to the taxpayer than a partial and temporary equity stake. The Minister, Deputy Brian Lenihan, as the line Minister could not afford to take those risks and just put forward ideas. He had to find something that balanced innovation and conservatism simultaneously. That is what NAMA is, and the Green Party agreed with this and fed into the process.

Much has happened since September 2008. There is a new Governor of the Central Bank and a new Financial Regulator. We now own Anglo Irish Bank and this process has begun, for better or for worse. It should be allowed to continue to minimise the cost to the taxpayer and maximise the returns from the good bank element in the future. There is a new chief executive in Anglo Irish Bank whose responsibility is to the Irish people, not to cronies and vested interests. I am disappointed that some say it is still more cost effective to let Anglo Irish Bank fail and leave its debts uncovered. The argument has moved on. We cannot realistically default on those debts without increasing the cost of borrowing and risking a Greek style financial tragedy. Moving forward is the only game in town.

There also appears to be confusion about where the money is coming from and whether there is an alternative way to spend the huge sums going into NAMA and bank recapitalisation. This is not our wish list. We had to put our banking and economic system on a sound footing and put the money into the banks. This money is coming from different sources, not a wish fund which one can spend on health, education and wages. It comes from a preferential ECB rate which is designed only to cover our bank rescue and NAMA. It would not be available otherwise. If one believes that getting our banking system up and running again is crucial to our economy, there is no other option and this is the cheapest method available. Other criticisms regarding lack of spending on capital projects or covering current annual State bills are spurious.

Today, we have been given the figures relating to the loans transferred to NAMA, comprising 20% of the entire portfolio. The average discount of 47% is far higher than the original guesstimate of 30% and puts paid to the suggestion that this would amount to favours for cronies. This is a decision made on commercial grounds and putting the public interest first. We now

[Deputy Paul Gogarty.]

own significant shareholdings in the larger banks. This will balance the risks associated with NAMA to ensure a return in future for the Exchequer.

I welcome the measures to protect those at risk of losing their homes, which were announced previously. I also welcome the statement of intent by the Minister to provide additional support to SMEs in particular, with regard to providing cashflow and the credit review process. One sector that could do with help from the State is the printing sector. It is experiencing huge cashflow problems at present. There is scope for the State to act. It could cut up its contracts into contracts of under €50,000 and ensure that Irish printers are provided with good business, rather than the current practice of giving it to contract operations to divvy out the printing to companies in other EU countries that are not covered by the same stringent regulations. Think Irish first where that is possible and help speed up the economic recovery.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I wish to share time with Deputy Deenihan.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is agreed.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion before us. The bank bailout that has been presented to the Dáil today is a gambler's nirvana. Sean Fitzpatrick and the big developers of this country gambled on the Irish property market, and that was funded by the banks. The gamble dramatically inflated property values. The banks then supported these untenable prices by providing mortgages of 100% and more to young couples, whom they knew would find it impossible to make their repayments if there was a downturn in the economy. The developers and the bankers gambled, they lost and now the taxpayer is being asked to repay these losses — some €16,500 for every man, woman and child in this country. This is what we are debating today. This is the bailout for which every single individual living in this country will have to put their hand in their pocket. Some 70% of that money will go directly to bail out Anglo Irish Bank, which will not create one job or support one small business.

Legitimate questions that have been put forward in the House and elsewhere by Deputy Richard Bruton have been ignored by the Government, which cannot provide answers to them. The Government attitude is that we must spend another €36.3 billion to protect the €4 billion we have already wasted on Anglo Irish Bank. This is nothing but roulette economics. It is €36 billion that could take half the unemployed off the live register and save the €4 billion in cuts which were announced last December.

As speaker after speaker on this side of the House has said, there is €2 billion in subordinated debt that is held by hedge funds, whose job is to run high risk funds with potential high risk of gains and losses. There is no reason the Irish taxpayer should have to bankroll those hedge funds yet the Government is guaranteeing everything. This goes back to the Taoiseach's commitment in the House that whatever cheques are necessary will be written to bail out the banks. It is threatening the country with national bankruptcy, the doubling of our national debt and the jeopardising of the future of our children and their children purely on a hunch that cannot and will not be backed up by the Government.

And all for what? To protect against reputational damage, we are told, because if we do not bail out the septic bank which is Anglo Irish Bank, it will damage the reputation of this country. While it may damage the reputation of the Minister for Finance when he meets his colleagues at ECOFIN meetings, Seánie Fitzpatrick was not too worried about reputational damage when he had secret loans of up to €129 million from Anglo Irish Bank. The Government needs to decide whether it wants to protect against reputational damage or against the long-term economic damage that can be caused to this country.

Deputy Richard Bruton pointed out that today's decision will freeze credit in this country for at least another eight months. Not one red cent will come out of the banks in the next eight months as they try to protect their shareholders. If we have a basket economy with more than 500,000 people unemployed, what reputation will we have at that stage? We must use the money that is being used to bail out Anglo Irish Bank to restructure our economy, to support business, to create jobs and to make Ireland an attractive investment. Will anyone remember Anglo Irish Bank in the future? If we can get our act together and build up our economy, no one will. Our reputation has to be based on getting people back to work and getting this economy off its knees.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: This is the fourth time we have come back to the House to discuss this crisis. First, there was the guarantee, next came the capitalisation, next was NAMA and now we have this chapter. I ask whether this is the last chapter, but I doubt it is.

The Minister and the Government give the spin that Ireland has been recognised internationally for taking corrective action. The Minister of State, Deputy Barry Andrews, and I were in America recently and that is the line being taken there. While the Opposition does not deny this is the case, those in America making that commentary are not living in Ireland, do not realise there are nearly 500,000 unemployed and that we have major difficulties across the spectrum, be it in education, health or otherwise. The spin that is given abroad is not the reality on the ground in this country.

There are no guarantees whatsoever in today's process. I know the Government has asked the banks to lend €3 billion to small business but there is no guarantee this will happen. The regulator has put pressure on the banks in regard to core tier 1 capital requirements. From where will that money come? The only possibility is that it will come from the Government because it will not come from anywhere else. The banks will be saving money, not giving it out — that will be the pressure on them, and it will not change. Small businesses will close every day. It is only since January that this pressure has really come on. I know of viable businesses that were depending on overdrafts but these have been withdrawn and they are simply closing their front doors. There is nothing in today's statement that convinces me there will be any change after today.

While I note ISME has welcomed the proposals by the Minister, it too has expressed concern that this may not mean there will be an increase in lending to small businesses throughout the country. A number of tourism enterprises are currently gearing up for the summer but they need cash flow and overdraft facilities because it is normally at the end of the year they come into profit. If they do not get these guarantees from the banks, they will not be able to start up business.

Following today's announcement, the taxpayer is facing a bill of €40 billion and counting, mainly for bailing out Anglo Irish Bank. It is difficult to explain to people how those who were involved in Anglo Irish Bank can have property all over the world and enjoy their summer in the Mediterranean, South Africa and elsewhere when the people here must suffer in paying that debt. The people are not fools. They know how they are being penalised and public servants know they have had their salaries reduced. Much of the public service dispute was an expression of anger at what has happened, as much as anything else. People cannot understand why 70% of the taxpayers' money which is being allocated to recapitalise the banks is going to one bank which is a dead end, will not lend money to anybody and will do nothing for this economy. It is difficult to explain how this is so and why the Government must prop up Anglo Irish Bank.

As Deputy Richard Bruton said earlier, the Government is throwing good money after bad with Anglo Irish Bank. Fine Gael's policy to wind up Anglo in an orderly fashion and allow

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the creditors to recover whatever value they can is now becoming more and more relevant. The Government's argument against such a course of action is based on trying to scare people into believing that any option but its own is too costly, which simply is not true. The Minister, Deputy Brian Lenihan, should publish the evidence on which he is basing his decision regarding Anglo so the public and relevant experts can make an informed judgment on the Government's strategy.

This is what we have been asking for but information from the Government is not forthcoming. It is frightening when one considers that, through this action, we are doubling the national debt to €115 billion. How will we and the next generation cope with this into the future? Today will go down as a watershed in the economic history of this country. This decision will be there to fester and to affect our economy, taxpayers and services for the future and will reflect very poorly on this Government.

Deputy Noel O'Flynn: I wish to share time with Deputy Edward O'Keeffe.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Noel O'Flynn: I speak tonight as one of the thousands of small and medium-size enterprises who need a voice in this Chamber. I also speak for the people who have mortgages and personal loans but who, because of this downturn in the economy and because they may have lost their jobs, need our help in dealing with the financial institutions. I speak tonight not only as a Deputy but as a businessman with a small business who started business on 1 April 1985, 25 years ago. The date is April fool's day and people said I was mad to begin on that date but I was not mad because it worked out well. It was in the middle of a recession and over the years my business has managed to do as well as possible.

We are still in business but the past two years have been difficult for any business in the SME sector. The motor industry business is down between 30% and 60% in many places with many closures and loss of jobs. Small and medium-sized enterprises need finance and working capital. We need confidence in business to trade, to purchase, to support credit and to trade in a safe environment. The difference in 1985 was that the banks were not broke and had money to lend but there was a world-wide recession. This confidence has not been evident in the country in the past two years, due to the lack of capital from the financial and banking systems.

I welcome the Government's decision today that AIB and Bank of Ireland will make €3 billion each available to the SME sector to kick-start economic activity. This will be monitored by an independent body with an appeals process to allow those unable to obtain finance to appeal that decision. No one is asking the banks to fund or lend to businesses which are not sustainable or profitable but we ask for fair play. Banks lend money, it is their business, their trade. They make money from this activity. Businesses make goods and supply goods and services, that is their business. They make money to reinvest and that is the nature of their business. The banks were recklessly lending money. Now they need our help but they have not been lending money. They are reducing overdrafts for business and personal accounts and putting pressure on people to pay their outstanding balances, driving some people to depression and even worse. They are putting sound, profitable businesses at risk by starving them of working capital. These businesses did not contribute to the banking crisis and to breaking the banks.

Those in the banks who loaned recklessly for land and buildings must now be removed from our banking systems. The Minister has started the job and he should finish it. Loans, charges and account costs must not be prohibitive by means of indirect charges and increases. Stealth

charges have been introduced and charges imposed on direct debits. I could go on all night about this issue. If we do not monitor and challenge the banks and ensure the capital they are receiving and the bonds they will cash for the loans going to NAMA are used for productive lending to the business and personal borrowers, they will go back to their old ways of banking. They must be forced to concentrate on lending to get this economy back on its feet.

The bank guarantee is worth €1 billion to the Exchequer this year. The taxpayer must know that this money will be available this year. We must ensure that when AIB and Bank of Ireland shares are sold in years to come, the State will make a profit. Unfortunately, I agree with the Opposition. The fate of Anglo Irish Bank, EBS and Irish Nationwide, will cost the State money. The alternative is liquidation which would cost the State more. The investigations in the banking sector must be concluded and the Oireachtas investigation must start. Those responsible for wrong-doing must be brought to justice and punished.

Deputy Edward O’Keeffe: I am pleased to speak in this important debate. I speak as a Deputy for Cork East and I speak on behalf of my party which has been to the forefront in Irish politics. I cannot understand people who attack the banks. This is one of the great world recessions but it will not be fixed by bashing the banks and criticising them. The SMEs are getting money from the banks. The economy has shrunk by 20% and SMEs are distressed but there is only a 2% shortage in credit, according to the business newspapers I read every day. There is no point in putting pressure and stress on our Irish banks to fund SMEs when the foreign banks who came here and caused aggressive lending which led to the current problem, will not be asked to do the same. There will be cherry-picking of the best SMEs by the foreign banks and the Irish banks will try to manage and look after distressed SMEs.

I wish to address the issue of Anglo Irish Bank. I am a farming businessman. I would not hold Anglo Irish Bank in my portfolio but I would have it liquidated tomorrow morning and sold off. It is going to be a sore and a boil on the Irish Government and the financial system of this country so long as it is left in existence. It has been a disgrace to Irish banking, to the Government and to the Fianna Fáil Party. Along with other colleagues, I was one of the first to say that this bank would cause great trouble in the days and years ahead. I also said that the construction industry would bring tears to the people and the families involved and how right I was. My then Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, said that people saying those things should commit suicide. I did not commit suicide and I probably never will but it was an outrageous statement when our whole economy was falling apart.

I want an answer to a question. Mr. Matthew Elderfield has been appointed as head of financial supervision. Mr. Elderfield worked in the financial services in the United Kingdom. In 2006 he went to Bermuda which was a British colony at one time. He has been in Ireland since last November. What was he doing in London when Northern Rock was on the eve of going bust? He is adopting a Draconian approach to the banking system.

Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Banks have stood the test of time in this country and have served us well and honourably. They are in distress and difficulty now. Bank of Ireland seemed to have been given a bit more support from the Government and from Mr. Elderfield than has AIB. AIB has been more successful in serving our community on this island for many decades and will continue to do so. It has a number of assets abroad which are worth a lot. Fair play to the bank because it had the foresight to invest. It has banks in America, Poland and London. These are all worth €5 billion or €6 billion. Why make them sell in the next 30 days if there is going to be buoyancy—

Deputy Michael Ring: What is the Deputy talking about? We had to bail them out.

Deputy Edward O’Keeffe: Deputy Ring does not know the first thing about banking and he can shut up. He should shut up, coming from——

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, Deputy O’Keeffe.

Deputy Edward O’Keeffe: I am being interrupted by an ignoramus from the west of Ireland.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are endeavouring to get some control back to the House.

Deputy Michael Ring: I could not listen to that nonsense.

Deputy Edward O’Keeffe: Why should AIB be told to sell its assets in the next 30 days? It should be given space to sell its assets and they will get more on the market. If the world economy is on the up — which it is — the bank will make substantial money on those assets. AIB may then become the free bank in our society and may not be dependent on the State and Mr. Elderfield telling us what to do. We do not want foreigners in here. Michael Collins, Liam Lynch, Patrick Pearse, James Connolly, would not have those foreigners running our business. It is about time we looked after our Irish people who are well educated.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy’s five minutes have expired.

Deputy Edward O’Keeffe: I am sorry I was interrupted by that man from Mayo, who knows nothing about banking but a bit about leaving cakes in a van.

Deputy Michael Ring: I know more about banking than Deputy Edward O’Keeffe. All he cares about are his bloody shares. He says one thing on RTE and another in here.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ring, please.

Deputy Edward O’Keeffe: Go home and bake some buns.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: I wish to share my time with Deputies Ring and Durkan.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Edward O’Keeffe: I want my questions answered.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy O’Keeffe, please.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: Today is a dramatic and traumatic day for the Irish people and especially the taxpayers. Quinn Group, which is much admired in my constituency, has been put into administration by the regulator and at the same time Anglo Irish Bank has been given a handout of €8.3 billion with a promise that it will get a further €10 billion when necessary. The Anglo Irish Bank loans being transferred to NAMA will be discounted by at least 50% and the transfers from the Irish Nationwide Building Society loans will on average be discounted by 58%.

It is unforgivable that the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance have asked the taxpayer to bail out these two institutions after their management caused havoc in this country through their irrational and unbelievable lending structures. While other banks were also careless it is clear that Anglo Irish Bank and the Irish Nationwide Building Society will cripple the Irish taxpayer for the next several decades.

Unfortunately, the Minister has put off a final decision on AIB and Bank of Ireland. This means there is no guarantee for businesses on when normal banking structures will once again

be in place. Clearly these banks will use the time provided to them to strengthen their own structures rather than provide normal lending to viable projects.

I was disappointed that the Presbyterian Mutual Society was not even mentioned. This is an all-Ireland institution which was forced into administration when Governments North and South provided guarantees to other banks. The issue was discussed at the time of the Hillsborough Agreement and although the €100 million required for it, including a 2% involvement by the Irish Government, is chicken feed compared to Anglo Irish Bank or the other institutions, it would be enormously important to the investors concerned. I urge that recognition be given to the issue even at this late stage.

The fact that Quinn Group has been put into administration has caused shockwaves across the Cavan-Monaghan region and further afield. Seán Quinn created thousands of jobs in an area the Government and the IDA ignored. Without him, I do not know what would have happened to the region. Regulation is important but we must not over regulate. I hope for everybody's sake that Seán Quinn and his companies can weather this storm and that the job they have done for the Irish people will be recognised.

Deputy Michael Ring: My blood boiled when I heard a previous speaker congratulate the banks on the wonderful job they have done. The legislation we should be debating this evening would allow us to detain these fellows in the Curragh Camp for what they have done to this country. This is not the first time we have had to save banks. The taxpayer had to pick up the tab when our banks invested in America and elsewhere and bail out the messers in PMPA, most of whom were associated with Fianna Fáil.

The people of this country do not understand what €40 billion means. People who are sitting at home unemployed are paying for Seanie FitzPatrick and the other guys in Anglo Irish Bank. They were every bit as bad in AIB. Tonight, however, a Deputy claimed we have a wonderful banking system. They destroyed the economy and the country and have put us back 100 years. I do not hear any outrage from the Taoiseach or the Green Party at the destruction of our economy or at bailing them out again even though we cannot afford to do so.

I am sick and tired of the rich being protected by Fianna Fáil and, now, the Green Party. If Green Party Deputies had any backbone, they would say "No, we will not vote on this. We will give the people of the country an opportunity to decide." If the people decide to give money to AIB, Bank of Ireland and Anglo Irish Bank, fine, but they will not want to do so. Small businessmen all over the country are coming into our clinics because they cannot get credit. These are the people who will create jobs.

Deputy Edward O'Keefe wants to know what we are doing for the bankers. I want to know when we are going to see some of them put behind bars, where they belong, for destroying the country and the economy. They are friends of Fianna Fáil and that is how we have paid for the Galway tent. Most of the people of this country will finish up living in tents because of Fianna Fáil. The sooner we get that party out, the bloody better for the sake of living in an honest and decent country.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: In his opening statement, the Minister stated:

The country has come a long way since we introduced the State bank guarantee 18 months ago . . . Back then, our banks were on the brink of financial collapse and our economy had gone into reverse. Revenue had fallen steeply and unemployment had risen sharply. For the first time in a quarter of a century, we were experiencing negative growth.

I know he has a sense of humour and I think he grinned to himself when he penned those lines. Everybody in this House is aware that we are contemplating a truly appalling vista.

[Deputy Bernard J. Durkan.]

As Deputy Ring pointed out, the uncontrolled operation of the banking and property systems has burdened the public, including those with new or old mortgages and business owners who cannot get sufficient credit, with the bill. The people behind these problems claimed to know better than anyone else and that they were worth every penny they cost us. They were wrong about everything. The economy has not been run well since 2002 because, as anybody could have attested, the fundamentals were wrong.

We have encouraged competition in the banking sector. Anybody who moves a deposit from one bank to another can increase significantly the interest earned, whereas he or she would earn nothing by leaving the money in one place. In theory, it would be better for people to move their deposits to a different institution but given the instability of the banks over the past couple of years, they are understandably slow to do so.

Reference is regularly made to people who borrowed unwisely to purchase houses. However, they were told that they had to get onto the bottom rung of the property ladder. Many sincere people who are now caught by negative equity have to pay for the banks' codology on the property market.

Deputy Edward O'Keeffe claimed the world economy is on the up but the problems that affect our economy are deeper than anywhere else in the world because nothing was done to address the issues on time. Let us remember that those paying for it are the citizens of Ireland. The citizens, who are already shouldering their own burden of debt incurred as a result of banking and economic policy, must now carry the burden for the banking system as well, which is a sad day for this Republic.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): I refer to the statement made by Deputy Ring and I wonder whether his decibel levels sometimes breach health and safety standards, especially for those sitting next to him. I am long enough in the building to remember the support the Fine Gael and Labour Party Government had to give AIB in 1985 in respect of the ICI operation. That was supported by the then Opposition.

I welcome the setting out by the Minister for Finance of a comprehensive statement of strategy and decisions in regard to the opening phase of NAMA operations and the recapitalisation of the banks. While it is often a natural, human, not to say political instinct to put off facing up to difficult problems, the Minister and the Government have taken the bull by the horns and set out the full extent of the problem, however unpalatable — it is extremely so — and how it must be tackled. Concealing problems is not the road to recovery either for banks or this society.

NAMA has continued to be hotly debated ever since the legislation was passed. It has been claimed or otherwise implied that what the Government is doing now will put future generations in hock. However, it is the irresponsibility of property developers and lending institutions that has done this. The Government and other authorities have been criticised for not having done enough to stop the madness and sometimes for adding to it. From time to time, we all had political or partial insights into the dangers but none of us consistently so. Prominent Labour Party Deputies frequently boasted that we were the second richest country in Europe, which was true on paper, but only on paper, and that the country was awash with money. Those who wished to restrain over-lending or development were cast aside.

We have many lessons to learn about the recent past, not least about not putting all our eggs in one or two baskets, the need to opt for a more cautious or sustainable approach to development, which will inevitably mean less exciting policies in some cases, and learning to say “No” to schemes that appear to promise large jobs and profits. Problems were greatly exacerbated

by the international crisis in banking confidence. Deputy Burton was correct to state the problem built up slowly but then crystallised with the collapse of the Lehman Brothers. It is risk-free to make suggestions with regard to alternative acts or courses of action that should have been taken, whether such suggestions come from the Opposition or the media. However, the Government of the day alone carries responsibility for the consequences of its decisions in an emergency. Perhaps this is why the changes made last week were cautious. Only the Government has any recent experience of the pressures of crisis management, although there are still some on benches opposite who have experience of the crisis of the 1980s.

Repeated allegations are made about the proximity of the main Government party to bankers and developers. Perhaps someone would like to explain what in today's statement or in NAMA's decisions represents favours to either group.

Creating confidence at home and abroad is vital to our recovery. Today's statement represents strong Government decisions, not those of a Government short of either strategy or ideas. The decisions create a greater degree of certainty. They free up the banks' ability to lend, which will be as important in the time of recovery as it is in today's depressed circumstances.

Like others, I welcome the direction to the two main banks to lend €3 billion as part of a seed capital fund and for environmental, clean energy and other projects. The credit review or appeals process to address firms denied necessary credit is very valuable. The Minister has explained why Anglo Irish Bank was systemic and why it would not be a good option to close it down either in the shorter or longer term because that would greatly increase the liabilities faced by the taxpayer. The Government is pragmatic about the ownership of banks. It is not an ideological principle.

Deputy Crawford called on me to meet the Irish Presbyterian Mutual Society and I have done so. However, 98% of its assets and holdings are in the UK and it is the responsibility of that country. In this matter there is a dimension of defending the economic independence and viability of the State, whether in budgetary or banking decisions. I welcome the realistic draft agreement reached last night.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am pleased but somewhat saddened to speak on this issue. It is a disgraceful situation in which we find ourselves. My message to the bankers and the small cabal of developers who caused this problem is, to misquote Shakespeare and a former Taoiseach, that they have done the State some mis-service and we know it. Unfortunately, the taxpayer knows it and the taxpayer must get on with things.

Deputy Frank Feighan: We will let that go.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: The taxpayer must get the best possible deal for this country from now on. I refer to the chart of bond spreads. The actions taken by the Government since this time last year have saved approximately €1.5 billion in interest payments. This is equivalent to another pay cut for the entire public service saved by this Government having the most effective policies to reduce the interest rate we pay on the national debt, which is at a serious level.

Deputy Frank Feighan: That is fantastic.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: We have been above Greece in terms of the fees on our interest for some time because of the actions the Government has taken, unpalatable though they have been. It is disgraceful that we are in this situation. These actions have stabilised the situation and have saved the country significant sums of money.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: What about the €4 billion?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: We must continue to do this. No one likes what we must do with Anglo Irish Bank.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Tell us about Anglo Irish Bank.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I am disgusted and angry that we must do it but there is no point sitting on the sidelines and making up arguments for the sake of it. Why does the Opposition not come with us and agree that we are right and that they would do the same if they were in Government?

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: We do not agree with the Deputy.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: This morning on the radio the Fine Gael finance spokesman stated the bank has brought the country to its knees, an indication of how systemically important this disastrous bank was. It was systemically important.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I was never of systemic importance.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Why did the Fine Gael spokesman say it brought the country to its knees? If one wished to describe systemic importance in plain man's language that was a very good example and the Deputy's finance spokesman did a good job of it. Unfortunately, we are in this situation and we must do this, but it is the least worst option. If we do what the Opposition suggested we would pay many tens of billions of euro more.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: What are we suggesting?

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Much as I hate to be here supporting this, I believe the Government must do it and I compliment the Government for its resolution and determination to get this through.

Deputy Michael McGrath: I welcome the opportunity to comment briefly on the motion. The reckless management of our banks in recent years is a national scandal and a bitter pill for taxpayers and Irish citizens generally. It was difficult to hear today the level of bailout required by the Government and the State in respect of our financial institutions. The reality is that we may not like banks or senior bankers but we need them to meet the needs of the economy and if we are to have any prospect of coming out of this recession and, in line with forecasts, begin to grow the economy again later this year.

When families get into financial difficulty one of the first pieces of advice MABS gives is the need to face up to their problems, to confront their loans and to deal with the reality of their situation. The bottom line is that in recent months the Irish banks have not been facing up to the extent of the losses they face. Today, we witnessed a comprehensive package of measures which forced the banks, once and for all, to face up to the extent of losses with which they must deal. The Minister and the Financial Regulator showed clearly today who is in charge. The Financial Regulator set a very high level of capital requirement for the banks, in line with best international practice, and did the State some service by requiring the banks to impose a level of capital far beyond the level of anticipated losses and NAMA loans. He has factored in losses on non-NAMA loans, both commercial and personal.

One of the criticisms of NAMA when it was introduced was that it would somehow go soft on the banks and let them off the hook. Today, we have seen evidence that this is not the case. NAMA has imposed a high level of discount, at an average of 47% across the loan book, which, in fact, improves its capacity to at least break even and, one hopes, make some money for the taxpayer over the ten-year period.

What we saw also today is a clear commitment on behalf of the Minister and the Government to compel the banks to provide an adequate level of lending to the economy, in particular to SMEs. We will see €12 billion worth of lending to SMEs by AIB and Bank of Ireland between now and the end of 2011, and that is a particularly welcome development. The regulator and the Government must be rigorous in ensuring such level of credit is extended because the banks will endeavour not to provide the level of required lending to the economy. It will be rigorously monitored.

The success of NAMA and recapitalisation will be judged ultimately on the basis of whether the banks meet the credit needs of the economy. The measures which have been taken today are necessary and unpalatable, as the Minister stated and as they undoubtedly are. They will put the economy in a position where it is served by a banking system which, once and for all, has faced up in an honest way to the extent of its losses and to the recent reckless and irresponsible management of its banks which now must be bailed out by the taxpayer but which will meet the needs of the economy in the future. I note that both ISME and Chambers Ireland have welcomed today's package of measures as an essential step by the Government in dealing with the banking crisis.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. I trust those Members who hold bank shares and who have come out strongly against some of the banks or in favour of some of the other banks have declared their interests before speaking in this debate.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Do not look at us.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I thought Deputy Edward O'Keeffe made many interesting points and I certainly would completely agree with a number of those. I trust he will have the sincerity to follow through with voting with the Opposition tonight. It is easy to come into this Chamber and shout one's mouth off. It is another matter to have the courage of one's convictions and to vote accordingly. I look forward to seeing what he does in a half an hour's time.

Today, 30 March 2010, is a day that will be etched on the minds of every citizen of this country because it is the day on which Fianna Fáil and the Green Party saddled each taxpayer with a massive debt in order that rogue developers, rogue builders and rogue bankers can be bailed out. Today, we are all paying the price for bad Government policies and for a situation where weak and often compromised Fianna Fáil Ministers remained in power for far too long.

This is the legacy of that trio, Deputy Bertie Ahern, former Deputy Charlie McCreevy and, to a large extent, Deputy Cowen, all of whom were Ministers who were happy to facilitate the golden circle in enriching themselves at the expense of ordinary people. Rather than having housing policies that viewed decent housing as an essential social good and, therefore, something that needed to be regulated by Government, these Ministers were happy to allow their developer and builder friends to control the market to maintain land at grossly inflated prices, leading to a frenzy in house buying. Prices soared, ever more people were forced and, indeed, encouraged to get in over their heads, and ever more foreign workers were drafted in to keep the building boom going. This inflated demand and, finally and inevitably, the pyramid collapsed. All of this madness was stoked by the financial institutions which threw out the rule book on lending. As the Minister, Deputy Brian Lenihan, stated earlier today, the banks played fast and loose with the economy. They were allowed to do so by the weak and compromised Fianna Fáil Ministers, Ahern, McCreevy and Cowen, the three disciples of light-touch regulation who presided over the destruction of the economy.

It is important that people know who is responsible for the financial disaster in which we find ourselves today. There were significant international factors but there is no doubt the

[Deputy Róisín Shortall.]

recession is far deeper and will be much longer lasting in Ireland than almost anywhere else in the world, and that is as a result of Fianna Fáil's mismanagement of the economy.

It is also important that people realise that had they voted differently in 2007, we would not be in this devastating position today. Not only did Fianna Fáil facilitate the conditions that led to the property bubble's creation and its subsequent destruction, when the collapse happened, they failed utterly to deal with it properly. Rather than taking action when serious problems began to emerge, the Government exacerbated the difficulties. As Deputy Edward O'Keeffe stated, we all remember Deputy Bertie Ahern's message to those who urged caution. Shamefully and pathetically, Deputy Ahern advised them to commit suicide. I do not know how Deputy Ahern has the neck to be in this House today. He has a great deal to answer for.

While problems were mounting in the banks, it was not until that other faithful date, 29 September 2008, that the Government took action. It took that action, it would seem, solely on the basis of advice from those bankers and those so-called public servants who themselves had contributed so much to the perilous state of the banks and our economy. It seemed, for ideological reasons, the Government was not prepared to countenance nationalisation and, instead, provided a blanket guarantee. Today's appalling vista can be traced back directly to that decision.

Having given this extraordinary blanket guarantee, the Government was in a position to dictate absolute terms to the banks but, yet again, it showed its complete weakness. There should have been a complete clear-out of senior executives and the entire boards in all of the covered institutions. There would have been no difficulty in doing this in light of the scope of the guarantee. Instead of that, however, the Ministers continued to kowtow to these people. The continuing bloated salaries, with increases as recently as last week, are an affront to decent people. Nobody has been sacked, nobody has been penalised and I doubt very much if anyone will end up behind bars. What else would one expect Fianna Fáil to do but to protect its golden circle friends?

Equally, the Government has failed miserably to do what it promised it would on getting credit flowing to small business. This, after all, was one of the main arguments it used for the guarantee. How many tens of thousands of jobs have been lost since then owing to SMEs being squeezed dry by the banks while all the time Ministers stood idly by? It is quite clear a separate national investment bank is needed and far too much precious time has been lost by the Government. Those who have lost their jobs in the meantime have paid a heavy price for that delay. It is hardly surprising, given the Government's central role, that it has refused to investigate adequately the circumstances leading up to the banking crisis. The paying public must await a change in Government to discover what actually happened over recent years.

The details of the proposals as unveiled today show an unprecedented crisis of far greater scale than had been indicated by Government or, indeed, than had been expected.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Shortall's time is rapidly running out.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I will take my last minute, if that is all right with the Ceann Comhairle.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: It is not. Her time started at two minutes past half-past nine. She had ten minutes and, therefore, she has three more minutes left.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not think she has three.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I have at least two.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will allow the Deputy to conclude.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: She has three more minutes left.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I have at least two. It is not running out, though. As I stated, the details of the proposals are far greater in scale than had been indicated by Government. The harsh unpalatable reality for the taxpayers, their children and grandchildren is that they have been lumbered with a huge debt for the foreseeable future as a direct result of the failure of Government policy. The Government's incompetence in handling the banks means the crisis is much deeper than it needs to be.

At no stage has the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, taken charge. Given that he had provided a State bank guarantee scheme with such a wide scope, he was in a position to deal with the bondholders. There was a need to share the risk with the subordinated tier-two bondholders. He could have easily indicated he was considering nationalisation or letting Anglo Irish Bank go altogether. In that context, he was in a strong position to negotiate with the tier-two bondholders. The Government should have also negotiated with the tier-one bondholders; the ones who took the highest risks must realise there is a price to be paid. If the Minister had dealt with the crisis adequately, he could have told them he would not have bailed them out and sought a sharing of risk.

We are told there is a guarantee of a 4% return on the promissory notes for Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide. There is absolutely no guarantee of such a return, like we saw with last year's recapitalisation.

The Minister for Finance denied cuts in public sector pay are funding a bailout for the banks. This is simply untrue as for the next 15 years the State will face an annual bill for €1 billion to bail out Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Shortall, we are into borrowed time now.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Fianna Fáil Party completely buckled to the pressure from its developer and banker friends. Meanwhile, the Greens remain silent preferring to do nothing while Fianna Fáil commits one of the gravest policy mistakes in Irish economic history. What is the point in a party having five Members as Ministers when they make no difference whatsoever to the most crucial decision facing the country?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Shortall has seriously exceeded her time and should finish in fairness to other Members who wish to speak.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The electorate will have an opportunity, sooner rather than later I hope, to pass judgment on this.

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): The Government's actions today are the culmination of painstaking analysis and detailed consideration of the measures necessary to restore our banks to fit-for-purpose institutions that can support economic development and the growth of enterprise.

Our actions today are necessary for the longer term economic stability of our nation which has been recklessly undermined by irresponsible property lending practices and corporate sector greed. I commend the efforts and hard work of my colleague, the Minister for Finance, and his officials, in bringing these banking solutions before the House.

The parallel announcements earlier today by the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA, and the Financial Regulator set the full context in which the Government is making

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

extra resources available to some banks. No Irish person wants to carry the burden placed upon us by reckless bankers. However, without a functioning banking system, our full economic recovery would not be possible. We need adequately resourced and financially sound banks to support the financial needs of businesses and householders.

Similar to the earlier recapitalisation scheme, the Government has again included in this recapitalisation plan explicit provisions targeted directly at supporting our enterprise sector, especially small to medium-sized enterprises.

Under the terms of today’s recapitalisation plan, Bank of Ireland and AIB will be required to make available more than €3 billion in lending to new small and medium-sized enterprises, SME, to include working capital this year and next year. This figure will be reviewed as the needs of the economy change. The two banks must each produce a plan that includes a sectorial and geographic breakdown of how they intend to divide up this new lending.

As part of his remit, the credit reviewer, Mr. John Trethowan, will assess these plans following which the Government will decide whether further action on sectorial targets is required.

The two banks will also need to make available €20 million each for seed capital to be provided to Enterprise Ireland-supported ventures and to make up to €100 million each available for environmental, clean energy and innovation funds. That is in addition to the €100 million each made available in accordance with the previous recapitalisation scheme.

The two banks will be required to commit resources to work with Enterprise Ireland and the Irish Banking Federation to develop sectorial expertise in the modern growth sectors of the economy, how best to develop the range of banking services that Irish SMEs trading internationally will need to develop and bring forward new credit products in areas where expected cash flow, rather than property or assets, will be the basis for business lending.

I welcome the formal appointment of Mr. Trethowan as credit reviewer to provide for an independent review of decisions by participating institutions to refuse or withhold credit to SMEs, farm enterprises and sole traders. This facility should afford individual businesses an opportunity for third-party review of bank refusals to grant credit. Participating institutions are required to comply with the recommendation of the reviewer or explain why this would not be appropriate. Statistical outcomes for each bank will be made public.

These measures and more reinforce the Government’s commitment to supporting businesses, especially SMEs, a key priority for me as Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Last year and this, my Department has made approximately €1 billion available in the capital budgets of the enterprise development agencies to fund financial supports to enterprises, including SMEs.

Enterprise development agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, IDA and the county and city enterprise boards have continued to help businesses through their grant and advisory schemes.

Last year, the enterprise stabilisation fund was introduced which aims to support viable but vulnerable companies in financial difficulty as a result of these unprecedented economic times.

Companies receive funding to support a range of activities, including market development, productivity improvements and development. Last year, €58 million was spent on 181 projects supporting approximately 7,500 jobs. The fund continues to attract a high volume of applications this year.

The employment subsidy scheme was launched last August to keep in jobs workers who might otherwise have been made redundant. Other initiatives included developing intellectual property assets; mandating comprehensive strategy reviews in IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland

and Shannon Development; establishing a code of conduct for business lending to SMEs; and setting up a credit supply clearing group.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister should begin to wrap up as we need to conclude by 10 o'clock.

Deputy Batt O'Keeffe: I was supposed to have ten minutes in my slot.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I will give way for a minute or two.

Deputy Batt O'Keeffe: Work is ongoing on a targeted loan guarantee scheme and we have secured a commitment by central government to pay its debts to businesses in 15 rather than 30 days.

Deputy Shane McEntee: That was introduced two years ago.

Deputy Batt O'Keeffe: We have secured the introduction of a pay-related social insurance exemption for employers creating new jobs this year.

Fine Gael wants a national recovery bank which would have no way of generating funds because the good loans it is supposed to buy from the banks are already being used as collateral for funding from the European Central Bank and international markets.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: It is about new loans.

Deputy Damien English: Please start again. The Minister should go back and read his brief.

Deputy Batt O'Keeffe: No country in the world has established a bank such as that proposed by Fine Gael because it would be folly, even for Deputy Enda Kenny, to set up a bank that cannot fund itself.

Deputy Shane McEntee: No country did what Ireland did. Fianna Fáil supported it.

Deputy Batt O'Keeffe: The question Deputies opposite must answer is how they propose to get credit flowing to businesses and householders. We all know that banks have curtailed lending, mainly because banks are finding it hard to access funds.

Deputy Damien English: Deputy O'Keeffe should return to his former position as Minister for Education and Science. He might learn something.

Deputy Batt O'Keeffe: Our banks should be extremely grateful for the resolve of the Irish people to intervene to save the economy and ensure a return to growth.

Deputy Shane McEntee: The Government would not listen to Deputy Richard Bruton in 2005, nor would it listen to him today.

Deputy Batt O'Keeffe: Their forbearance and the courageous actions of this Government is putting this country on the road to recovery. When this period of Irish history comes to be written, it will be recorded in favour of those courageous enough to do the right thing in the national interest.

Deputy Shane McEntee: All of our kids will be outside the country. They will be in the US and Australia.

Deputy Frank Feighan: I genuinely hope this works out. There are some flaws in it. Anglo Irish Bank should not have been protected. I refer to bond holders. Those who buy shares may win and pay their taxes but if they lose they take the loss. They should not be protected.

The banks under the banking guarantee should be protected. We should pay tribute to them. Unfortunately, there are many outside banks here, such as National Irish Bank, Ulster Bank and other UK banks. They are going after Irish deposit holders. We must wear the green jersey. We must put our money into the banks under the Government guarantee scheme because that money is going back to the economy. I ask the Minister to raise this matter. He should let unions and schools put their money into the banks under the Irish guarantee scheme.

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I commend the new Governor of the Central Bank, Professor Patrick Honohan and the new Financial Regulator, Matthew Elderfield on their work in this process. They are independent of the Government in the exercise of their functions and that is as it should be. When Deputy Bruton criticised the Government for giving the banks too much time for capitalisation, he missed the crucial point. The requirements on capitalisation are now laid down by the regulator. As a result of the decision made by the regulator today, Allied Irish Banks have until the end of April to draw a definitive capital plan. The time available is quite limited. I commend the NAMA management team who have proven the critics wrong by operating in a hard-headed and commercial manner in the best interests of the taxpayer.

Deputy Damien English: The EU made NAMA do that.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: I thank my officials as well.

Deputy Damien English: The Minister should thank the Commission.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: They operated under a statutory mandate laid down by this House. I thank the Members for the work they put into that legislation. These agencies worked with my Department and the NTMA to resolve our banking crisis. We now know the problems we have, we have faced up to them and we have put in place a pathway out of them. Today provides for once and for all a solid basis for confidence in the future of our financial system.

The Government is recapitalising the financial institutions so that the system as a whole may return to its rightful role as provider of credit to the real economy. Inevitably, there is an upfront investment by the State because we have forced the banks to recognise their losses upfront and to rid the system of the scourge of these speculative loans and the mismanagement of the banking system.

Deputy Bruton questioned why, as an alternative to recapitalisation, the Government does not just let Anglo Irish Bank fail. Many other Deputies questioned the systemic importance of Anglo Irish Bank and why it was guaranteed at all. Anglo Irish Bank was much larger relative to the Irish economy than Lehman Brothers was relative to the US economy. The disorderly failure of Lehman Brothers brought the global financial system to its knees. The disorderly failure of Anglo Irish Bank two weeks later would have had the same effect on the entire Irish banking system. I understand Deputy Bruton referred to Washington Mutual. The resolution mechanism in that bank cannot be applied to a bank in this country because the bank's senior bonds were issued not by the bank itself but by a separate holding company. That corporate structure allowed the US authorities to treat senior bondholders and depositors differently.

Deputies raised points concerning the treatment of bondholders. When talking about this jurisdiction, it is important to bear in mind that those who provide funds to Irish banks are not exclusively from other countries.

Deputy Damien English: What about Quinn?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Approximately half of the funds advanced to the Irish banks to support the Irish economy are derived from domestic sources. When people talk about defaulting on bondholders, they are talking about defaulting on themselves, Irish credit unions, Irish enterprises and Irish pension funds.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Has the Minister tried negotiating?

Deputy Brian Lenihan: If Deputy Shortall wants to negotiate with her local credit union about a reduction in the amount of deposits and wishes to advise her constituents in Dublin North West of her banking policy, I encourage her to do so immediately. She should see what their reaction will be. This is a fundamental issue for the country. If there is any suggestion the Government would lose the vote tonight and there would be a change of Government in a few days time, it would be extremely serious for this country in light of some of the comments made about bondholders in this country and in current opinion polls. Happily, that will not happen tonight and I hope that by the next election we will realise the realities of this issue.

Deputy Bruton noted that Anglo Irish Bank retains approximately €2 billion in subordinated debt. The vast bulk of these bonds are dated bonds, meaning they are covered by the guarantee scheme until September 2010. The treatment of that remaining subordinated debt in the future will be considered as part of the process for agreeing a restructuring plan for Anglo Irish Bank with the EU Commission over the coming months. In assessing the options to deal with bondholders it is important to note the lending base of the Irish economy. It is 50% funded from international sources and 50% funded from domestic sources. Interestingly, Irish sovereign borrowing is 80% funded from international sources. The Labour Party has not advocated this policy but the suggestion made by Deputy Bruton is that there would be no read through from a default on bank debt to a default on sovereign debt; it is erroneous when 80% of our funding derives from foreign sources. The maintenance of international confidence in the Irish financial system is of critical importance to our economy. Despite the many figures bandied about this afternoon our bond spreads have not moved an inch. This is signal testimony to the international confidence in the common sense of the announcement made today and the capacity we demonstrate to tackle our problems.

Deputy Burton suggested that if we nationalised Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland, it would have eliminated the valuation risk around NAMA, and as a result there would have been no need for the concept of long-term economic value. She suggested the approach the Government followed is more costly. I stress that if we had done this the losses crystallised at Allied Irish Banks and Bank of Ireland would still have to be fully recognised and real capital would be required. It is appropriate that we have an asset management agency going through the banks on a bottom-up basis and establishing where were the vulnerabilities in each institution and the degree of culpability for excessive lending in each institution.

Deputies Bruton and Burton questioned when we would see a revised NAMA business plan and NAMA codes of practice. There are substantial provisions in the Act dealing with transparent reporting by NAMA. The board proposes to review the draft business plan published in October 2009 and will publish a revised business plan by 30 June 2010. NAMA has met its obligation to submit such codes of practice and my Department is working with NAMA to ensure these codes fully meet the standard expected.

Deputies have queried the uplift factor on the assets transferred to NAMA today. The uplift factor reflects the difference between the current market value of the asset and what NAMA believes it can achieve for the asset over time, or the long-term economic value. NAMA reports this was 11.3% in the first tranche. Previous estimates had been that this figure would be

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

approximately 15%, which was based on aggregate data provided by the institutions. There are a number of reasons the initial estimate was reduced massively in subsequent discounts. One was the overoptimistic assumptions by the institutions about the loan to value ratios. A further factor was the bottom-up valuation process and another factor was the securitisation and a degree of securitisation for particular loans. The revised uplift is the result of individual loan valuations following extensive due diligence and individual property valuations.

There has been little comment in the debate on the most important steps I have taken to secure further provision of credit to the business community. The specific lending targets are backed up by legal sanctions. If further legal sanctions are required, they will be insisted upon.

10 o'clock I acknowledge the work of all parties on this subject in the course of the debate on NAMA. This represents a considerable increase on lending last year and in particular must include funds for working capital for businesses. The two banks will be required to submit SME lending plans both by geography and sector for each year. Mr. John Trethowan as the new credit reviewer will review bank lending policies as part of his remit.

I again emphasise that there is now a renewed international confidence in Ireland because of our determined moves to place our public finances on a more sustainable footing. Today's actions will place the banking system on a robust footing too. My colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Martin, today described to the House the positive international reaction to our fiscal and banking correction matters. Contrary to what the Opposition allege there is no doubt that relative to other countries we have moved speedily to deal with our banking problems. The banks have been forced to recognise their losses and the Government has committed the capital that will ensure we have a banking system to serve our economy as it recovers.

We have many other steps to take. We must work on public sector reform. In this context, I welcome the decision of the public service unions to conclude a public service pay agreement with Government to put those conclusions to their membership. We must continue to address our competitiveness, which has improved in the past year. We must examine every sector of the economy to identify wherein there is scope for growth and stimulus. All of these steps must be taken.

The essential precondition to economic recovery is that we have viable public finances and a viable banking system. We have taken those decisions in the heat of intense battle. The Government will ensure it takes the necessary decisions required to put this country on the road to recovery and to ensure all of the jobs we want to see created again in this economy are created so that every Irish man and woman can have a stake in this country.

Deputy Seán Connick: Hear, hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: In accordance with the Order of the Dáil I am must now put the question on amendment No. 2.

Question put: "That the words proposed to be deleted stand."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 83; Níl, 69.

Tá

Ahern, Bertie.
 Ahern, Dermot.
 Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Andrews, Chris.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Aylward, Bobby.
 Behan, Joe.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Áine.
 Brady, Cyprian.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Browne, John.
 Byrne, Thomas.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Pat.
 Collins, Niall.
 Conlon, Margaret.
 Connick, Seán.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cregan, John.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Curran, John.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Fahey, Frank.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Michael.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Flynn, Beverley.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Gormley, John.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Hanafin, Mary.
 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, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 Lowry, Michael.
 McEllistram, Thomas.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 Mansergh, Martin.
 Martin, Micheál.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M. J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 O'Brien, Darragh.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Donoghue, John.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keeffe, Batt.
 O'Keeffe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 O'Sullivan, Christy.
 Power, Seán.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Scanlon, Eamon.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Mary.
 White, Mary Alexandra.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
 Bannon, James.
 Barrett, Seán.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burke, Ulick.
 Burton, Joan.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Carey, Joe.
 Clune, Deirdre.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Crawford, Seymour.
 Creed, Michael.
 Creighton, Lucinda.
 D'Arcy, Michael.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Doyle, Andrew.

Durkan, Bernard J..
 English, Damien.
 Enright, Olwyn.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Hayes, Brian.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Higgins, Michael D.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kenny, Enda.
 Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 McCormack, Pádraic.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McGinley, Dinny.
 McHugh, Joe.

Níl—*continued*

McManus, Liz.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Morgan, Arthur.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Keeffe, Jim.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 O'Sullivan, Maureen.

Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Ring, Michael.
 Sheahan, Tom.
 Sheehan, P. J.
 Sherlock, Seán.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Upton, Mary.
 Varadkar, Leo.
 Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies John Curran and John Cregan; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg.

Question delcared carried.

Amendment declared lost.

Question, “That the motion is hereby agreed to”, put.

The Dáil divided: Tá, 83; Níl, 68.

Tá

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

Grealish, Noel.
 Hanafin, Mary.
 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, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 Lowry, Michael.
 Mansergh, Martin.
 Martin, Micheál.
 McEllistrim, Thomas.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M. J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghail, Seán.
 O'Brien, Darragh.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Donoghue, John.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.

Tá—*continued*

O'Keeffe, Batt.
 O'Keeffe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 O'Sullivan, Christy.
 Power, Seán.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Sargent, Trevor.

Scanlon, Eamon.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Mary.
 White, Mary Alexandra.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

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

Lynch, Kathleen.
 McCormack, Pádraic.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McGinley, Dinny.
 McHugh, Joe.
 McManus, Liz.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Morgan, Arthur.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Keeffe, Jim.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 O'Sullivan, Maureen.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Ring, Michael.
 Sheahan, Tom.
 Sheehan, P. J.
 Sherlock, Seán.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Upton, Mary.
 Varadkar, Leo.
 Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies John Curran and John Cregan; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg

Question declared carried.

Adjournment Debate.

Departmental Properties.

Deputy Joe Costello: I congratulate Deputy Connick on his appointment as Minister of State. I served with him on a number of committees and I am delighted he has been promoted.

The issue I raise is causing considerable discontent and concern in Wolfe Tone Close, which is a local authority residential complex largely populated by senior citizens. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has acquired the lease on a property owned by Liam

[Deputy Joe Costello.]

Carroll directly across the road, which is intended to be used for probation services. However, there is a great shortage of information in this regard and local residents are concerned that all sorts of anti-social behaviour will emanate from the premises. The layout of Wolfe Tone Close is similar to an amphitheatre with steps up to a gate, which is a long way removed from the street. There is room for 60 people to sit on the steps one above the other and there is also a curved space beside the gate, which was originally intended as a parking area for six to eight cars. There are two major spaces, therefore, in which anti-social behaviour and undesirable activity involving drink and drugs could take place if people attending the new premises across the road congregate there.

The residents protested last week. There was a large turnout not only of residents of the complex but also of many other people living in the area. A further protest march is planned tomorrow from the premises to Parnell Square to highlight the residents' opposition to the proposal and the lack of information provided by the Department.

There was no planning permission for the building and Dublin City Council has served an enforcement order on the premises. It is highly irresponsible of the Department to lease a building, refurbish it for a particular service it intends to provide, fail to apply for planning permission, find itself in breach of local authority planning laws and have an enforcement notice served on it. In addition, the local business community is up in arms and a meeting of business people is planned tomorrow evening to highlight the issue and to register their protest about what is happening because they also were not consulted. Neither the local residents or the business community were consulted about the issue and given an opportunity to have their say on it. Both groups are up in arms.

There is an overabundance of justice facilities in this part of the north inner city. We have stated again and again that we do not oppose the distribution of such facilities but it has not been done fairly. Almost every justice facility is on the north side, particularly in the inner city. Opening another facility in an overburdened community is not the way to go.

The Minister should not allow a premises to open without planning permission because that is bad form. He should seek an alternative location for this facility. There is plenty of space beside Mountjoy Prison on the North Circular Road, given the Department under the previous Minister, Michael McDowell, acquired Egan's Cash and Carry, which is lying idle. He should also look to the south side for a change to balance the distribution of justice facilities. Will the Minister of State outline how this private property held in the name of Liam Carroll and his wife was acquired by the Department?

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Sean Connick): I thank the Deputy for his good wishes on my appointment.

I am taking the matter on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Perhaps it is useful to place on the record of the House the level of funding provided by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, through the Probation Service, to community based projects that assist the Probation Service in its core work. This year alone the Department will provide funding in the region of €11 million to approximately 50 such projects across the country. To the best of the Minister's knowledge all of the projects are operating with community support and but for the voluntary participation of local people who agree to sit on the boards of management of the projects we could not support the various client groups in the community thus assisting in reintegration, improving job skills and generally assisting in increasing community safety.

Like all streams of taxpayers' funding it is important that we constantly monitor and evaluate such funding and I am pleased to tell the House that the Department undertook a value for money and policy review of all funded projects which was published on the Department's

website on 2 September 2008. The conclusions were broadly favourable, recognising the importance of the support provided by community based projects to the work of the Probation Service. The Probation Service has a dedicated unit in place within its structures to implement the range of recommendations set out in the report and to constantly examine the added value provided by individual projects.

The project which is the subject of this Adjournment debate has operated in the Dublin 1 area for the past 15 years. I am sure the Deputy is fully aware the project provides an intensive supervision programme for male offenders, in the 20 to 25 years age group, in the greater Dublin area who are subject to Probation Service supervision. It can cater for up to 12 clients at any one time and the programme is delivered during office hours from Monday to Friday. Those who come to the project do so by appointment. The programme itself is delivered by a multidisciplinary team with the Probation Service as the lead agency. For the information of the House and by way of clarity I should say this project is not an addiction treatment centre nor is it a drop-in facility.

By way of background to the proposed move of the project to new premises on Wolfe Tone Street, I will provide some general history of the project. For the past 15 years the project has been accommodated in leased premises in Parnell Street, Dublin 1. These premises are no longer suitable for the longer term operation of the project and, in any event, the lease to the current premises will come to an end in a matter of months. As the recommendation was that the existing premises would not meet future requirements, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform gave approval to the board of management of the project in August 2009 to tender for the fit-out of proposed new premises on Wolfe Tone Street. The work was advertised on e-tenders by the project and contracts were awarded last December. Work commenced in January with an expected completion date of May 2010 for the work.

As the project is fully funded by the Department, through the Probation Service, it fell to the Department to enter into a lease for the Wolfe Tone Street premises for use by the project in question. During the negotiations for the lease the Department was advised by the Chief State Solicitors Office and it had no reason to believe the planning permission for a change of use obtained by the landlord prior to the Department's interest in the ground floor space was not valid. However, the Department has been made aware that queries have been raised around the status of the planning permission in existence in recent times. Those matters are being examined further in consultation with our legal advisers.

The Minister trusts the Deputy will accept the bona fides of this project, which has been running in the inner city for a considerable number of years, supporting some of the most vulnerable citizens to lead more constructive lives. The project — based on its 15 years of experience — now needs new premises to continue its valuable work.

Litter Pollution.

Deputy Michael McGrath: I warmly congratulate my colleague and good friend, the Minister of State, Deputy Connick, on his appointment. I assure him that Deputy Thomas Byrne and I have had words with a certain journalist who wrote comments in a newspaper last Saturday. Both he and I are absolutely delighted at the Minister of State's elevation. I look forward to working with him.

I thank the Ceann Comhairle for giving me the opportunity to raise this issue tonight. I am sure all Members would agree that littering and illegal dumping is becoming a growing problem in every community across the country. This problem, with which we will have to get to grips, has worsened considerably in recent months. From talking to other colleagues it is clear that it is a nationwide problem. A small minority of people who are littering our communities and engaging in illegal dumping are causing a blight on our landscape. We will have to tackle the situation in a meaningful and serious way. From the number of complaints coming to my

[Deputy Michael McGrath.]

constituency office and from personal observations the situation is deteriorating. At a time when we are seeking to exploit the economic potential of the tourism industry in this country we need to be careful about the reputation we will get given the level of litter and illegal dumping that is apparent on our streets, country roads and in every community across the country. Recently the West Cork Tourism Co-operative Society Limited managed, after a huge amount of work, to reinstate the Cork to Swansea ferry link, which comes into my constituency in Ringaskiddy in Cork South Central. What impression will it give to tourists arriving there who are driving to west Cork or elsewhere to observe litter and black bags of rubbish dumped at the roadside? That sends out a terrible signal about us as a country. If that is the impression with which people leave this country it is unrealistic to think they will return. In addition, how many people will they tell about their experience?

That gives rise to a number of questions about the level of enforcement by local authorities and the Garda who is also empowered under the legislation to issue on-the-spot fines. It is clear that not enough fines are being issued. Is there a lack of consistency across the country in terms of the number of fines being issued and the level of enforcement? How many cases are being brought to court where people do not pay the on-the-spot fine and one is levied?

I was interested to read that the Probation Service has undertaken an initiative in recent months whereby persons who have been convicted of minor crimes are being required by the courts to do community service and the Probation Service is engaging with local authorities to get those people involved in a graffiti removal programme. My suggestion, which I mentioned to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, is that the Probation Service would extend that idea to get people involved in litter picking and in cleaning our roads and streets. It would be a suitable payback to society if people convicted of minor crimes were required by the courts to carry out community service. I urge the Minister to seriously consider the suggestion.

We must also consider whether a fine of €150 is sufficient. Perhaps it is, but it is not being levied often enough. We are all well aware of the huge amount of voluntary work being done by tidy towns groups around the country, residents associations within estates, community groups and the Irish Business against Litter group. Currently, they are literally swimming against the tide of litter and illegal dumping which is becoming a scourge in society.

We must first acknowledge that the situation is getting worse. Businesses must play their part. Many fast food outlets are still not fulfilling their responsibilities. Vacant local authority housing stock is also a problem. We have had some successes such as the plastic bag levy, for example, but much more needs to be done. The positive suggestion I make tonight is that the Minister would contact the Probation Service with a view to extending the programme of graffiti removal to include picking up litter and cleaning areas affected by illegal dumping.

Deputy Seán Connick: I thank my colleague and friend, Deputy Michael McGrath, for his good wishes. I also thank him for tabling on the Adjournment this important matter that affects each and every one of us citizens. I am replying on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Under the Litter Pollution Acts, the primary management and enforcement responses to litter must come from the local authorities. Under this legislation it is the local authorities that are responsible for keeping public places, including public roads, clear of litter as far as is practicably possible. Local authorities take this duty seriously, as is seen in the number of litter fines issued, which have increased from 7,563 in 1998 to 27,825 in 2008, a three and one half fold increase in a ten year period.

In acknowledgement of their role, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has allocated €1.1 million this year from the Environment Fund to provide grants

to local authorities for public education and awareness activities in regard to litter and graffiti. The Minister would welcome and will consider any new measures that local authorities might identify to tackle the problems of litter and illegal dumping and his Department will continue to co-operate with the local authorities in dealing with this ongoing issue.

Considerable progress has also been made by the relevant statutory agencies in dealing with illegal waste activity. In particular, since the establishment of the Office of Environmental Enforcement in 2003, enforcement has been better structured through the establishment of a national enforcement network. Annual supporting funding from the environment fund of over €7.5 million has led to some 120 additional local authority enforcement personnel and a greatly enhanced response on the ground. However, litter and dumping problems will only be resolved through a partnership approach in which all sectors, including local authorities, business, community groups, residents' associations, schools and individuals, play their part. To this end, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, has provided financial support from the environment fund to a number of anti-litter initiatives aimed at influencing people's behaviour in regard to their method of disposing of litter. These initiatives include the National Spring Clean campaign, the Irish Business Against Litter league and a grant to the protecting upland and rural environments, PURE, project, which is operating in the Wicklow-Dublin upland area.

The benefits of the support provided to all sections of the community are clear from the improved results presented by both the national litter pollution monitoring system and the Irish Business Against Litter league. These results show a gradual but steady improvement in recent years in regard to the extent of litter pollution countrywide. Under the national litter pollution monitoring system, almost 70% of the country was designated as either litter free or only slightly littered in 2008. Irish Business Against Litter has reported that 65% of towns surveyed are now classified as "clean to European norms".

Despite these achievements, the Minister is aware that litter and illegal dumping continue to present an ongoing challenge. He will continue to monitor trends in litter pollution and, in co-operation with the local authorities, ensure that measures are adopted and resources are focused on those areas where the need for action is greatest.

Fishing Quotas.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Connick, on his appointment. He is entering a Department that requires a bit of common sense and persistence. Above all, leadership is required. Leadership is required not in terms of leading the Department but in terms of leading the fishing community. The latter feels it has been devoid of a voice. It has common-sense, practical solutions to put forward and does its own conservation-related scientific research. It knows the long-term sustainability of fisheries depends on sustainable fishing practices. Fishermen are pragmatic and want their sons to enter the industry. They want to work with the Minister of State. I hope the Minister of State will work with them. I know he will based on my experience of working with him to date in Leinster House. I congratulate him and look forward to working with him.

I raise the issue of spurdog because I have been speaking to many fishermen along the coast in my constituency, Donegal North-East. This is a coastal issue. In 2008, 390 tonnes of spurdog were fished. There was a quota of 195 tonnes last year. All of a sudden, this was reduced to zero tonnes on the basis of so-called scientific research recommending a blanket ban.

Area VIa, with which the Minister of State will become familiar, comprises 23% of Irish waters. The removal of the quota does not take into account the local perspective or the fact that one could engage in sustainable fishing on a small scale with boats under 18 m. There are not many of them anymore because, as the Minister of State knows, there has been a decommissioning scheme for boat owners. Incidentally, the scheme did not result in a penny

[Deputy Joe McHugh.]

being given to the crews who worked on the boats. There are people who are still willing to work on a small scale and in a sustainable manner.

Area 39E3 is a small pocket just above north County Donegal which takes in the fishing area north of Fanad Head or Greencastle. Scottish and Northern Ireland boats are fishing in the area but local Donegal boats are not allowed to. The fishermen are fishing for a shellfish. Irish boats will not be allowed fish in the waters until 1 April. There is something amiss here. There is deep-felt anger and resentment, not towards other fishermen but towards the rules that make circumstances unfair. The unfairness is almost palpable every time one meets the fishermen in Donegal. In the last referendum on the Lisbon treaty the nation voted “Yes” but Donegal voted “No”. The Minister should analyse the strong “No” vote from the fishing community.

The Marine Institute has stated there are 350,000 seals off the north-west coast of Scotland that come across the north-west territory. Each seal requires 10 kg of fish per day, which gives an overall weight of 35 tonnes. This equates to 1,000 fish boxes per day. We talk about conservation and sustainability but that is a factor that the Minister of State should consider. He should listen to the fishermen and determine how we can make progress on this matter.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: I thank Deputy McHugh for allowing me a minute of his very limited time. I congratulate the Minister of State on his appointment and hope to see him in Donegal, particularly Killybegs, before long.

Spurdog or dogfish, now known as rock salmon, was primarily a catch for the inshore fleet, the small 20 ft. or 30 ft. half-decker vessels. It was not meant for the deep-sea pelagic fleet at all and was often the bread and butter for the inshore fleet.

At present, there is nothing happening in the north west. The inshore fleet is tied up because the box referred to by Deputy McHugh, area VI, is completely closed. There is no point in allowing a quota for spurdog unless one opens area VI to the inshore fleet. I refer to the small fishermen fishing out of Arranmore island and my village of Bunbeg. There is only one boat now although there used to be 30 or 40. It will open the Minister of State’s eyes when he visits.

Spurdog fishing was the bread and butter of the fishermen to whom I refer. Spurdog was only a bycatch for the deep-sea fleet when we had a quota. We have none at present. The essential difference between the deep-sea and small inshore fleets is that spurdog represents the bread and butter of the latter. If the Minister of State changes his mind on this matter, he should allow for fishing in area VI by fishermen in small craft of 30 ft. or 40 ft. in length.

Deputy Seán Connick: I thank my colleagues for their good wishes on my appointment to my new portfolio. I have been reading into my brief over recent days. It has been a baptism of fire and I spent yesterday in Brussels. I have been learning the names of the boxes, including VIIa and VIIb, and about associated issues. I met the strategy group today and many people from the Deputies’ constituencies.

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the house in my new capacity as Minister of State with responsibility for fisheries. I look forward to a robust and, I hope, creative exchange of views on the issue at hand, but also on the myriad challenges that will face the fishing industry over my tenure in this portfolio.

The topic for today stems in the main from the conservation measures for whitefish affecting Area VI, west of Donegal and off Scotland, which were adopted at the 2008 December Fisheries Council. These conservation measures impacted directly on some of our vessels fishing in the north west.

An associated issue, which has been referred to, is the question of quota for spurdog. The scientific advice of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, ICES, is that the

stock of spurdog or dogfish is depleted, that there should be no targeted fishery therefor and that the bycatch in mixed fisheries should be reduced to the lowest possible level. On the basis of this advice, the Council regulation fixing for 2010 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Community waters and for Community vessels, made no allowance for a directed fishery for spurdog. By-catches, under certain specific conditions, are permitted up to 10% of the 2009 quota levels established in Regulation (EC) No 43/2009. Catches not complying with these conditions or exceeding these quantities shall be promptly released unharmed to the extent practicable.

In effect this means that Irish vessels may catch up to a maximum of approximately 19 tonnes of spurdog-dogfish as a by catch in 2010. At the regular monthly whitefish meeting between officials of my Department and fishing industry representatives on 22 January 2010, the Federation of Irish Fishermen proposed that for the month of February 2010 a by-catch provision of 2% for this stock should be applicable to all vessels. This proposal was accepted by the former Minister of State, Deputy Killeen, and was later replicated for the March and April management periods. This management arrangement will be kept under constant review to ensure that our overall limit is not exceeded.

To return to the main matter at hand, and without going too much into the technical details, the conservation measures introduced in December 2008 defined minimum mesh sizes, other aspects of fishing gears and geographical areas, in particular the area which is deemed to have the highest concentration of cod, haddock and whiting in shallower waters. This is defined and commonly known as the French line. Certain types of fishing is prohibited or restricted, and vessels operating in the defined area are required to use a larger mesh size than is generally applicable in western waters.

Against a very difficult background and a determined Commission position, Ireland succeeded in getting limited concessions, which reduced, to some degree the impacts on our vessels in particular our smaller vessels. Vessels under 15 m are permitted to use smaller mesh size than the larger vessels. However as the main fishery being pursued by these vessels is the megrim fishery, the mesh size defined for all vessels is too large and has resulted in this important fishery being uneconomic for our fishermen.

The Commission was of the firm view that the measures are essential for the conservation of cod, haddock and whiting stocks. Scientific advice for these stocks and in particular cod and whiting is that they are depleted and must be rebuilt. While I fully accept the scientific advice, I consider, however, that the measures taken are disproportionate as they impact adversely on the megrim fishery which is of significant financial importance to our vessels operating in the area. As I have stated, these measures were introduced for the first time in December 2008 as emergency measures by the Commission. The then Minister of State, Deputy Killeen, immediately sought amendments to these measures and brought forward proposals in consultation with the industry which would both deliver on the conservation requirements for cod, haddock and whiting and preserve a viable megrim fishery. The Minister of State sought to have these amendments introduced as part of the new technical conservation measures, TCM, regulation. As the Deputies are aware, this failed to be adopted during the Fisheries Council in November 2009, despite a late compromise being tabled by the Swedish Presidency.

Ireland and the UK worked closely together with both sets of industries to amend the 2009 provisions. As there was no agreement at Council, the Commission introduced transitional measures which substantially copied those in place for 2009 and did not take cognisance of the changes necessary for Ireland's megrim fishery. For this Ireland voted against the transitional measures and the UK also voted against them. The European Parliament and the Council under the co-decision procedure must now consider the full TCM proposal.

The current situation is not satisfactory and has been the subject of ongoing debate and lobbying by ourselves and the UK, particularly Scotland. As recently as last Thursday at the

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EU Fisheries Working Group in Brussels, the Commission advised it will withdraw the TCM proposal which was not agreed by Council last November when the Presidency compromise failed and transitional measures were agreed to run until mid 2011. It now intends to propose, as part of the overall CFP reform package, a new technical measures regulation which will take account of co-decision procedure and which considers a fuller impact assessment. The new regulation will be part of the CFP reform package expected to be released in spring 2011 and concluded before end 2012 and it therefore proposes to extend the transitional measures currently in place until end 2012.

Ireland has consistently, both at ministerial and official levels, set out our difficulties with the 2008 technical measures. Deputy Killeen has made very clear that this situation is not acceptable, and I fully agree. He secured a commitment from the Commission at last December's Fisheries Council to the effect that:

The Council and the Commission take note of requests by some Member States to modify existing technical measures for the ICES Zone VI in advance of the agreed overall reform of the technical measures rules for mid 2011. The Commission will consider these requests and where appropriate present relevant proposals, if possible in the course of first half of 2010.

From an Irish perspective it is vitally important that the revisions envisaged are introduced in 2010, and with that in mind I will vigorously pursue the Commission on this and insist that it honours its commitment. I will work closely with my UK colleague who has similar concerns in this matter. In addition, I intend to continue the consultation process with the Federation of Irish Fishermen on this matter with a clear view to strengthening our efforts to have a satisfactory conclusion on the issue.

I am looking forward to the challenges facing me with this portfolio. It is fair to say that I am excited with the prospect of working in tandem with the fishing industry, other stakeholders and this House to deliver a strong, vibrant and viable Irish seafood sector and to promoting the best interests of our coastal communities dependent on the fishing industry at National, EU and international levels.

School Accommodation.

Deputy John Browne: I should like to share time, with the permission of the House, with Deputy Michael D'Arcy.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Michael Kennedy): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy John Browne: I join in the good wishes to Deputy Connick on his elevation to Minister of State and wish him well in that position.

Gorey community school has more than 1,600 students enrolled and as such is the biggest second-level school in the country. Again this year, however, we find it is not able to cater, in particular, for the first-year students who want to attend from September 2010. Somewhere in the region of 45 to 50 students have no space or school to attend.

This situation has been ongoing in Gorey for a number of years. For the last three or four years we have had difficulties with different Ministers, trying to secure space for such students. Gorey, as Deputy D'Arcy can tell the House, and the Minister of State will know, has doubled in population over the last ten to 12 years during the Celtic tiger era. Many people from the Acting Chairman's constituency came to live in Gorey and the numbers have escalated out of all proportion as regards school attendance.

Two new primary schools were built in the last few years and we have been promised another second-level school under public private partnership. The site for this has been acquired, planning permission has been granted and we are awaiting the go-ahead from the Minister. The outgoing Minister, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe, promised that an announcement would take place early this year and, hopefully, the new Minister, Deputy Mary Coughlan will make the announcement shortly.

In the short-term, however, there is a problem at Gorey community school. Parents are their wits’ end and I ask the Minister to take a serious look at providing extra space, whether on the grounds of Gorey community school or on a site at its entrance where some space is available for rent at present. A solution must be found very quickly and it is important the Minister takes on board the issues we are raising tonight to allay the fears of parents and students coming from the different primary schools in the area.

Deputy Michael D’Arcy: I congratulate Deputy Connick on his new position. I hope he will spend much time looking after those fishing issues in Donegal and off the coast.

This is a major issue. For the first occasion during my time in politics, there is a school that is full — with 45 pupils that have nowhere to go. One might say that while this had happened in the past, there was capacity in other schools on the periphery. However, there is now no longer such capacity in those other schools.

This has meant that the schools have had to draw lots for students in the catchment area. It is a very unfair position that children find themselves in. In one situation where there were two students to attend a community school, three miles away, one child’s name was drawn in the lottery and the other was not. The lottery was held in the presence of a garda, on behalf of the community school, so that everything was seen to be above board.

This is a crazy scenario, but I do not want to get into the history of it. The children from another school, Ballygarrett, traditionally went on to Gorey community school. There is a strong tradition of music in the school, which is not available in Kilmuckridge which is within the Ballygarrett catchment area. The number of children due to come from the primary schools was known and it was foreseen that the difficulty would first arise in September 2010. I ask that capacity be made available on the grounds of Gorey Community School. I appreciate Deputy Browne’s remark that there is a premises available, but it is some distance away across a car park.

The school management, the Department and everybody involved must get together to make the accommodation available. It will only be required for the short term. The outline planning permission for the new second level school has been granted and the local authority has compulsorily purchased a portion of land to provide the access route from the relief road in Gorey for the new school. The solution, of course, is the new second level school but there is a difficulty for September 2010 and potentially for September 2011 in ensuring the children are not discommoded.

I thank Deputy Browne for sharing time. I have spoken to other Deputies from the constituency and we are due to meet the Minister. She has given a tentative date of Thursday morning for that meeting, if that is possible. Hopefully, we will be able to put our views directly to her also.

Acting Chairman: I am sure the Minister has more than a passing interest in this reply.

Deputy Seán Connick: I thank my constituency colleagues for their good wishes. It is unusual to have three Wexford men in the Dáil by themselves. I am interested in the response because I am very familiar with the issues involved.

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As my colleagues will understand, I am replying on behalf my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science, who, unfortunately, cannot be present. I thank the Deputies for raising the matter as it provides me with the opportunity to outline to the Dáil the position with regard to Gorey Community School, although, due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to give full details.

Gorey Community School is a sole post-primary school provider for the Gorey catchment area. It has a current enrolment of 1,586 pupils, which includes 142 PLC, post-leaving certificate, students. The school has been extended twice in the recent past to cater for its increasing enrolments. Initially, €3 million was spent to increase capacity to 1,300 pupils. Subsequently, the school indicated that it needed an extra six classrooms to meet its long-term needs and funding of over €800,000 was provided to deliver these. The Department's medium-term plan is to provide a second post-primary school to meet the needs of the Gorey catchment area.

This new school is being delivered under the Department's expanded public private partnership programme. The project is one of eight schools which the then Minister for Education and Science approved for inclusion in the third bundle of schools to be procured via the public private partnership method of delivery. This bundle is in the pre-procurement stage. Detailed output specifications and the public sector benchmark are being finalised and outline planning permission has been received in the case of seven of the eight schools, including Gorey. Work is continuing on securing outline planning permission for the remaining school site. On successful completion of this process, it is the Tánaiste's intention that the bundle will be handed over to the National Development Finance Agency for procurement.

The indicative timeframe for the delivery of a public private partnership school building currently stands at approximately four years from the date the bundle is announced. When the new school is delivered, it is intended that Gorey Community School will operate with a reduced and more ideal enrolment below 1,300 pupils. Pending the delivery of the new school, it is intended that the needs of the Gorey catchment area will be met at Gorey Community School and the Department has been supportive in light of the demands being placed on the school for additional places by providing funding for the extensions already mentioned.

It has been brought to the Department's attention recently, however, that there may be a capacity issue at the school for the 2010-11 school year. A preliminary examination of the school's enrolments indicates that the current enrolment is 23 less than the previous year. This situation should help to relieve some pressure. For the last number of years, the school also applied to enrol pupils from outside its catchment area. As an exceptional measure the Department of Education and Science agreed to this on the understanding that the school had sufficient accommodation to facilitate these pupils. It will be of concern to the Department if this development now means that pupils from the catchment area cannot obtain places in the school for the new school year.

Notwithstanding this, it is open to the school authority to apply to the Department for further accommodation if this is needed. The Department has no record of any such application to date. It would look on an application of this nature as favourably as possible. The Department will be in contact with the school to establish the position and to work with the school authority to ensure that all pupils seeking places for next September can have them. I again thank the Deputies for raising this matter and assure them that the Department of Education and Science will work with Gorey Community School to assist it with any accommodation issues it might have.

The Dáil adjourned at 11.05 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 31 March 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 3, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 4 to 68, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 69 to 75, inclusive, answered orally.

Foreign Conflicts.

76. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the measures that the international community should now be taking to head off any prospect of ethnic violence in advance of the elections in Kenya in 2012 in view of the increasing reports of large stocks of armaments being assembled by competing groups in Kenya. [13353/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I share the Deputy's concern that everything possible must be done to avoid a repeat of the ethnic violence that erupted after the 2007 elections in Kenya, in which it was estimated that over 1,500 people were killed and as many as 600,000 were displaced.

Following mediation talks led by the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, an agreement designed to bring an end to the conflict was negotiated between the Kenyan government and opposition in February 2008. Under the terms of the agreement, a new power-sharing government was established which committed itself to implementing a programme of reforms intended to address the underlying causes of the post election violence. The reform agenda as set out in the National Accord includes a comprehensive constitutional review; electoral, police and judicial reforms; as well as a commitment to adopt measures to end the impunity of perpetrators of the post-election violence and to fight corruption.

Regrettably, the progress achieved since the formation of the power-sharing government has not lived up to expectations, in particular in the areas of judicial reform and the fight against impunity. On foot of the failure of the government to set up a special tribunal to deal with those accused of post-election violence, the International Criminal Court is considering whether to authorise investigations by the Prosecutor on Kenya. Progress on electoral reform, meanwhile, is slow and funding for it continues to be a challenge. As for the fight against corruption, to date not a single high-level official has ever been convicted on corruption charges. Additional

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to our concerns over the lack of reform, are our concerns over the general security situation in the country with persistent yet unconfirmed reports of communities arming themselves and fears of increased ethnic hostility.

It is imperative to ensure the full implementation of the reforms set out in the National Accord in order to avoid a recurrence of the unfortunate events of December 2007. Together with our partners in the EU, we will continue to make clear our concerns regarding the situation in Kenya and to call upon the parties in power urgently to implement the reform agenda well in advance of the elections in 2012.

Overseas Development Aid.

77. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will indicate the specific proposals he has made to the European Union as it finalises its position for the September UN high level conference on the review of the millennium development goals. [13332/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by Heads of Government at the Millennium Summit in 2000 provide the framework for international development up to 2015. They involve a series of ambitious and far-reaching commitments by the entire international community, together with a set of specific targets against which to measure progress in the reduction of global poverty.

The Summit meeting in New York in September to review progress on the MDGs will be an important test of commitment to the world's poorest people in the face of increased global challenges and continuing international economic difficulty. As the largest single provider of development assistance worldwide, it will be essential that the EU plays a central role in the effort to accelerate progress on all of the MDGs by 2015.

In its annual report on progress on the MDGs, the UN noted late last year that, despite significant achievements since 2000, we are not on track for the achievement in full of the Goals by 2015. It emphasised that we need to focus in particular on stronger action in the fight against global hunger, in maternal mortality, in primary school enrolment and in the provision of employment.

At the meeting of EU Development Ministers held in Spain in February, Ireland was represented by Minister of State Power who emphasised the importance of maintaining the commitments we have made for 2015 and of working in closer partnership with developing countries for their achievement. Ireland also urged a strong focus on the MDGs where least progress has been made, with a particular emphasis on the first Goal, the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

The Government will work for a clear, concise and focused EU position at the Summit. I believe that if we can concentrate more effectively on a comprehensive approach to the scandal of world hunger we can generate greater progress on a range of MDGs, including maternal mortality, gender equality, employment and education levels.

Since the launch of the Government's Hunger Task Force Report at the UN in September 2008, Ireland has taken a leadership role internationally on the fight against hunger. Hunger is a cornerstone of the Ireland's aid programme. We are determined that, by 2012, we will devote 20% of the programme to actions on the eradication of hunger.

When I met with US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in Washington on 16 March we agreed that Ireland and the US will cooperate closely in the areas of food security, agriculture and nutrition. Ireland and the US will co-host an international event on a comprehensive approach to the global hunger crisis at the New York Summit in September. This high-level political

meeting will highlight the importance of linking agriculture, food security and nutrition programming in order to provide a realistic and sustainable solution to the global hunger crisis.

Over the coming months, the EU Development Ministers will work on the preparation of the Union's position for the MDG Summit, which will be finalised by Heads of State and Government at the European Council in June. I can assure the Deputy that Ireland will continue to play a strong role with our EU partners and in discussions at the UN in New York to ensure that September's meeting provides renewed impetus to the fight against global poverty in all its forms.

Humanitarian Assistance.

78. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if assistance has been provided to Chile following the recent earthquake; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13232/10]

122. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will provide details of any proposals, at national and or EU level, to offer support to the afflicted following the recent earthquake in Chile. [13343/10]

293. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the extent to which the international community was able to offer assistance in the aftermath of the earthquake in Chile. [13526/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78, 122 and 293 together.

On 27 February, an earthquake measuring 8.8 on the Richter scale struck off the Chilean coast, just 90 kilometres from Concepción, Chile's second largest city. The earthquake was followed by a destructive tsunami and several serious aftershocks were also registered. According to the Chilean authorities, the earthquake resulted in more than 400 fatalities, 200,000 houses damaged beyond repair and some 2 million people affected.

Ireland's Ambassador to Chile, Ms Philomena Murnaghan, represented Ireland at the recent inauguration of the new Chilean President, Mr. Sebastián Piñera. She reiterated the condolences of the President and Government at the terrible loss of life and destruction caused by the earthquake and the subsequent tsunami. She also expressed our solidarity with the people of Chile, with whom Ireland shares historical ties.

Chile has a strong emergency preparedness and response capacity, and the Chilean authorities have effectively led the earthquake response from the outset. The Chilean people have also demonstrated great generosity in raising funds to assist those affected by the earthquake. For example, one Telethon event raised some US\$60 million.

Given the capacity and resources available to the Chilean Government, the United Nations has not launched an international funding appeal in response to this crisis. The Government does not, therefore, propose to provide direct financial assistance to Chile. The UN Secretary General has, however, announced an allocation of US\$10 million from the UN Central Emergency Fund. This Fund was established in 2006 to provide a pool of funding from which the UN could draw without delay during humanitarian emergencies. Ireland has provided a total of €73 million to the Fund since 2006.

The EU deployed a civil protection team to Chile in the days immediately after the earthquake and a number of EU Member States have provided specialised in-kind assistance, such as water purification units and medical equipment. The European Commission has also announced an emergency allocation to Chile of up to €3 million, following a recent visit to the

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country by the Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Kristalina Georgieva. Commissioner Georgieva briefed EU Foreign Ministers on her visit at the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 22 March.

Official Engagements.

79. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will provide details of his recent visit to Egypt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13242/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): As the Deputy will be aware, I visited Cairo on 23-25 February for discussions with my Egyptian counterpart, Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit. Whilst in Cairo I also took the opportunity to meet with the Secretary General of the Arab League, Amre Moussa, and with the Director of the Egyptian Intelligence Service, General Omar Suleiman. Discussions in Cairo largely focused on the Middle East Peace Process and the prospects for the US efforts to bring about a resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Other international issues discussed included Iran, Sudan and the forthcoming Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference.

Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit and I shared our views at some length on the proposed proximity talks and possible next steps for the peace process if and when these talks got underway. I was also briefed on ongoing Egyptian efforts to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit also updated me on the local understanding of the situation in Gaza ahead of my visit there the following day, which the Egyptian government kindly facilitated. We both agreed that conditions in Gaza were unacceptable on humanitarian grounds and I advised him of the itinerary of my visit which was organised in close coordination with UNRWA.

I also discussed the situation in Iran with Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit and my other interlocutors in Cairo, and I reiterated Ireland's strong support for the dual-track approach and the discussions now underway in New York on a new Security Council Resolution, in light of Iran's continuing failure to engage seriously with the international community on its nuclear programme. On the Egyptian side concern was expressed in relation to the possible destabilising effect on the region of the ongoing international concerns and tensions arising from Iran's nuclear programme.

Other issues raised at my meetings in Cairo included the forthcoming Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference and Sudan where confidence was expressed that Darfur may now be on the track to a solution but the situation in the South remains more problematic, with considerably more needed in the way of assistance for that region, in advance of next January's referendum.

I also availed of my meetings in Cairo to brief on the Irish and EU position in relation to the recent assassination of a senior Hamas leader in Dubai and the fraudulent use of Irish passports and those of other EU Partners by those suspected of carrying out this killing.

Human Rights Issues.

80. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he is in a position to make a statement on the prospects of an amendment to the electoral law in Burma in advance of the forthcoming elections such as would render these elections suitable for international monitoring. [13326/10]

81. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the recently announced restrictions by the Burmese Government which formerly annul the National League

for Democracy's 1990 election win, under laws enacted for polls expected later in 2010, which will prohibit pro-democracy leaders, including the detained Aung San Suu Kyi, from participating in those elections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13260/10]

295. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will report on the situation in Burma; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13528/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80, 81 and 295 together.

As Deputies will be aware from many previous statements in this House, the Government has long been deeply concerned about the situation in Burma. We are actively engaged in the EU and international efforts to support the Burmese people in their struggle for justice, democracy and development.

The Burmese authorities are pushing ahead with plans to hold elections later this year, although no date has yet been confirmed for these elections. Despite a broad view that the terms of the discredited 2008 Constitution virtually precluded the possibility of credible elections, the international community felt it important to do all in its power to urge the regime to conduct elections, and an electoral process, which were free, fair, inclusive and transparent. We also made clear the need for all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, to be released without delay and for a process of national dialogue and reconciliation, involving all opposition and all ethnic groups, to be initiated in advance of the elections. Ireland, the EU, the UN and even a number of ASEAN Members played an active role in such efforts. UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon was particularly clear in articulating international expectations during his visit to the country last July.

As Deputies will be aware, however, none of this happened. Efforts by the new US Administration to try to engage with the regime, in the interests of promoting the agenda of credible elections, have also met with virtual silence. Instead of being given her freedom, Aung San Suu Kyi's detention was extended for a period of 18 months in August, to ensure that she would not be in a position to contest the elections or lead her party in them. Few other political prisoners have been released. No effort was made to initiate national dialogue. While the regime has tried to induce some of the ethnic groups who have agreed ceasefires with them to endorse, and participate in, the electoral process, few are prepared to accept the regime's terms. Meanwhile, military offensives against a number of other ethnic groups continue, designed to crush their resistance in the lead-up to the elections.

There was little surprise therefore, when the publication of the new electoral laws in the last few weeks confirmed that the elections were going to lack all credibility; that, in place of inclusivity, there would be heavy restrictions on the registration of political parties and individuals; that Aung San Suu Kyi would be among the many opposition and ethnic representatives rendered ineligible to participate in the elections or even to belong to a recognised political party; and that the elections would be run entirely on the regime's terms. If there was any element of surprise, it was perhaps the extent to which the Burmese regime so blatantly ignored the demands of the international community, and the absence of even the smallest concessions to placate international opinion. The regime has made it clear that it intends to control every aspect of the preparation of the elections, their outcome and the future government that will emerge from them.

Many Burmese opposition and ethnic groups have responded quickly, making clear their views that these elections are a sham. Aung San Suu Kyi declared the new laws 'unjust' and her NLD party has announced that they will not register for, or contest, the elections on the basis of these laws. Among the international community, there have been strong expressions

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of concern. There is need, I believe, for the international community to assess the situation in a careful and co-ordinated manner, to listen to what the people of Burma are saying and to prepare a clear and coherent response to these developments.

With this as my objective, I have proposed to my colleagues in the EU Foreign Affairs Council that we have a full discussion on Burma at the earliest opportunity, and particularly on the implications for the EU and international community, of the new Burmese electoral laws. Unfortunately, it was not possible to do this at last week's Council, due to a very full agenda, but it was agreed that this discussion would take place at the next Council in April.

As Deputies may recall, the EU had agreed in December that we should send an exploratory mission at official level to Burma with a focus on the electoral process, essentially to investigate whether the EU could play any part in encouraging a credible electoral process. Clearly we will now have to review our position very carefully. It will be important also for the EU to liaise closely with the US and other international partners in the preparation of a strong and co-ordinated response to these developments.

Departmental Staff.

82. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of posts unfilled in his Department due to the recruitment embargo; the sections they are in; the number in Dublin; the number in decentralised locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13239/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Since January 2009, there has been a net reduction of 58 in staffing levels in my Department.

The moratorium on recruitment has meant that staff and functions within my Department are continually being reallocated and reorganised. In addition, the changing business needs of my Department, along with the nature of its core work, require the frequent reassignment of staff, both at home and to our Missions abroad.

Under the Government's decentralisation programme announced in 2003, the Development Cooperation Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs, which operates externally under the name of Irish Aid, decentralised to Limerick. I can advise the Deputy that, at present, there are 9.5 fewer staff working in the Irish Aid office in Limerick than at the beginning of 2009.

However, my Department has sanction for 50 temporary clerical officers for the Passport Office and these people should be recruited as soon as possible.

Emigrant Support Services.

83. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the progress made to date on resolving the issue of undocumented Irish in the United States; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13233/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Finding a solution for our undocumented citizens in the United States continues to be an important priority for this Government. We are also committed to enhancing our bilateral migration arrangements with the US through the establishment of a reciprocal two year renewable visa scheme, known as the E3 visa, and the further development of the working holiday programme.

During our recent St Patrick's Day visit Washington, the Taoiseach and I took the opportunity to discuss immigration reform and the plight of the undocumented Irish during our

meetings with President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton and leading members of Congress. In his remarks at the St Patrick's Day reception, President Obama offered an assurance that his own commitment to comprehensive immigration reform remains unwavering.

On 18th March, Senator Charles E Schumer (D-New York) and Senator Lindsay Graham (R-South Carolina) unveiled their draft framework for action on immigration. This bipartisan proposal includes provision for a path towards legalisation for the undocumented. It proposes that the undocumented could become legalised provided that they admit to having violated US laws, undertake the repayment of taxes and perform community service.

I am encouraged by this significant development and also by the efforts which continue to be made on Capitol Hill to resolve this issue despite the considerable political challenges which still remain.

Our Embassy in Washington will continue to maintain very close ongoing contacts with both Congressmen and advocates who are engaged on this matter, so as to ensure that Irish interests are considered as part of the ongoing process towards the introduction of a new immigration bill. These contacts have made clear that the issue of the undocumented can only be fully addressed through comprehensive immigration reform.

This Government will continue to support and encourage movement towards finding a solution for the undocumented Irish. Through the Emigrant Support Programme, we have provided \$285,000 to the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform, since 2006, to assist with their lobbying efforts. In 2009, we also provided \$10,000 to the Chicago Celts for Immigration Reform.

Arms Trade.

84. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the latest report that there has been a 22% increase in arms sales by Germany in the past five years; the implications of this for the EU's foreign policy, and in particular, insofar as a very high proportion of these sales are to some of the poorest countries in the world, many with authoritarian regimes. [13347/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I am aware of the report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) which indicated a rise in the level of arms exported from Germany in recent years.

Since December 2008, all European Union Member States, including Germany, are legally bound to uphold Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP, which defines common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment.

I am satisfied that the EU Common Position ensures that the export of military technology and equipment from the EU is carried out with the strongest possible safeguards. Furthermore, I would emphasise that Germany maintains a robust export control system and would also note that the SIPRI report states that "European recipients represent the main destinations" for German military exports.

The EU Common Position ensures that every application for a licence to export items on the EU Common Military List is assessed against eight criteria. These criteria take into consideration a number of factors, including matters such as respect for the international obligations and commitments of Member States, in particular the sanctions adopted by the UN Security Council or the European Union; respect for human rights in the country of final destination as well as respect by that country of international humanitarian law; the internal situation in the country of final destination — such as the existence of tension or armed conflict; the preservation of regional peace, security and stability; the national security of Member States

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and of friendly and allied countries; terrorism and respect for international law; the risk of diversion to an undesirable end user, either within the buyer country or by re-export; and the compatibility of the particular equipment with the level of development of the country in question, i.e. whether the proposed export would seriously hamper the sustainable development of the recipient country.

I would also recall that this Government, in line with our EU partners, is committed to supporting a binding and comprehensive global treaty on the arms trade, covering all weapons and ammunition. Germany in particular has played a leading role in this effort and the EU as a whole will be working towards this goal in the coming months.

Middle East Peace Process.

85. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will make a statement on the positive developments he expects to flow from Baroness Ashton's visit to Gaza. [13345/10]

87. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will propose at EU level the establishment of a permanent secretariat to existing and particularly new initiatives for peace in the Middle East. [13346/10]

99. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will make a statement on implications for the peace process in the Middle East of the approval of the Israeli Government of further housing units in East Jerusalem. [13327/10]

105. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the steps he will take to officially break the EU consensus which affords Israel preferential trade by withdrawing Irish consent for this in view of the recent announcement by Israel of its intention to build a further 1,600 illegal settlement houses and the many atrocities committed by that State. [13296/10]

107. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if, during his recent meeting with the US Secretary of State, the subjects of Gaza and the settlements were raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13342/10]

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the extent to which he directly or through the EU or the UN has been in a position to positively influence or develop the peace process in the Middle East with particular emphasis on the need for a permanent structure to which all sides can have recourse; if he will indicate his own conclusions arising from any of the discussions he has had with the various interests in the region; if any progress has been made on rebuilding operations in Gaza; if the funding made available through the international community is still accessible; if he will outline the extent to which the EU specifically hopes to influence the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13359/10]

125. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on whether the proximity talks between Palestinian and Israeli representatives are likely to take place and yield a result in view of the impasse in relation to the expansion of illegal settlements. [13350/10]

287. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the degree to which he and his EU and UN colleagues have observed ongoing developments in Gaza, the West

Bank and the Middle East; if any particular strategy, policy of initiative is likely to follow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13520/10]

296. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the initiatives that are open to the international community to advance the peace process in the Middle East in the wake of recent extension of Israeli settlements and the ongoing need for the reconstruction of buildings in Gaza; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13529/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 85, 87, 99, 105, 107, 115, 125, 287 and 296 together.

I refer to my earlier reply to Priority Questions 70 and 72 for details on my discussions with Secretary Clinton, and on the issues of Gaza and of Israeli settlement construction. Further to that reply, I would add a number of points in answer to matters raised by Deputies.

The difficulties inherent in reaching a comprehensive settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflicts are readily apparent, not least in the light of the very great difficulty in even bringing the parties to the starting point. But we are very familiar in Ireland with the long, frustrating and endlessly patient work that can be required in a process of this nature, and we must continue to encourage the parties to take those difficult steps. The US Administration has put a great deal of effort into trying to reach the commencement of talks, in the belief that the issues to be settled are well capable of resolution, most of them having been the subject of intermittent negotiation and debate for the best part of two decades. I share their view that the talks can succeed if both sides genuinely want them to. That is the crucial question.

The idea of a secretariat structure for the peace talks has been raised before in the House. I have to say however that in my discussions with them, none of the parties to the conflict have suggested that they would find such a structure useful. Indeed it is unlikely that they would accept any such structure, even if it were to be clear under what auspices or mandate it would operate. It might simply add to the long list of issues on which there is no agreement. I do not therefore plan to make such a proposal at EU level. There are, of course, already Special Representatives in the field for the UN, the EU, the US and the Quartet, each with a small staff.

The problems in the Middle East are primarily caused by lack of political will and spirit of compromise, not lack of process and structure. It is true that each successive negotiation effort has to some extent had to begin again at zero, but nonetheless some of the outlines or parameters of possible agreement have gradually emerged through these talks and interim agreements. I strongly approve the firm US intention that the current negotiation process, if it can be launched, should reach a final comprehensive agreement within two years, to avoid any further loss of ground gained.

I have on many occasions restated the consistent policy of successive Irish Governments that it would be neither helpful nor feasible to pursue EU trade measures against Israel, despite our many and clear differences with them on issues relating to their continuing occupation of Palestinian Territories. Such an approach would not increase our influence on Israeli policy or public opinion, nor among our EU colleagues. Nor is there any possibility of reaching agreement on such a policy at EU level, which would in fact require a consensus in favour of such sanctions.

I support any initiative to positively address the dreadful situation in Gaza. In particular, I welcome the recent visits to the strip by the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, and the EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton, which followed closely on my own visit.

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As I saw myself, there has been very little reconstruction of damaged buildings and infrastructure, due to the continued blockade on the import of construction materials. Since it is clear that militant groups are readily able to import materials for their own construction purposes through the tunnels, this policy primarily affects ordinary Gazan citizens in the homes and businesses. There have been some recent positive steps by the Israeli authorities, acting in cooperation with the UN, UNRWA and the Quartet Representative, Tony Blair, in allowing in materials for 150 housing units, work on the sewage treatment plant, an elevator for the maternity hospital, the flour mill, and some window glass and window and door frames. But UN Secretary General Ban has accurately described these exceptions to the blockade — welcome as they are — as ‘a drop in a bucket’. The only acceptable and rational policy is for a complete and lasting end to the blockade.

It is also important that I restate clearly that the firing of a further missile at Israel even during the visit to Gaza of EU High Representative Ashton, which killed a Thai agricultural worker in Israel, is an example of how little some militant groups care about the effects of their actions on innocent civilians on either side of the border. I also repeat that Israel has a right to expect that the abducted soldier, Sergeant Shalit, be released immediately from Gaza.

Human Rights Issues.

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the extent to which the EU, the UN or the wider international community has influenced matters in Iran, with particular reference to that country’s nuclear development programme, the stability of the region and the alleged human right abuses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13360/10]

288. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the steps that have been taken at EU or UN level to address human rights abuses in Iran, with particular reference to the aftermath of civil protest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13521/10]

300. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the degree to which the international community has remonstrated with the Iranian authorities in relation to the ongoing persecution of academics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13533/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86, 288 and 300 together.

International concerns about the nature and aims of Iran’s nuclear programme, which are shared by Ireland, have been the focus of diplomatic efforts for some years. The EU has been actively engaged with the Iranian authorities since 2004 in trying to reach a satisfactory resolution of this issue. This EU commitment was repeated in the Declaration on Iran which was issued by the European Council in December. An intrinsic element of this approach has been the need to introduce progressively stronger measures which might persuade Iran to reconsider its position. This need is reinforced by the continuing refusal of Iran to comply with its obligations under both IAEA and UN Security Council Resolutions, and by the current stalemate in the negotiations. Consistent with this dual-track approach, the European Council Declaration stated that the Union would support action by the UN Security Council if Iran continues to ignore its obligations.

In line with our consistent support for the efforts of the E3+3, Ireland has always made clear that, in the event of continuing non-compliance by Iran, we could contemplate the adoption of further restrictive measures against Iran. Our strong preference would be for this to be agreed

at UN level. If this cannot be achieved, we would be ready to support EU action. Discussions are continuing in New York on a possible new Security Council resolution imposing new sanctions against Iran but it is likely to be a number of weeks yet before any such text is tabled.

Iran's own neighbours, especially its Gulf Arab neighbours, have long made clear their extreme concern at the implications of Iran's nuclear programme, and indeed have raised the possibility that they may feel obliged to follow a similar path, which would be most unwelcome in an already tense region. It is in this context that recent reports of possible defensive measures, including by US forces based in the Gulf, should be seen. However, it is important to stress that all sides, including the United States, have made clear that they are committed to a peaceful resolution of this issue through diplomacy. This remains the absolute priority for Ireland and our EU partners.

The EU has been vocal in its reaction to the deterioration in human rights generally in Iran since the disputed Presidential elections, with a particular focus on the maltreatment of those in detention and the need for due legal process to prevail. High Representative Ashton has issued a number of strong statements, the latest on 11 February, expressing the EU's serious concerns regarding the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran which Ireland welcomes and fully supports. I note that High Representative Ashton also issued a joint statement with the United States on 8 February in which the European Union and the United States together condemned the continuing human rights violations in Iran since the June 12 election and called on the Government of Iran to live up to its international human rights obligations, to end its abuses against its own people, to hold accountable those who have committed the abuses and to release those who are exercising their rights.

I have also reported to the House on a number of occasions of my own efforts to engage with the Iranian authorities bilaterally on the steady deterioration of human rights protection in Iran in recent years. Most recently during the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review of Iran on 15 February Ireland raised a number of issues including the continued use of the death penalty, and of torture in Iranian prisons as well as women's rights and the situation of human rights defenders. My Department has also raised the case of a number of those detained since the elections last June, including that of Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh, an American citizen who was sentenced to five years imprisonment in Iran for a variety of charges linked to the post election disturbances in Iran. We welcome Dr. Tajbakhsh's brief release to celebrate the Persian New Year with his family and will continue to monitor his case closely.

Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 85.

European External Action Service.

88. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the recruitment process for the staff of the European External Action Service; if he envisages Irish citizens being afforded an opportunity of applying for such positions; if such positions will be open for public application; and the manner in which the process will be advertised. [13339/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The European External Action Service (EEAS) is an important innovation under the Lisbon Treaty which will support the work of the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton. The High Representative has on 25 March presented a proposal for a Council Decision on the organisation and functioning of the EEAS and discussion will soon commence on this.

As regards the staffing of EEAS posts, the Treaty provides that the EEAS will comprise officials from relevant departments of the Commission and the Council Secretariat, as well as staff seconded from national diplomatic services of the Member States. The High Representa-

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tive's forthcoming proposals will include proposals for the staff recruitment process. Appropriate amendments will also need to be made to the EU's Staff Regulations.

As I indicated in my reply to parliamentary questions last month, the EEAS recruitment process should be open, transparent and merit-based while also ensuring that EEAS staffing is representative of the diversity of the Union. These points were made again on 22 March when Ministers in the General Affairs and Foreign Affairs Councils had a useful, wide-ranging discussion with High Representative Ashton.

Irish candidates will be able to compete for positions within the EEAS on an equal footing with those from other Member States. My Department has sought general expressions of interest from officials in our own foreign service in seeking positions in the EEAS. It is not yet clear how the EEAS will advertise the posts available but as the recruitment procedures are developed, steps will be taken to ensure that qualified Irish candidates are fully informed.

Separately, a limited number of posts vacant in EU missions abroad this year have been opened to competition and the details have been circulated to qualified staff.

The overall size of the EEAS is still under consideration and it will be some years before it reaches full operational strength. Staffing from the member States, including Ireland, is likely to start modestly. However, over time there will be a real benefit to the State through the experience gained by the rotation of Irish officials between the EEAS and the Irish diplomatic service. I look forward to Irish candidates of the highest calibre being recruited into the new Service.

Tax Code.

89. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on whether such reforms of the international monetary system, as a foreign policy principle, as would allow for the establishment of a transaction tax, such as the Tobin tax, so as to contain or eliminate the destructive anti-democratic consequences of speculation in international debt and currency.

[13352/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The question of introducing any tax measures is primarily a matter for the Minister for Finance.

From a foreign policy perspective, I would not exclude that taxation measures might have a role to play in regulating international financial markets, alongside other international instruments.

As the Deputy will be aware, there were calls at the G20 Summit in St Andrews last November for a global financial levy or an insurance fee to be implemented by all the world's financial centres, in consideration of the need to reflect the global responsibilities of financial institutions to society. While this was not agreed at the meeting, the G-20 leaders have tasked the IMF to prepare a report in time for their June 2010 meeting laying out a range of options as to how the financial sector could make a fair and substantial contribution toward paying for any burdens associated with government interventions to repair the banking system.

The European Council in December 2009 emphasised the importance of renewing the economic and social contract between financial institutions and the society they serve and of ensuring that the public is protected from risk.

Passport Applications.

90. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his contingency plans for the passport office following the recent flooding there; his further plans to address delays in the

passport office as a result of ongoing industrial action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13244/10]

91. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the procedure that is in place to facilitate the issuing of urgent passports during the ongoing dispute by public service unions; the affect that this dispute is having on the passport office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13252/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 90 and 91 together.

I refer the Deputies to my response to Priority question number 13403/10.

As the Deputy is aware, customers have been experiencing disruption to passport services as a result of ongoing industrial action in the public service. The industrial action has led to a backlog of over 50,000 passport applications in the system and application turnaround time is currently 15-20 working days. As a result, the Department advises that it is not possible to fast-track any application other than in a case of genuine family emergency, in which case proof will be required that travel is necessitated by the death, illness or welfare of a family member. The issuing of passports in such emergencies is not affected by the industrial dispute. Furthermore, the public counters and out of hours services should only be used by those who have a necessity to travel for reasons of family emergency.

In the circumstances, customers are advised to check the expiry dates of passports before making any overseas travel plans and to apply in sufficient time that the new passport can be received before the intended date of travel. In response to the industrial action the Department has in addition temporarily suspended the requirement that applicants submit their existing passport with their application for a new passport. Where the current passport has not yet fully expired customers may include a photocopy of the personal details pages of the current passport with their application for a new passport.

Clearly the present situation is not acceptable where so many of our citizens are experiencing intolerable delays. However, the situation will not ease until normal working is resumed. The Passport business is seasonal throughout the world and every service has to rely on the recruitment of seasonal workers and overtime. Until the current restrictions in these areas are overcome, the Passport service will continue to struggle with the timely provision of passports for Irish citizens.

Without the normal flexibility, which has characterized the Passport Service in the past, it is simply not possible to provide these functions. I am calling on the CPSU to resume normal working arrangements as soon as possible particularly now that there was a conclusion to the Public Sector talks early this morning in Croke Park under the Chairmanship of Mr. Kieran Mulvey.

Following this morning's agreement, there are clear grounds for ending the current industrial action. Should this occur, my Department will move immediately to eliminate the backlog of passport applications by offering overtime, redeploying staff to get ease bottlenecks in the process and recruiting temporary staff. With the cooperation of staff, who let us not forget made the Passport Service the efficient, customer friendly service it was before this dispute, we can soon again have a service to be proud of.

Decentralisation Programme.

92. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of public servants

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employed by Irish Aid in Dublin that did not renew their posts when the agency was decentralised to Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13245/10]

112. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of public servants employed by Irish Aid that have requested a transfer to other Departments or public agencies in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13247/10]

116. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of vacant posts at a mid to senior management level in Irish Aid that remain to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13246/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 92, 112, and 116 together.

Under the Government's decentralisation programme announced in 2003, the Development Cooperation Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs decentralised to Limerick. This Division operates externally under the name of Irish Aid. The Headquarters of Irish Aid is situated in my Department's Limerick building.

Of the 108 staff assigned to Irish Aid at the time decentralisation was announced, 19 officials were transferred to other areas of my Department as they did not wish to decentralise.

In the past three years, five staff of the Development Cooperation Division of my Department have transferred to other Departments or public bodies.

It is in the nature of the work of my Department that staff members transfer between Divisions at HQ, and indeed to Embassies abroad, on a regular basis. This routine rotation accounts for the balance of the staff transfers from Irish Aid.

The total number of unfilled posts in Irish Aid is currently 9.5. Of those, 6.5 are at, or above, Executive Officer level and equivalent.

Irish Residents Abroad.

93. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of Irish citizens who are permanently resident abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13763/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): There is no legal requirement for Irish citizens living abroad to register with their nearest Embassy. As such, no official figures are available for the number of Irish citizens who are permanently resident abroad.

During 2009 our diplomatic missions issued 81,000 passports to Irish citizens ordinarily resident abroad. The most recent US census recorded 124,000 Irish born residents, although some 42 million people claim Irish ancestry. The 2001 census in Britain showed that there were 750,000 Irish born people living in Britain and it is estimated that a further 1.7million people are born to Irish parents. There are also significant numbers of Irish citizens living in Australia, New Zealand, Argentina and Canada.

The Government takes a broad and inclusive approach when it comes to defining our global community. The Irish Diaspora is not limited to Irish born people living overseas or to those who have activated Irish citizenship. Instead, it encompasses all those who believe they are of Irish descent and feel a sense of affinity with this country. I believe it is essential that we in Ireland value and affirm the validity of this sense of Irishness, felt by so many people abroad.

Supporting Irish communities abroad is a priority for this Government. Since 2004 almost € 70million has been allocated, through the Emigrant Support Programme, mainly to Irish com-

munity organisations throughout the world. Despite the difficult economic situation, a further €13million has been allocated to the Emigrant Support Programme for 2010.

The Government has also developed new initiatives aimed at creating a more strategic relationship with the global Irish, particularly in the economic sector. The Global Irish Economic Forum and the subsequent establishment of the Global Irish Network clearly demonstrate our commitment to achieving this objective.

Human Rights Issues.

94. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the breaches of human rights affecting trades union members in Columbia. [13330/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I am aware of and share the deep concern that has been expressed at the manner in which trade union activists, human rights defenders and journalists have been treated in Colombia. To this end, a number of steps have been taken over the past year in addressing human rights issues directly with the Government of Colombia and together with the European Union.

First, in December 2008, at the *Universal Periodic Review* of Colombia at the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Ireland made a set of strong recommendations *inter alia* on the protection of human rights defenders in Colombia. Foreign Minister Bermudez subsequently wrote to me outlining in detail the steps that Colombia has undertaken, particularly in response to Ireland's recommendations at the Human Rights Council. In my response to Foreign Minister Bermudez' letter, I acknowledged the progress made but equally stressed the need for further serious efforts by the Colombian Government in order to meet its human rights commitments.

In particular, I underlined my grave concern at the number of deaths of trade union members, who play a crucial role in our societies. I called on the Colombian Government to ensure that thorough investigations are carried out into the deaths of those trade unionists who have died in violent circumstances and that concrete action is taken immediately to ensure the protection of those people who continue to participate in trade union activity in Colombia. Finally, I sought detailed information on the measures being taken by the Colombian Government to ensure the safety of trade union members in Colombia.

Secondly, the Irish Ambassador to Colombia met with President Uribe, Foreign Minister Bermudez and senior officials in Bogota in November 2009 and raised a range of human rights issues, in particular the question of the number of trade unionists killed in recent years. The Colombian side acknowledged the difficulties they are facing with regard to the protection of human rights but outlined the steps being taken such as trebling the budget of the Protection Programme for Human Rights Defenders to \$47 million in 2009. This permitted the extension of the Protection Programme to cover trade unionists and journalists. Indeed in the first half of 2009, the Protection Programme benefited 1,430 trade unionists.

Thirdly, during negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Colombia, Ireland insisted on the inclusion of a clause committing both the EU Member States and Colombia to the implementation of their human rights responsibilities with the proviso that failure to do would result in the suspension of the Agreement. In addition, I wrote to the EU Trade Commissioner in January to underline the importance I attach to the inclusion of a strong and effective human rights and suspension clause as an essential element of the Agreement.

In addition to the bilateral track, the European Union has stepped up its human rights dialogue with the Colombian authorities, who have been left in no doubt about the seriousness

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of our concerns regarding the human rights situation and the extent of the improvements needed.

I can assure you that the Government will continue to closely follow the human rights situation in Colombia and take the steps we consider necessary bilaterally as well as in cooperation with our EU partners.

Diplomatic Representation.

95. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of honorary consuls and their location; the numbers of vacancies for the position of honorary consul; the locations of same; his plans to fill these vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13762/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): There are a total of 89 Honorary Consuls serving at present and the table below sets out where they are located.

Consideration of whether to appoint an Honorary Consul in a particular country or specific area within a country is taken on the basis of several criteria eg Consular needs, location of significant Irish community, business opportunities etc.. The Department requests all missions to keep the situation under review. Should a need for a new Honorary Consul be identified, I will give it active consideration.

When an Honorary Consul retires or resigns, we conduct a review of whether the position should remain in that particular location. Before any public announcement of an Honorary Consul appointment, it is necessary to get the agreement of the Receiving State.

Country	Location of Honorary Counsuls					
Australia	Perth					
Bahrain	Manama					
Belgium	Antwerp					
Bermuda	Hamilton					
Bolivia	La Paz					
Botswana	Gaborone					
Brazil	Sao Paulo					
Canada	Calgary	Montreal	Edmonton	Toronto	Vancouver	St. John's Newfoundland
Channel Islands	Jersey					
Chile	Santiago					
China	Hong Kong					
Columbia	Bogota					
Croatia	Zagreb					
Ecuador	Quito					
Egypt	Alexandria					
El Salvador	San Salvador					
Finland	Helsinki					
France	Antibes	Cherbourg				
Germany	Cologne	Frankfurt	Hamburg	Munich		
Georgia	Tbilisi					
Greece	Corfu	Crete	Rhodes			
Guatemala	Guatemala					
Guyana	Georgetown					
Iceland	Gardabaer					
India	Bangalore	Mumbai				

Country	Location of Honorary Counsuls					
Indonesia	Jakarta					
Italy	Milan					
Japan	Osaka					
Jordan	Amman					
Kenya	Nairobi					
Korea	Seoul					
Malawi	Blantyre					
Mexico	Cancun					
Monaco	Monaco					
Morocco	Agadir	Casablanca				
Netherlands	Rotterdam					
New Zealand	Auckland					
Nigeria	Lagos					
Oman	Muscat					
Pakistan	Karachi					
Panama	Panama					
Peru	Lima					
Philippines	Manila					
Poland	Poznan					
Russian Federation	St.Petersburg					
Serbia	Belgrade					
Sierra Leone	Freetown					
Spain	Alicante	Barcelona	Bilbao	El Ferrol	Gran Canaria	
Spain cont.	Lanzarote	Malaga	Mallorca	Seville	Tenerife	
Sri Lanka	Colombo					
Sudan	Khartoum					
Switzerland	Zurich					
Syria	Damascus					
Thailand	Bangkok	Phuket				
Trinidad and Tobago	Port of Spain					
Tunisia	Tunis					
Turkey	Istanbul					
Ukraine	Kiev					
U.S.A.	Houston	Los Angeles	Naples, FL	Reno, NV	St. Louis	Seattle
	Denver					
Venezuela	Caracas					
Zimbabwe	Harare					

Total number: 89

Diplomatic Residences.

96. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No 307 of 23 February 2010 in which he indicated that it is intended to use the Irish Ambassador's residence in Ottawa, a building on which his Department just spent \$7 million renovating, as an amenity to promote trade with Ireland, if a strategy to maximise the return to the taxpayer has been put in place including a schedule of events in terms of presentations by State agencies and Irish companies and so on; and if so, if he will provide this Deputy with a list of same. [13298/10]

127. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs further to Parliamentary Question number 307 of 23 February 2010, in which he indicates that it is intended to use the Irish Ambassador's residence in Ottawa, Canada, a building on which his Department just spent \$7 million renovating, as an amenity to promote trade with Ireland, if his Department developed and considered detailed projections on the scale of the return that the taxpayer can expect on their investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13297/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 96 and 127 together.

Ireland has strong commercial and business linkages with Canada. Total trade (manufacturing and services) between Ireland and Canada in 2008 was valued at more than €1.6 billion. The first ten months of 2009 saw a 12 % increase in this trade. Canada is also a key tourism market for Ireland with 108,000 Canadians visiting Ireland in 2008.

Further development of Ireland's economic interests in Canada is a key priority for the Embassy in Ottawa. To this end, the Embassy works closely with the state agencies and in particular with the Enterprise Ireland office in Toronto, to support their activities in Canada and to grow and develop our bilateral economic relationship. The Embassy also works with individual companies seeking to enter the Canadian market and provides assistance to Irish companies in relation to market access issues. The Embassy and the Residence are used for this purpose and are available to the state agencies and their clients to assist them in developing their business in Canada.

The renovated Residence in Ottawa is now in operation and represents a valuable asset for the State and a resource in the consolidation and enhancement of our important relationship with Canada with whom we also have many shared foreign policy values.

A key promotional focus for the Embassy every year is St Patrick's Day. This year, the Embassy hosted a reception, at the Ambassador's Residence, for up to 500 people including senior political and business representatives.

An important element of the evening was the ability to promote, including through audiovisual display, the work of Tourism Ireland, Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland and the IDA.

A number of Irish food and drinks products were also showcased. The Ambassador's Residence is the ideal location for this type of promotional work and is extremely cost effective by comparison with other possible options such as a hotel.

The Embassy will continue to work closely with the State agencies and the private sector and has a number of trade development activities in planning for the remainder of the year.

I am confident that through assiduous use of the new resources and a cohesive approach to trade, tourism and investment promotion, the investment made in our representation in Canada, which is the world's seventh largest economy, will yield a positive result.

Foreign Conflicts.

97. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if the EU has held any discussions regarding the ongoing tensions between the power sharing Government in Zimbabwe; if there are any plans for EU involvement to assist in resolving these tensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13255/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The situation in Zimbabwe continues to be of great concern to the Government and to the European Union as a whole. While we

have seen some improvements in the economic sphere since the formation of the unity government, this has not been matched in other crucial areas, including respect for human rights, the rule of law and security sector reform.

The lack of progress in implementing the Global Political Agreement (GPA) has been the main source of tension between the parties in the power-sharing government. The most recent crisis was triggered by the arrest and indictment last October of the MDC nominee for Deputy Minister for Agriculture on treason charges and culminated in the disengagement by the MDC from their Zanu-PF partners in government. Both sides subsequently agreed to enter talks facilitated by the South African Development Community (SADC) on the full implementation of the GPA. These talks are continuing. Ireland, with our EU partners, remain supportive of this effort, believing that Zimbabwe's neighbours have a critical role to play in encouraging reform, and can bring the greatest influence to bear in achieving progress in implementing the power sharing agreement.

The EU has repeatedly stated its willingness to re-engage with the Zimbabwean Government. Re-engagement, however, remains conditional on a willingness to pursue in good faith the agreed goals set out in the GPA. On 21 April, a ministerial delegation from Zimbabwe will travel to Brussels where they will meet with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton. I am hopeful that these discussions will be productive.

In the meantime, Ireland has worked closely with our EU partners in developing a consistent approach to Zimbabwe that benefits the people of Zimbabwe, while maintaining pressure on the Government to reform. In keeping with other international donors, we do not provide funding to the Zimbabwean Government, but respond to the humanitarian needs of the Zimbabwean people through support for the work of multilateral and non-governmental organisations. In 2009, Ireland provided funding of €5.6 million to a range of humanitarian programmes in Zimbabwe, focussed on food security, tackling HIV and AIDS, human rights and supporting civil society organisations that provide essential services for the population.

Human Rights Issues.

98. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he is in a position to report progress at the level of the EU on accepting former detainees of Guantánamo. [13329/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): At an early stage, a number of EU Member States, including Ireland, agreed to accept former Guantánamo detainees cleared for release. To date, twenty-two former detainees have been received by EU Member States. I understand that in the case of certain other Member States, the consideration of whether or not to accept detainees is ongoing.

Together with our EU partners, Ireland continues to encourage the US to bring about the closure of the Guantánamo Bay detention facility in the shortest possible time.

Question No. 99 answered with Question No. 85.

Foreign Conflicts.

100. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the ongoing protests by anti-government protestors in Thailand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13261/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Thailand is currently experiencing large scale demonstrations on the streets of the capital Bangkok. The rallies have been taking place since 12 March with anti-government 'Red Shirt' protesters — supporters of ousted

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former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra — demanding the dissolution of Parliament and new elections. The Prime Minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, has stated that he will not dissolve Parliament and that his Government will continue in office for its full term. 50,000 security personnel have been deployed in the capital and the Internal Security Act has been invoked.

There have been reports that over the week-end twelve soldiers and four civilians were hurt in hand-grenade attacks at a military barracks and at three television stations associated with the Government. I very much regret these incidents. I hope that restraint and caution will be exercised by all sides. Observance of the rule of law, respect for the Thai constitution and protection of the democratic process by all parties are vital.

In response to a Parliamentary Question following protests that took place in 2008, I expressed the view that, if political stability was to be achieved, and if Thailand was to successfully address the many challenges it faces, it was vitally important for the parties there to engage with each other in a spirit of national reconciliation. That remains my position.

It is regrettable that there is continued political polarisation. I hope, however, that restraint and reason will prevail in this instance and that serious efforts will be made by all sides to maintain stability. In this context, I welcome the talks which took place between the Prime Minister and the ‘Red Shirt’ protesters on Sunday and Monday and which were also televised. I hope that these talks will lay the foundation for broader dialogue on the range of issues which divide the country.

101. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the current political position in Nigeria. [13351/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): There have been a number of developments of interest and concern in Nigeria in recent weeks, relating both to the composition of the Federal Government, and to outbreaks of violence in the country. The absence of President Yar Adua, who left Nigeria in November last year for medical treatment in Saudi Arabia without transferring power to Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, caused some Constitutional uncertainty as the Vice President was not legally empowered to carry out all the functions of the President. On 9 February the National Assembly adopted a unanimous resolution to recognise the Vice President as Acting President. Subsequently, on 23 February President Yar Adua returned to Nigeria, although he has still not been seen in public since his return.

On Wednesday 17 March, after a 12 hour cabinet meeting, Acting President Jonathan dismissed the other Ministers of Government, promising to nominate a new Government within two weeks. Duties and powers have been handed over to the permanent secretary in each ministry. The Acting President indicated that he expects to reappoint most of the previous ministers.

In relation to the recurrent violence in Jos, in which several hundred people have died since the beginning of the year, Vice President Goodluck Jonathan has acted swiftly and sent the army to the area to stop the violence, and reinforce a curfew. The Federal Attorney General also dispatched a special legal team in early March to help prosecute perpetrators of the attacks. Much work is needed to identify and address the root causes of the violence if the cycle is to be broken and long term peace restored.

The situation in the Niger Delta had been relatively calm, but in recent weeks violence has flared again. Last week Nigerian militants detonated two car bombs outside a government building in the southern city of Warri where talks were being held about implementing the amnesty programme. Acting President Goodluck Jonathan has made reviving the amnesty programme and restoring peace in the Niger Delta a priority. The Acting President is acting

to control and address the extremely difficult situations faced in those parts of Nigeria affected by violence, especially Jos and the Niger Delta.

I am hopeful that, with the support and goodwill of the people in these regions, the Nigerian authorities will continue to seek stability, inclusion and reconciliation in these areas. Our Embassy in Abuja will continue to monitor these developments as well those relating to the nomination of members of the federal Government of Nigeria.

Embassy Marriages.

102. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of marriages conducted at foreign embassies in Dublin which are not recognised by Irish law; the representations he has received from foreign missions accredited to Ireland regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13325/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Marriages performed by Embassies in Ireland have never been recognised in Irish law although they may of course be recognised in the laws of the states whose Embassies perform them. In international law a marriage performed at an Embassy will only be internationally recognised if it is in the country in which it is performed. It is for this reason that a state proposing to perform marriages at its Embassies abroad should ideally consult with the relevant local authorities in advance in order to establish whether these marriages will be recognised in all states or only in the state whose Embassy performs the marriage. As Irish law does not recognise or regulate Embassy marriages we have no statistics as to how many have been performed here.

When the matter recently came to my Department's attention that a number of Embassies have been performing marriages, we contacted the Registrar General and the Department of Social and Family Affairs and advised all Embassies of the requirements of the law governing marriages in Ireland.

Representations were subsequently made by a number of Embassies and their concerns have been forwarded to the Registrar General. The matter is currently being reviewed by the Department of Social and Family Affairs and my Department to consider what if any assistance can be provided to couples that have encountered practical difficulties arising from the non-recognition by Irish law of marriages performed at Embassies here.

I understand that Embassies have now ceased to perform marriages.

Irish law does not authorise the performance of marriages at Irish Embassies abroad by Irish diplomatic and consular officers.

Haiti Earthquake.

103. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the follow up assistance that is being offered by the international community in general and the EU specifically to the relief effort in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13344/10]

129. **Deputy Deirdre Clune** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the recommendations for action by Irish Aid in the medium and longer term made by the technical team he sent to Haiti to undertake an analysis of priority needs; the actions he has taken and plans to take resulting from these recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13249/10]

290. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the degree to which international aid to Haiti has been successfully and strategically delivered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13523/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103, 129 and 290 together.

The challenges faced in responding to the devastating Haiti earthquake of 12 January were exceptionally serious: the destruction of essential infrastructure, the tragic loss of both key Government and UN personnel, and enormous pre-existing vulnerabilities.

The international community generally and the EU specifically responded decisively and comprehensively to the disaster. From the outset, immediate operational support was provided through the deployment of search and rescue teams, and other expert personnel, including from the EU. EU Member States and the European Commission quickly committed significant levels of emergency funding for emergency assistance, and airlifts of essential humanitarian supplies were organised. Despite the difficult circumstances, hundreds of thousands of people in Haiti have now received vital humanitarian assistance.

Within days of the earthquake, the Government sent a technical team of four personnel to Haiti to undertake an analysis of priority needs and to make recommendations for action by Irish Aid in the medium and longer term. The team — three Irish Aid officials and an engineer from the Defence Forces — spent five days on the ground.

The team reported to me with a comprehensive set of recommendations which have underpinned the actions taken by the Government in response to the crisis. Drawing on lessons learned following the 2004 Asian Tsunami, they advised that Irish Aid focus on a small number of key sectors and experienced partners.

The most urgent recommendation was for a second airlift of emergency shelter, water and sanitation equipment in addition to the 84 tonne shipment carried out immediately following the earthquake. The Government responded by transporting a further 50 tonnes of essential relief items from our pre-positioned supplies. These supplies, to benefit 12,000 disaster affected families, were distributed by Concern, Goal and Trócaire.

The team recommended that the Government concentrate its short to medium resources on the protection of vulnerable groups such as women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities, and sanitation, to help prevent the spread of disease. We are therefore providing support to Concern for work in the area of water, sanitation and hygiene; to Haven for the construction of latrines; and to World Vision and Plan Ireland for the education and protection of children.

The team proposed that Irish Aid support Cash for Work schemes, which employ local people in delivering recovery projects. Irish Aid-funded water and sanitation projects are therefore providing much need employment for local people in their implementation.

In the longer term the team recommended the Government support the Haitian people in developing the necessary capacity to rebuild their country. The EU, together with the wider international community, has repeatedly underlined the importance of Haitian leadership of its own recovery and development processes. Irish Government funding will enable UN HABITAT to provide technical and secretariat assistance to the Haitian Government in the vital areas of housing, social and physical infrastructure, urban and spatial planning, and shelter advice.

The informal European Council in Brussels of 11 February committed the European Union to a central role in Haiti's recovery and rehabilitation over the medium and longer term. The European Commission, together with the Haitian Government, the UN, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, undertook a comprehensive Post-Disaster Needs Assessment in Haiti. The Assessment will provide the framework for Haiti's long term recovery

and will be an important input to an International Donors' Conference in New York tomorrow (31 March).

A common EU position for the Conference was agreed by the Foreign Affairs Council, which I attended on 22 March. The Council agreed to support, in partnership with the international community, a Haitian Government-led plan for long-term reconstruction and sustainable development in Haiti. The common EU position will be conveyed by the EU High Representative at the International Donors' Conference and will include a common pledge representing the overall EU commitment to the reconstruction of Haiti.

In line with the recommendation of our own technical team for a longer term engagement in Haiti, the Government will pledge a multi-million Euro, three year package of Irish Government support to Haiti at tomorrow's Donor Conference. This package, which is a clear indication of Ireland's commitment to the Haitian people, will include relief, recovery and development assistance over the period to the end of 2012, as well as a contribution to the relief of Haiti's debt.

European External Action Service.

104. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he is satisfied that the new EU Foreign Policy Chief and External Action Service will respect the neutral status of our nation and afford Ireland equal input into common foreign policy in view of the fact that we have already been excluded from a meeting of the Baroness with a number of foreign ministers that took place in Finland over the weekend of the 13th and 14th March 2010. [13295/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I have previously welcomed the appointment of Catherine Ashton as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Vice President of the European Commission. HR Ashton is already working closely with European Union Foreign Ministers to ensure that the Union plays an active and influential role on the world stage. It is important that we put in place a capable External Action Service to support the High Representative in this work, as envisaged in the Lisbon Treaty.

At the recent meeting of EU Foreign Ministers hosted by the Spanish Presidency in Cordoba, I made the point that recruitment to the new service should be open, transparent and on merit, while having regard to geographic and gender balance. The discussions on setting up this ambitious new service are ongoing and Ireland is fully engaged in this process. There was also a suggestion at the Cordoba meeting that given the busy and varied agenda, there would be benefit from smaller informal gatherings of Ministers in terms of helping to deepen dialogue on a particular issue.

In this regard, I welcome the initiative of my colleague Alexander Stubb, Foreign Minister of Finland, whom I met at the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday, to invite a small number of EU colleagues, HR Ashton and the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to an informal meeting in Lapland recently. There is no question of Ireland being excluded from EU meetings. Nor is there any threat to Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality, as was made clear in the decision adopted by the European Council in June of last year.

The reality is that following the endorsement of the Lisbon Treaty by the Irish people, we are again at the heart of Europe, working hand in hand with our EU colleagues on issues including the Middle East Peace Process, Afghanistan and Haiti.

Question No. 105 answered with Question No. 85.

Human Rights Issues.

106. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he is in a position to make a statement on the continued detention of opposition leaders in Ethiopia. [13328/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I am very concerned over the continued detention of Ms Birtukan Midekssa a prominent opposition figure in Ethiopian politics. Ms Midekssa was among the opposition leaders who were imprisoned following the 2005 elections in Ethiopia and the ensuing violence. Almost all of these detainees were pardoned and released in 2007, on condition that they admitted to errors in the post-election period. However, in December 2008, Ms Midekssa, then leader of a new opposition party called Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ), was re-arrested and re-imprisoned because statements which she had made about the 2007 pardon process were regarded as having violated the terms of her pardon.

Our Embassy in Addis Ababa continues to monitor closely her situation and, together with our EU partners, to raise regularly our interest in her case with the Ethiopian authorities. Ireland's concerns were also raised by my colleague, the Minister of State with responsibility for Development Cooperation, when he visited Ethiopia last year.

As a long-standing development partner of Ethiopia, Ireland believes that the strengthening of democracy is an essential element of the development process. Although positive progress was made in this regard following the introduction of Ethiopia's first Constitution in 1995, a number of developments in recent years, such as legislation introduced in relation to civil society and media, have given rise to some concerns about the Ethiopian Government's commitment to democratic freedoms. An integral aspect of Ireland's relations with Ethiopia is working with all parties to address these concerns.

These concerns are all the more pressing in view of the preparations which are now underway in Ethiopia for elections in May 2010. Ensuring that the forthcoming elections are fair, free and peaceful will be an important test of the democratic commitment of the Ethiopian Government and of wider society. Creating an environment which encourages the widest possible participation in the democratic process is essential to this. In this regard, I welcome the fact that an electoral Code of Conduct which meets best international practices is now enshrined in legislation. I encourage all parties to implement this Code fully. In the period ahead, we will continue to avail of all opportunities to assist in the strengthening of democracy in Ethiopia and to voice our concerns about threats to the latter, such as the detention of opposition representatives.

Question No. 107 answered with Question No. 85.

Trade Relations.

108. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the potential from trade tourism and otherwise through the development of Ireland's links with Taiwan; and if, taking into account all the circumstances of the situation, he has any proposals in this regard. [13231/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): As the Deputy is aware, the Government of Ireland recognises the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate government of China.

This does not inhibit the development of economic relations with Taiwan, however, and our trade with Taiwan has increased steadily over the years.

Our merchandise trade with Taiwan in 2008 was worth €761 million: trade in services is also significant. Several Irish companies export products and services to Taiwan and, in collaboration with Enterprise Ireland, are exploring additional opportunities there, particularly in the ICT and software sectors. A number of Taiwanese companies operate successfully in Ireland, and the IDA continues to market Ireland as a location for research and development, and as a headquarters or support centre for Europe, along with high-value manufacturing.

A visa waiver scheme with Taiwan became effective on 1 July 2009. This has facilitated business-related travel between Ireland and Taiwan and has enabled opportunities, including tourism and education opportunities, to be explored. Other areas of potential interest include medical devices, food and green energy.

My Department will continue to work with other Government Departments and State Agencies to promote our trade, investment and tourism links with Taiwan.

EU Enlargement.

109. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will indicate his position for membership of the EU by Iceland. [13336/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Iceland applied for membership of the EU in July 2009. On 24 February, the Commission delivered a largely positive opinion (*avis*) on Iceland's readiness to begin accession negotiations. The *avis* recommends that a date should be set for commencement of talks. The Council of Ministers should now consider the Commission's recommendation and I look forward to its inclusion on a forthcoming agenda.

Ireland supports the Commission's recommendation to open accession negotiations with Iceland. It is a country with which we have strong ties of geography, history, culture and politics. Iceland is already closely integrated with the EU in several areas, through its membership of the European Economic Area and the Schengen area which should ease some of the negotiating process. We would regard Iceland's accession to the EU as a positive development.

Enlargement of the EU is of course a negotiated process and, as in any negotiation, the eventual outcome and timeframe cannot be predicted. Some of the areas to be covered in negotiations will present challenges and we are currently considering our approach to these.

Human Rights Issues.

110. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the progress being made to ban female genital mutilation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13234/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Peter Power): The practice of female genital mutilation is a clear violation of the human rights of women and girls. It has serious social, health and psychological consequences, and it infringes on children's rights to special protection. The World Health Organisation estimates that between 100 million and 140 million girls and women worldwide are currently living with the consequences of female genital mutilation. In Africa alone, it is estimated that three million girls are at risk annually.

The Government is active in global policy development, funding and research to address this appalling practice. We recognise that it is a form of gender-based violence, and that it must be an important element in our comprehensive approach to tackling such violence, through our overseas aid programme. The Government's 2006 White Paper on Irish Aid includes a firm commitment that Ireland will build its support for measures focused on preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

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Irish Aid, the Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs which manages the Government's aid programme, is a founding member of the Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence, which brings together representatives from Government Departments and Irish development, humanitarian and human rights Non-Governmental Organisations to promote a coordinated response to all forms of gender-based violence, including female genital mutilation.

Internationally, we are cooperating with United Nations agencies in a concerted effort to end the practice of female genital mutilation. Last year, the Government provided core funding of €8 million to the United Nations Fund for Children (UNICEF) and €3 million to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to support their work on child protection, gender equality, reproductive health, maternal mortality and HIV and AIDS. These agencies operate a joint programme to counter female genital mutilation with the aim of ending the practice in seventeen countries by 2012. Ireland contributed €0.5 million to this specific programme in 2007. In addition, in 2009 a total of €1.1 million was provided specifically for support of gender equality and women's empowerment, including through support for the UN Trust Fund for actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women.

Progress is being made towards ending the practice of female genital mutilation, but detailed international coordination and consultation remains essential. On 6 February 2010 which is designated International Day Against Female Genital Mutilation, UNICEF and the UNFPA reported that there has been success in reducing the incidence of the practices in several countries where it was once highly prevalent. They noted that it is important to focus on encouraging change from within societies, and that where communities have chosen to make public declarations against the practice, for example in Senegal, declines of up to 65 per cent have been recorded.

Passport Security.

111. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the position regarding the abuse of Irish passports used by individuals of members of groups involved in an assassination in Dubai recently. [13331/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I refer the Deputy to my answer of this afternoon to Priority Question 69.

Question No. 112 answered with Question No. 92.

Diplomatic Representation.

113. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will indicate such representations he has received from countries represented here as to the attempt to recruit Irish citizens for the assassination of a named Swedish citizen. [13337/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I am not aware of any representations made to my Department in respect of matters referred to in the Deputy's question.

Overseas Development Aid.

114. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the increasing militarisation of international development initiatives in general and in particular Afghanistan. [13333/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Peter Power): The central objective of Ireland's aid programme is to contribute to the fight against global poverty and hunger. We pursue this objective through the Government's aid programme, and in consultation with our EU partners. The European Union — Member States and the European Commission — provides over half of all official development assistance worldwide, with the overarching goal of eradicating poverty in a sustainable way, in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Insecurity and conflict are amongst the biggest obstacles to achieving the MDGs. It is estimated, for instance, that the costs of conflict in Africa between 1990 and 2005 were equivalent to the total international aid in the same period. It is also clear that poverty and poor governance contribute directly to conflict and instability. Security and development must therefore be seen as mutually reinforcing, with security recognised as an important condition for development. Peace and security have been established as central to the EU's development policy, and to Ireland's. The European Security Strategy and the European Consensus on Development acknowledge that sustainable development cannot be achieved without security, nor can there be sustainable peace without development.

In Afghanistan, the prospects for sustainable development are directly linked to the establishment of peace and security in the country and the surrounding region. The primary role of the international military forces now in Afghanistan is to assist the Afghan Government in establishing a secure and stable environment. International military forces also support security sector reform through the mentoring and training of the Afghan National Army. In providing this type of assistance, the military have a clearly defined role.

International military personnel in Afghanistan are also engaged in some areas of development and humanitarian assistance which would normally be carried out by civilians, in more secure environments. This work is primarily undertaken at the provincial and district level through Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which are often the only available option for the safe delivery of much-needed aid.

In general, however, there is strong agreement that development assistance should be delivered by civilians with the necessary skills and expertise, and with a long-term perspective on development needs. Military structures should only be used to channel humanitarian assistance in very limited circumstances, where there is no comparable civilian alternative, and where there is a critical humanitarian need.

While recognising the complementary role of humanitarian, development and military/security actors, it is essential that the international community continue to recognise their different roles and mandates. In this way, I believe that the impartiality, humanity, neutrality and independence of humanitarian and development action must and can be safeguarded.

I should add that Ireland does not use military structures to channel assistance in Afghanistan. Our humanitarian and development funding to Afghanistan is provided through UN and Non-Governmental Organisation partners, as well as through a World Bank-administered Trust Fund in support of the Afghan Government. Through Irish Aid, the Government allocated a total of €5.2 million to Afghanistan last year, including support for food assistance, mine clearance and the effective coordination of the overall humanitarian effort.

Question No. 115 answered with Question No. 85.

Question No. 116 answered with Question No. 92.

Diplomatic Representation.

117. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of Irish Embassies overseas; if there are plans to reduce our diplomatic representation abroad in view of the new provisions of the Lisbon treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13253/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Irish Diplomatic Network is made up of 75 overseas missions, in addition to offices in Armagh and Belfast. The network consists of 58 Embassies, 7 multilateral missions and 10 Consulates General and other offices overseas. In addition to their country of primary accreditation, many Ambassadors are also accredited to additional countries on a non-resident basis.

The Irish diplomatic network provides essential consular services, diplomatic representation and commercial services overseas. 26 of our Embassies are in other EU Member States where they perform a strong role in advancing Ireland's EU interests. A number of missions also play a key role in the delivery of Ireland's development aid programme. The size of our network is modest when compared to other equivalent European States. Moreover, three quarters of our missions consist of only two or three diplomatic officers.

The European External Action Service (EEAS) is an important innovation under the Lisbon Treaty to support the work of the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton. The High Representative will shortly present a proposal for a Council Decision on the operation of the EEAS.

A Declaration concerning the common foreign and security policy attached to the Lisbon Treaty makes clear that the provisions in the Treaty, including the establishment of an External Action Service, do not affect the existing responsibilities of Member States for the formulation and conduct of their foreign policy nor their national representation in third countries and at international organisations.

The work of the EEAS will be complementary to the work of national diplomatic services. In countries outside of the European Union, European Commission Delegations have now become European Union Delegations and form part of the EEAS structure. These Delegations will work in close cooperation with Embassies from EU member States, including Irish Embassies. EU Delegations will also take on work at international organisations which is currently performed by the rotating Presidency, although the details of how this will operate have yet to be agreed.

The size of the EEAS has not yet been decided. It will be modestly-sized in its initial stages and will take some time to reach its full complement of staff and for the scope of its operations and its working methods to be settled.

There are key areas of my Department's work where the EEAS does not have responsibility. In particular, the promotion of Ireland's trade and economic interests, the provision of consular assistance, and the administration of our overseas development aid programmes remain our own responsibility. The EEAS may play a role in regard to consular assistance but this would be subsidiary to the work of national Embassies.

The EEAS will not play any role in relations between EU Member States and therefore will not affect the work of our Embassies in other Member States in promoting bilateral relations with our EU partners.

Taking the role of the EEAS and other factors into account, the size and scale of our diplomatic network is considered by the Government on an ongoing basis. Decisions regarding any

reduction in our diplomatic representation abroad must take full account of the operational and reputational costs.

Likewise any decision to expand our diplomatic network will be taken having regard to clear national priorities and available resources, and must be on the basis of an anticipated significant return for the State.

An internal review of our Mission network was undertaken in 2009 and this matter will be revisited on a regular basis.

Overseas Development Aid.

118. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the way the cuts to overseas aid funding announced in budget 2010 will be implemented; the details of the projects and programmes that will be affected; the amount by which they will be cut; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13250/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Peter Power): For 2010, the Government has provided an overall allocation for Official Development Assistance (ODA) of €671 million. Of this total, €536 million will be administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and a further estimated €135 million will come from other Government Departments, together with Ireland's share of the EU Development Cooperation budget.

The allocation involves a relatively small reduction of €25 million on the 2009 ODA allocation. Based on current projections Ireland's expenditure on ODA will stabilise at approximately 0.52% of GNP. This level of funding will ensure that we exceed our commitment as an EU Member State to spend 0.51% of GNP on ODA in 2010. It will also confirm that Ireland remains one of the more generous donors internationally on a per capita basis. This is a very significant achievement in the difficult budgetary situation we face. The decision to maintain our funding is also a reflection of the Government's determination, supported by the Irish people, to help those in the world who are most in need.

As the Deputy will be aware the 2010 detailed budget allocations across Vote 29 are now published in the Revised Estimates Volume. In making those detailed budget and programming decisions we are determined that Ireland will continue to deliver an internationally acclaimed aid programme, sharply focused on poverty reduction and hunger eradication — concentrated on a limited number of very poor, mainly African, countries. Most of our programmes and projects in these countries represent long term investments in their people and institutions designed to relieve poverty and to build capacity, in order to bring about real and lasting social and economic progress.

Over €190 million has been allocated to nine countries, called Programme Countries, seven in Africa and two in Asia. Our programmes are concentrated on the sectors of health, education, governance and democracy-building, community development, local government and agriculture.

The fight against global hunger remains a cornerstone of the aid programme and one on which we have led internationally. In line with one of the key recommendations of our Hunger Task Force Report I plan to spend up to 20% of the Irish Aid budget on actions to alleviate and eradicate hunger. Expenditures on tackling HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases will also remain very high at around €100 million.

Ireland's aid programme is recognised internationally as providing strong support to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Indeed we are one of the largest donors to NGOs in

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the world. In 2010 we will continue to support development NGOs and Missionary Organisations and will provide in excess of €100 million to their development efforts. We will also work with our NGO partners to assist them in enhancing their own development effectiveness.

A sum of €54 million has been set aside specifically for humanitarian assistance in emergencies. I have also made available considerable additional funding for recovery and post emergency rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Finally we have maintained our 2010 multilateral allocations to our UN partners and the European Development Fund largely in line with 2009 levels.

Our ODA programme, notwithstanding the current budgetary circumstances, remains one of the largest in the world on a per capita basis. It is also one of the most effective in the world, as pointed out by the OECD in its most recent Peer Review of our aid programme. Aid volumes are important in the fight against global poverty. But equally important, or perhaps even more important, is aid quality. We will ensure that this quality is maintained at every level of the aid programme in order to maximise effectiveness and provide value for money.

EU Enlargement.

119. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his view on the application for membership of the EU by Turkey. [13335/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The European Union has a long and close relationship with Turkey. Accession negotiations were opened in 2005, and are continuing. Ireland makes a constructive input to those negotiations.

As a beneficiary of a past enlargement, and on the experience of more recent accessions, Ireland is generally supportive of enlargement. Enlargement bolsters economic and political reform processes and helps to promote stability, security and prosperity in Europe. It is subject to rigorous conditionality and should take account of the capacity of the EU to integrate new members. Enlargement is a negotiated process and, as in any negotiation, the eventual outcome and timeframe cannot be predicted.

These factors shape Ireland's supportive approach to Turkey's candidacy. There are, in addition, potential gains to the single market and to trade through the accession of a country of Turkey's size. The Union's reach and influence in the Middle East and Central Asia could be enhanced through Turkish accession. With our partners we have subscribed to successive European Council conclusions which have highlighted the progress made by Turkey, drawn attention to the need to accelerate the pace of reforms, and called for Turkish compliance with obligations under the Ankara Protocol and on the Cyprus issue.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, in our meeting here in Dublin of 10 March, outlined the progress Turkey has made on reforms in a number of areas as it has sought to bring Turkey more in line with the EU *acquis*. He explained how the accession negotiations provide a strong incentive for Turkey to pursue reforms, strengthen democracy and human rights and further modernise the country. Much has been achieved in Turkey in these areas, but the challenge is now for Turkey to maintain and accelerate the progress on reforms. In this meeting, I reiterated Ireland's support for the Turkish candidacy. At the same time, I noted the Council's deep regret at Turkey's continued non-compliance with its obligations under the Ankara Protocol and encouraged Turkey to make progress towards normalisation of its relations with the Republic of Cyprus.

Official Engagements.

120. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will report on his recent meeting with the US Secretary of State; and the issues discussed at that meeting. [13341/10]

123. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will provide details of his visit to the United States of America for St. Patrick's Day 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13240/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 120 and 123 together.

I accompanied the Taoiseach on his St Patrick's Day visit to Washington D.C. from 15-18 March 2010 and to his meetings with President Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senators Pat Leahy and Chris Dodd, Congressman Ritchie Neal and other members of the Congressional Friends of Ireland Group. I also had a very useful bilateral meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

On St. Patrick's Day, I accompanied the Taoiseach to his bilateral meeting with President Obama. The discussions with the President covered a wide range of priority issues for Ireland and the United States including global economic developments, Northern Ireland, Middle East, Afghanistan and immigration reform. Following the bilateral meeting, President Obama attended the lunch hosted by the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, in honour of the Taoiseach at the US Capitol. President Obama and First Lady Obama later hosted the Taoiseach and his delegation at the evening White House reception and Shamrock Ceremony. The Taoiseach and I took the opportunity to repeat the open invitation to President Obama to come to visit Ireland and assured him of a great welcome from the Irish people when he comes.

The Taoiseach and I also had the opportunity to meet with Vice President Joe Biden when he and Dr. Jill Biden hosted the Taoiseach and his delegation at a St Patrick's Day breakfast in his residence. I joined the Taoiseach in his meetings with Senators Dodd and Leahy, and with Congressman Neal and other members of the Friends of Ireland group in Congress. I also joined the Taoiseach in his meeting with his Economic Advisory Board and members of the Global Irish Network. We took the opportunity to update this group on the progress made in dealing with the economic downturn and the Government's preparations to position Ireland to take full advantage of the upturn. I also briefed the meeting on progress made since the Global Economic Forum in Farmleigh in September.

During my meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Tuesday, 16 March, we discussed a broad range of foreign policy issues, including the Middle East, Afghanistan, Iran, international aid, conflict resolution and immigration issues. We agreed new areas for cooperation including cooperation on a joint event on Hunger at the UN Millennium Goals Summit in New York next September. I also conveyed our appreciation for the longstanding and ongoing support of the United States to securing peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland and for the Secretary's personal support for the Hillsborough Agreement on the transfer of policing and justice powers.

On the evening of 16 March, the Taoiseach and I attended the Ireland Fund of America dinner which honoured Secretary of State Clinton. The dinner was attended by President Bill Clinton and representatives of a wide cross section of Irish America.

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Earlier that day, the Taoiseach announced the appointment of Gabriel Byrne as Ireland's first cultural ambassador in the United States.

This year's St Patrick's Day programme in Washington DC again provided Ireland with unrivalled access to promote Ireland's economic, political and cultural interests at the highest levels in the US Administration and Congress.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

121. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the recent statement by the UN Secretary General to seek an independent evaluation of the scientific work of the UN intergovernmental panel on climate change. [13338/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Government welcomes Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's recent initiative to ask the InterAcademy Council to conduct an independent review of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) processes and procedures. It is important that the occurrence of a small number of inaccuracies be reviewed and placed in context, and not allowed to obscure the wider picture of the contribution of man-made emissions to climate change.

The IPCC has made a hugely significant contribution to our understanding of the impacts of climate change on the earth and its ecosystems. Apart from the recently reported issues in relation to its work, climate change science is evolving all the time and it is appropriate that the review be conducted to ensure that the IPCC can continue to provide the scientific advice necessary to underpin the international agenda under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

At a meeting of EU Environment Ministers on 15 March 2010, the Council adopted the following conclusions, which Ireland fully supports:

EMPHASISES its continued full support to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in deepening our understanding of climate change through its robust and solid scientific assessments of climate change; TAKES NOTE of the fact that a limited number of inaccuracies have been reported; IS CONVINCED that the IPCC offers the most authoritative and comprehensive assessment process on the existing science of climate change; in this context, WELCOMES the initiatives to review the internal IPCC procedures for its future work.

Question No. 122 answered with Question No. 78.

Question No. 123 answered with Question No. 120.

Human Rights Issues.

124. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the disappearance of Chinese human rights lawyer (details supplied); his views regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13254/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): As stated in the House on 9 February and on 11 March last, in reply to Parliamentary Questions relating to the same case, I have been deeply concerned about the disappearance of Mr. Gao Zhisheng, a prominent Chinese human rights lawyer.

I am therefore heartened by press reports yesterday which suggest that Mr. Gao Zhisheng appears to be alive and that he has been in contact with associates. These reports suggest that fellow lawyers spoke to him on Sunday; that he is in good health and that he is currently located at a Buddhist mountain retreat in Wutaishan in Shanxi Province. I am currently seeking verification of these reports and I hope that it will be possible to ascertain more about Mr Gao's circumstances.

Mr. Gao had been missing for over a year from his home in Shanxi province. On the two occasions on which he had been sighted since that time, the last of which was June 2009, he was accompanied by police officers. From June of last year until now, neither family members nor his professional colleagues were able to make contact with him.

Human rights issues in China, including individual cases, are regularly discussed on a bilateral basis with the Chinese Government, both in Beijing and in Dublin. The Government continues to stress at such meetings the great importance attached by Ireland to human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, and to urge the Chinese authorities to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

A broad-ranging EU-China human rights dialogue enables the EU to engage with China on such issues as freedom of expression, the death penalty, the independence of the judiciary, prison conditions, and freedom of religion and minority rights. It also provides an opportunity for the EU to raise individual cases, such as that of Mr. Gao Zhisheng.

In the period since the disappearance of Mr. Gao Zhisheng, the EU repeatedly called on the Chinese authorities to reveal his whereabouts. His case was raised during the last two meetings of the EU-China Human Rights dialogue, held in Prague on 14 May 2009 and in Beijing on 20 November 2009 respectively. We called on the Chinese authorities to give Mr. Gao access to legal advice and to allow him to maintain contact with his family. We urged them to clarify without delay his present situation and to open a fully independent and transparent investigation into his disappearance.

Since I last referred to this case in the House on 11 March, the Chinese Foreign Minister Mr. Yang Jiechi commented at a press conference on 16 March that Mr. Gao had been sentenced on a charge of subverting state power. It is unclear whether this is a new charge brought against Mr. Gao or whether it relates to a previous sentence imposed in 2006.

On my instructions, my Department is planning to raise the case of Mr Gao Zhisheng and the situation regarding human rights defenders in China more generally, at forthcoming consultations with the Chinese Government.

Question No. 125 answered with Question No. 85.

Foreign Conflicts.

126. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the efforts that are being made at EU level to implement the EU-brokered ceasefire agreement between Georgia and the Russian Federation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13259/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The EU continues to play a key role in seeking a resolution to the conflict between Georgia and Russia following the war in August 2008. As the Deputy is aware, the then French EU Presidency negotiated a cease-fire between Russia and Georgia on 12 August 2008. A peace plan was subsequently agreed on 8 September 2008. The EU has consistently called on all sides to implement the terms of the August 2008

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ceasefire agreement and the September 2008 peace plan, including the withdrawal of all military forces to the positions held prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

An EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) comprising over 300 personnel was deployed on 1 October 2008 in accordance with the arrangements set out in September 2008 peace plan. Its mandate has been extended until September 2010. The Mission has played an important role in stabilising the situation on the ground in Georgia. Ireland at the outset provided four personnel to the Mission. Three remain with the EUMM, funded by the exchequer, while a fourth is now directly contracted. The EU is pressing for the Mission to be allowed unhindered access to the breakaway regions.

The September 2008 peace plan also provided for talks to take place in Geneva under the co-chairmanship of the UN, the EU and the OSCE. These talks have taken place on eight occasions, most recently on 28 January 2009. The talks provide the only forum in which all the parties to the conflict are involved and have made some limited progress, most notably the establishment of incident response and prevention mechanisms. The next round is due to take place today, 30 March 2010.

An EU-backed independent investigation into the origins of the August 2008 war undertaken by Heidi Tagliavini, a Swiss former UN special representative to Georgia, reported in September 2009. The report found fault on both sides and made recommendations as to how such a conflict might be avoided in the future.

The EU continues to reiterate its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. The EU has also encouraged the Georgian Government to recognise the need to engage with the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in order to avoid isolating them. In January, the Georgian Government published a strategy paper setting out its policy towards the breakaway territories. The paper outlines various strategies of practical engagement and cooperation and commits the Georgian Government to the use of peaceful means to achieve its goals. The EU welcomed the spirit of the initiative as a constructive step towards easing tensions and encouraged the Georgian Government to consult with all parties in developing the plan.

Question No. 127 answered with Question No. 96.

Passport Applications.

128. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of passports issued annually since 2005; the number of passports deemed lost annually since 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13243/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Details of the numbers of passports reported as lost or stolen since 2005 are set out in the table below.

Year	Total Passports issued	Lost or mislaid	Stolen	Total lost, mislaid or stolen	% of total issued
2005	630,000	31,500	5,900	37,400	5.90%
2006	630,000	32,820	5,910	38,730	6.15%
2007	601,000	31,500	4,959	36,459	6.07%
2008	576,617	31,262	5,002	36,264	6.29%
2009	579,508	29,801	4,821	34,622	5.97%

The introduction of the biometric or e-Passport on 16 October, 2006 further enhanced the security features of the Irish passport. The microchip in the passport contains a digital image of the holder which cannot be altered. Any attempt to alter the data on the microchip will be apparent when the passport is read at a border control station because of the added security on our chip. Border control authorities can be assured that the document is genuine and unaltered.

To compliment the major technical advance which the APS passport represented new legislation was enacted in 2008. The Passports Act 2008 introduced a series of new offences relating to the misuse of passports and passport fraud.

As regards lost or mislaid passports, the Department is constantly urging that care and vigilance be observed, and that passports should always be kept in a secure place. The percentages of Irish passports which are lost and stolen is in line with other countries, including the United Kingdom.

Since 1 October, 2009 the Department increased the frequency of its reporting of the serial numbers of all lost/mislaid or stolen passports to Interpol through An Garda Síochána, to daily reports. This information is then made available immediately to police forces worldwide in the Interpol database to protect against the fraudulent use of these Irish passports.

The holders of lost/mislaid or stolen passports are advised not to use them again for any travel if they are subsequently recovered. When completing the statement of loss as part of their new passport application, applicants undertake not to travel on a missing passport if subsequently found. However, a number of individuals either unknowingly or mistakenly use their previously reported lost or stolen passports. This may account for the following numbers of Irish citizens who were delayed at international border controls:

2008 — 87;

2009 — 126.

There has been an increase in these incidents which is due to in part to heightened security at international ports and airports and an increase in the number of border stations worldwide that are electronically reading passports.

In each of the cases above, the Passport Office has received a request from Interpol to verify the identity of the travellers. The Passport Office has been able to resolve such cases after checks of the relevant passport details against its own database were carried out.

Question No. 129 answered with Question No. 103.

Europe 2020 Strategy.

130. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will make a statement detailing his approach to negotiations around the draft EU 2020 strategy including whether he is pushing for a set of objectives; the details of those objectives; and if same include the inclusion of a poverty reduction commitment on the part of each member state in the strategy. [13299/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Government has consistently held the view that any new European Strategy for Jobs and Growth (also known as “Europe 2020”) must be effective in steering a comprehensive exit from the financial and economic crisis in the short term, while also equipping the EU towards a higher sustainable growth potential, accompanied by job creation, in the medium to long term.

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We hold that the primary focus for the Europe 2020 Strategy must remain squarely on sustainable jobs and growth.

The European Commission Communication, of 3 March 2010, on “Europe 2020, A Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”, provides us with a very useful framework for the discussions which will continue on this proposed new Strategy, up until its anticipated adoption before the end of June 2010.

The broad thrust of the Commission Communication is for Europe, over the coming decade, to deliver “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”. It proposes a set of five EU headline targets covering employment; research and development, including innovation; climate change and energy; education; and poverty.

The Government believes that the creation of sustainable jobs and growth is central to improving social inclusion in Europe. The key link between jobs and growth and social inclusion is underlined in the Commission’s Communication. Of the five EU headline targets, three directly concern issues of social inclusion: employment, education and poverty. Specifically, these targets seek to increase employment to 75% of those aged between 20 and 64; reduce the share of early school leavers to under 10%, ensuring that at least 40% of the younger generation have a third level degree; and work to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty by 20 million. Furthermore under the Strategy, the Commission propose putting forward a dedicated initiative, the ‘European Platform against Poverty’, to combat social exclusion by ensuring that the benefits of growth and jobs are shared throughout society.

The Spring European Council (25 – 26 March 2010), at which the Taoiseach represented Ireland, had a lengthy discussion on the new Strategy. The European Council agreed on the new Strategy’s main elements, including the key targets which will guide its implementation and arrangements for its improved monitoring.

Ireland fully supports the core elements of the new Strategy as they have been agreed, with a sharp focus on knowledge and innovation, a more sustainable economy, high employment and social inclusion — which are in line with our own national strategy — *Building Ireland’s Smart Economy*.

We are very satisfied with the broad thrust of the five EU headline targets which the European Council have agreed upon, which cover: employment; research and development, including innovation; climate change and energy; education; and social inclusion, in particular poverty. These targets cover the main areas where efforts are rapidly needed and they are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

In the case of the education and social inclusion targets, further work is needed to be done to reach numerical rates and appropriate indicators respectively. The European Council will return to these at its June meeting.

Ireland had also sought to ensure that the role of the agriculture and food sector in achieving growth and jobs, whilst ensuring sustainable use of natural resources and addressing the critical strategic issue of food security, should be appropriately recognised in this new Strategy. We are very happy with the conclusions reached by the European Council, which now recognise the important contribution of a sustainable, productive and competitive agricultural sector to the new Strategy and the role of the Common Agricultural Policy in supporting the Strategy.

We have also cautioned against complicating discussions on Europe 2020 by running them into the EU budget and financial perspectives debate, as to do so would likely delay reaching agreement on this Strategy. We are most satisfied with the outcome of the Spring European Council on this issue of importance also.

The Government previously made a written submission to a European Commission consultation process on a new Europe 2020 Strategy in January of this year. We have availed of every opportunity to promote Ireland's position on the new European Strategy for Jobs and Growth in all appropriate fora at EU level, including in the Council of Ministers and the European Council. We will continue to do so ahead of its anticipated final adoption at the June European Council.

Diplomatic Representation.

131. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will meet with his Swedish counterpart to request that his Government reconsiders their proposal to close their Swedish Embassy in Dublin. [13256/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): As I informed the Dáil on 16th February, I made clear the Irish Government's deep regret at this decision to my Swedish counterpart, Mr. Carl Bildt, when he telephoned me to communicate the decision on the evening before the official announcement was made. I reiterated this regret and disappointment in a subsequent letter I wrote to Minister Bildt.

The Government recognises that each country makes its own assessment of how best to use resources in the current economic climate, but we are nevertheless disappointed that there appears to be no scope for maintaining a resident Swedish Embassy in Dublin. This is a view that we continue to put to our Swedish friends, through political and official channels, when the opportunity arises.

Human Rights Issues.

132. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the arrests in Gambia of opposition supporters including a former Minister; his views regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13257/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I am aware of and concerned by the recent arrest of opposition supporters, including one of their leaders Halifa Sallah, as well as that of the former Minister of Fisheries, Antouman Saho.

The broader context to these incidents is a series of dismissals in the past two months of senior officials in the police and defence forces and members of the Cabinet. This was accompanied by a wave of arrests of former officials and opposition supporters and the trial on charges of treason of seven former defence personnel and three businessmen.

I understand Mr Sallah has since been released from custody and charged with sedition. The charges against him reportedly relate to a number of articles he wrote for the main opposition newspaper Foroyya criticising the Gambian security forces.

The reason for the arrest and detention of Mr Saho, who is still in custody, is unclear.

The treason trial of former defence personnel, including the former Chief of Defence, remains ongoing.

These events raise questions regarding the standard of human rights and governance adhered to by the Gambian Government. Unfortunately, these questions are not new. Ireland and the EU view with great concern the human rights situation in the Gambia, in particular with regard to freedom of expression.

The EU is a major development and trade partner of the Gambia. This presents some opportunities for leverage in relation to our concerns over human rights in the Gambia. Most recently, the EU and the Gambia discussed these issues at a political dialogue provided for

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under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement that was held in Banjul on 8 December 2009. The EU side warned that there could be adverse consequences for EU funding for the Gambia. The EU side also cited a series of specific human rights cases of concern. While the Gambian side challenged the EU presentation, it did accept that there was an international perception that standards of human rights and governance were decreasing and that this needed to be addressed.

In February of this year the Gambia underwent its first Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council. The EU raised many issues there regarding the enforcement of rights and freedoms provided for by the Gambian Constitution and made several recommendations for improvement.

Ireland is accredited to the Gambia through our Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York. We will continue to monitor the situation, and in conjunction with our EU colleagues, to urge the Government to adhere to its own constitution and commitments to international standards of human rights and good governance.

133. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the increase in pro-democracy movements in Cuba; the efforts that are being made at EU level to demonstrate solidarity with these movements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13258/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): As a country in transition, Cuba is faced with far reaching choices regarding its future. The EU's position is that it is the right of Cuban citizens to decide independently about their future.

The EU's longstanding Common Position on Cuba is reviewed on an annual basis at the June Foreign Affairs Council. In the most recent Council conclusions on Cuba in June 2009, the Council reaffirmed its determination to pursue a result-oriented comprehensive dialogue with the Cuban authorities as well as with representatives of civil society and the peaceful pro-democracy opposition.

The EU follows developments in Cuba closely and engages with Cuba on a number of levels, including a structured political dialogue. Human rights form a detailed part of this dialogue. The next meeting of this dialogue will take place at Ministerial level on 6 April in Brussels.

Foreign Conflicts.

134. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if the talks in relation to building the peace process in Darfur includes both African and Arab communities. [13349/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The persistence of the conflict in Darfur, albeit at a lower level than the intense violence of 2003-2004, and the ongoing suffering of the people in the region are of grave concern. The UN estimates that the past seven years of conflict there have resulted in the deaths of over 300,000 people and the displacement of nearly three million.

The Doha peace process is the focal point for international efforts to bring an end to the conflict in Darfur. The negotiations are being led by the joint AU-UN chief mediator, Djibril Bassole, whose work Ireland fully supports. Bassole has been supported in his efforts by a number of representatives of regional and international stakeholders, including both the African and Arab communities. These include former South African President Thabo Mbeki, who is helping in his capacity as chairman of the AU High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan, to which the EU contributes through the African Peace Facility. The Organisation of

the Islamic Conference (OIC) is also involved. Its most recent initiative was a Donors' Conference on Darfur that was held in Cairo last week, at which the EU and many of its Member States, including Ireland, were represented. Envoys from Qatar and Libya have also played a very active role in efforts to bring peace to the region.

Other stakeholders engaged in the process from outside the African and Arab communities include President Obama's special envoy Scott Gration as well as EU Special Representative Torben Brylle. The presence of such a wide range of actors can enhance the prospects of a solution being found which includes the interests of both the Arab and African communities.

In recent weeks there has been some welcome progress on the Doha peace process. In February of this year, the Sudanese Government and one of Darfur's biggest rebel groups, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), signed a framework peace agreement aimed at ending their hostilities. Another milestone was reached last week when the Government signed a similar framework agreement with the Liberation and Justice Movement, a newly-formed umbrella group of rebel factions in Darfur. While the details of these agreements are still being negotiated, we are hopeful that they will lead to an inclusive and comprehensive peace agreement that will bring durable peace and stability in Darfur.

Ireland, with its EU partners, welcomes the commitment of the major regional and international stakeholders to achieving peace in Darfur. We welcome in particular the strong African lead taken, which increases the possibility of success. At the same time, we believe that it is essential that a unified and coherent international approach is taken. This approach will continue to inform EU policy on Darfur in the push for further progress in the Doha peace process.

Immigration-Emigration Levels.

135. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Taoiseach the numbers of persons that immigrated here in each year between 2000 and 2010; the numbers that emigrated in each year from 2000 to 2010; the net immigration and emigration numbers in each year between 2000 and 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13393/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy John Curran): The following table provides the most up-to-date and current estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration for the 12 month period ending mid April for the years 2000-2009.

Estimated Migration for the 12 month period ending mid- April by Year

Year	Persons		
	Immigrants	Emmigrants	Net migration
2000	52,602	26,630	25,972
2001	59,036	26,244	32,792
2002	66,921	25,607	41,314
2003	60,008	29,259	30,749
2004	58,502	26,486	32,016
2005	84,578	29,448	55,130
2006	107,759	35,952	71,807
2007	109,500	42,200	67,300
2008	83,794	45,307	38,487
2009	57,304	65,149	-7,845

Departmental Properties.

136. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Taoiseach the number of properties that his Department is currently leasing from property landlords along with the location of same; the number of these that lease agreements contain upward only rent review clauses; the cost arising from these rents; the efforts that are being made by his Department to ensure that these rents are operating at a sustainable level in the current business and economic environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13606/10]

The Taoiseach: My Department is not currently leasing any properties from property landlords.

137. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Taoiseach the number of properties his Department is currently leasing to commercial business along with the location of same; the number of these that lease agreements contain upward only rent review clauses; the income derived from these rents; the efforts that are being made by his Department to ensure that these rents are operating at a sustainable level in the current business and economic environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13607/10]

The Taoiseach: My Department is not currently leasing any properties to commercial business.

Unemployment Levels.

138. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Taoiseach the numbers and percentage on the live register for each year between 2000 and 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13391/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy John Curran): The Live Register series gives a monthly breakdown of the number of people claiming Jobseekers Benefit, Jobseekers Allowance and other registrants as registered with the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The most recent Live Register figures available are for February 2010. The Live Register for March will be published on March 31st.

It should be noted that the Live Register is not a definitive measure of unemployment as it includes part-time workers, and seasonal and casual workers entitled to Jobseekers Benefit or Allowance. The table below contains the number of persons, both unadjusted and seasonally adjusted on the Live Register along with the standardised unemployment rate (SUR) for each month from January 2000 to February 2010.

The standardised unemployment rate represents the estimated percentage of persons unemployed as a percentage of the labour force. It is estimated using the most recently available unemployment and labour force estimates from the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) extrapolated with reference to the trend on the Live Register in the most recent months.

Numbers of persons on the Live Register (Seasonally Adjusted and Unadjusted) and Standardised Unemployment Rates January 2000-February 2010

		Actual Live Register	Seasonally Adjusted Live Register	Standardised Unemployment Rate (SUR)
		(Number)	(Number)	%
2000	January	176,162	172,400	4.8
	February	172,093	170,100	4.7
	March	163,489	165,500	4.5
	April	161,796	164,600	4.4
	May	152,871	159,200	4.2
	June	156,753	155,600	4.1
	July	159,914	152,100	4.0
	August	159,026	150,100	4.0
	September	144,932	146,600	3.9
	October	139,189	144,800	3.9
	November	136,962	143,700	3.9
	December	141,586	140,700	3.8
Annual Average 2000		155,398	155,500	4.2
2001	January	142,071	138,500	3.7
	February	139,515	137,400	3.7
	March	135,885	137,900	3.7
	April	136,561	139,400	3.8
	May	133,691	139,800	3.9
	June	140,865	139,200	3.9
	July	147,101	138,600	4.0
	August	149,439	140,000	3.9
	September	140,550	142,800	3.9
	October	141,835	147,800	4.0
	November	147,121	154,000	4.2
	December	152,406	153,900	4.3
Annual Average 2001		142,253	142,400	3.9
2002	January	159,960	156,700	4.4
	February	162,337	160,200	4.4
	March	162,252	164,100	4.5
	April	156,237	159,300	4.3
	May	154,944	160,900	4.3
	June	164,277	162,000	4.3
	July	172,098	162,800	4.3
	August	173,563	163,500	4.4
	September	161,432	164,100	4.5
	October	157,706	164,100	4.6
	November	158,636	165,800	4.6
	December	166,142	166,500	4.7
Annual Average 2002		162,465	162,500	4.4

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		Actual Live Register	Seasonally Adjusted Live Register	Standardised Unemployment Rate (SUR)
		(Number)	(Number)	%
2003	January	170,701	167,800	4.8
	February	171,394	169,300	4.7
	March	168,059	169,800	4.5
	April	170,940	174,300	4.5
	May	166,105	172,000	4.5
	June	177,852	174,900	4.7
	July	185,447	175,200	4.8
	August	185,953	175,200	4.7
	September	170,822	173,900	4.6
	October	166,552	173,400	4.6
	November	164,541	172,100	4.5
	December	170,604	171,400	4.5
Annual Average 2003		<i>172,414</i>	<i>172,400</i>	<i>4.6</i>
2004	January	174,500	172,000	4.6
	February*	173,100	171,200	4.8
	March	168,900	170,300	4.7
	April	164,700	167,800	4.5
	May	162,000	167,600	4.4
	June	169,000	165,200	4.3
	July	177,500	166,300	4.3
	August	175,800	164,500	4.3
	September	160,500	164,100	4.4
	October	155,500	163,300	4.5
	November	152,000	160,400	4.6
	December	158,800	160,500	4.4
Annual Average 2004		<i>166,025</i>	<i>166,100</i>	<i>4.5</i>
2005	January	160,500	158,300	4.3
	February	158,600	156,500	4.1
	March	157,700	158,700	4.3
	April	151,600	154,600	4.4
	May	150,800	155,800	4.5
	June	159,300	154,600	4.5
	July	168,500	156,500	4.5
	August	169,400	157,900	4.5
	September	153,300	157,700	4.4
	October	149,600	158,600	4.4
	November	150,100	159,500	4.3
	December	155,800	158,400	4.3
Annual Average 2005		<i>157,100</i>	<i>157,300</i>	<i>4.4</i>

		Actual Live Register	Seasonally Adjusted Live Register	Standardised Unemployment Rate (SUR)
		(Number)	(Number)	%
2006	January	160,100	158,200	4.4
	February	159,600	157,100	4.4
	March	155,500	155,900	4.4
	April	154,600	156,800	4.4
	May	152,600	156,500	4.4
	June	163,100	157,300	4.5
	July	168,900	156,300	4.5
	August	169,600	158,300	4.6
	September	152,300	157,700	4.5
	October	148,500	158,900	4.4
	November	148,500	159,200	4.3
	December	155,400	159,000	4.4
Annual Average 2006		<i>157,392</i>	<i>157,600</i>	<i>4.4</i>
2007	January	158,800	156,800	4.4
	February	159,400	156,200	4.5
	March	155,900	155,300	4.4
	April	154,300	155,700	4.5
	May	154,000	156,900	4.5
	June	166,400	159,700	4.5
	July	174,600	161,600	4.5
	August	174,200	163,100	4.5
	September	160,700	167,000	4.6
	October	157,400	169,100	4.7
	November	161,700	173,700	4.8
	December	170,400	174,800	4.8
Annual Average 2007		<i>162,317</i>	<i>162,500</i>	<i>4.6</i>
2008	January	181,400	179,400	4.8
	February	189,500	185,600	4.9
	March	198,000	196,700	5.2
	April	195,600	196,100	5.2
	May	201,800	203,700	5.5
	June	220,800	213,400	5.9
	July	238,200	225,000	6.4
	August	247,400	236,600	6.8
	September	240,200	247,400	7.2
	October**	250,700	263,300	7.6
	November	267,200	280,000	8.1
	December	290,000	295,100	8.6
Annual Average 2008		<i>226,733</i>	<i>226,900</i>	<i>6.4</i>
2009	January	326,300	324,100	9.4
	February	352,500	348,100	10.1
	March	369,200	367,400	10.7
	April	381,900	381,900	11.2

[Deputy John Curran.]

		Actual Live Register	Seasonally Adjusted Live Register	Standardised Unemployment Rate (SUR)
		(Number)	(Number)	%
	May	394,100	395,600	11.6
	June	415,500	407,700	12.0
	July	432,400	419,100	12.3
	August	436,700	426,200	12.4
	September	419,900	427,400	12.4
	October	412,400	425,400	12.4
	November	413,500	426,800	12.4
	December	423,600	428,900	12.5
Annual Average 2009		398,167	398,200	11.6
2010	January	436,900	434,700	12.7
	February	437,000	432,400	12.6

*QNHS calendar quarter benchmarking began in February 2004.

**Figures from October 2008 have been revised.

Departmental Agencies.

139. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13642/10]

The Taoiseach: The National Economic and Social Development Office is the only agency under the Aegis of my Department.

The Office has three constituent bodies; the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP) and the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), each of which has a Director/ CEO. The information regarding pay and remuneration for each of these individuals as requested by the Deputy is given in the table below.

Organisation	NESDO/ NESC	NESF	NCPP
Salary 1 on August 2008	€147,036	€111,577	€111,577
Salary on 1 September 2008	€150,712	€114,366	€114,366
Voluntary Pay-cut	No	No	No
Current Salary	€146,191	Retired	€105,429
Bonus	No	No	No
Pension	Payment of 16.66% of salary	Public Service Pension	Public Service Pension
Car / Benefit-in-Kind	No	No	No

Emigrant Support Services.

140. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Taoiseach if he raised the plight of undocumented Irish people in the United States with President Obama during his St. Patrick's Day visit to the White House; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13729/10]

The Taoiseach: I raised the issue of immigration reform in the US during the course of my meeting with President Obama. I informed the President that my Government has campaigned very hard over recent years to try to find a solution to the situation facing our undocumented community in the US and to put in place new bilateral migration arrangements between our two countries. In the US the feeling is that the best prospect for a solution for the undocumented is through comprehensive immigration reform. President Obama stated that comprehensive immigration reform remains high on his agenda.

Departmental Reports.

141. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Taoiseach the list of all proposals in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13889/10]

The Taoiseach: The position is summarised in the table beneath:

	Recommendation	Action Taken
NESDO	Discontinue NESDO except for the NESC	The NESF and the NCPP, constituent bodies of the NESDO, are being dissolved and their staff are being absorbed into the NESC.
Ireland Newfoundland Partnership	Discontinuation of the Ireland Newfoundland Partnership	The work of the Ireland Newfoundland Partnership has been subsumed into my Department
Active Citizenship Office	Discontinuation of Active Citizenship Office	The work of the Active Citizenship Office has been subsumed into my Department.
Central Statistics Office	Staff Restructuring	Restructuring measures are yielding savings of €2.7million in the CSO in 2010. Re-organisation plan prepared by CSO and implemented from September 2009 has same overall impact as McCarthy Report proposals. The following are being implemented in 2010: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closure of library; • Consolidation of administrative support, changing data collection methodologies; • Using ICT in collecting price data for the Consumer Price Index; • Greater use of administrative data, where available, in the compilation of the major annual structural surveys of business; • Reduction of field staff employed to follow up business surveys.
	Reduce Census 2011 Costs	Census of Population administration costs are being reduced by €0.3m on an ongoing basis from 2010 onwards. Larger once-off savings of €2.7m are planned for 2011, when the Census will be collected.
	Expedite the use of electronic solutions for data extraction and filing, in the first instance for business and commercial returns with the household and census forms following as soon as practicable	Electronic systems for extraction and return of earnings payroll data are in place. Further development of e-forms solutions for business surveys is being planned.
Attorney General's Office	Administrative Savings	Included in the calculation of Estimates for 2010.
Chief State Solicitor's Office	Administrative Savings	Recommendations were taken into account in forming the 2010 Estimates. The provisional outturn for 2009 shows a saving of €1m over the 2009 estimate. The 2010 estimate is reduced by a further €1.8m over the 2009 provisional outturn.
Director of Public Prosecutions	Administrative Savings	Achieved.
	Reduction in Professional Fees	In 2009 a reduction of 8% was applied to legal fees paid to barristers engaged by the DPP's Office. It is estimated that this produced savings of approximately €640,000 in 2009 and will realise savings of the order of €1m in 2010. A further 8% reduction is being applied to barrister's fees from 1 April 2010. This will produce further savings on top of those already realised.

Departmental Properties.

142. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the current use of the former Enterprise Ireland sites at Merrion and Glasnevin, Dublin; the annual cost of maintaining these sites; his future plans for these sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13585/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): When Enterprise Ireland was established in 1998 it became a strategic objective to bring all Dublin based staff together in one location. This was achieved with the move to East Point Business Park in September 2008. Until this time, Enterprise Ireland occupied four office locations in Dublin, primarily as a result of the amalgamation of various state agencies into a single organisation over a number of years to support indigenous enterprise. From an operational perspective, occupying four separate locations in Dublin was not satisfactory for an Agency mandated to provide a range of services and expertise in a holistic manner across several critical business functions.

The leases on two of the buildings occupied (Merrion Hall and IPC House) expired in Quarter 4, 2008 and the properties reverted to the landlords.

The offices occupied at Wilton Park House reverted to Forfas which already occupies the building. The Glasnevin site, which is owned by Enterprise Ireland, was vacated by the agency in September 2008. The National Metrology Laboratory of the National Standards Authority of Ireland remains on a part of the site that will be retained. The remainder of the Glasnevin site was assigned to the Affordable Housing Initiative by a Government decision made in April 2008. Following the completion of a feasibility study by the Affordable Homes Partnership, the Government decided on 13 January 2010 that the site was no longer required for the scheme. The OPW are now carrying out an evaluation of the site to determine its best utilisation for public service use.

The cost of maintaining the Glasnevin site is approximately €1m per annum, made up of local authority rates €620k, security €240k, heat / light / power €120k and general maintenance €20k. There are annual savings of approximately €3m, in addition to significant operational efficiencies, resulting from the Dublin HQ centralisation move to the East Point Business Park. Pending a final decision by the OPW, EI engaged Estate Agents in December 2010 to explore potential leasing options for the property.

Industrial Relations.

143. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will refer the decision of Aer Lingus to lay-off all of its cabin crew to the Labour Court to determine whether it constitutes a case of exceptional collective redundancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13582/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): In October 2009 Aer Lingus announced details of a cost savings programme aimed at reducing operating costs by €97million, comprising staff savings of €74 million and non-staff cost savings of €23 million.

Following four months of intense negotiation between Aer Lingus management and Unions, under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission, the resulting joint agreements were put to Aer Lingus staff with a recommendation for acceptance by each of the respective unions. The results of the ballots were that the plan was accepted by four out of the five unions

[Deputy Dara Calleary.]

involved. Cabin crew rejected the plan by a 2:1 majority. Aer Lingus subsequently announced their plans to achieve the necessary cost savings.

As a result of further discussions at the Labour Relations Commission on 19 March, during which clarifications on the cost saving plan were given, cabin crew agreed to ballot again on the restructuring package. The outcome of this ballot was in favour of acceptance of the plan and the company has welcomed the result and announced its intention to work with the Unions to achieve the required productivity targets.

Given the positive outcome negotiated between the company and the Unions representing employees in this instance, recourse to legislation governing exceptional collective redundancies does not arise.

The Government is satisfied, from all of the information available to it, that a major restructuring of the Group's cost base is essential if Aer Lingus is to return to profitability and growth. The cost base of Aer Lingus is seriously out of line with that of its competitors. Airlines throughout the world are either rationalising or going out of business as a result of the global economic downturn.

The Government want to see a strong viable Aer Lingus in the future. The cornerstones of Government aviation policy are competitiveness and connectivity. A viable Aer Lingus is key to ensuring the achievement of these objectives.

Public Service Contracts.

144. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he will examine and change the current format of E tender questions regarding the requirement for new companies to provide a three year financial statement of accounts which then precludes them from tendering for all State contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13599/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): Any changes to the qualification criteria in respect of prospective tenderers in relation to the Government E tenders website would be a matter for the Minister for Finance.

Departmental Agencies.

145. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13635/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): I am not in a position to supply the requested information in the time available. However, the information is currently being compiled and I will reply directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Redundancy Payments.

146. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when a redundancy payment will be awarded in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13661/10]

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 16 July 2009 claiming inability to pay on behalf of the employer. I understand that a query was raised with the employer on this claim which has now been resolved. I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the claim has recently been processed and authorized for payment. Payment should issue to the claimant over the next one to two week period.

County Enterprise Boards.

147. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the financial allocation for each county and city enterprise board in respect of 2007 to 2010 inclusive. [13723/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): In the time available it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Redundancy Payments.

148. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if the proposal to use statutory redundancy payments as an element in the organisation of new working conditions is in accordance with the rules of the redundancy fund; and if it constitutes State aid in a case such as Aer Lingus. [13769/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): In general, redundancy is payable in instances where the job as opposed to the person is made redundant. In relation to the issue of eligibility for redundancy payments, I should point out that redundancy is a matter of fact that occurs after the event of termination of employment. Qualification for an entitlement to the payment of statutory redundancy under the Redundancy Acts cannot be made until the full facts of the situation are known, after the event. When presented with redundancy claims for payment, the Department will have regard to the legislative provisions governing the eligibility of any such claims and can, if necessary, have the matter referred to the Employment Appeals Tribunal for a decision on any claims that might actually be made.

In October 2009 Aer Lingus announced details of a cost savings programme aimed at reducing operating costs by €97million, comprising staff savings of €74 million and non-staff cost savings of €23 million.

Following four months of intense negotiation between Aer Lingus management and Unions, under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission, the resulting joint agreements were put to Aer Lingus staff with a recommendation for acceptance by each of the respective unions. The results of the ballots were that the plan was accepted by four out of the five unions involved. Cabin crew rejected the plan by a 2:1 majority. Aer Lingus subsequently announced their plans to achieve the necessary cost savings.

As a result of further discussions at the Labour Relations Commission on 19 March, during which clarifications on the cost saving plan were given, cabin crew agreed to ballot again on the restructuring package. The outcome of this ballot was in favour of acceptance of the plan and the company has welcomed the result and announced its intention to work with the Unions to achieve the required productivity targets.

Industrial Development.

149. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of county enterprise funds that exist in the State; the level of funding that has been granted to each of these funds in each of the past five years by his Department in a tabular format on a county basis; if there is a ceiling on the level of loans to be awarded from each fund per application; the person who is the accounting authority in each case; and if there is an annual audit report in respect of each fund. [13816/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Billy Kelleher): There are 6 County Enterprise Fund Companies. They are separate, individual legal entities and my Department has no function in relation to their activities. My Department does not allocate funding to these companies. The companies are subject to the provisions of the Companies Acts.

Departmental Functions.

150. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the size of the unit responsible for skills and training policy currently within his Department; the exact number of personnel directly employed in his Department who will be transferred to the Department of Education and Science; the location in the estate of the Department of Education and Science where they will be housed; the size of the budget as set out in the Estimates for 2010 for which they have responsibility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13863/10]

151. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the way in which the work of the expert skills group currently attached to his Department will transfer for the training activities of FÁS, as recently announced by the Taoiseach on 23 March 2010; the number of personnel who are civil servants; the number of personnel who are public servants; the number of staff which will move from his Department or FÁS; the location within the estate of the Department of Education and Science where they will be accommodated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13864/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 150 and 151 together.

Following last week’s announcement in the Dáil by the Taoiseach of Ministerial changes and changes to certain Departmental functions, the exact details of the transfer of resources from my Department that will be necessary to fully effect these changes, including the work of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), have still to be finalised.

Departmental Staff.

152. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if the Secretary General of his Department will be the Accounting Officer for purposes of reporting to the Committee of Public Accounts and the Comptroller and Auditor General; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13865/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Secretary General of my Department is and will be the Accounting Officer for purposes of reporting to the Public Accounts Committee and the Comptroller and Auditor General on the activities of my department. The standard responsibilities of the Accounting Officer role will continue to apply.

Departmental Reports.

153. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the list of all proposals in the report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13882/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes included recommendations for the rationalisation of some services provided by my Department’s agencies, and for reductions in certain programme and staffing costs. A number of these recommendations have been accepted in whole or in part and the projected financial savings were incorporated into the Revised Estimate for my Department which was published on 18 February this year. Details of these recommendations and their associated savings are provided on the table. In addition to the savings outlined on the table, further savings will be realised in 2010 through the reduction in staff numbers and in pay levels across my Department and its agencies.

Recommendation in the Report of the Special Group	Saving in 2010	Comments
	€m	
Reduce IDA capital and administrative costs, including rationalisation of regional offices in Ireland and shared services	0.857	Administrative costs have been reduced by €857,000 for 2010. The question of rationalisation of offices requires further consideration. IDA’s Capital allocation for 2010 is directly related to its legal commitments. However, €10m was cut from the agency’s budget in 2009 on a once-off basis.
Enterprise Ireland — efficiency saving in administration.	3.024	Enterprise Ireland’s administrative budget has been reduced by €3.024m for 2010.
Cease funding <i>FÁS Services to Business and Skillnets</i> ¹	6.000	Reduction of €6 million has been made in 2010 Estimates for FAS’s Services to Business
Abolish FÁS training allowances for participants who do not qualify for Jobseekers Benefit/Allowance ¹	3.200	This recommendation is being implemented in 2010
Formally merge the functions of the <i>Registrar of Friendly Societies and Companies Registration Office</i> and secure additional efficiencies	0.146	The CRO and the RFS currently operate on a shared office basis. Legislative change is required to formally merge the bodies. The Department is currently reviewing the Industrial and Provident Societies (co-operatives) and Friendly Societies legislation. In the meantime, administrative efficiencies of €146,000 have been identified for 2010.
Savings in Corporate Services; reduction in Administrative Budget.	0.468	Non-Pay savings of €468,000 and substantial Pay savings in the Administrative Budget will be reflected in the Revised Estimates Volume.
Total	13.695	

¹ In accordance with the Taoiseach’s statement to the Dáil on 23 March 2010, responsibility for FÁS’s training activities will transfer shortly to the Department of Education and Skills, while responsibility for FÁS’s Employment Services and Community Services programmes will transfer to the Department of Social Protection.

Employment Support Services.

154. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the specific requirements set down for employers participating in the work placement programme in relation to minimum training requirements and where these requirements are set down; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no requirements are mentioned in the work placement programme provider application form or in the accompanying guidelines document; the steps that have been taken to ensure that any such requirements are met before a placement is sanctioned and while a placement is in progress; and the penalties applying to providers who do not meet any such requirements. [13899/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): Under the Work Placement Programme there are no compulsorily minimum training requirements for placements to be approved. The purpose of the programme is to provide valuable work experience to unemployed individuals and as such it is essentially a work experience programme. FÁS, however, encourages employers to offer training during a placement but it is not a requirement of the programme. In fact several existing placements do include a training element for participants on the Work Placement Programme. Individuals participating in the Work Placement Programme can also avail of the broad range of FÁS training, during their placement. This training can be delivered through a range of different methodologies such as online, blended learning, evening courses, which would enable these individuals to combine their work placement with a training element.

155. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the penalties applying to an employer who makes a false declaration in Part C of the work placement programme provider application form. [13900/10]

157. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the steps he is taking to ensure that the work placement programme is not being exploited to displace existing or prospective employment. [13902/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155 and 157 together.

FÁS are responsible for managing and overseeing the operation of the Work Placement Programme and they have introduced a number of measures designed to prevent exploitation and the displacement of existing or prospective employment. For instance, all potential providers must confirm the following:

- The placement will not be provided to fill an existing vacancy.
- The placement will not be provided to displace an existing employee.
- Providers must have Public and Employers liability insurance and this must cover the participant on the work placement.
- Providers must confirm that their company is fully compliant with current workplace health and safety and all other legal requirements.

In addition, organisations are not allowed to participate if they have made an employee redundant in the last three months. However, where there is no direct displacement of an employee, and the level of redundancies in the last three months was less than 5% of the workforce, these organisations will be eligible to participate. Prior to any placement commencing, an organis-

ation must complete and sign the provider application form and confirm that they meet these requirements.

FÁS has also put in place a process whereby opportunities offered under the Work Placement Programme are cross checked against any recent similar job vacancies notified to FÁS by employers with a view to avoiding any related job displacements. Within the first two months of the commencement of a placement, the Provider receives a formal monitoring visit from FÁS. The visit is conducted to monitor whether the placement is taking place as described in the Work Placement description. A monitoring report is completed with any issues that arose during the visit detailed. Some possible outcomes of the monitoring visit could be to recommend that:

- The placement continues;
- The placement continues with a follow up monitoring visit scheduled;
- The placement is ended;
- The Provider should not be approved for future placements.

In addition to the formal application process and formal monitoring of the placement and the Provider, at all times any staff member, a Participant or member of the public can raise issues or make known their concerns about a placement or a Provider by contacting any FÁS office. FÁS will in all instances follow up on any complaints made in relation to abuse of participants or of the spirit of the programme. If any organisation is in breach of the conditions of the programme or make a false declaration such as under Part C on the Provider application form, FÁS may immediately remove them from the programme.

156. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of work placement provider applications that have been sanctioned to date; and the number that have been refused. [13901/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): Under the Work Placement Programme 2,126 provider applications have been received to date. Of these a total of 2,033 have been sanctioned and 93 applications have been refused to date.

Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 155.

Work Permits.

158. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, further to Parliamentary Question No. 157 of 9 February 2010, when a reply will issue to this Deputy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13910/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The information sought by the Deputy requires a report to be generated by personnel engaged in industrial action. The information will be provided as soon as possible after the cessation of this action.

Redundancy Payments.

159. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment when former workers of a company (details supplied) in County Limerick that have yet to be paid the Labour Court recommendation for an additional three weeks redundancy pay despite the

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approval of the Rights Commissioner will be paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14020/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Dara Calleary): In November 2004 the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment announced a policy change to the Job Initiative Programme that provided for contracts to be renewed for participants who wished to remain on the scheme thus removing the requirement for participants to leave. This policy change brought about an amendment to the rules regarding redundancy payments and allowed for the payment of enhanced redundancy to persons made redundant after November 2004. I understand that the matter in question relates to persons employed under a Job Initiative Scheme who were made redundant in November 2003, prior to the rule change, and therefore they would not have an entitlement to an enhanced redundancy payment.

Heritage Sites.

160. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of State funding that has been invested in Newgrange world heritage site, County Meath, in each of the past four years; the international promotion that has taken place to promote it as a tourist destination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13907/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Office of Public Works is responsible for Brú Na Bóinne which is a designated World Heritage Site. Direct expenditure by the Office of Public Works on management and related works is as follows:

Year	2006	2007*	2008	2009
Amount	€1,312,425.82	€2,159,237.00	€1,621,628.15	€1,433,031.83

*Includes vehicle (buses) replacement costs.

Brú Na Bóinne — Number of Visitors

Location	2006	2007	2008	2009
Visitor Centre	48,591	49,439	44,437	40,406
Newgrange	128,316	135,361	133,524	130,083
Knowth	53,642	56,465	58,351	51,941
Total	230,549	241,265	236,312	223,430

Direct international promotion of the site is undertaken by the tourist authorities.

National Parks.

161. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Finance the reason for the removal of many trees in the Phoenix Park, Dublin 7; the number of trees removed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13586/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): As part of the normal management of the Park tree surveys are carried out to identify trees which are dangerous to the public. As a result of a recent survey 31 broadleaf trees were felled as they were

judged to be in a dangerous condition. The trees suffered from a range of tree diseases or were structurally unstable and posed a serious danger to public safety. A programme of woodland restoration is in progress & over 190 replacement trees have been planted this spring with an additional 300 proposed for this autumn.

162. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Finance the action he is taking to prevent public drinking and lighting of barbecues in the Phoenix Park, Dublin 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13587/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Park Rangers Unit actively work to deter individuals from drinking in the Phoenix Park, and liaise closely with the Gardai to remove such individuals. Small barbecues are permitted in the Park at designated picnic areas, and these are monitored closely by the Ranger Unit.

Legislative Programme.

163. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to address the concerns raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13615/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The concerns outlined in the correspondence enclosed by the Deputy refer to the need to update legislation governing the operation and regulation of credit unions in Ireland and to the proposal to amend Section 35 of the Credit Union 1997 which imposes limits on credit unions in relation to longer-term lending.

With reference to credit union legislation, I agree that the current legislative framework needs reform. Accordingly, I have requested the Financial Regulator to initiate a strategic review of the credit union sector in Ireland. This project, which is already underway, will involve an examination of the structure, operation, regulation and legislation of the credit union sector. It will provide a report making recommendations, including specific proposals to strengthen prudential soundness, which will advise and inform an assessment of the future strategic direction of credit unions.

The restrictions contained in Section 35 of the Credit Union Act 1997 are an important asset and liability instrument protecting the financial stability of the credit union movement over many years. The need for such a mechanism will be addressed in the strategic review but in the immediate future it is necessary to address ongoing issues with regard to Section 35 now. The matter has been considered by my Department following consultation with the two Credit Union representative bodies, the Irish League of Credit Unions and the Credit Union Development Association and with the Registrar of Credit Unions and a provision has been included in the Central Bank Reform Bill 2010 published this morning.

Departmental Agencies.

164. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded; the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13637/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The information requested in relation to agencies under the aegis of my Department is set out below. It should be noted that it is not the practice to identify individuals in relation to voluntary deductions from their remuneration.

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	National Lottery	Special EU Programmes Body (has 2 sponsor departments: Department of Finance and Department of Finance and Personnel of Northern Ireland)
Salary at 1 August 2008	€230,000	£61,217–£69,020–£76,826–£84,630
Salary at 1 September 2008	€230,000 (Salary frozen at €230,000 since 1st January 2008).	£61,217–£69,020–£76,826–£84,630 (It was confirmed by sponsor departments that no annual increase would be applied to the scale on 1st April 2009). (It was confirmed by sponsor departments that no annual increase would be applied to the scale on 1st April 2009).
Director's Fee	€12,500	
Car allowance	€15,000	
Health Insurance	€5,000	
Company Pension contribution	€33,000	
Performance related pay	Non-pensionable performance related bonus (0% to 25% based on performance related objectives — not finalised in 2009 by Remuneration Committee).	The CEO's contract of employment provides for a performance pay system. The range of possible bonus payment was set for 2008 at between £nil to £10,000.
CEO's personal pension contribution	6.5%	The North/South Pension Scheme ("the Scheme") is an unfunded, contributory, defined-benefit Scheme. The Scheme was established by the North/South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland Limited ("the Bodies") with effect from 29 April 2005. The CEO contributes 1.5% of his salary. Benefits are based on 1/80th of final pensionable salary for each year of reckonable service subject to a ceiling of 40 years. Lump sum is based on 3/80ths of pensionable salary for each year of reckonable service.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Public Appointments Service (PAS) is remunerated at the grade of Assistant Secretary in the Civil Service, and enjoys the same terms and conditions applicable to that grade.

Tax Code.

165. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will clarify the impact of the carbon tax on marked gas oil and agricultural diesel; if he has received representation regarding the deferral of that date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13670/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I announced in the Budget that a carbon tax at a rate of €15 per tonne is being introduced on fossil fuels. The tax was applied to petrol and auto-diesel with effect from midnight, 9 December 2009; and will apply from 1 May 2010 to kerosene, marked gas oil (also known as 'green diesel' or 'agricultural diesel'), liquid petroleum gas (LPG), fuel oil and natural gas. The application of the tax to coal and commercial peat is subject to a Commencement Order.

The carbon tax will result in an increase of approximately 4 cents per litre (excluding VAT) on Marked Gas Oil including agricultural diesel, broadly the same as that for regular diesel. I have received representations from numerous organisations in relation to the carbon tax, including the treatment of agricultural diesel. However, as provided for in the Finance Bill 2010, the carbon tax will apply to marked gas oil on 1 May 2010.

Tax Collection.

166. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding persons bringing cigarettes from EU countries here; the position in respect of people returning from trips to Europe with cigarettes and cigarettes posted from an EU country to family members living here; the legal position in this regard; if cigarettes can be brought in once the duty has already been paid in the EU country of purchase; if there is any duty liable on these goods here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13672/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that tobacco products tax is not, by virtue of section 104(2) of the Finance Act 2001, chargeable on cigarettes that are bought tax-paid by a private individual in another Member State of the European Union. The cigarettes must be acquired by the person for his or her own use and not for commercial purposes, and be personally transported and accompanied into the State by that person. However, in the case of territories where EU rules on VAT and excise duties do not apply, such as the Canary Islands, an absolute limit of 200 cigarettes may be so brought into the State.

The question of whether cigarettes are for a private individual's own use or for commercial purposes falls to be determined in accordance with criteria set down in the Control of Excisable Products Regulations 2001. The specified considerations include the reasons given by the person for having the cigarettes, and the quantity involved. The guide level as to what constitutes a quantity consistent with personal use is set at 800 cigarettes. A person with a larger quantity of cigarettes may be asked questions to establish that they are not intended for commercial purposes. Cigarettes posted to a person in the State by a person in another EU Member State are liable to tobacco products tax and VAT.

Financial Services Regulation.

167. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if a former chief executive (details supplied) has repaid their €1 million bonus to a building society; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13704/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the building society that the bonus has not been repaid but that the society is continuing to pursue the matter. I have asked the society to continue to strongly press this matter and I fully support the society's efforts to recoup the payment in accordance with the commitment made by the former chief executive.

Public Service Contracts.

168. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Finance the value of Irish public contracts advertised in the Official Journal of the EU in 2008 that were awarded to Irish companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13730/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Public contracts valued at approximately €4.5 billion were advertised by Irish contracting authorities in the Official Journal of the European

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Union in 2008. Of this total, returns from contracting authorities indicate that contracts to the value of over €4 billion were awarded to Irish companies.

Departmental Properties.

169. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 299 of 3 November 2009, the ranges of options being considered for the long-term use of the vacant building at the Kells Road, Navan, County Meath; if allowing the building to be used by voluntary and community groups locally is one such consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13731/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): Having regard to the ongoing rationalisation programme of the State Property Portfolio, the Office of Public Works is considering the long term use of the State owned property on the Kells Road, Navan, which is a valuable and strategic site. The property options include whether or not to retain the existing buildings, that are in need of major refurbishment. Accordingly, allowing the building to be used by voluntary and community groups is not under viable consideration at present.

Tax Collection.

170. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Finance if she will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13733/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a Revenue Official contacted the taxpayer on 25 March 2010 and advised her that the form P21 for 2009 issued on 23 March 2010. A further copy was also posted on the 25 March 2010.

Departmental Expenditure.

171. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of the Cabinet reshuffle; the amount it is costing in terms of administration and other expenses; the amount it is costing each Department; the way the allocation of resources and votes will be distributed now due to the changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13740/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): All transfers of funds between votes will be carried out on an Exchequer-neutral basis in all cases. In addition, the re-allocation of resources will be provided for by way of Amended Estimates or Further Revised Estimates as appropriate. Some administrative costs will arise (for example, stationery costs) and I will be asking the relevant Departments to ensure that these are kept to a minimum. Final figures in respect of these costs are not yet available.

Flood Relief.

172. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance when he will allocate funds for flood prevention measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13804/10]

173. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if funding for flood prevention will now be allocated arising from the recent flooding in Bandon, County Cork; the amount thereof; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13805/10]

174. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if funding for flood prevention will now be allocated arising from the recent flooding in Clonakilty, County Cork; the amount thereof; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13806/10]

175. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if funding for flood prevention will now be allocated arising from the recent flooding in Skibbereen, County Cork; the amount thereof; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13807/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 172 to 175, inclusive, together.

The Government has allocated approximately €68.3M towards Flood Risk Management in 2010. This includes €50M for Capital Flood Risk activities and approximately €18.3M for ongoing Drainage Maintenance and Hydrometric activities.

Under the 2010 Capital allocation, OPW has made an initial sum of €6M available for the Minor Flood and Coastal Erosion Works Programme initiated in 2009. Based on assessments completed by OPW of applications received from Local Authorities to date, €5.43m has been allocated to 12 Local Authorities for measures to address localised flooding problems in 52 inland areas. In addition, allocations totalling €1.27m are being made to 6 Local Authorities for minor coastal flooding and erosion measures, at 8 locations around the country. Following that initial allocation, OPW will continue to liaise with a number of Local Authorities with regard to applications received that require further information.

OPW has committed to undertaking a full Feasibility Study of the flooding problem in Bandon Co Cork. In this regard, applications for a pre-qualification assessment are about to be invited from Consulting Engineers, and, following the tender process, OPW expect to be in a position to make an appointment in July 2010.

Cork County Council have submitted applications for funding for works in both Clonakilty and Skibbereen under the 2010 Minor Flood Works Programme. In this regard, OPW has agreed to fund both a study of the Ilen River at Skibbereen which will inform future works, and works to improve channel capacity at Clonakilty aimed at alleviating flood risk.

Flood Relief.

176. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will reply to a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13826/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The matter raised by the Deputy is currently being investigated and as soon as information is available it will be forwarded directly to him.

Pension Provisions.

177. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will reply to the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13846/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Prior to Finance Act 1999, any person taking a pension under a defined contribution scheme or a Retirement Annuity Contract (RAC), was required to purchase an annuity with the pension fund money remaining after the drawdown of the appropriate tax-free lump sum.

Finance Act 1999 introduced significant changes which gave a considerable degree of control, flexibility and personal choice to certain categories of individuals in relation to the drawing down of benefits from their pension plans. These choices include the following options:

- to purchase an annuity from a life assurance company,
- to receive the balance of the pension fund in cash (subject to tax, as appropriate),

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- to invest in an Approved Retirement Fund (ARF) or Approved Minimum Retirement Fund (AMRF), as appropriate,
- or a combination of these.

ARFs and AMRFs are not pension schemes per se. They are investment options into which the proceeds of certain pension arrangements can be invested on retirement. Individuals are entitled to take their tax-free lump sum option as part of the election for an ARF. Beneficial ownership of the assets in an ARF/AMRF rests with the individual. The ARF/AMRF is managed by a Qualifying Fund Manager and pays no tax on its investment income or capital gains while the funds are invested in it.

The option to have all or part of an individual's accumulated pension fund placed in an ARF must be exercised not later than the date on which the annuity or pension would otherwise become payable. The option is open to a qualified person who is either over 75 years of age or who has a guaranteed pension income (specified income) actually in payment for life of at least €12,700 per annum. Where the minimum specified income test is not met, then an AMRF must be chosen into which the first €63,500 of the pension fund or the whole of the fund, if less than this amount, must be invested (alternatively an annuity can be purchased with the first €63,500 of the pension fund and the balance placed in an ARF). The capital in an AMRF is not available to an individual until he or she reaches 75 years of age, though any income generated by the fund can be drawn down subject to tax. The purpose of an AMRF is to ensure a capital or income "safety net" for certain individuals throughout the period of their retirement.

All of the conditions and requirements attaching to investment in an ARF or AMRF are set out in sections 784A to 784D of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (reflecting Finance Act 1999 and subsequent Finance Act changes). The trustees of the individual's pension fund and the Qualifying Fund Manager with whom the individual invested in an AMRF would have been aware of the requirements involved.

As is stated in the recently published National Pensions Framework, the Government is aware that individuals who invested their funds in an AMRF because they did not satisfy the specified income requirements at retirement, may later satisfy those requirements. Notwithstanding this, such individuals are effectively locked into the AMRF until they reach 75. The Government has decided to allow those individuals who meet the specified income conditions after retirement to have their AMRFs treated as ARFs to which they will have access. The details of this change will be worked out during the implementation phase of the Framework and legislated for in due course.

Departmental Reports.

178. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Finance the list of all proposals in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13884/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As the Deputy is aware the report of the Special Group on Public Numbers and Expenditure Programmes outlined a wide range of proposals across all departments, a number of which can only be achieved through restructuring over a number of years. The implementation of the proposals for my Department and the

Offices under its aegis is ongoing, and initial progress has been made in this regard in Budget 2010.

The Special Group also made a number of cross-cutting recommendations in relation to initiatives such as procurement reform, shared services, greater focus on performance and outputs and strengthening of multi-annual budgeting arrangements. The consideration and progression of these recommendations is being coordinated by the Department of Finance in the broader context of the Transforming Public Services agenda.

The proposals recommended for my Department and the Offices under its aegis, together with an update on the status of these proposals, are set out in the tables.

Office/Other	Group's recommendation	Status
Office of the Minister for Finance	General administration and programme efficiencies including staff reductions of 60 over four years, €5.0m	Completed
Office of the Minister for Finance	Administrative savings in the IPA and the ESRI resulting in reduced grants in aid	Completed
Office of the Minister for Finance	Potential to develop shared services (salaries, pensions, accounts, HR)	In progress
Office of the Minister for Finance	Further scaling-back and re-prioritisation of capital expenditure.	In progress
Office of the Minister for Finance	A uniform Public Service Numbers Policy.	In progress
Cross-cutting	Implementation of measures in the <i>Green Paper on Pensions</i>	In progress
Strategic	Medium-term envelopes	In progress
Strategic	Strategic objectives for the new NPPPOU.	In progress
Strategic	Prepare legislation to centralise the management of State property in OPW	In progress
Strategic	Updated and enhanced guidelines for acquisition, management, sale and inter-agency transfer of property.	In progress
Strategic	Centralised shared approaches to ICT services and data centre facilities, IT Advisory Group.	In progress
Strategic	Pension policy should be adjusted to take account of future pension liabilities to the state.	In progress
Strategic	Public Service Performance Charter	In progress
Strategic	Development and enhancement of IT skills	In progress
Office of the Minister for Finance	Enhanced VFM & Policy Reviews & Possible role for the C&AG in auditing or verifying the Annual Output Statements	Under consideration
Office of the Minister for Finance	New benchmarking process.	Under consideration
Cross-cutting	Monitor performance against objectives of NPPPOU	Under consideration
Cross-cutting	Estimates should be produced on a programme-by-programme basis.	Under consideration
Cross-cutting	All regulators to submit budgets to the DoF	Under consideration

Office	Group's recommendation	Status
State Laboratory	Sharing of services with HSE laboratories.	The proposal was examined but will not be implemented.
Valuation Office	Administrative efficiencies in the Valuation Office	In progress
Ombudsman	Consider undertaking investigative functions at lower grading levels, Amalgamate ombudsmen/regulators offices into the Office of the Ombudsman.	Under consideration
Public Appointments Service	Reduce Expenditure by 20%, Reduce large volume recruitment, Rationalise senior executive recruitment, Deferral of selected research projects and staff efficiencies, Improve the efficiency of recruitment, Staff reductions	In progress, staffing levels reduced by 31% and Vote reduced by 34%.
C&AG	Merge the Local Government Audit Service within the aegis of the C&AG	Under consideration
C&AG	Make legislative changes to ensure that significant public expenditure is audited by the C&AG.	Under consideration
Appeals Commissioner	Publish decisions of Appeal Commissioners electronically.	Under consideration
Valuation Office	Merge the Valuation Office (VO) and the Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI) with the Property Registration Authority (PRA)	The merits/demerits of the proposed merger are being assessed.
Commission for Public Service Appointments	Potential to merge the Office of the Commission for Public Service Appointments with the Office of the Ombudsman, Reduce staff numbers	In progress
Office of Public Works	Spare capacity should be reduced	In progress
Office of Public Works	Benchmark rents & occupancy levels with private sector rates	In progress
Office of Public Works	Introduce a moratorium on the state providing car parking spaces in urban areas	Under consideration (no new spaces being taken)
Office of Public Works	Identify the State's real estate portfolio	Under consideration
Office of Public Works	Outsource engineering and architectural activities	Ongoing
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	IT efficiencies	In progress. A number of measures have been taken including e-Stamping.
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Efficient use of consumables	Completed
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Savings in legal services	Completed
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Review the number of regional office locations	In progress — a number have been closed and others are under review
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Examine scope for further efficiencies	Savings substantially achieved. One further option under review.
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Associated reduction in staff numbers	Completed

Tax Code.

179. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance the average time it takes for the issue of a VAT number and an employer PPS number for a new company starting up a business; and his views on whether in the context of encouraging enterprise and employment a special effort should be made to minimise any delays in enabling such new companies to be fully Revenue registered and compliant. [13892/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that Revenues Customer Service Standards, published in August 2009, state that they will register 100% of employer registrations within 5 working days and 100% of VAT registrations within 10 working days.

The 10 working day standard for VAT registrations takes into account an extra level of scrutiny carried out by Revenue to ensure that the VAT registration is in respect of a legitimate trade. A VAT registration carries a greater risk of abuse than other registration types. 95% of Employer Registrations are dealt with within 5 working days. 96% of VAT Registrations are dealt with within 10 working days.

Revenue is currently developing an online self-service registration system through its Revenue Online Service. This will be available to taxpayers and their agents and will allow them to complete their Registrations online. This new service will further reduce the time and the administrative burden involved in registering for an Employer number and VAT number. This development is scheduled for completion in late 2010.

Flood Relief.

180. **Deputy Deirdre Clune** asked the Minister for Finance when he will be in a position to allocate funding for flood relief measures under the minor works scheme; the amount of moneys available under this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13914/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): Under the 2010 Capital allocation, OPW has made an initial sum of €6m available for the Minor Flood and Coastal Erosion Works Programme initiated in 2009. Based on assessments completed by OPW of applications received from Local Authorities to date, €5.43m has been allocated to 12 Local Authorities for measures to address localised flooding problems in 52 inland areas. In addition, allocations totalling €1.27m are being made to 6 Local Authorities for minor coastal flooding and erosion measures, at 8 locations around the country. Following that initial allocation, OPW will continue to liaise with a number of Local Authorities with regard to applications received, where further information is required.

National Parks.

181. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the purpose of putting wind mills and solar panels at Mountjoy Corner in the Phoenix Park, Dublin; the cost of same; their purpose; the reason they have been removed; the further plans for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14021/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The wind / solar lamp standards were temporarily placed at the Mountjoy Roundabout for health and safety reasons for the purpose of illuminating the construction works area at night during the recent refurbishment works to the roundabout. As works on site are now completed, with the installation of the new five headed gas lamps and up lighters to the centre of the roundabout, the wind / solar lamp standards have been removed and are now permanently installed at Kilmacur-

ragh Arboretum carpark, Co. Wicklow. The cost of the four wind / solar lamp standards was €11,000. Ex VAT.

182. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the measures that will be taken at Mountjoy Corner in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, to prevent motorists going straight across the cobblestoned roundabout at the junction instead of around the roundabout; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14022/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The newly refurbished roundabout at the Mountjoy junction, Phoenix Park has been designed and constructed to ensure speed of oncoming traffic entering the roundabout is reduced. The new 5-headed gas lamp centrepiece and electric up lighters illuminate the roundabout at night. The outer edge of the roundabout is clearly delineated with solar powered road studs, which automatically illuminate at night. These measures are considered adequate and appropriate to both control the speed of traffic and protect the structure of the roundabout.

Pre-school Services.

183. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on extending early childhood cover to children who are now underage but have committed to enroll in primary school in September 2011 by which time they will be four years of age and who will therefore miss out on the pre-school year. [13578/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I have responsibility for implementation of the free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme which was introduced in January of this year.

The objective of the scheme is to make early learning in a formal setting available to all children in the key developmental year before they commence primary school, with appropriate age related activities and programmes being provided within a particular age cohort. Targeting the pre-school year at a particular age cohort is, therefore, fundamental to the scheme and for this reason minimum and maximum limits to the age range within which children participate in the scheme, have been set. While the majority of children commence school between the age of 4 years 6 months and 5 years 6 months, an age range of almost 17 months has been set for the scheme to maximise flexibility. As a result, the scheme is open to children who are aged more than 3 years and two months and less than 4 years 7 months at 1 September each year. A child who will be too young to avail of the scheme in September 2010 will qualify for the scheme in September 2011.

Health Service Staff.

184. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost of training one general practitioner, broken down according to cost of undergraduate medical training, and post-graduate GP training; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13875/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Services.

185. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the best international practise in relation to audiology screening for newborn babies; if her Department has investi-

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gated introducing such a screening programme here; the annual cost of such a scheme; the amount this would save in emergency measures and complicated medical procedures being caught early; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13569/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Medical Cards.

186. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if persons who are separated but over 70 years have the maintenance payment to their spouse taken into account when calculating eligibility for the medical card. [13579/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme.

187. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Health and Children, further to Parliamentary Question No. 400 of 19 January 2010, when it is anticipated that the Health Service Executive will be in a position to reply this question; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13591/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospital Services.

188. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding Belmullet Hospital, County Mayo which has seen wards closed and reductions in front-line nursing staff due to the embargo on recruitment; the future plans for developing Belmullet Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13594/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Services.

189. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the schools dental scheme has been withdrawn in the east Galway area by the Health Service Executive; if her attention has been drawn to the frustration and anxiety this has caused to children and parents alike; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13595/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question.

If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Special Educational Needs.

190. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide structured occupational therapy and or speech and language therapy for the pupils of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 6; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13597/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Pre-school Services.

191. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the early childhood care and education scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13598/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I have responsibility for implementation of the free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme which was introduced in January of this year.

The objective of the scheme is to make early learning in a formal setting available to all children in the key developmental year before they commence primary school, with appropriate age related activities and programmes being provided within a particular age cohort. As a result, the scheme is open to children who are aged more than 3 years and two months and less than 4 years 7 months at 1 September each year. I am pleased to say that approximately 90% of pre-school services are participating in the scheme and over 51,000 children, or 80% of children in the year before starting school, are availing of the scheme.

Special Educational Needs.

192. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he will put in place a plan to provide occupational and or speech and language therapy services for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 6 either in conjunction with the Lucena clinic or through the appointment of appropriate staff directly to the school; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that only a small minority of children are receiving these services through the Lucena clinic and these are mainly children registered with the Lucena clinic in Rathgar who have been referred to the school by the clinic; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13605/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Action Plan.

193. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children when her cardiovascular health policy will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13624/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Medical Cards.

194. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health and Children her plans to deal with the delays for applicants applying for medical cards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13627/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Service Staff.

195. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health and Children her plans to lift the moratorium on recruitment in the public sector to fill vacancies (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13628/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Departmental Staff.

196. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded; the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13639/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospital Accommodation.

197. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she is satisfied with the current number of maternity beds available; if additional beds are necessary; her views on whether additional beds should be public beds or private beds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13664/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospital Services.

198. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on stand alone private maternity hospitals and whether these hospitals should be integrated into a larger hospital campus which would provide public and private services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13665/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Medical Cards.

199. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8 was not granted a medical card; if she will consider granting a full medical card in this case due to financial hardship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13669/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Services for People with Disabilities.

200. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5. [13673/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospital Services.

201. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) will receive an eye appointment in Ardkeen Hospital, Waterford. [13675/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospitals Building Programme.

202. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the proposed new children's hospital at the site of the Mater hospital; if she continues to be satisfied that this is the most appropriate location for this hospital in view of the fact that the metro north project is unlikely to go ahead for a number of years; her views on access to this facility in the future in view of the traffic situation in Dublin city; her further views on parking facilities for the hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13679/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question.

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If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

203. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she plans to make available to the public the draft plans for the proposed children's hospital at the Mater site; if so, when these plans will be available; the locations at which they may be viewed; if she will be providing a consultative process for the public on these draft plans; if so, the dates and locations of such a consultative process; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

[13680/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Community Care.

204. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the provision of a new primary care health centre in Glenties, County Donegal,; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13681/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospital Services.

205. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the action she will take arising from the recent disclosures on symphysiotomies carried out in hospitals in this country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13702/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Medical Cards.

206. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8 was refused a medical card and a general practitioner visit card; if she will consider granting a card in this case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13703/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Adoption Services.

207. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health and Children his views on couples who have been through assessment for adoption as potential foster care parents in view of the

thorough Garda vetting, various courses and child protection education procedures that these couples have undertaken; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13716/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospital Services.

208. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if there is a provision, under domestic or EU law, whereby a person (details supplied) in County Cork, who has a very rare condition, and has to be treated in London may have some or all of the costs defrayed by the Health Service Executive in view of the fact that there is no treatment available here for the condition. [13720/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Service Staff.

209. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she is in receipt of a report on the facilitated days complementary therapists which were organised in 2007; if she plans to fill the vacancy left by the death of a person (details supplied) in order to take this process forward; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13722/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Services.

210. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 135 of 24 February 2010, when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive. [13738/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Mental Health Services.

211. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 136 of 24 February 2010, when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive. [13739/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Water Fluoridation.

212. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she has assessed the scientific evidence on the merit of fluoridation of water supplies for general distribution; if she is satisfied that the existing levels of fluoridation in water supplies are appropriate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13771/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

213. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the steps she is taking to address concerns regarding the possible health impact of the fluoridation of water supplies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13772/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Services.

214. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children who have been assessed and diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder in the mid-Leinster region during the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13780/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

215. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder who are currently receiving therapy including psychology, occupational, speech and language and physiotherapy by the early intervention team in County Laois; the number of children with a diagnosis of ASD who are currently receiving therapy by the early intervention team in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13781/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

216. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder who are currently receiving therapy including psychology, occupational, speech and language and physiotherapy in post-early intervention service in County Laois; the number of children with a diagnosis of ASD who are currently receiving therapy in post-early intervention service in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13782/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

217. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder who are currently on waiting lists for assessment from an early intervention team in County Laois; the number of children diagnosed with ASD who are currently on waiting lists for assessment from an early intervention team in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13783/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

218. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children with suspected autistic spectrum disorder who are currently on waiting lists for assessment from post-early intervention service in County Laois; the number of children with suspected ASD who are currently on waiting lists for post-early intervention service in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13784/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

219. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder who are currently on waiting lists for therapy from an early intervention team in County Laois; the number of children with a diagnosis of ASD who are currently on waiting lists for therapy from an early intervention team in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13785/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

220. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder who are currently on waiting lists for therapy from a post-early intervention team in County Laois; the number of children with a diagnosis of ASD who are currently on waiting lists for therapy from a post-early intervention team in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13786/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

221. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the approximate timeframe that children with autistic spectrum disorder may expect to wait for assessment and therapy from an early intervention team in County Laois; the approximate time frame that

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children with ASD may expect to wait on assessment and therapy from an early intervention team in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13787/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

222. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the approximate time frame that children with autistic spectrum disorder may expect to wait for assessment and therapy from a post early intervention team in County Laois; the approximate time frame that children with autistic spectrum disorder may expect to wait for assessment and therapy from a post early intervention team in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13788/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Service Staff.

223. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of posts that are vacant including those where therapists are on maternity leave on the early intervention team in County Laois; the number of posts that are vacant including those where therapists are on maternity leave on the early intervention team in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13789/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

224. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of posts that are vacant including those where therapists are on maternity leave on post early intervention team in County Laois; the number of posts that are vacant including those where therapists are on maternity leave on post early intervention team in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13790/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

225. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the policy on the filling of posts vacant on account of therapists including occupational, speech and language and physiotherapy services on leave including maternity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13791/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question.

If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Special Educational Needs.

226. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will take the action necessary to attach to a school (details supplied) in Dublin 6 a full clinical team including a consultant psychiatrist, psychologist, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists as was attached to it until approximately six years ago to provide essential services for the educational needs of 60 children attending the school with emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties; that such clinical team should be provided in conjunction with the Lucena clinic in Rathgar or through the appointment of appropriate staff directly to the school; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that many of the children attending this school are in urgent need of structured and regular occupational therapy and or speech and language therapy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13793/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Services for People with Disabilities.

227. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will reply to a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13796/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): It is not possible to disaggregate the amount spent on the quality of disability services from the overall total spent on disability services annually.

Children with disabilities in generic residential centres under the Child Care Act 1991 are covered by the standards and inspection regimes already applying to those centres. There are a number of other centres providing residential or respite care to children with disabilities. Children who reside in these centres are not in the care of the State, although they are cared for by the State. The majority of these centres are run by voluntary organisations funded by the HSE and are not included in the inspection regime under the Child Care Act 1991. In relation to the children with disabilities in these other residential centres, the Ryan Commission report recommends that “All services for children should be subject to regular inspections in respect of all aspects of their care”. An implementation plan for the recommendations of the Ryan Commission was submitted to Government by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs which included proposals to implement in full, all the recommendations of the Commission. The implementation plan contains a commitment that the Health Act 2007 will be commenced to allow the independent registration and inspection of all residential centres and respite services for children with a disability by December 2010.

As the Deputy may be aware, “National Quality Standards: Residential Settings for People with Disabilities” which relate to adult services have been published by HIQA. These standards will provide a national framework for quality, safe services for persons with disabilities in a residential setting.

Given the current economic situation, to move to full statutory implementation of the standards, including regulation and inspection, presents significant challenges at this time. However, notwithstanding the difficulties of immediate statutory implementation, the Department of Health and Children, the HSE and HIQA have agreed that progressive non-statutory imple-

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mentation of the standards will now commence, and that they will become the benchmark against which the HSE assesses both its own directly operated facilities and other facilities that the HSE funds. The Minister for Health and Children will shortly be bringing detailed proposals to Government with regard to the protection of vulnerable adults with disabilities who are currently in institutional care.

Inter-Country Adoptions.

228. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding persons who want to adopt children from non-Hague and non-bilateral countries. [13798/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): The Adoption Bill, 2009, is designed to give force of law to the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption. The new legislation, which incorporates the provisions of the Hague Convention, is designed to provide a framework to ensure that appropriate procedures have been followed and that all adoptions are effected in the best interests of the child. Future intercountry adoption arrangements will be governed by the terms of the Adoption Bill 2009 when enacted.

I brought forward at Committee stage an amendment to the Adoption Bill 2009 that will enable prospective adoptive parents to proceed with an adoption from a non-Hague or non-bilateral country, if prior to the establishment date, they have been issued with a Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability to adopt. The proposed amendment requires that the Adoption Authority (to be set up under the Act) would be satisfied that the particular adoption meets all the standards of the Hague Convention. Following the Committee stage debate I am also giving consideration to the possibility of including the ‘cooling off’ period provided for in the ratification process for the Hague Convention in the transitional provision.

Vaccination Programme.

229. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of people who have obtained the H1N1 swine flu vaccine through their general practitioner; the total cost involved; the number of persons who have obtained the H1N1 swine flu vaccine through Health Service Executive clinics and health centres and the cost involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13799/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Services.

230. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the case of persons (details supplied) in County Carlow; if same will be examined and amended; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13809/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

231. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she has received a request to meet with the chief executive officer of an organisation (details supplied) to discuss issues of concern; if she plans to accede to this request; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13810/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

232. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5. [13831/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospital Services.

233. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support the case of a person (details supplied). [13833/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Services.

234. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12 has been landed with a debt of €9,000 for funeral expenses in respect of the burial of a family member. [13858/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospital Services.

235. **Deputy Seán Fleming** asked the Minister for Health and Children when surgery will be carried out in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13869/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

236. **Deputy Seán Fleming** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of orthopaedic operations carried out by each surgeon on a monthly basis for the past 24 months at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore, County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13870/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme.

237. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of applications for the nursing home scheme that were made by hospitals or institution administrators on behalf of patients; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13872/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Services.

238. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health and Children the grounds that the Health Service Executive is continuing funding for a group (details supplied) in County Cork; if she will provide a breakdown of the way in which this funding is spent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13873/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

239. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health and Children if it is her intention to install a methadone dispensing clinic at a location (details supplied) in Dublin 15; if a licence has been provided for same; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that this premises is located directly beside a facility for adults with special needs; and if her further attention has been drawn to the concerns expressed by the families of those using this service. [13874/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Service Staff.

240. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost of training one general practitioner, broken down according to cost of undergraduate medical training, and post-graduate GP training; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13876/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Departmental Reports.

241. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Health and Children the list of all proposals in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure relating to

her Department or to bodies or agencies under her remit which have been implemented to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13886/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

Recommendations	Status
<i>Vote 39</i>	
Reduce the size of the Department of Health & Children	The Incentivised Scheme for Early Retirement and the recruitment and promotion moratorium has been applied to the Department. Number of staff (Whole Time Equivalents) in 2008 was 526.50 and in 2009 was 485.88, including an additional 24.17 WTEs who transferred into the Department during 2009.
Merge the <i>Ombudsman for Children</i> with the <i>Office of the Ombudsman</i>	Government decided not to implement this
Merge <i>Health Research Board</i> with single stream science funding	Initiative to streamline STI funding announced in Budget
Integrate the <i>Health Insurance Authority</i> into the <i>Financial Regulator</i>	Not implemented but no savings would accrue here as the Health Insurance Authority is funded by the industry
Restrict the <i>National Treatment Purchase Fund</i>	Not implemented
Remove the Exchequer element of agencies part funded by the <i>National Lottery</i>	Funding has been reduced by €199,000 in 2010
<i>Vote 40</i>	
Health sector efficiencies	HSE to achieve €106m in efficiencies in 2010
Health sector staffing	HSE pay is being reduced by €100m in 2010 for reduced staffing
Eliminate all bonus payments to HSE staff	Bonus payments not provided for in 2010
Revise income guidelines for medical cards	Not implemented
Increase threshold for Drugs Payments Scheme	Threshold increased
Introduce co-payment (€5) for GMS and LTI schemes	As announced in Budget intention is to introduce a €0.50c per item prescription charge
Tendering for GMS services	Reductions in drug costs agreed with the IPHA, together with other measures, expected to produce savings of €94m in a full year.
Increase hospital charges	Charges are not being increased this year but collection of charges is being improved
Increase charges for private beds in public hospitals	Charges are not being increased this year but collection of charges is being improved
Introduce mandatory protocols to use generic medicines	Legislation will be introduced on reference pricing
Efficiencies in non-emergency patient transport	HSE is to make savings of €4.3m in 2010
Efficiencies in Disability and Mental Health administration	Overall €106m savings to be achieved on non-pay by HSE, including Disability and Mental Health providers, in 2010
Increase percentage recoupment under Fair Deal	Not implemented
Introduce Means Test for Homecare Packages	Not implemented
<i>Vote 41</i>	
Abolish the transitional provisions for the <i>National Childcare Investment Programme</i>	The allocation to the NCIP was reduced by €2.5m
Alter the means test by eliminating Band C	New arrangements to achieve savings will be introduced in September 2010.
Rationalise the administrative structures of the <i>National Childcare Investment Programme</i>	Not implemented pending introduction of new Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) scheme

Health Services.

242. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average waiting time for children seeking speech and language therapy on a county basis in tabular form; if she considers this is an acceptable time for children to be on waiting lists; the action she will take to alleviate the waiting lists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13903/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

243. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the details of the waiting period for children seeking speech therapy in County Meath for the past four years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13904/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Service Staff.

244. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of speech and language therapists who are working in each of the 26 counties for the past four years in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13905/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Child Care Services.

245. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will approve additional funds for a child care project (details supplied) in County Roscommon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13912/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I have responsibility for implementation of the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP).

The company referred to by the Deputy, was approved under the NCIP for capital grant funding up to a maximum of €520,000, of which €501,093 has been paid to date. I understand that the company is seeking additional funding for the project and that Pobal, who assist my Office in the day to day management of the NCIP, is examining this request. When Pobal report to my Office a decision on the company's request will be made and the outcome will be advised to the company.

Hepatitis C Incidence.

246. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 300 of 23 March 2010, if she will address the issue of the small number of women who received contaminated anti-D but who have tested negative for hepatitis C despite

having similar health problems to persons who have tested positive; if legislative change is necessary to address this; if she will amend the legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14019/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Health Services.

247. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 105 of 4 November 2009, when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive. [14023/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

General Medical Services Scheme.

248. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 145 of 12 November 2009, when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive. [14024/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Hospital Services.

249. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 69 of 25 February 2010, when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive. [14025/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

250. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 70 and 71 of 25 February 2010, when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive. [14026/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I regret that due to industrial action I am not in a position to provide a substantive response to your Parliamentary Question. If this matter remains of continuing concern to you, however, I would invite you to raise it with me again in due course.

Search and Rescue Service.

251. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Transport the detail of a new contract

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between the State and a Canadian company for the provision of a helicopter search and rescue service; the way this will interact with the current service provider by the Coast Guard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13572/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): CHC Ireland has been selected as the preferred bidder for the supply of the national Search and Rescue Helicopter service from mid-2013.

Following the required stand-still period, which finished yesterday (29th March 2010), contract negotiations have just commenced.

The new contract will run for 10 years and will represent a stepped improvement in the capacity, range, speed, and capability of Irelands SAR service, using modern medium-load helicopters.

CHC Ireland are also the current service provider.

252. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Transport if he will publish details of the call out incidents for helicopter search and rescue service for each of the operating bases run by the Coast Guard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13573/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The detailed statistics requested cannot be provided at this time due to industrial action. However I will provide the Deputy at a later date with a table and charts that may be of interest to him.

253. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Transport the rationale behind proposals to downgrade the level of cover for helicopter search and rescue missions for the south and east coast in view of the heavy volume of fishing commercial and recreational traffic in the south and east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13574/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): There has been much ill informed comment about the proposed new SAR contract.

The new contract has been presented as a “cutback” in services; nothing could be further from the truth. The new contract will cost significantly more on an annual basis than the current contract, because of the improved services to be provided.

The Government has just approved a massive half a billion euro investment in maritime search and rescue capability on the island. The proposed contract represents a dramatic increase in funding for SAR helicopter services in Ireland from approximately €30 million to €50 million per annum. This is an increase, in difficult circumstances, of €20 million a year in this service alone.

The new contract represents a stepped improvement in the capacity, range, speed and capability of Irelands SAR service.

254. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Transport the contact between his Department and the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform regarding the ability of the Garda helicopter service to participate in search and rescue in view of new contractual arrangements being considered and specifically the proposal to downgrade the level of service available in the south east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13575/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The helicopters in use by the Garda Air Support Unit are unsuitable for maritime Search and Rescue tasks. They are not equipped or configured for maritime Search and Rescue and would certainly not be suitable for most of the

conditions and circumstances where SAR operations are deployed in the Irish Search and Rescue region.

255. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Transport the contact between his Department and the Department of Defence regarding the ability of the Air Corps to participate in search and rescue in the view of the new contractual arrangements being considered and specifically the proposal to downgrade the level of service available in the south east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13576/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The possibility of the Department of Defence taking over responsibility for Search and Rescue operations was considered by both Departments. However the potential for the Air Corps to re-enter this area of operations was not considered feasible.

Transport Services.

256. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport if he has assessed the need to develop stronger transport links with Asia; and the initiative he plans to develop these links. [13580/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Department and its agencies have aviation, maritime and land transport links across the world, including with Asia. The potential for enhancing these links or establishing new ones is a matter that is kept under review.

Air Services.

257. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport if there are opportunities to develop the air freight sector here as an internationally traded service with specialized back office support; and if aviation interests and the enterprise agencies here have carried out any assessment of the opportunities in this sector. [13581/10]

266. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Transport if, in view of a recent response from the European Commission which indicates that the Commission would be supportive of the Irish Government investing in the Lynx Cargo project at Shannon Airport, he will make the necessary finance available to invest in this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13913/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 257 and 266 together.

Responsibility for driving the development of the air freight sector lies primarily with the Dublin Airport Authority, given its mandate with regard to the three State airports. This development will be primarily influenced by airlines' assessment of market potential. Accordingly commercial decisions on specific air services, such as air freight, are essentially matters for the airlines concerned. I am not aware that the European Commission has made a decision on the lines suggested by the Deputy with regard to the proposed Lynx cargo project in Shannon Airport.

The current position with regard to this project is that in 2009 the DAA concluded a memorandum of understanding with the Lynxs Group, a global airport cargo facility company, to explore jointly the feasibility of developing a major cargo facility at Shannon Airport. My Department has recently received the DAA's evaluation of the business case for the project. The DAA has to operate to a commercial mandate and it does not have access to unlimited funds to undertake capital investment. Accordingly, consideration of the best way to support

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the project will take account of the extent of potential investment by the DAA on foot of its evaluation of the business case and any support that could be provided by the State, subject to compliance with EU state aid rules.

258. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Transport his views on the decision of Aer Lingus to lay-off all of its cabin crew; if he has or will contact the board of management about this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13584/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Decisions on commercial and operational matters at Aer Lingus are a matter for the Board and management of the Company and it is not open to the Government to intervene in such matters. Aer Lingus is an independent Company and it has to make decisions on a commercial basis. In a second ballot, the result of which was announced on Friday 26th March, Aer Lingus cabin crew members of IMPACT voted in favour of the company's cost reduction programme. All five union groups at the company have now voted in favour of the programme.

Road Network.

259. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport when the roads review that was a key transport commitment in the Programme for Government 2007 will begin; if his Department will oversee the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13593/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The review is being undertaken by the National Roads Authority, as the body with statutory responsibility for the improvement and maintenance of national roads, including the allocation of funding to individual projects. The review has already commenced and will be completed later this year and submitted to my Department.

Departmental Agencies.

260. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13643/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Further to Parliamentary Question No. 75 of 10th February 2010, the Department provided the Deputy with the pay scales for each chief executive of an agency under the aegis of this Department. The additional information requested by the Deputy cannot be provided at this time due to industrial action.

Road Safety.

261. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Transport if he will give local authorities the power to introduce 40 kilometre per hour speed limits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13657/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Section 9 of the Road Traffic Act 2004 sets out the range of special speed limits that may be applied by local authorities through bye-laws. This legislation is kept under review by my Department on an ongoing basis. There are,

however, currently no proposals to provide for a 40km per hour special speed limit option in addition to the 50kmph and 30kmph options that are currently provided for.

Public Transport.

262. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that proposed alterations in the Bus Éireann service between Gorey, County Wexford and Dublin will increase the weekly commute time by up to four hours; if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that these proposed changes have the potential to put jobs at risk for travellers who will be unable to arrive in their workplace at the due time owing to the altered bus schedule and that they will impact adversely on family life where parents will arrive home much later than at present; if Bus Éireann sought his Department's permission for these alterations and whether the impact of such alterations was taken into account; if he will intervene to ensure that Bus Éireann reviews the proposed diminution in service to take account of all consequences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13818/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): This is an operational matter for Bus Éireann.

Car Tests.

263. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Transport the length of the waiting lists at each of the national car testing centres in the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13849/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006) vehicle testing is a matter for the Road Safety Authority.

Air Services.

264. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport his views on the current impasse between an organisation (details supplied) and the Irish Aviation Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13871/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Statutory responsibility for the regulation of safety standards of civil aviation in the State has been vested in the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) under the Irish Aviation Authority Act, 1993. I have no function in this regard. I understand from the IAA that it issued a consultation document on the current requirements for microlight operations in the State on 5th February. The consultation period has recently ended and I understand that the IAA has undertaken to publish the outcome of this review in mid-April. Prior to this recent consultation process, I understand from the IAA that its officers had met representatives of the National Microlight Association of Ireland on seven occasions between January 2009 and 2010. I trust that the comprehensive review of the requirements for microlight operations that is currently underway will afford all parties with an interest in this matter to make their views known and that all submissions will be given due consideration by the IAA in completing its review.

Departmental Reports.

265. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Transport the list of all proposals in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure relating to his

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Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13890/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The following savings for my Department, arising from the Report of the Special Group were included in Budget 2010.

	Transport Savings Measures	Savings 2010
		€m
	<i>Programme A — Administration</i>	
A.1	Reduce pay expenditure	1.90
A.2	Reduce non pay expenditure	0.90
	Programme A Savings	2.80
	<i>Programme B — Roads</i>	
B1	Reduce expenditure on roads maintenance/improvement	13.80
B4	National Vehicle and Driver File (NVDF)	3.5
	Programme B Savings	17.30
	<i>Programme C — Public Transport</i>	
C1	Operational efficiencies among CIE companies	27.00
	Programme C Savings	27.00
	<i>Cross Programme Savings</i>	
	Reduction in National Roads Authority (NRA) administrative budget	1.00
	Reduction in Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) administrative budget	0.35
	Cross Programme Savings	1.00
	Total Programme Savings	48.10

The National Roads Authority has taken over responsibility for the administration of regional and local road grants to local authorities.

Question No. 266 answered with Question No. 257.

International Agreements.

267. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason Ireland has not yet ratified the UN Convention Against Corruption; when same will be ratified and implemented here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13658/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The United Nations Convention Against Corruption was signed on behalf of Ireland when the Convention was opened in December 2003. Before Ireland can proceed with ratification of this Instrument, there are certain legislative measures required to be in place. As soon as the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill 2008, which is currently awaiting Committee Stage in the Dáil, has been enacted, it is intended that the appropriate arrangements will be made for ratification of the Convention.

Citizenship Applications.

268. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when an

application will be processed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13568/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I regret that information relating to the application from the person concerned is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available. However, I can advise the Deputy of the position generally. The average processing time from application to decision is 26 months. More complicated cases can at times take more than the current average while an element of straight forward cases are now being dealt with in less than that time scale. Applications for a certificate of naturalisation are dealt with in chronological order as this is deemed to be the fairest to all applicants. Additional resources were allocated to the Citizenship Division of my Department to enable certain categories of applicant to be dealt with more expeditiously. These include refugees, spouses of Irish citizens and minors.

Garda Equipment.

269. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the person who authorised the use of private personal laptops and mobile phones for Garda duties; the nature of the information stored on both personal laptops and mobile phones relating to Garda duties; if this information is encrypted, backed up and secure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13601/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The conditions under which equipment is used by members of the Garda Síochána in the course of their official duties are determined by the Garda Commissioner. I regret that current information with regard to the issues raised by the Deputy is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Road Traffic Offences.

270. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding fines and or penalties imposed for breaches of the laws relating to cycling offences. [13609/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The penalties imposed for breaches of the law in relation to cycling offences are set out in road traffic legislation which is the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Transport. I am informed by the Garda authorities that all members of An Garda Síochána are tasked with enforcing road traffic legislation including the relevant provisions in respect of cyclists. An Garda Síochána also conducts on an ongoing basis awareness and education campaigns and enforcement initiatives to reduce road fatalities and serious injuries, prevent and detect breaches of road traffic and transport legislation and promote an improved compliance culture among all road-users, including cyclists.

Asylum Applications.

271. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason a person (details supplied) was removed from Dublin and sent to Waterford on the person's 18th birthday in view of the fact that the person was receiving support and language tuition at a school in Dublin 1 where the person was a student in fifth year; if his attention been drawn to the fact that this person is not currently in school in Waterford and has no

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guarantee of further schooling; and if he will make a statement on the practice of removing foreign nationals from their location and school on their 18th birthday. [13611/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The person referred to in the question made an application for asylum on 21 February, 2008, was deemed an unaccompanied minor by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and referred to the HSE which has responsibility for the care of unaccompanied minors under the Child Care Act, 1991. Where an unaccompanied asylum seeker minor in the care of the HSE reaches 18 years of age, he or she may be referred by the HSE to the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) for transfer to adult accommodation and service provision. In circumstances where the HSE deem such a person to be particularly vulnerable, the period in HSE care can be extended beyond 18 years of age at the HSE’s discretion.

The RIA is responsible for the accommodation of asylum seekers in accordance with the Government policy of direct provision and dispersal. In respect of persons referred to the RIA by the HSE at age 18, it is the RIA’s policy to disperse such persons to centres outside Dublin, generally family centres which have established links to HSE services and NGO supports. The person concerned was referred to the RIA by the HSE and was dispersed in accordance with the policy outlined above. While it is not the policy of the RIA to give details of specific cases, I can confirm that the person concerned presented to RIA with no schooling requests.

Work Permits.

272. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will clarify the entitlements of a person who is on a stamp 1 permit from his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13623/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): In general, immigration stamp 1 is granted to persons to facilitate their residence while working in the State on foot of a specific permission. Most Stamp 1 holders are persons whose permission to work is obtained through an employment permit. In addition, a number of persons who are not covered by employment permit arrangements but nevertheless permitted to work by the Minister for Justice and Law Reform may be given Stamp 1 (e.g. persons granted business permission by my Department or those on Working Holiday Authorisations). It is not possible to state the entitlements, outside of the residence and work rights, which a person may have where they hold immigration Stamp 1. Such other entitlements would be a matter for the department or agency concerned and would depend on the individual circumstances of each case.

Departmental Agencies.

273. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13640/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The following table sets out the salary scales at 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 of the post holders in the role of Chief Executive Officer or relevant position in each of the agencies on those dates:

Name of Body	CEO/Equivalent	Salary Scale 1 August 2008	Salary Scale 1 September 2008
Equality Authority*	CEO	Assistant Secretary scale €128,535 – €147,036	Assistant Secretary scale €131,748 – €150,712
Human Rights Commission*	President CEO	High Court Judge level €237,151 Assistant Secretary scale €128,535 – €147,036	High Court Judge level €243,080 Assistant Secretary scale €131,748 – €150,712
Courts Service	CEO	Secretary General level €216,516	Secretary General level €221,929
Garda Síochána Complaints Board*	CEO	Assistant Secretary Scale €128,535 – €147,036	Assistant Secretary scale €131,748 – €150,712
Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC)#	Chairperson Two Commissioners	Previously High Court Judge scale – see note below Specific one-point scale €163,328	Previously High Court Judge scale – see note below Specific one-point scale €167,412
Legal Aid Board*	CEO	Assistant Secretary scale €128,535 – €147,036	Assistant Secretary scale €131,748 – €150,712
National Disability Authority	CEO	Principal Officer higher scale €90,468 – €111,577	Principal Officer higher scale €92,730 – €114,366
Office of the Data Protection Commissioner*	Data Protection Commissioner	Assistant Secretary Scale €128,535 – €147,036	Assistant Secretary scale €131,748 – €150,712
Private Security Authority	CEO	Principal Officer scale €84,066 – €103,982 plus Director's Allowance €19,416	Principal Officer scale €86,168 – €106,582 plus Director's Allowance €19,902
Property Registration Authority*	CEO	Deputy Secretary scale €173,217	Deputy Secretary scale €177,547

#During the course of Judge Kevin Haugh's service with GSOC (2006 – 2009), he was remunerated as a High Court Judge. Following Judge Haugh's death in January 2009, Mr Dermot Gallagher was appointed Commissioner with a salary of €90,000.

In addition to these posts, there are also a number of other full-time Heads of Office in the Justice and Equality Sector (that are generally graded at Deputy Secretary, Assistant Secretary or Principal Officer level) responsible for the Irish Prison Service, the Equality Tribunal, the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, the Irish Film Classification Office, the State Pathology Service etc.

The issue of a voluntary pay cut is a matter for each post holder. The statutory pay reductions provided for under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act, 2009 apply in respect of all post holders with effect from 1 January 2010.

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All post holders, with the exception of the President of the Human Rights Commission and the Chairperson of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, are members of the relevant civil service pension scheme for established or non-established staff. The President of the Human Rights Commission and the Chairperson of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission have no pension entitlements in relation to their positions as President and Chairperson respectively.

Those post holders marked with an asterisk in the table above and a number of the Heads of Office in the Justice and Equality Sector were covered by the Civil Service-wide scheme of performance related awards. No payments were made under this scheme in respect of 2008 and subsequent years following the suspension of the scheme. None of the post holders above are in receipt of cars provided by the State.

Garda Recruitment.

274. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when it is proposed to advertise for another intake of Garda recruits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13662/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The moratorium on recruitment in the Public Service currently applies to the Garda Síochána, both sworn members and civilian support staff. The strength of sworn members of An Garda Síochána on the last day for which figures are readily available was 14,547 with an additional 232 students in training. I am keeping the situation under review in consultation with the Garda Commissioner and my colleague the Minister for Finance with a view to maintaining Garda operational strength at the highest possible level.

Visa Applications.

275. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding a visa appeal in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13663/10]

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 Equipment.

276. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding the Garda helicopters and Garda plane; the cost of purchasing and leasing same; the annual running costs including the maintenance of same for each of the past five years; if the maintenance of the helicopters and plane are included in any tendering process; the details of same including the amount and name of successful company; if the Air Corps have been asked to tender; if not, the reason for same; if they have ever expressed an interest; the location at which the helicopters and plane are kept; if Air Corps maintenance is located adjacent to such base; the number of staff working in such facility; their maintenance qualifications and the helicopters and planes they work on; the cost of building and maintaining such facility for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13684/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The making of arrangements for the operation of the Garda Air Support Unit is primarily a matter for the

Garda Commissioner and the Air Corps. I regret that current information with regard to the issues raised by the Deputy is not readily to hand. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Juvenile Offenders.

277. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress that has been made in establishing five trial sites within the existing complement of Garda youth division projects to help determine whether the approach advanced in the baseline report adds to project effectiveness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13705/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The youth justice trial site project commenced in July 2009 and will conclude before the end of 2010. The 5 trial sites are :-

- The TACT Project, Togher, Cork
- SUB Project, Birr, Co. Offaly
- Woodale Project, Dublin 17
- JAY Project, Tallaght, Dublin
- The Junction Project, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway

This project involves the development of prototype projects to provide leadership to the remaining 95 Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) in terms of best practice in service planning aimed at reducing youth crime. The Irish Youth Justice Service and the Garda Office for Children and Youth Affairs are coordinating the project.

These trial sites are engaged in a detailed process of evidence based service design. This involves a detailed analysis of local youth crime in cooperation with An Garda Síochána and a clear response from each GYDP demonstrating how its interventions will impact youth crime in the community it serves. Understanding the specific patterns of youth crime in any given community will greatly assist in devising strategies to reduce offending behaviour. Interventions will be designed and deployed to respond directly in interrupting these patterns of youth offending, taking account of the most up-to-date available research evidence.

The learning from the 5 prototype services will be disseminated across GYDPs across the country and should lead to a more general improvement in outcomes for this important crime prevention investment. Each of the 5 GYDPs in this trial site project has agreed to subject itself to this process and implement any findings within its existing resources. The trial site project is just one of the recommendations to improve the effectiveness of GYDPs which came out of the baseline analysis published in July 2009. The other recommendations relate to improved knowledge and capacity across all projects and improvements to the annual business planning format. The implementation of these recommendations is well advanced. I am satisfied that this change programme will deliver improvements in project effectiveness. Progress will be evaluated on an ongoing basis. In addition a detailed evaluation exercise will be undertaken in early 2011. These developments will also be monitored by the National Youth Justice Strategy Oversight Group.

Citizenship Applications.

278. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform further to Parliamentary Question No 372 of 26 January 2010, the position regarding an application in

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respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13797/10]

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.

Road Network.

279. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will support the case of a person (details supplied). [13832/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have no responsibility in respect of the matter raised by the Deputy. The National Roads Authority, which comes under the aegis of the Department of Transport, is responsible for the implementation of individual national road projects, including tolling.

Visa Applications.

280. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will give an update in relation to an application for a visa to visit Ireland by a person (details supplied); and if same will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13838/10]

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.

Departmental Reports.

281. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the list of all proposals in the report of the special group on public service numbers and expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13887/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I wish to refer the Deputy to parliamentary question (Ref 12984/10) from Deputy Rabbitte which I responded to on 25/3/2010 in relation to this matter. A number of the measures in the Special Group Report (McCarthy) have been implemented at this stage in order to achieve reductions in the Departments Estimates for 2010. These relate to the programmes in a range of subheads which include Gender Mainstreaming, Graffiti Removal Operations, Equality Monitoring Consultative Committees, European Refugee Fund and Refugee Integration. The McCarthy Report recommended a total reduction of some €5 million in respect of these particular items. The actual budgetary reduction was €6.92 million.

A significant proportion of the recommendations (€84 million) related to reductions in payroll costs on items such as allowances payable to members of the Garda Síochána and the Prisons Service. In common with all Departments, there are significant reductions in payroll related provisions in 2010 to take account of the reductions in payroll rates and other factors. The overall reduction in gross payroll budgets for the Justice Sector compared with the 2009 estimate is in the region of €126 million.

A number of recommendations were made by the McCarthy Group on structural reform and rationalisation across the Justice and Equality Sector. The Deputy will be aware of last

weeks announcement by An Taoiseach, where the Equality and Disability sectors of the Department together with the Human Rights Commission and Office of the Data Protection Commissioner are transferring to the renamed Department of Community, Equality and Gael-tacht Affairs. The arrangements to transfer these functions together with the relevant budgets and staffing resources are already in train.

Asylum Applications.

282. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 345 and 356 of 9 February 2010 and No. 216 of 10 February 2010, when replies will issue to this Deputy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13909/10]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): It is not possible to state, at this stage, when replies will issue to the Parliamentary Questions referred to by the Deputy.

Departmental Agencies.

283. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13638/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): There are no state agencies operating under the aegis of my Department.

Passport Applications.

284. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of Irish passports that were issued in each year over the past five years. [13671/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The number of Irish Passports issued over the last five years are as follows:

Year	Total Passports issued
2005	630,000
2006	630,000
2007	601,000
2008	576,617
2009	579,508

285. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will support the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5. [13694/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): A passport application for the named person was registered with the Passport Office in Balbriggan on 8 March, 2010. It was received through the Passport Express service which is a ten day guarantee service that is provided by the Passport Office in partnership with An Post. However, due to industrial action the Passport

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Express guarantee was suspended on 4 March. As a result it is presently taking about twenty working days to process Passport Express applications. Applications are being processed on a first come first served basis, the application in question was being processed on 29 March and if everything is in order the applicant should have the passport within the next few days.

Foreign Conflicts.

286. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the extent to which the EU or UN have monitored events and implications at the recently convened meeting in Slovenia to advance EU accession which was not attended by Serbian representatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13519/10]

292. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the current state of the peace process in the Western Balkans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13525/10]

298. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the full extent of ongoing peace and reconciliation measures in Bosnia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13531/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 286, 292 and 298 together.

Together with its EU partners, Ireland attaches considerable importance to achieving stability in the countries of the Western Balkans which were recognised as having the perspective of EU membership at the 2003 European Council in Thessaloniki. The European Union's Stabilisation and Association process provides the framework for cooperation on economic, political and legal matters aimed at bringing the Western Balkan countries towards EU standards and principles in order to meet EU accession requirements.

There were a series of positive developments in December. Justice Ministers of the countries in the Schengen Agreement area granted visa free travel to citizens of Serbia, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The European Commission will continue to work with Bosnia Herzegovina and Albania to assist those countries in meeting the Schengen criteria for visa free travel. In December, EU Foreign Ministers discussed the European Commission's latest reports on each of the Western Balkan countries and reaffirmed their support for the region's European perspective.

There were a series of positive developments in December. Justice Ministers of the countries in the Schengen Agreement area granted visa free travel to citizens of Serbia, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The European Commission will continue to work with Bosnia Herzegovina and Albania to assist those countries in meeting the Schengen criteria for visa free travel. In December, EU Foreign Ministers discussed the European Commission's latest reports on each of the Western Balkan countries and reaffirmed their support for the region's European perspective. Foreign Ministers also agreed to implement the Interim Agreement on Trade aspects of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Serbia. At the end of December Serbia applied to join the EU.

With regard to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an EU/US initiative last October brought local party leaders together to discuss necessary political reforms. While these talks were not immediately successful, the EU remains engaged in efforts to secure political progress, including the transition from the Office of the High Representative to a reinforced EU Special

Representative. EU Ministers noted in December that this requirement must be met before a membership application from Bosnia Herzegovina could be accepted by the EU.

EU Ministers pledged in January to remain fully engaged with the leaders of Bosnia Herzegovina to secure political progress in the run up to the general elections there in October. On 15 November last, local elections were held in Kosovo. These were the first democratic polls organised by the Government there. The assessment is that these were organised in a professional manner and took place peacefully, although the turnout in some Serb majority areas was low. The EU and the international community will continue to work in Kosovo to encourage stability and progress, including cooperation between the two main communities.

The Prime Ministers of Slovenia and Croatia invited leaders from the region to a conference on the European Future of the Western Balkans in Brdo, Slovenia, on 20 March. All countries were represented at senior political level with the regrettable exception of Serbia. It is understood that this absence may have been related to the manner in which the meeting was structured, including the presence of Kosovo.

Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fuele was at the Brdo conference and described it as an important step in the right direction. The Spanish Presidency is planning to organise a further high level meeting on the Western Balkans in the late spring, involving all EU member States and the governments of the region.

Question No. 287 answered with Question No. 85.

Question No. 288 answered with Question No. 86.

289. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the extent to which EU and UN military presence is to be maintained in the Western Balkans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13522/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): There are two main international military missions in the Western Balkans, both of which are under a UN mandate: the EU mission EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR). Both missions are currently undergoing transformation.

EUFOR Althea, a more than 1,900-strong mission, continues to provide a military presence that contributes to the calm and stable security environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Building on these achievements, on 25 January 2010 the Council of the EU decided to start providing non-executive capacity-building and training support to the armed forces of BiH within the framework of the existing Operation.

Operation Althea's executive mandate will continue in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1895 (2009). The Council has expressed the readiness of the EU, should the situation require it, and under a UN mandate, to maintain an executive military presence in BiH beyond 2010 to ensure a safe and secure environment in the country.

It is expected that as of this summer, there will be a significant reduction in the strength of the mission. Ireland welcomes and supports this new direction for the mission. Noting this transition, the Government decided that as of July next, the participation of the Defence Forces should be reduced to approximately 5 personnel with remaining personnel retaining appointments at headquarters as the mission transitions into a primarily civilian format.

The UN-mandated NATO-led KFOR mission encompasses over 9,900 troops across Kosovo charged with the maintenance of a safe and secure environment. In June 2009, NATO Defence Ministers reaffirmed that KFOR would remain responsible for a safe and secure environment

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in Kosovo and will stay in Kosovo, under UN mandate, for as long as is necessary. Noting the steady improvement of the security situation, a gradual adjustment of KFOR's force presence was agreed such that, when appropriate and according to the evolution of events, there would be a reduction in the number of forces on the ground. Currently, 232 members of the Defence Forces are engaged with KFOR. In April, at the next rotation, it is planned to draw down Irish personnel from KFOR to approximately 50 troops and further to downsize to a small residual component post-October 2010.

Question No. 290 answered with Question No. 103.

EU Enlargement.

291. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the position in the matter of EU enlargement; the progress made in regard to each of the candidate countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13524/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The issue of enlargement was discussed by EU Foreign Ministers at the December 2009 General Affairs Council. The Council's conclusions, subsequently endorsed by the European Council, underlined that enlargement is based on consolidating commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality and the EU's capacity to integrate new members, and that each country is assessed on its own merits.

The General Affairs Council commended Croatia for the considerable efforts it made in 2009 and the good overall progress achieved in meeting benchmarks in the accession process. The Council underlined that building on the progress made; further efforts will be required over the coming year in a number of areas of reform and in relation to cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Overall, the process is well advanced and a group has commenced work on the drafting of the Croatian Accession Treaty.

On Turkey, the Council welcomed progress in some areas of reform and stated that it was encouraged by the Turkish Government's democratic initiative. It noted that further efforts are required in a number of areas including freedom of expression, freedom of the press and trade union rights and invited Turkey to step up the pace of reform. Recalling previous conclusions, the Council noted with deep regret Turkey's continued non-compliance with its obligations under the Ankara Protocol and that it had not made progress towards normalisation of its relations with the Republic of Cyprus. It called for progress without further delay and invited the Commission to monitor and report on these various issues in its next annual report. Subsequent to the December Council, the European Union and Turkey opened the environment chapter of negotiations on 21 December.

The Council welcomed the progress made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in a number of important areas and that the country had substantially addressed the key priorities of the accession framework. It stressed that the reform agenda must be continued. The Council noted the Commission's recommendation to open accession negotiations with FYROM and will return to the matter during the current Spanish Presidency.

Iceland applied for membership of the EU in July 2009. On 24 February, the Commission delivered a largely positive opinion (*avis*) on Iceland's readiness to begin accession negotiations. The *avis* recommends that a date should be set for commencement of talks. The Council of Ministers should now consider the Commission's recommendation and I look forward to its inclusion on a forthcoming agenda.

In December, the Council welcomed the progress over the past year made by Montenegro and Albania and highlighted areas where further efforts are required. It agreed to consider the

opening of formal negotiations with both, when the Commission provides its formal opinions in respect of each application.

Serbia applied for EU membership on 22 December 2009. The next step will be for the Council to consider whether to refer Serbia's application to the Commission for a formal opinion.

Question No. 292 answered with Question No. 286.

Question No. 293 answered with Question No. 78.

Human Rights Issues.

294. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will report on the situation in the various African countries which have been the subject of human rights concerns, war, famine, genocide; the nature or extent of ongoing or intended preventative measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13527/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): No part of the world is totally free from human rights abuses, and some countries in Africa also experience war and hunger. As I have stated on previous occasions in answer to very similar questions, it is not the policy of the Government to list countries most seriously affected by such issues, and I shall therefore not focus on individual countries.

Human rights concerns remain central to our foreign policy. Together with our EU partners, Ireland monitors closely the human rights situations in many countries throughout the world, on the basis of information obtained from a variety of sources including both official and non-governmental organisations.

Where and when the situation warrants, we make known our concerns about human rights violations to the Governments in question. We do this either bilaterally, through the EU, or through action at the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council, including, in the case of the latter, through the new Universal Periodic Review process whereby the human rights performance of each UN State is reviewed.

Active participation in multilateral organisations such as the EU, the UN and the Council of Europe provides opportunities for Ireland to voice its concerns regarding human rights abuses. Through these organisations, international pressure can be brought to bear on those responsible for the violation of human rights.

For example, together with our EU partners, Ireland has been a consistent and strong supporter of the International Criminal Court, recognising it as an essential means of combating impunity for the most serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The Court's Prosecutor has opened investigations into a number of country situations and we will continue to monitor this work closely.

With regard to the issue of starvation, it is estimated that more than a billion people today do not have enough food. Ireland is responding to this challenge and in doing, so we are working bilaterally in our programme countries, with our EU and partners and at a global level through the UN agencies. Since the publication of the report of the Hunger Task Force in September 2008, Ireland's focus on hunger reduction has become a cornerstone of Irish Aid's development programme. In particular, efforts are concentrated on the three priority areas identified in the report, namely: increasing smallholder agricultural productivity in Africa; targeting under-nutrition (especially maternal and infant); and promoting governance and leadership action on tackling global hunger. Nowhere is this work more challenging than in countries

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affected by conflict where it is critically important to move quickly with large-scale emergency food assistance in order to save lives.

Irish Aid is committed to responding to emerging global hunger issues. Funds are targeted at a number of different agriculture, food security and nutrition interventions. Food assistance and therapeutic care save lives when starvation has already caused malnutrition but it is also vitally important to focus on prevention — to reach vulnerable groups through nutritional interventions which have long-term positive effects. This means a particular focus on women and young children. Best practice and scientific research demonstrates that by intervening as early and aggressively as possible during the short interval from pregnancy to 24 months of age leads to greater reductions in child under-nutrition than later interventions aimed at reversing under-nutrition.

With regard to security, UN peacekeeping missions in Africa have a major role in stabilising former and current conflict zones. Members of the Irish Defence Forces have participated in numerous UN peacekeeping missions in Africa, including in the Congo, Eritrea, Liberia and currently in Chad.

Situations which fully conform to an internationally accepted definition of genocide are thankfully extremely rare. Nevertheless, there are a number of current situations in Africa which give rise to extreme concern. The UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide is mandated to alert the international community to the potential of genocide in a particular country or region, and to make recommendations on actions to prevent or halt genocide.

In developing a sustainable approach which properly addresses the root causes of human rights abuses, war, famine and genocide, African leadership and responsibility are crucial. This is recognised by the EU and UN, which are both working to build the capacities of African States and the African Union to respond to these challenges. Ireland is committed to playing its part in this work, and I believe that our comprehensive and inclusive approach to the challenges of human rights abuses, poverty, conflict and security stands the best chance of facilitating real and positive change in the lives of millions of people in Africa.

Question No. 295 answered with Question No. 80.

Question No. 296 answered with Question No. 85.

Foreign Conflicts.

297. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the progress made in the matter of resolution of the Cyprus issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[13530/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Ireland takes an active interest in the successful resolution of the Cyprus problem. The United Nations has the lead role in the search for a comprehensive settlement. The Government fully supports the leadership of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in this important work. He visited Cyprus last month to meet leaders of the two communities and encourage them to intensify their efforts to reach agreement.

The Secretary General's visit aimed at giving impetus to the talks process which began in September 2008, under the auspices of his Special Advisor on Cyprus, Mr. Alexander Downer. The objective of these talks is to reach a comprehensive settlement. Since September 2008, over sixty meetings have been held between President Christofias and Mr. Mehmet Ali Talat, representing the Turkish Cypriot community in Northern Cyprus.

I have regular contact with my Cypriot colleague, Mr Markos Kyprianou, at Council meetings in Brussels. We also engage with the Cypriot and Turkish governments through our Embassies in Nicosia and Ankara and their Embassies in Dublin and at meetings of international organisations.

I hosted Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu during his official visit to Dublin on 10 and 11 March. We discussed a range of bilateral and regional issues, including the Cyprus talks process. We agreed on the need to support the work of the UN Secretary General and his Special Advisor in seeking a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Cyprus issue. I emphasised that political will is key to finding a resolution. The importance of making early progress was stressed given the elections to be held by the Turkish Cypriot community in Northern Cyprus next month.

As the Deputy will be aware, Ireland, in addition to political support for the UN in Cyprus, also provides a contingent of 18 members of the Garda Síochána to serve with the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, (UNFICPY).

Ireland will continue to encourage progress towards the achievement of the objective of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federal State through an honourable, balanced and durable settlement protecting and guaranteeing the basic rights of all Cypriots.

Question No. 298 answered with Question No. 286.

Lisbon Treaty.

299. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the full extent of complementary measures put in place in each EU member state including Ireland in the wake of the Lisbon Treaty agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13532/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Lisbon Treaty entered into force on 1 December 2009, following its ratification by all EU Member States. A number of measures are now required to give full effect to the Treaty and the Spanish Presidency has attached the highest priority to this work.

This task has been greatly facilitated by the preparations for the Treaty's entry into force which included the election of Herman Van Rompuy as President of the European Council and the appointment of Catherine Ashton as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

It is a matter for each Member State to make appropriate arrangements to give effect to the Treaty at national level. In Ireland's case, this was done by means of the European Union Act 2009 which provides, among other things, for the new powers of the Houses of the Oireachtas under the terms of the Treaty. In December, this House approved a motion making interim arrangements for the exercise of these new powers. I understand that a sub-Committee of the two EU Oireachtas Committees will shortly begin a review of the role of the Oireachtas in EU affairs, including these new arrangements for the Lisbon Treaty. In regard to other Member States, the arrangements for their National Parliaments will depend, naturally, on their domestic constitutional requirements.

At an EU level, important steps are being taken to implement the Lisbon Treaty. Work in advancing on the European External Action Service, which is an important innovation under the Lisbon Treaty to support the work of the High Representative. The High Representative presented proposals at the end of last week for a Council Decision on the EEAS and for related budgetary provisions and staff regulations.

The Lisbon Treaty increased the number of seats in the European Parliament and a draft Protocol has been prepared which would regularise the situation of the additional 18 Members

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of the European Parliament. The European Parliament is expected to give its opinion on this in May, after which it could be approved by an ad hoc inter-governmental conference. This protocol would not affect Irish representation in the Parliament.

The Commission is expected to bring forward shortly a proposal for a Regulation which would make provision for the procedures and conditions required for a Citizens' Initiative under the Treaty. The Government strongly supports the Citizens' Initiative which has the potential to increase citizens' engagement in EU matters by giving them the right to call directly on the Commission to bring forward new policy initiatives. This initiative will reinforce citizens' and organised civil society's involvement in the shaping of EU policies.

Specific arrangements will be required in Ireland as we do not presently have a system of popular initiative or petition. In particular, arrangements will be required to manage the collection, authentication and verification of signatures. Discussions are underway at an official level between interested Departments.

The Lisbon Treaty introduced a Solidarity Clause (Article 222 of the consolidated Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union — TFEU) which calls for fellow Member States to act in a spirit of solidarity, and for the Union to mobilise all instruments at its disposal, in response to a terrorist attack or a natural or man-made disaster affecting a Member State. Arrangements for the implementation of the solidarity clause will be decided by the Council based on a joint proposal by the Commission and the High Representative. It will be for Member States — including Ireland, acting in a spirit of solidarity and without prejudice to its traditional policy of military neutrality — to determine the nature of aid or assistance to be provided in such cases. The legal guarantees obtained by Ireland make clear that nothing in the Lisbon Treaty affects or prejudices Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality.

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union will accede to the European Convention on Human Rights which is under the aegis of the Council of Europe. The Commission has recently brought forward its recommendations for a Council Decision authorising negotiations between the European Union and the Council of Europe. A unanimous decision of the EU Council will be required to initiate and to conclude this accession agreement. This will then require ratification by all EU Member States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements. The Spanish Presidency has indicated that it hopes to agree a Council mandate before the end of its term authorising the opening of these negotiations

Other matters relating to the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty include arrangements for delegated and implementing acts (Articles 290 and 291 — TFEU) and the establishment of a consultative Panel (Article 255 — TFEU) for appointment of members to the European Court of Justice and the General Court.

The guarantees obtained by Ireland in relation to the Lisbon Treaty became legally binding when the Lisbon Treaty entered into effect. These guarantees will become a protocol to the EU Treaties at the time of the next EU accession treaty.

Question No. 300 answered with Question No. 86.

Passport Applications.

301. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will support the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin. [13834/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The application for this person was registered in the Passport Office in Balbriggan (PPOB) on 4 March, 2010. As result of disruptions to passport services due to industrial action, there was a delay in the processing of this application. On 23 March, the application was checked for passport entitlement. Unfortunately,

the application could not be finalised for passport issue because the person's signature, which would appear on his passport, was too faint.

The PPOB wrote to the applicant on 24 March to inform him of the position and to advise him on the steps that have to be taken to progress his application to passport issue. A reply was received from the applicant on 29 March. This resulted in the approval of his application and the issue of his passport later that day.

Departmental Reports.

302. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the list of all proposals in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13885/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes made a number of recommendations to Government in respect of my Department. These were considered in the context of this year's budget and public service estimates and it was decided to implement a number of them in full or in part.

Recommendation in the report of the Special Group	Comment
Overseas Missions savings	<p>A 6% cut in the Administrative Budget allocation and the recruitment moratorium has impacted on the Department's network abroad.</p> <p>Some refocusing of resources is envisaged in 2010 including a trial of new models of overseas representation.</p> <p>The grading of Heads of Mission has been addressed with a reduction in the number of Assistant Secretaries foreseen during 2010.</p> <p>Given the important contribution that is being made by our diplomatic network in promoting our key objectives abroad, in particular, support for our economic recovery, I have not taken the step of reducing our number of Missions.</p>
Reduce Staff Numbers by 65	The staffing complement at the end of 2009 is 49 below the complement at the end of 2008. The target of 65 is expected to be reached during 2010.
Cease funding the European Movement in Ireland and the Ireland United Nations Association	Implemented for the Ireland UN Association.
Reduce allocation for Contributions to International Organisations by €5million	Allocation reduced in line with the recommendation of the Special Group.
Cease expenditure to EU and other European States under Subhead K	Fully implemented in line with the recommendation of the Special Group
Maintain allocation for Vote 29 at 0.39% GNP in 2010 and extend timeframe for reaching UN target until 2015	<p>Vote 29 ODA set at 0.42% of GNP in 2010 in order to ensure that Ireland exceeds its EU commitment as a Member State to spend 0.51% on ODA in 2010.</p> <p>The alignment with the EU timeframe of 2015 to meet the UN target has also been agreed.</p>
Reduce expenditure on <i>Support for Irish Emigrant Services</i>	Implemented in 2010 with a reduction of €2.2m

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The report of the Special Group, which foresaw a multi-annual implementation period, continues to inform decisions being taken by me in terms of the allocation of resources within my Department.

Departmental Agencies.

303. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13630/10]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The salaries of the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), or equivalents, of the agencies under the aegis of my Department are as set out in Table 1 below. The details of the current approved benefits packages of these CEOs, or equivalents, are as set out in Table 2 below.

In addition, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Northern Ireland Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment are sponsor Departments for *Tourism Ireland*. The remuneration and other conditions and terms of service of the CEO of *Tourism Ireland* are determined by the Board of the Company, with the approval of the North-South Ministerial Council and the respective Finance Ministers.

The decision as to whether to take a voluntary pay cut is a matter solely for each CEO, or equivalent. In respect of the agencies under the aegis of my Department whose remuneration includes bonuses, decisions to award payments in any instance are not made by me as Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport but, rather, by the boards of the agencies concerned, subject to the terms and criteria contained in the associated remuneration schemes agreed with the CEOs, or equivalents. Accordingly, the bases of any such awards are matters for the boards of the agencies concerned. Furthermore, the payment of bonuses other than in the case of commercial State bodies, which in the case of this Department were Bord na gCon and Horse Racing Ireland, until recently transferred to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, is suspended pursuant to the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009, and the relevant agencies under the aegis of my Department have been requested to implement these provisions.

Table 1: Agency CEOs/Equivalents – Salaries

Agency	CEO/Equivalent	Salary 1 Aug 2008	Salary 1 Sep 2008	Other Information
Arts Council	Director	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale reduced pursuant to Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009.
Chester Beatty Library	Director	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	As above
Crawford Art Gallery ¹	Director	Civil Service Assistant Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Assistant Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	As above
Irish Film Board	CEO	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	As above
Irish Museum of Modern Art	Director	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	As above
Irish Sports Council	CEO	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	As above
National Concert Hall	Director	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	As above
National Gallery of Ireland	Director	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	As above
National Library of Ireland	Director	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	As above
National Museum of Ireland	Director	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	Civil Service Principal Officer Grade 1 Scale	As above
National Sports Campus Development Authority	CEO	€137,202	€140,632	€129,381 Reduction in salary pursuant to Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009
Fáilte Ireland Ltd	CEO	€173,649	€177,990	€156,631 Reduction in salary pursuant to Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009.
Bord na gCon	CEO	Range €156,616 – €195,718	Range €160,531 – €200,611	Range €160,531 – €200,611
Horse Racing Ireland	CEO	Range €161,843 – €202,304	Range €165,889 – €207,362	Range €165,889 – €207,362

¹ The salary of the Director of the Crawford Art Gallery Cork is paid by the Vocational Education Committee but is recouped from my Department.

Table 2: Agency CEOs/Equivalents — Benefits Packages

Agency	CEO/Equivalent	Pension	Car	Bonus/Performance Pay	Other
Arts Council	Director	Yes	No	No	No
Chester Beatty Library	Director	Yes	No	No	No
Irish Film Board	CEO	Yes	No	Yes (up to 20% of basic Salary)	Accommodation Allowance
Crawford Art Gallery	Director	Yes	No	No	No
Irish Museum of Modern Art ¹	Director	Yes	Use of Pool Car	No	No
Irish Sports Council	CEO	Yes	No	Yes (Up to 20% of Basic Salary)	No
National Concert Hall	Director	Yes	No	Yes (Up to 20% of basic Salary)	No
National Gallery of Ireland	Director	Yes	Use of Pool Car	No	No
National Library of Ireland	Director	Yes	No	No	No
National Museum of Ireland	Director	Yes	No	No	No
National Sports Campus Development Authority	CEO	Yes	No	No	No
Fáilte Ireland ²	CEO	Yes	Yes	Yes (Up to 25% of Basic Salary)	No
Bord na gCon	CEO	Yes	Yes	Yes (Up to 25% of Basic Salary)	No
Horse Racing Ireland	CEO	Yes	Yes	Yes (Up to 35% of Basic Salary)	No

¹It is a condition of the Director's contract that he resides at Kilmainham in accommodation provided by the Office of Public Works, but rent is paid in respect of this accommodation.

²Although the CEO of Fáilte Ireland is entitled to avail of a company car, the current CEO does not exercise this option.

Departmental Reports.

304. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the list of all proposals in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure relating to her Department or to bodies or agencies under her remit which have been implemented to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13891/10]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes, as published in July 2009, made a number of recommendations in respect of my Department and the agencies under its aegis. Specifically, the Special Group made proposals to reduce programme expenditure by almost €105 million in 2010 and to structurally reduce 170 staff across the Department and its agencies. It also proposed that consideration should be given to the discontinuation of my Department as a Department in its own right.

Savings of more than €35 million, or almost 7 per cent, were achieved in the Revised Estimates for 2010 for my Vote Group, compared to 2009. Moreover, the Government's moratorium on staff recruitment and promotion and its incentivised early retirement scheme continue to achieve reductions in staff numbers across my Department and its agencies. Finally, as recently as last week, the Government made structural re-alignments to a range of Departments of State. As part of these re-alignments, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism is to become the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport, having an enhanced emphasis on maximising the benefits to Ireland, in financial and other terms, of both our tourism product and our cultural and sporting heritage. In addition responsibility for the horseracing and greyhound industries has been transferred to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Departmental Agencies.

305. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary paycut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13632/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The table below sets out the salaries paid to CEOs of relevant agencies/bodies funded from my Department's Vote Group on the dates referred to by the Deputy.

With regard to voluntary pay cuts, the Deputy will appreciate that these are a private matter for the individuals in question. Bonuses were not payable in respect of the year 2009, except in the case of the CEO of Údarás na Gaeltachta. In that case, I am advised that a bonus of €3,900 covering the period Jan-Mar 2009 was awarded by the board of the agency, in line with an approved bonus scheme.

Pension contributions for CEOs are paid in accordance with guidelines set down for the relevant public service pension schemes by the Department of Finance. In the case of North/South Bodies, the North/South Pension Scheme is approved by both the Department of Finance and the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland.

I understand that the only agency to provide its CEO with a company car is Údarás na Gaeltachta. The list price of this car is €39,800 and the benefit in kind pertaining to it is €7,164. I am advised that no other benefits in kind are payable to any of the CEOs.

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Salaries paid to CEOs of relevant agencies/bodies on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008

BODY/AGENCY	Salary at 01/08/08	Salary at 01/09/08>
Western Development Commission	€107,029	€113,141
Údarás na Gaeltachta	€155,042	€158,918
Waterways Ireland	£92,636	£92,636
An Foras Teanga, comprising:		
<i>Ulster-Scots Agency</i>	£74,328	£75,815
<i>Foras na Gaeilge</i>	€119,271	€119,271

Note: Office of Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests and Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga not included.

Forbairt Pobal.

306. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Chun a fhiafraí** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil dul chun cinn ar bith déanta maidir le hiarratas ó Chomhairle Contae Dhún na nGall chun airgead a fháil le soilsiú poiblí breise a chur ar fáil ar bhealach réigiúnach Anagaire Thiar in aice le hÓstán an Chaisleáin Óir in Anagaire; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. Ní mór a nótáil go mbaineann freagracht i leith an ábhair atá luaite ag an Teachta le Comhairle Contae Dhún na nGall ar an gcéad dul síos. [13682/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): Ón mbliain 2002, tá os cionn €2 milliún i ndeontais ceadaithe ag mo Roinn faoi Scéim na mBóithre Straitéiseacha Gaeltachta chun feabhas a chur ar an bhóthar a fhreastalann ar Aerfort Idirnáisiúnta Dhún na nGall ar an Charraig Fhinn. Déanfar an cheist maidir le deontais bhreise a cheadú faoin scéim in 2010 a mheas i gcomhthéacs an tsoláthair airgid atá ar fáil chun na críche seo, ag tógáil san áireamh geallúintí agus tosaíochtaí atá ar láimh cheana.

Departmental Funding.

307. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore:** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress that has been made on a submission from Donegal County Council to have moneys provided for a number of additional public lights adjacent to Caislean Óir Annagry on the road serving Donegal Airport at Carrickfin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13683/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): It should be noted that responsibility for the matter referred to by the Deputy is a matter for Donegal County Council in the first instance.

In the period since 2002, under the Gaeltacht Strategic Roads Scheme, my Department has provided grant aid in excess of €2 million for this particular road that serves Donegal International Airport at An Charraig Fhinn. The question of approving additional grant aid under the scheme in 2010 will be considered in the context of funding available to my Department for this purpose, having regard to existing commitments and priorities.

Departmental Functions.

308. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the cost of the proposed changes to his Department; if there are logistical changes necessary such as staff changes, relocation of his Department or sections of his Department; when it is antici-

pated that all of the necessary changes will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13767/10]

309. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if legislation is necessary to ensure the transfer of any section or agency of his Department as result of recent changes; if funding of the various agencies will be affected; if so, if a mechanism is being prepared or in place to ensure that no delays take place in relation to such funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13768/10]

310. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the number and name of agencies now under his remit; the number and name of agencies previously under the remit of his Department that have being reallocated to other Departments due to recent changes; the change in policy of sections of his Department and the Minister of State responsible for each of the new policy sections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13779/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 308 to 310, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware, as part of the restructuring of Departments and agencies announced by the Taoiseach in Dáil Éireann on 23 March last to ensure greater coherence and produce more efficient delivery, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will become the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and will incorporate responsibility for social inclusion policy and family policy from the Department of Social and Family Affairs and for equality, disability, integration and human rights from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The changes in Departmental functions announced by the Taoiseach will have an effect on the Estimates of the Departments involved, including my Department. These changes will involve transferring the relevant programme expenditure from one Department to another. All such transfers of funds will be carried out strictly on an Exchequer-neutral basis. Some staff, and related administrative costs, may also be transferred between Departments, again on an Exchequer-neutral basis.

On the question of legislation, in most cases transfers of Departmental functions are carried out by Government Order under powers contained in section 6(1) of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 1939, while in some cases amending legislation may be needed. This aspect of the changes announced by the Taoiseach is still being examined in my Department and in the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and Social and Family Affairs. The issue of orders delegating functions to Ministers of State would arise subsequent to that process.

The Deputy will appreciate, therefore, that at present it is not possible to provide him with the detailed information that he has requested in relation to staff changes, the relocation of sections of my Department, the assignment/functions of agencies, the anticipated costs involved and other associated matters. However, I can confirm that I have directed officials within my Department to ensure that any costs arising in this context be kept at a minimum and will be met from within existing resources.

Departmental Reports.

311. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the list of all proposals in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and

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Expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13879/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): As the Deputy is aware, the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes represented a set of options to reduce expenditure and staff numbers across the public sector. These options were considered by the Government within the context of framing the 2010 Budget.

Gross savings of some €57 million, or almost 12%, were achieved in the 2010 Revised Estimates Volume (REV) for my Department's Vote relative to the 2009 REV. While the allocations in most expenditure programmes were reduced, the primary concern was to make every effort to ensure that the daily front-line services provided with funding from my Department were protected, especially those focused on the needs of the most socially deprived communities.

With regard to the reduction in staff numbers, the Government's moratorium on staff recruitment and promotion and other associated measures, including the incentivised early retirement scheme, have achieved, and continue to achieve, reductions in staff numbers across my Department and relevant agencies.

Finally, as part of the restructuring of Departments and agencies announced recently by the Taoiseach to ensure greater coherence and produce more efficient delivery, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will become the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and will incorporate responsibility for social inclusion policy and family policy from the Department of Social and Family Affairs and for equality, disability, integration and human rights from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. As stated by the Taoiseach in this context, it is important, while addressing the priority issues in responding to unemployment and driving economic recovery, that we do not lose sight of the importance of social development, the targeting of the most vulnerable and support for those working to make a difference right across our communities.

Community Development.

312. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural Gaeltacht Affairs the position of an application for capital funding by a group (details supplied); the commitments made to the group in the past two years; if an application for refurbishment of the present structure has now been received; if so, when a decision will be made in regard to the application in view of the urgent need to carry out the renovation or repair work to allow the activities of the group to continue until a new premises can be built; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13916/10]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): As no details were supplied in this case, I regret that I am unable to answer the Deputy's Question. If the Question is re-submitted with details of the group in question, I will be glad to respond appropriately.

Social Welfare Benefits.

313. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a person who

is on a stamp one permit is entitled to apply for a social welfare payments and or rent allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13623/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): In general, immigration stamp 1 is granted to persons to facilitate their residence while working in the State on foot of a specific permission. Most Stamp 1 holders are persons whose permission to work is obtained through an employment permit. In addition, a number of persons who are not covered by employment permit arrangements but nevertheless permitted to work by the Minister for Justice and Law Reform may be given Stamp 1 (e.g. persons granted business permission by my Department or those on Working Holiday Authorisations).

It is not possible to state the entitlements, outside of the residence and work rights, which a person may have where they hold immigration Stamp 1. Such other entitlements would be a matter for the department or agency concerned and would depend on the individual circumstances of each case.

314. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if persons who took places in programmes of study under the labour market activation scheme, but whose entitlement to jobseeker's benefit expires during the course of their programme of study and who furthermore may not qualify for jobseeker's allowance, will be allowed to receive jobseeker's benefit for the duration of their course in order to allow them to complete their studies; or if another arrangement will be made for these cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13648/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Social welfare recipients who wish to participate in a course of study under the labour market activation programme can do so under the Department's part-time education option. Unlike the Department's other educational opportunity schemes there are no specific eligibility criteria for availing of this option. This represents a greater degree of flexibility when compared to the Back-to-Education schemes as a person may be of any age and need not be unemployed for a prescribed length of time before commencing a part-time course of education.

The part-time education option was introduced to provide an increased element of flexibility to enable unemployed people to attend part-time courses of education or training and retain their jobseeker's allowance or jobseeker's benefit provided that they continue to satisfy the conditions of being available for and genuinely seeking employment on an on-going basis. A person whose jobseeker's benefit expires during a course is entitled to apply for jobseeker's allowance. Failure to qualify for job-seeker's allowance would indicate that a person has an income in excess of the means threshold. In these circumstances, it is considered that extending the duration of jobseeker's benefit or other such arrangements in these cases would be inconsistent with the objective of targeting scarce resources at those in greatest need.

The back to education programme will continue to be monitored to ensure that its objectives are being met in the light of the changing economic climate.

Social Insurance.

315. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the purpose of pay related social insurance at the present time; if the money accruing to the Government from the employer and employee PRSI contributions are ring fenced for social insurance purposes; the other purposes for which the moneys are used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13847/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Irish social insurance system is based on two fundamental principles. The contributory principle whereby there is a direct link between contributions paid and entitlement to a varying range of, short-term and long-term, benefits and pensions that are payable as a right — if and when particular contingencies arise. These benefits and pensions, unlike social assistance payments, are not subject to means testing. The solidarity principle sets out that contributions paid by insured persons are not actuarially linked to benefits but are instead redistributed to support contributors who are more vulnerable. In this way, contributions are an expression of solidarity between both earning groups and generations.

The PRSI system draws together a relationship between the employment or self-employment status and the rate of contribution payable and benefits or pensions receivable as a result of these contributions. In common with many social insurance systems throughout the world, the system is not actuarially based but funded through a pay-as-you-go approach, with the Exchequer acting as a residual financier to contributions from employees and employers.

The monies collected from employment contributions paid by employed contributors and their employers, by self-employment contributions, by optional contributions and by voluntary contributions, are paid into the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) and used to fund benefits and pensions. The SIF consists of a current account managed by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs and an investment account managed by the Minister for Finance. The Comptroller and Auditor-General examines and certifies the accounts of the SIF and provides a report to the Oireachtas.

Payments made under the Redundancy Payments Acts and the Insolvency Payments Scheme, administered by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, are also made from the SIF.

Social Welfare Appeals.

316. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he has received an appeal on a disability allowance claim in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; if, in view of the medical circumstances involved, he will look favourably on the appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13570/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

317. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be approved and awarded illness benefit. [13571/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

318. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be approved and awarded occupational injury benefit. [13592/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

319. **Deputy Michael Noonan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a person (details supplied) in County Limerick has been awarded carer's allowance; if not, the reason their application proved unsuccessful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13612/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

320. **Deputy Michael Noonan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when disability benefit will be awarded in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13613/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

321. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be approved and awarded jobseeker's allowance. [13620/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Departmental Agencies.

322. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13641/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): All of the required information is not immediately available. It will be obtained and a reply will be sent to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Social Welfare Benefits.

323. **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. [13647/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

324. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when an application for family income supplement in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will be concluded; the position regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13649/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals.

325. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when an appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will be concluded; the position regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13650/10]

326. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when an appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will be concluded; the position regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13651/10]

327. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; when this appeal will be concluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13652/10]

329. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when an appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will be concluded; the position regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13654/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 325 to 327, inclusive, and 329 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.

328. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare was refused the free fuel allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13653/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Question No. 329 answered with Question No. 325.

Social Welfare Appeals.

330. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if persons (details supplied) will have their social welfare entitlements reinstated and that the decision to refuse the applications on the basis of the habitual residence condition will be reversed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13655/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): A claim for Jobseekers Allowance by the person concerned was refused on the grounds that they did not satisfy the Habitual Residence condition. This decision was appealed to the Social Welfare Appeals Office and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome in due course.

Social Insurance.

331. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork is not entitled to make voluntary PRSI contributions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13656/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

332. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be approved family income supplement. [13660/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

333. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason mortgage supplement in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork has been reduced from €47.50 per week to €30 per week. [13667/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

334. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reasons a person (details supplied) in County Cork was not awarded their illness benefit for a week in March 2010. [13668/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

335. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason child dependent allowances was not awarded in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [13691/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

336. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason for the delay in issuing a free travel pass in respect of a person (details supplied). [13692/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

337. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason half child dependent allowance is not being awarded in respect of a person (details supplied) who is on illness benefit; and the further reason their rate of payment is at a reduced rate. [13693/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

338. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for and Family Affairs when an application for lone parent allowance will be decided on in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13698/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

339. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason a person (details supplied) in County Longford has had their disability allowance discontinued and been requested to return their free travel pass; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13701/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Pension Provisions.

340. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason for the delay in awarding State pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare. [13710/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

341. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason for the delay in awarding family income supplement in respect of a person (detail supplied) in County Kildare. [13711/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Pension Provisions.

342. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when a State pension will be awarded in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [13712/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

343. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if she will take steps to expedite an application for permission to work under the condition for receipt of illness benefit in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13765/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

344. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application for fuel allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13766/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals.

345. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs when an appeal

against the disallowance of an illness benefit claim in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will be decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13794/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

346. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding an application under the family income supplement scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13795/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

347. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason a person (details supplied) cannot claim jobseeker's benefits despite having paid social insurance contributions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13800/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

348. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the amount spent by community welfare on payments for Communion or Confirmation expenses for 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009; the eligibility criteria for this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13802/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the statistics sought by the Deputy.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, which is administered on behalf of the Department by the community welfare division of the Health Service Executive, an exceptional needs payment (ENP) may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which the applicant is unable to meet out of his/her own resources. There is no automatic entitlement to a payment, or no predetermined amounts under the different categories for exceptional needs payments. Each application is determined by the Executive based on the particular circumstances of the case.

349. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway who applied for jobseeker's assistance and has been granted €48.50 per week is not entitled to a higher rate of payment in view of the fact that he has had no employment since 1 January 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13815/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

350. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of persons in receipt of rent supplement who have had the 30 hour rule waived due to the fact they were on a waiting list for the rental accommodation scheme. [13824/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Pension Provisions.

351. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the pension entitlements of persons (details supplied). [13828/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits.

352. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he will support the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5. [13830/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Departmental Staff.

353. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of civil servants and the number of public servants currently responsible for the community services programme of FÁS who will now be transferred to his Department; if he will state the office in which they will be located and the size of the budget as set out in the Estimates for 2010 for which they will have responsibility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13866/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): FÁS, operating under the aegis of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, delivers various community based services. The Government has decided to transfer responsibility for some of these to my Department. The two Departments and FÁS are working together to identify the staff, financial, IT, accommodation and other resources that will need to transfer to my Department from FÁS and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to give effect to the new arrangements. As this process is not yet complete, the details sought by the Deputy are not available at this time.

Departmental Reports.

354. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the list of all proposals in the report of the special group on public service numbers and expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under its remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13888/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The following recommendations of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes were implemented in Budget 2010:

1. Welfare rates should be reduced by 5% generally or alternatively, by 3% reversing the October 2008 Budget increases.

— Weekly rates of payment to people under 66 years of age were reduced by about 4.1% or an average of €8.30 per week.

2. Reduce and standardise Child Benefit payments.

— The higher and lower rates of Child Benefit were reduced by €16 per week.

3. Grading of Jobseeker's Allowance by age: the personal rate for new claimants between the ages of 20 and 24 should be reduced to €150.

— The rate of Jobseeker's Allowance for new recipients was reduced to €100 per week for those aged 20 and 21 years (in line with the rate for 18 and 19 year olds) and to €150 per week for those aged 22 to 24 years.

4. Discontinue the Treatment Benefits Scheme

— Entitlement to the Scheme has been limited to medical and surgical appliances and to the free examination elements of dental and optical benefits.

5. Re-examine the level of the Rent Supplement payment on a regional basis.

— This review is nearing completion.

Social Welfare Benefits.

355. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of social contributions that have been accumulated in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 16; if they will be entitled to the contributory State pension when they turn 66 in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13898/10]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Due to staff action currently being taken, I regret that I am unable to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Departmental Agencies.

356. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence the salary of the chief executive of each agency under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person, including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13633/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): I regret to advise the Deputy that due to industrial action it is not possible to provide a response to his question at this time.

Departmental Reports.

357. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Defence the list of all proposals in the report of the special group on public service numbers and expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13880/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): All of the main savings measures identified in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes have been implemented, or alternative savings have been implemented, as follows:

[Deputy Tony Killeen.]

Special group's recommendation	Implementation
Reduction in personnel in Permanent Defence Force and Department over 2 to 3 years.	Recommended reductions already achieved.
Rationalisation of Ireland's overseas commitments — end participation in UN mission in Chad.	Commitment in Kosovo and Bosnia- Herzegovina will be scaled back in 2010.
Reduction of the Reserve Defence Force by two-thirds.	The number of paid training days available for RDF members reduced.
Close the sail-training scheme (Asgard II).	The sail-training scheme has been discontinued.
Further consolidation of property portfolio.	Additional property sales are planned in 2010.
Charge the full economic cost of aid to the civil power, aid to the civil authority services etc.	An Post, the Central Bank and other organisations will be charged for security services on the same basis as the commercial banks. The Central Bank has agreed to pay such costs while discussions with the other organisations have been initiated.
Extend the timeframe of the naval vessel replacement programme.	The final award of contract to purchase new naval vessels will be subject to Government approval and agreement on funding.

The Special Group's recommendation to close the Army Equitation School has not been accepted.

Special Areas of Conservation.

358. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his Department will go ahead with the proposed sale of the All Saints Bog and Esker special area of conservation, County Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13603/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I understand the particular site to which the Question refers is part of Kilnaglinny bog, an undesignated bog adjacent to All Saints Bog Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The land in question is owned by my Department and is currently being used for turf-extraction by a number of turf-cutters who moved from the SAC. These cutters have expressed an interest in purchasing the land.

I am considering proposals concerning the arrangements that will be necessary to implement the cessation of remaining turf-cutting on raised bog SACs, including All Saints Bog, as required by the Habitats Directive and our own Habitats Regulations.

The future use and ownership of this bog is being considered as a part of the general arrangements for those affected by the cessation. My Department will be in touch with the turf-cutters in question in due course.

Departmental Agencies.

359. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the salary of the chief executive of each agency under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person, including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13636/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Water Charges.

360. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if there are any concessions with regard to water rates for schools that have acquired a green flag status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13678/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Government's Water Pricing Policy requires local authorities to recover the cost of providing water services from non domestic users of these services. Water charges are levied by local authorities based on volumetric use measured by water meters. There is no specific concession in relation to water charges for schools that have acquired green flag status. However, where a school has undertaken measures to reduce water consumption as part of the Green Schools Programme, they will incur lower water charges. My colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science, is providing funding for water conservation measures in schools as part of the Summer Works Scheme for 2010 which is managed by her Department.

Special Areas of Conservation.

361. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding turf-cutting; and the proposals that exist with regard to turf-cutting. [13697/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The derogation allowing a continuation of turf cutting on 32 Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) that were notified for designation in 1999 has now expired. A further 23 raised bog SACs were notified for designation in 2002 and 75 Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) were designated in 2004. The derogation on these sites will expire at the end of 2011 and 2013 respectively.

The Working Group on the Cessation of Turf Cutting in Designated Areas is nearing completion of its deliberations and I expect to receive its report very shortly. I will conclude my consideration of the report and any recommendations it contains as rapidly as possible, and will then be in touch with affected individuals and representative groups in regard to the position.

Waste Disposal.

362. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that, due to apparent over-capacity in Fingal's waste disposal system and in advance of the Portrane WTP coming on stream, Fingal County Council is transporting leachate from the Balleally landfill in North Dublin on a regular basis to discharge into the foul sewer adjacent to the Phoenix Park train station in Dublin 15; the safety precautions that are being taken to protect local residents, flora and fauna; if batch testing is being carried out on discharged leachate; if radioactive isotopes, asbestos fibres, dioxins, bovine spongiform encephalopathy prions, mercury, chromium, lead, cadmium, chlorides, cyanides, ammonia, phenols or xylene have been screened for or found, and their concentrations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13699/10]

370. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that tankers are discharging leachate

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from Fingal County Council landfill into the main foul sewer in proximity to the new Phoenix Park railway station off the Navan Road, Dublin 15; if batches of the leachate are tested on a regular basis; if there is an Environmental Protection Agency licence associated with this activity; if noxious substances or gases have been identified, in view of the fact that prevailing winds bring very unpleasant smells to local residential neighbourhoods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13848/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 362 and 370 together.

From enquiries my Department has made I understand that contracted tankers are carrying out the temporary and supervised discharge of leachate from Fingal County Council's licensed landfill at Balleally into the main foul sewer at the location in question. This effluent is entering an enclosed foul sewer system from where it is carried to the waste water treatment plant for full treatment. The Council has indicated that as this discharge is being supervised by council staff it considers that there is no exposure and therefore no risk to any member of the public because of this activity. No other leachate or effluent is permitted to be discharged at this location.

The arrangement in question has been put in place with the consent of Dublin City Council, which is the local authority with responsibility for the sewer involved. Section 40 of the Waste Management Act 1996 provides for the granting by the EPA of a waste licence for a landfill or other waste facility. The conditions applying to a waste licence and the enforcement of such conditions are matters for the EPA. However, I understand that the discharge of the leachate from Balleally landfill into the public sewer in question by Fingal County Council has been agreed with the EPA.

Grant Payments.

363. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when a decision will be made on an application by a church (details supplied) in County Longford for a civil structures conservation grant for 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13700/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested cannot currently be provided as a result of industrial action.

Departmental Bodies.

364. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the date he or his Department received the reports from the Dublin Docklands Development Authority; the date he forwarded each report to the Attorney General; when he expects to receive advice from the Attorney General; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13713/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department received the Dublin Docklands Development Authority's report on corporate governance, together with two supporting independent consultants' reports, on 1 February 2010. A further report from the Authority regarding its participation in the Becbay Joint Venture was received on 5 February.

Copies of the corporate governance reports and the Becbay paper were submitted to the Office of the Attorney General on 3 and 5 February, respectively, and following initial consider-

ation I wrote to the Attorney General on 12 February in relation to them. A number of advices have since been received and discussions have taken place between my Department and the Office of the Attorney General.

I expect the engagement with the Attorney General's Office to continue in the context of the completion of my consideration of the reports and my reporting back to Government.

365. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he expects to appoint a new chief executive of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13714/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The appointment of a new Chief Executive of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority is a matter for the Authority in the first instance. My Department has recently received proposals from the Authority on a number of staffing matters, including the issue of a CEO appointment. These proposals will be considered, in conjunction with the Department of Finance, in the context of the consideration of wider governance and other issues in relation to the Authority, and taking account also of the moratorium on public sector recruitment.

366. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the programmes the Dublin Docklands Development Authority has cut back on in 2009 and 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13715/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): In the context of addressing its current financial circumstances and progressing towards a break-even operating position, it is a matter for the Dublin Docklands Development Authority, in the first instance, to decide on the measures to be pursued. In that regard, given the Authority's difficult financial position, its Board has examined all budget lines and has cut all discretionary expenditure on projects and programmes, and curtailed expenditure on all non-essential items. All of the Authority's programmes, in terms of area regeneration and social regeneration, are affected. In addition, the Authority has put in place a radically reduced organisation structure. Staffing in the Authority has been reduced from 56 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) in January 2009 to 32 at present.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

367. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the proposed new sewerage scheme for Courtmacsherry and Timoleague, County Cork; when he expects work to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13717/10]

368. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, further to Parliamentary Question No. 62 of 21 January 2010, if he will announce when the Bandon sewerage scheme, County Cork, will go to tender in view of the need to complete the scheme due to flooding issues in the town; when he expects that the water services investment programme 2010 to 2012 will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13808/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 367 and 368 together.

In relation to the position on the proposed sewerage scheme for Courtmacsherry and Timoleague I refer to the reply to Question No. 560 of 2 February 2010. In relation to the position on

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the Bandon Sewerage Scheme, I refer to the reply to Question No. 62 of 21 January 2010. I expect to publish the Water Services Investment Programme 2010 to 2012 in the coming weeks.

Planning Issues.

369. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the construction of a mast (details supplied) within 25 ft. of a private residence in Brownstown, County Kildare; if this mast is an exempted development under Class 31(j) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13823/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): In general, planning permission must be obtained for the erection of an antenna support structure or mast. Under Article 6 and Schedule 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, certain classes of development carried out by a statutory undertaker authorised to provide a telecommunications service are, subject to specified conditions, exempted development for the purposes of the Planning Acts. These include—

- the attachment of additional antennae to an existing antenna support structure;
- the erection of an antenna support structure in place of an existing antenna support structure, and
- the attachment of antennae to certain existing structures, such as lamp posts, flag poles, CCTV poles, electricity pylons and certain public or commercial buildings (other than educational facilities, childcare facilities or hospitals).

The application and interpretation of the Regulations is a matter for the relevant planning authority in the first instance, although a question in relation to whether works/structures are or are not exempted development may be referred to An Bord Pleanála under section 5 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. Enforcement of planning control is also a matter for the planning authority, which can take action where a development requiring planning permission has not obtained this permission or where permission has not been complied with.

Question No. 370 answered with Question No. 362.

Departmental Reports.

371. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the list of all proposals in the report of the special group on public service numbers and expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13883/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Expenditure provisions for 2010 for my Department are set out in the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2010 published by the Minister for Finance. These provisions have been determined in the context of the overall provision for public services, reflect the need to reduce public spending and, as indicated by the Minister for Finance in his Financial Statement on 9 December 2009, have been guided by the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes. My Department, local authorities and related agencies are working to maximise outputs from the 2010 provisions through prioritisation, increased efficiency and lower procurement costs generally.

Recommendations in the Report relating to my Department are reflected in savings in administrative costs arising from reductions in public service numbers and pay; the reduced Exchequer contribution to the Local Government Fund (€226 million in 2010, in the context of wider developments relating to local government finance); the review of the EPA which has recently commenced; the ongoing rationalisation of agencies in the housing area; and policy developments concerning charging for treated water use and more extensive use of leasing to ensure overall housing output is maintained at the highest level possible. I have also announced details of the work of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group which, consistent with the approach in the Report, will look at the cost base and expenditure of, and numbers employed in, local authorities.

Departmental Agencies.

372. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13631/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I regret to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to provide a response to his Question at this time. I will write to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Grant Payments.

373. **Deputy John Cregan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to increase the current grant of €4,000 payable by Sustainable Energy Ireland for external wall insulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13854/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): There are no plans to increase the grant of €4,000 for external wall insulation under the Home Energy Savings Scheme.

Departmental Reports.

374. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the list of all proposals in the report of the special group on public service numbers and expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13878/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The following table shows the current status of proposals in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure relating to my Department and to bodies and agencies under its remit. Implementation of the proposals in the Report is a matter for the Government. As the Deputy is aware the report of the Special Group outlined a wide range of proposals across all Departments, a number of which, if agreed to proceed, can only be achieved through restructuring over a number of years. The consideration of the proposals for my Department and the Agencies under its aegis is ongoing and as the table shows, progress has been made in relation to certain proposals.

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Savings outlined in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure

Merge DHDA with EI/IDA	Structural — not implemented
Merge ComReg with BAI	Structural — not implemented
Transfer IFCO into BAI	Structural — not implemented
Partially fund TG4 from TV Licence	Not included in Budget 2010 but direct Exchequer subvention to TG4 reduced by €2.083 million
Terminate DCENR/SEI energy awareness programmes	Separate budget for Energy Efficiency Awareness eliminated in Budget 2010 (€0.894 million saving)
Rationalise multiplicity of energy efficiency schemes run by SEI	Being rationalised in the context of the multi-annual National Retrofit Programme announced in Budget 2010
Transfer energy research funding to new single funding stream for all research	Structural — energy research function retained.
Review operations of Bord na Móna to achieve optimal value	Will be done on an ongoing basis — any potential savings arising would not accrue to the Exchequer
Merge OSi and the Valuation Office with the PRA	Structural — not implemented
Secure efficiencies/increased revenue worth 20% of GSI's operating costs	DCENR proposes to undertake Value for Money Review of GSI in 2010 to secure efficiencies/increased revenue
Secure additional savings from the merger of the regional fisheries boards	Merger will take place in 2010 and direct Exchequer funding for Inland Fisheries reduced by €3.145 million
Transfer responsibility for Inland Fisheries from DCENR to DEHLG	Structural — not implemented
Reduce DCENR authorised number of civil servants by 30 posts	DCENR has achieved target
Reduce DCENR agency staff by 26	Structural, under ongoing consideration; new functions in some Agencies will impact on target

Fisheries Protection.

375. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he plans to reopen bass fishing for commercial purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13614/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The Federation of Irish Fishermen (FIF) has made a proposal to my Department regarding the possibility of a limited offshore Sea Bass fishery. This proposal is being given careful consideration in the context of advice received from both the Marine Institute and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority. In coming to a decision on the matter, I am particularly conscious of the need to maintain the current protection afforded to the inshore Sea Bass fishery. This factor is also recognised in the FIF proposal which gives assurances that the inshore Sea Bass fishery around our coast would not be targeted for commercial fishing. Under the FIF proposal, vessels would be permitted to land Sea Bass caught south of (51.30'N) in area VII. This area is approx 50 km off the SE coast of Ireland.

In order to take account of the views of all stakeholders, including anglers, Minister Killeen wrote to Minister Lenihan in the Department of Energy, Communications and Natural Resources, who has responsibility for inland fisheries, seeking his views on this proposal before making any final decision in the matter. Minister Lenihan's response will be taken into account in the matter.

Grant Payments.

376. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork is having difficulty with regard to their suckler cow welfare scheme payment arising from alleged errors in calf registration for which responsibility does not rest with the applicant; if he will make immediate arrangements for payment in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13577/10]

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.

Animal Welfare.

377. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his plans to re-locate or proscribe the Horse Market in Smithfield, Dublin 7; his further plans to introduce new animal protection laws that would alleviate the suffering of animals brought to the market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13588/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My responsibilities do not extend to issues regarding trading in public places. Such matters are for the relevant local authority and in the case of the horse market at Smithfield the relevant local authority is Dublin City Council.

With regard to the introduction of new animal welfare legislation the position is that an Animal Health and Welfare Bill which will give effect to commitments in the Programme for Government and the Renewed Programme for Government on issues relating to animal health and welfare is being prepared in my Department. The new legislation will amend and consolidate legislation in the area of animal health, particularly to reflect the changed disease status of our animals. Existing legislation will also be updated to ensure that the welfare of all animals, including non-farm animals is properly protected and that the penalties for offenders are increased significantly. The Bill also provides for the consolidation of responsibility for the welfare of all animals (including non-farm animals) within my Department.

I intend to submit the proposed heads of this Bill to the Government at an early date this year.

Harbours and Piers.

378. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his plans for the harbour at Cape Clear, County Cork which is deteriorating and in view of the fact that if it falls further disrepair the island may not be accessed by boats and ferries. [13610/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My Department's Engineering Division is aware of and continues to monitor the condition of the harbour at Cape Clear.

A number of options are currently being examined to determine the optimum intervention strategy for the harbour. In addition I have this year allocated €30,000 under the 2010 Fishery Harbours and Coastal Infrastructural Development Programme for design works associated with the bull-nose at Cape Clear Harbour.

Equine Industry.

379. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied that the passport system for the equine industry is working as required under the

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legislation; the number of animals that have been found to date to have been moved without a passport and have been detected by his Department; the number of animals that have been stopped in transit due for export due to the fact they did not have correct passports or identity documents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13617/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): European Commission Regulation No. 504/2008 set out an improved system for the identification for equidae and is binding on all Member States of the European Union. All keepers of horses, passport issuing bodies and veterinary practitioners are obliged to comply with the provisions of this Regulation. The enhanced system for identifying equidae has three elements (1) an equine passport; (2) a microchip implanted in an equine to create an unequivocal link between the passport and the equine and (3) the assignment of a unique equine life number to the equine in the database of the approved passport issuing organisation. I am satisfied the approved passport issuing organisations are operating in compliance with this Regulation this country.

Regulation 504/2008 requires that all equines must have a passport, foals must be identified in accordance with the Regulation within six months of birth.

Keepers of equines must have passports for their animals in order to be eligible to participate in a wide range of events and activities across the equine sector e.g. thoroughbred breeding and racing, showjumping, competitions, shows, sales and also if certain veterinary medications are to be availed of. Equines cannot be considered for slaughter for human consumption unless they have a passport.

My Department does not maintain a record of instances where equines are found without passports, there is no requirement to do so. Officials from my Department who carry out checks of equine passports at Rosslare and Dublin ports have found in recent years near 100% compliance with the requirement for horses to be accompanied by passports; they observe that on foot of publicity campaigns undertaken by my Department in recent years there is a high level of awareness amongst those involved in the equine industry of the passport requirements.

Departmental Agencies.

380. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13629/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The information requested by the Deputy regarding the Chief Executives in the agencies under the aegis of my Department is set out in tabular form below.

CEOs in the non-commercial agencies for which my Department is responsible are subject to pay adjustments in accordance with the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act, 2009. These pay adjustments are set out in the table below.

The Deputy should refer to the agencies concerned regarding information on pension contributions.

Organisation	Salary 1/08/2008	Salary 1/09/2008	Current Pay scale	Bonus	Car
	€	€	€		
National Milk Agency	90,346	92,605	85,845	N/A	N/A
Teagasc	150,795	154,865	139,800	Suspended for 2008 & 2009	Car allowance paid
Bord Bia	162,795	166,865	151,800	N/A	N/A
Irish Marine Institute	147,036	150,712	138,655	Suspended for 2008 & 2009	N/A
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	130,236	133,491	122,812	Suspended for 2008 & 2009	N/A
SFPA — Chairman	117,446	120,382	110,844	N/A	N/A
Coillte	297,024	297,024	297,024 Increases sanctioned on 1/03/2008 and 1/09/2008 were not implemented	Suspended for 2008 & 2009	Car allowance paid
Irish National Stud*	126,391	126,391	133,419	Provision in contract	Provision in contract

*A new CEO was appointed in Feb 2010.

Alternative Energy Projects.

381. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the criteria and eligibility for applications under the biomass grant scheme; if growers whose crops have failed over the winter 2009/2010 are eligible to apply for this grant to help rejuvenate their crops; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13644/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The Miscanthus and Willow BioEnergy scheme came into operation on 5th February 2010 and the closing date for applications for pre-planting approval is 31st March 2010.

The full terms and conditions are available on my Department's website, www.agriculture.gov.ie

The Scheme is open to applicants who meet the following criteria:

- Applicants who are landowners or have leasehold title to the land and have responsibility for farming the land on which it is proposed to carry out the plantation.
- Where an applicant has leasehold title to the land, aid will not be granted unless the leasehold title allows for planting or where the landowner has consented to planting in a supplementary lease.
- An applicant who is not the owner of land involved shall only be admitted to the Scheme if they are a family member and are managing the land. Such an application can only be made with the written permission of the landowner.
- Commonage shares, rented lands and grazing rights are not eligible for payment under the Scheme.

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- Applications will only be accepted in relation to the establishment of new sites, which were not previously planted with miscanthus and willow.

Grant Payments.

382. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their payment under the suckler cow grant scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13645/10]

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.

383. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when payment will be awarded in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13646/10]

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.

384. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) will receive their REP scheme and suckling payment. [13725/10]

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.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme.

385. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce a 50% top up payment to farmers based on islands in the new agri-environment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13734/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The amendment to the Rural Development Programme approved by the European Commission, under which I have introduced the new Agri-Environment Options Scheme today, does not include provision for a higher payment to farmers on islands.

386. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if a special island top up is awarded to all island farmers who were accepted into the REP scheme four; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13735/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): In REPS 4, land farmed on off-shore islands receives an additional 15% over and above the general rates of payment.

Grant Payments.

387. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if all outstanding payments will be made on shed grants for island farmers in view of the increased transport and cargo costs incurred by these farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13736/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The arrangements for payment of grants under the Farm Waste Management Scheme on a phased basis were

confirmed in early 2009 with the first instalment of 40 per cent being paid in that year as claims were approved, a further instalment of 40 per cent in early 2010, and the remaining instalment of 20 per cent in January 2011. In addition, I also announced at that time that a special ex-gratia payment not exceeding 3.5 per cent of the value of the deferred amount would be made to farmers whose Farm Waste Management grants are partially deferred in the manner set out above. This payment will be made in January 2011 along with the final instalment.

I have no plans to alter these arrangements at this time. However, the Deputy should note that the Scheme provided for an increase of 25 per cent in my Department's Standard Costs in the case of investments carried out on off-shore islands.

388. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if there will be cuts to any island farm payments due to their disadvantage as opposed to mainland farmers; the steps that he will take to encourage the continuation of farming on our islands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13737/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): A special category was included in the Single Payment Scheme 2007 national reserve for off-shore island farmers where the value of existing entitlements were less than the District Electoral Division (DED) average value. Under this measure, some €64,000 was allocated to Island farmers. This top-up will, of course, apply each year and will be worth some €384,000 over the period 2007-2012 inclusive.

Dumping at Sea Permits.

389. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his plans to dredge a lough (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13803/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): A number of dredging operations have been undertaken by Donegal County Council at Lough Swilly in recent years. All dredging operations require a Dumping at Sea Permit, and my Department has issued a number of permits to the Council in order to facilitate dredging at the location referred to.

However, following the enactment of the Foreshore and Dumping at Sea (Amendment) Act 2009, responsibility for the grant of Dumping at Sea permits was transferred from my Department to the Environmental Protection Agency. The transfer of this responsibility took effect from 15 February 2010. Any enquiries regarding the grant of Dumping at Sea permits should be directed to that agency.

Grant Payments.

390. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their suckler cow welfare scheme payment. [13827/10]

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.

Animal Medicines.

391. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his views on whether the current categories for the administration of animal medicines are helpful to farmers in view of the difficulties arising from the prescription-only medical exempt category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13829/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Under the European Communities (Animal Remedies) (No 2) Regulations 2007 (SI 786/2007), responsibility for categorising veterinary medicines in one of six mandatory routes of supply rests with the Irish Medicines Board, acting in its role as national licensing authority. Decisions in individual cases are made by the Board on the basis of its assessment of the degree of restriction which is appropriate, following its scientific evaluation of the product in question and taking account of relevant criteria laid down in EU and national legislation.

I believe that the current range of categories is appropriate having regard to the interests of farmers and the need to protect public and animal health. In the most recent review of EU medicines legislation, my Department was to the forefront in seeking to ensure that farmers would continue to have reasonable access to medicines and we were succeeded, despite European Commission proposals to the contrary, in maintaining an ‘off-prescription’ category for a range of products such as wormers and certain vaccines.

Products assigned to the “Prescription Only (Exempt)” category can be supplied, without prescription, by a pharmacist or by a veterinary practitioner for animals under his or her care. The POM(E) category exists in the route of supply hierarchy to enable IMB, where it considers it appropriate, to assign particular products, which would otherwise be restricted to being supplied only on the basis of a veterinary prescription (POM), to this category. My Department is not aware of particular difficulties with this supply category, which, in any event, must be viewed in the context of the totality of the route of supply hierarchy.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme.

392. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the promised €50 million for the new farm environment scheme will be made available. [13835/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): I have launched the new Agri-Environment Options Scheme today. The Minister for Finance agreed in December last to provide for the launch of the new scheme at a rate of up to €5,000 for approximately 10,000 participants.

Grant Payments.

393. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the percentage of REP scheme four applicants that have been paid on a county basis. [13836/10]

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.

394. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be awarded the suckler cow welfare scheme. [13839/10]

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.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme.

395. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his plans to lessen the negative impact of the proposed new agri-environment options scheme on small and medium sized farms involved in REP schemes for a number of years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13855/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Under the new Agri-Environment Options Scheme which I have launched today, farmers will be paid to undertake identifiable and verifiable environmental actions and have a menu of options from which to choose. The Government has provided for the launch of the new scheme at a rate of up to €5,000 for approximately 10,000 participants.

Generally speaking, the amount any farmer participating in the AEOS will be paid will depend on the number of individual actions he or she undertakes. I am satisfied that many participants will have the opportunity to reach the maximum payment of €5,000. I am confident that very many others will get very close to that figure. In the current economic climate, I believe the Scheme will be attractive to farmers and will also deliver real, worthwhile environmental benefits.

The new Scheme was approved by the European Commission, as part of an amendment to the Rural Development Programme 2007–13, after several months of detailed and difficult negotiations involving officials of my Department. Any substantive changes to the amended RDP would require further negotiations with the Commission. Following discussions with the farming organisations, however, I have asked my officials to take up some points of detail with the Commission with a view to getting their agreement to changes.

396. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make provision under the new agri-environmental options scheme for farms to continue to be managed in a REP scheme mode; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13856/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Under the new Agri-Environment Options Scheme which I have launched today, farmers will be paid to undertake identifiable and verifiable environmental actions and have a menu of options from which to choose. Many of the options were previously features of REPS. A whole-farm approach on the REPS model is however no longer a possibility.

397. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his plans to offset the impact of the new agri-environment options scheme, which as proposed, will be another blow to the rural economy, and will in no way deliver the €50 million promised in budget 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13857/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Under the new Agri-Environment Options Scheme which I have launched today, farmers will be paid to undertake identifiable and verifiable environmental actions and have a menu of options from which to choose. Generally speaking, the amount any farmer participating in the AEOS will be paid will depend on the number of individual actions he or she undertakes. I am satisfied that many participants will have the opportunity to reach the maximum payment of €5,000. I am confident that very many others will get very close to that figure. In the current economic climate, I believe the Scheme will be attractive to farmers and will also deliver real, worthwhile environmental benefits.

398. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in respect of the proposed agri-environment scheme which replaces the REP scheme, he will meet the farming organisations to discuss significant changes and improvements which could be made to the scheme to make it more effective and acceptable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13868/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Under the new Agri-Environment Options Scheme which I have launched today, farmers will be paid to undertake identifiable and verifiable environmental actions and have a menu of options from which to choose. The Government has provided for the launch of the new scheme at a rate of up to €5,000 for approximately 10,000 participants.

Generally speaking, the amount any farmer participating in the AEOS will be paid will depend on the number of individual actions he or she undertakes. I am satisfied that many participants will have the opportunity to reach the maximum payment of €5,000. I am confident that very many others will get very close to that figure. In the current economic climate, I believe the Scheme will be attractive to farmers and will also deliver real, worthwhile environmental benefits.

The new Scheme was approved by the European Commission, as part of an amendment to the Rural Development Programme 2007–13, after several months of detailed negotiations involving officials of my Department. Any substantive changes to the amended RDP would require further negotiations with the Commission. Following discussions with the farming organisations, however, I have asked my officials to take up some points of detail with the Commission with a view to getting their agreement to changes.

Departmental Reports.

399. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the list of all proposals in the report of the special group on public service numbers and expenditure relating to his Department or to bodies or agencies under his remit which have been implemented to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13877/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The position in relation to the main recommendations of the Special Group on Public Numbers and Expenditure Programmes is set out in the following table:

Main recommendations	Current position
Terminate Suckler Cow Scheme	The rate of payment under the Scheme was reduced from €80 to €40 per eligible animal in the 2009 Budget in October 2008.
Close REPS 4 and no roll-over of participants from REPS 2 & 3 into REPS 4	REPS 4 was closed to new applicants on July 2009.
Reduce the annual expenditure on the Disadvantaged Area Compensatory Allowance Scheme by 30%	Expenditure was reduced by 14% or €35m in the 2009 Budget in October 2008
Reduce staff numbers and implement efficiency savings in the Department and State bodies under the Department's aegis	The Administrative Budget for the Department of €257 million in 2010 represents a reduction of €46 million in administration costs compared to 2008 and includes reductions in salary, overtime and travel costs due to (a) lower staff numbers, reduced overtime and travel allocations, (b) improved efficiencies and (c) the rationalisation of the Department's local office network. Reductions of the Grants-in-Aid to the State bodies under the aegis of the Department include €25 million cuts compared to 2008 in funding for administration and operating costs due to reductions in staff numbers and improved efficiencies.

The Vote for my Department has been reduced from a gross outturn of €2.104 billion in 2008 to €1.758 billion in 2010, a reduction of €346 million. The lower 2010 budget provision reflects

a combination of factors including lower administration costs, the closure of certain schemes to new applicants, the introduction of lower payment rates, lower levels of funding to discharge outstanding liabilities under existing schemes and lower budget provision for once-off items such as the cost of measures to deal with the dioxin crisis in the pig meat sector.

Grant Payments.

400. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of 2009 single farm payment applications submitted by persons in counties Roscommon and Leitrim respectively; the numbers paid and those where payment is outstanding in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13908/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The following are the details sought in relation to applications submitted by Leitrim and Roscommon herd-owners under the 2009 Single Payment Scheme:

County	Total number of applications	Number paid to date	Value of payments
Leitrim	3,647	3,330	€17,791,251
Roscommon	6,065	5,654	€41,539,891

Applicants under a variety of other schemes, including Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and REPS, are obliged to submit SPS applications, even where they are not applying under the Single Payment Scheme. Of those applicants Leitrim and Roscommon applicants who have not been paid the 2009 Single Payment, 194 Leitrim applicants do not hold SPS entitlements, while 244 Roscommon applicants similarly do not hold entitlements.

School Staffing.

401. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the alternative arrangements that will be put in place for substitute cover in County Monaghan in view of the decision by her Department to discontinue the teacher supply panel scheme which up to now provided substitute cover for 12 local schools in that county. [13812/10]

427. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if she will review her decision to discontinue the teacher supply panel scheme which provides substitute cover for 12 local schools in County Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13811/10]

428. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science her views on whether the decision to discontinue the teacher supply panel in County Monaghan will cause undue hardship for schools, in view of the fact that principals will now be forced to search for their own substitute teacher at short notice, verify qualifications and introduce them to their school instead of just simply contacting the supply panel scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13813/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 401, 427 and 428 together.

The supply teacher scheme was initially set up at primary level over 15 years ago at a time when schools had difficulty getting substitute teachers. The supply scheme operates on the basis of an additional full-time teacher being allocated to a school to cover certified sick leave absences in that school and a cluster of neighbouring schools. If the teacher is not required on

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a given day to cover sick leave absences they generally assist with other work in their school such as administrative duties. There are 60 posts allocated to the scheme.

A value for money review of the Supply Teacher Scheme was published in July 2006. The review found that approximately 60% of these teachers' time was used to cover sick leave absences with the balance on various other school duties. This reflects the unpredictable nature of sick leave absences.

While there are benefits for schools in having these full-time teachers it is considered more cost effective to use the normal substitution arrangements that apply to all other schools to cover sick leave absences instead of having a cohort of full-time teachers "on call" all the time in these schools to cover sick leave absences that may or may not arise.

The supply teacher scheme will cease from the start of the 2010/11 school year. The teachers concerned will be redeployed in accordance with the existing redeployment arrangements to other schools that have vacancies.

Due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to give the full details sought by the Deputy.

Child Abuse.

402. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the trust fund established for victims of abuse in church-run institutions; and the way she plans to administer and distribute these funds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13894/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The proposal to establish a trust for the support of victims and to other education and welfare purposes arises in the context of the call on the religious Congregations to commit to making further substantial contributions by way of reparation, following the publication of the Ryan Report.

The present position is that the Government has been considering the offers of contributions from the religious Congregations that were party to the 2002 Indemnity Agreement together with the report of the panel appointed to assess the statements of resources submitted by the Congregations. It is expected to publish the panel's report and details of the offers from the Congregations shortly, following meetings with representatives of the former residents and with the religious Congregations.

Schools Curriculum.

403. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the content of a press article (details supplied); and if she is satisfied that the organisation referred to therein should have access to schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13590/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Officials within my Department are aware of the press article referred to by the Deputy.

Schools may invite visitors to support the work of the curriculum where appropriate.

My Department has recently issued best practice guidelines to schools which include specific guidance relating to the role of any visitors in supporting the implementation of the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme. These guidelines require that visits are carefully planned with the relevant school personnel, and that the content of talks/programmes by outside facilitators are consistent with school policies, and with the SPHE programme.

It is a matter for each school authority to decide on the suitability of any proposed visitors and to determine the suitability of the support materials and resources to be used.

Local Drugs Task Forces.

404. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the proposed reductions to projects run through local drugs task force in Dublin in 2010, with a cessation of this funding in 2011; if there has been any review of these proposals; or if there are plans to review these proposals. [13600/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department provides funds for over thirty projects in Local Drugs Task Force areas.

In the context of the budget for 2010 and the difficult fiscal climate, it was decided that funding for these projects was to be reduced from €3,643,000 in 2009 to €2,461,000 in 2010 and to cease from 2011.

My Department is currently reviewing the implications of the budget decisions relating to funding allocations for all of these projects. A key aspect of the review is to determine whether my Department is the appropriate location for these projects or whether funding should more appropriately be channelled through another Department or agency. The Department will submit recommendations for my consideration based on the review which, it is anticipated, will be completed shortly.

Higher Education Grants.

405. **Deputy Paul Gogarty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if a person who is in receipt of a vocational education committee third level maintenance grant and who becomes seriously ill, and then has to repeat the year, is entitled to receive the maintenance grant again; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13602/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Clause 7.2 of the VEC Scholarship Scheme provides that a VEC shall have discretion to allow funding for a repeat year of study in exceptional circumstances, such as certified serious illness. The exercise of this discretion and the decision on eligibility is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant VEC.

Child Abuse.

406. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if she is satisfied that in the event of an allegation of abuse being made to a teacher, informing the designated liaison person in the school is sufficient; and her views on whether it should be mandatory that the allegation goes directly to either the Health Service Executive or the Gardaí. [13608/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The primary statutory responsibility for child protection lies with the Health Services Executive (HSE). The role of my Department is to provide guidance and support to schools in implementing child protection policy and to refer any allegations received to the appropriate authorities for investigation.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has issued child protection guidelines to all schools. The guidelines are based on Children First — the Department of Health & Children's national guidelines for the protection and welfare of children. The Children First guidelines make very clear the reporting and investigation mechanisms to be followed in cases of suspected child abuse wherever they occur.

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Consistent with the principles of Children First, all organisations providing services to children should identify a designated person to act as a liaison with outside agencies and as a resource person to any staff member or volunteer who has child protection concerns. The designated person is responsible for reporting allegations or suspicions of child abuse to the HSE or An Garda Síochána. My Department's guidelines for schools require each board of management to designate a senior member of staff, normally the principal, as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) for the school.

In accordance with Children First and my Department's guidelines, if a member of school staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she should, without delay, report the matter to the DLP in that school. The DLP is responsible for ensuring that the standard reporting procedure is followed so that suspected cases of child abuse are referred promptly to the HSE or An Garda Síochána.

The guidelines provide that if the DLP is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation, he/she should report the matter to the HSE immediately.

Both Children First and my Department's child protection guidelines for schools require that where the DLP decides that the concerns of the member of staff should not be referred to the HSE, the member of staff should be given a clear statement, in writing, as to the reasons why action is not being taken and that the member of staff should be advised that, if he/she remains concerned about the situation, he/she is free to consult with or report to the HSE.

The Deputy will also be aware that, in anticipation of the review and proposed updating of Children First, my Department wrote to all the education partners last Autumn inviting submissions from them on potential changes that might be desirable to the Department's existing child protection guidelines to schools. The education partners were also invited to participate in a working party to review the guidelines. The working party commenced last December and its work is ongoing.

Irish Language.

407. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the reason her predecessor had announced that no further gaelscoileanna will open in 2010; if this action is a U-turn by her Department on policy in this area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13616/10]

413. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if she will support a matter (details supplied). [13674/10]

414. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science her reason for refusing to open any new Irish medium schools in 2010; the position regarding the seven applications made by founding committees to establish new Irish medium schools in 2010; the criteria on which the decision to proceed with new schools in 2010 was made; her views on the fact that Irish medium schools are oversubscribed and they are turning away children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13676/10]

430. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if she will review the decision not to open any new gaelscoileanna in 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13819/10]

431. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if she will clarify the criteria used to make the decision on new schools for 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13820/10]

432. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the seven applications made by founding committees to establish new gaelscoileanna in 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13821/10]

433. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science her views on whether the decision not to open any new gaelscoileanna in 2010 is a breach of parents' constitutional right to Irish medium education for their children, and the State's obligation to protect and nurture the Irish language; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13822/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 407, 413, 414 and 430 to 433, inclusive, together.

Primary education has a pivotal role in the preservation and expansion of the first official language. The promotion of the Irish language has been an important aim of successive Irish Governments and its place in our education system has been consistently protected. This is reflected in the fact that in recent years a significant number of new gaelscoileanna have been recognised — 17 in total since 2005.

As the Deputy may be aware the Commission on School Accommodation is currently reviewing the procedures for the establishment of new primary schools. When my predecessor announced the commencement of the review he stated that no new primary schools would be established ahead of the completion of the review and the putting in place of revised procedures except in places where new schools are warranted because of increased demographics. The interim arrangements for the recognition of new primary schools, while the review of procedures is underway, provide that the Chairman of the Commission on School Accommodation would advise the Minister in cases where more than one patron expresses an interest in opening new schools in locations where new schools are required to meet demographic trends.

Forward Planning Section has carried out a study of the country to identify the areas where, due to demographic changes, there may be a requirement for significant additional accommodation in future years. This study indicated that for the school year 2009/10 there was no requirement for any new school entities based on demographic changes. This is not to say that certain locations were not experiencing an increase in the school going cohort. Following this detailed analysis it appeared prudent to plan for the establishment of new schools to commence operation in September 2010 to meet increasing demand in certain identified areas. There was detailed consultation during 2009 with all patrons in relation to the areas under consideration. In relation to most of these areas the view of the Gaelscoileanna movement was that there was not sufficient additional demand for all Irish provision to warrant the establishment of a new gaelscoil.

There was a specific application for the establishment of a new gaelscoil in Ratoath, Co Meath. However, after detailed analysis of the increase in pupil numbers for September this year and of the capacity in existing schools it was not necessary to establish a new school to cater for the demographic increase. My Department was satisfied that the existing schools can cater for the projected increase in demographics in September 2010. This situation will be reviewed for September 2011 in light of needs and consultation with the patron bodies.

Higher Education Grants.

408. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if there are scholarships or funds available which would help a person (details supplied) to pursue a university education in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13621/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The schemes of third level student support extend to full-time undergraduate courses of not less than two years duration which are pursued in Ireland or other EU member states. Courses pursued in countries outside of the EU are not approved for grants purposes.

My Department has no scheme under which funding is made available to students taking up a sports scholarship for study in the United States of America.

Schools Funding.

409. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the programmes and or schemes that a school (details supplied) in County Limerick has benefited from through her Department; if it has provided funding for capital works to the school since the year 2000; the exact nature of the projects and her Department’s financial contribution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13625/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to give the full details sought by the Deputy.

However, I set out below a list of capital grants provided to the school since 2000, for the Deputy’s information.

Ard Scoil Mhuire FCJ, Bruff

Project Description	Amount Paid	Date Paid	Year
	€		
Cont. 2009 — Electrical Upgrade	126,362.88	22-Sep-09	2009
Cont. 2009 — Electrical Upgrade	56,139.04	19-Nov-09	2009
Cont. 2009 — Electrical Upgrade	78,215.11	27-Nov-09	2009
Loose Furniture & Equipment	5,057.93	12-May-08	2008
Loose Furniture & Equipment	7,602.39	29-Jun-07	2007
Conversion Works	17,155.00	17-Sep-07	2007
Replacement Boiler	31,135.32	24-Jan-07	2007
Loose Furniture & Equipment	35,797.15	12-Oct-06	2006
Loose Furniture & Equipment	29,821.18	28-Nov-06	2006
Dust Extraction	2,722.50	09-May-05	2005
Dust Extraction	19,534.15	10-Feb-05	2005
Dust Extraction	6,104.20	22-Mar-05	2005
Dust Extraction	5,521.23	20-Apr-04	2004
Prefabs	1,803.60	16-May-03	2003
Prefabs	1,803.60	12-Sep-02	2002
Loose Furniture And Equipment	40,027.85	16-Feb-01	2001
Prefabs	30,382.38	07-Nov-01	2001
New Science Room	39,838.36	30-Jul-01	2001
New Science Room	12,695.46	22-Aug-01	2001
New Science Room	3,565.42	06-Nov-01	2001
	551,284.76		

Departmental Agencies.

410. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the

salary of each chief executive of agencies under the aegis of his Department on 1 August 2008 and 1 September 2008 in tabular form; if a voluntary pay cut was taken by each CEO; if so, the date of same; the salary of the CEO at that date; the full benefits package now applying to each such person including pension contributions and amount of bonus, if any; if same was awarded, the way in which it was benchmarked; the cost of a company car and any other benefit in kind; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13634/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to provide the precise details requested by the Deputy.

However I set out below for the Deputy’s information details which were provided in response to a similar parliamentary question tabled in September 2008, which outlines the basic salary and pension entitlement details for the CEOs of those bodies under the aegis of my Department at that time. If the Deputy requires more information relating to a specific agency I will endeavour to provide him with the relevant information.

The scheme of bonus payments on performance related awards in the Civil Service applies to the grades of Deputy and Assistant Secretaries and equivalent grades. These payments are made on the basis of recommendations made by the Committee for Performance Awards. As staff in both the National Council for Special Education and the State Examinations Commission are civil servants the CEO of each of these bodies is part of the civil service scheme for my Department and is eligible for awards under that scheme. Awards made to individual officers under the scheme are not disclosed as they are confidential and personal to the officers concerned. Payments under this Scheme were suspended in April 2009.

Agency Name	CEO Basic Salary	CEO Pension Entitlements
Advisory Council for English Language Schools	Equivalent to Assistant Principal Higher	Private Pension Plan
An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta	Equivalent to Assistant Principal Higher Scale	Civil Service Pension Scheme
Commission into Child Abuse	Equivalent to Assistant Principal Higher Scale	Civil Service Pension Scheme
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies	Equivalent to Principal Officer Scale	Defined benefit Government scheme
Education Finance Board	Nil — The CEO is not in receipt of any payments. The Secretary/Manager is seconded from the VEC and is in receipt of salary at Assistant Principal Office (VEC) Scale	Nil — The CEO is not in receipt of any payments. The Secretary/Manager — as per VEC Superannuation Scheme
Further Education & Training Awards Council	Equivalent to Assistant Secretary General Scale	FETAC Superannuation and Spouse’s Children’s Scheme
Grangegorman Development Agency	€147,290.00	A pension contribution of 5% is paid by the Department of Education and Science
Higher Education and Training Awards Council	Equivalent to Assistant Secretary General Scale	HETAC Pension Scheme
Higher Education Authority	Equivalent to Assistant Secretary Scale	Public Service Defined Benefit Scheme
International Education Board — Ireland	TCD Senior Admin level 6	Defined benefit at age 65
Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology	Single Point Scale	Public Service Defined Benefit Scheme
Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences	Salary Scale €74,640 — €93,334	Public Service Defined Benefit Scheme

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Agency Name	CEO Basic Salary	CEO Pension Entitlements
Leargas — The Exchange Bureau	Salary Equivalent to PO Higher Scale	Member of Private defined contribution pension scheme
National Centre for Technology in Education	Seconded Principal from CDVEC	Seconded Principal from CDVEC
National Centre Guidance in Education	Lecturer Scale	Education Sector Superannuation Scheme
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Equivalent to Assistant Chief Inspector	Civil Service Pension Scheme
National Council for Special Education	Equivalent to Assistant Secretary	Civil Service Pension scheme
National Education Welfare Board	Equivalent to Assistant Secretary General Salary Scale	Civil Service Pension Scheme
National Qualifications Authority of Ireland	Equivalent to Assistant Secretary General Scale	Civil Service Pension Scheme
Residential Institution Redress Board	Civil Service Principal Officer Scale	Civil Service Pension Entitlements Scheme
Residential Institution Review Committee	Salary as per the abatement rule	Nil
State Examinations Commission	Equivalent to Assistant Secretary General Scale	Civil Service Pension Scheme
The President's Award — Gaisce	Salary Equivalent to PO Standard Scale	Member of Private defined contribution pension scheme
The Teaching Council	Principal Officer (Higher) LS1	Teachers Pension (on secondment)

Higher Education Grants.

411. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if there are any scholarships or funds available which would help a person (details supplied) to pursue a university education in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13659/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The schemes of third level student support extend to full-time undergraduate courses of not less than two years duration which are pursued in Ireland or other EU member states. Courses pursued in countries outside of the EU are not approved for grants purposes.

My Department has no scheme under which funding is made available to students taking up a sports scholarship for study in the United States of America.

School Transport.

412. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if a decision will be made regarding school transport in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork who is appealing refusal of same. [13666/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): My Department understands that the case referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied is being appealed to the School Transport Appeals Board.

The decision of the School Transport Appeals Board will be relayed directly to the family concerned.

Questions Nos. 413 and 414 answered with Question No. 407.

Local Authority Charges.

415. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if there are any concessions in relation to water rates for schools that have acquired a green flag status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13677/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Deputy will be aware that each local authority sets its own water rates.

Under the Water Framework Directive, the payment of water charges is required with effect from 1 January 2010. The legal advice available to the Government is that schools, like other non-domestic water services users, must pay the full cost of water services used on a metered basis.

While no specific concessions are available to schools that have acquired green flag status, schools' water bills will decrease if they use less water.

As advised in Circular 64/2009, issued by my Department, the recommended per capita usage is 2.1 cubic metres per annum. However, data from local authorities indicates that water consumption levels in many schools remains too high. It is therefore incumbent on all schools to seek to put in place conservation measures to reduce water consumption.

Schools were advised of actions they could take to reduce water consumption in Circular 46/2008, which was issued by my Department in April 2008. They were advised to develop a water management plan, in order that they would be familiar with the water distribution systems serving the school and the areas where water is used along with potential areas for wastage and leakage. Practical suggestions for reducing water consumption, along with examples of best practice, were also included.

I wish to draw the Deputy's attention also to Circular 57/2009, which is available on my Department's website. Circular 57/2009 outlines the funding available through the Summer Works Scheme 2010 for water conservation measures, which will have the effect of reducing schools' water charges and of contributing to environmental sustainability.

Disadvantaged Status.

416. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if she plans to extend the contracts of librarians in DEIS schools whose contracts are due to expire in August 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13695/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Under the terms of the DEIS Action Plan, a commitment was made to extend the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) Demonstration Library Project to the 50 School Support Programme (SSP) schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage over the five years to 2010, with extension to further SSP schools to be considered subsequently.

To date, the Project has been extended to 20 of the targeted 50 additional SSP schools, bringing the current number of schools with a Demonstration Library to 30.

The project establishes high quality, fully stocked and equipped modern school libraries and provides each with a professional librarian. A number of studies have noted that the project is effective in addressing the literacy needs of students in schools with the highest concentration of disadvantage in particular it has been noted that reading standards, student concentration and behaviour had improved.

Library staff, like other public servants in the Education sector, other than teachers and SNAs, are subject to the public sector moratorium and consequently the matter raised by

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the deputy falls to be considered in the context of the current public financial and numbers policy environment.

417. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the DEIS schools in Dublin 15 that have a librarian whose contract is due to expire during 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13696/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

State Examinations.

418. **Deputy Shane McEntee** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the reason repeat leaving certificate students are charged €284 to sit the leaving certificate examination, while first-time examinees are only charged €109; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13706/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Special fees for repeat candidates were introduced in 1987 on the basis that it is not unreasonable to expect those who have already benefited from the normal course of second level education, and who wish to take an extra year, to make a contribution towards the cost of providing the necessary resources. A course fee is also payable in respect of such candidates.

Examination fees generally cover only a fraction of the cost of running the examinations. Additional demands on the system have been arising in recent years due to the introduction of new methods of assessment in various subjects and to continuing increases in special arrangements for students with special needs.

There is an alleviation scheme in place whereby current medical card holders and their dependents are exempt from the payment of fees. This exemption applies to approximately 30% of all examination candidates each year. This alleviation scheme also applies in the case of repeat candidates in respect of both the course fee and the repeat examination fee.

Schools Building Projects.

419. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the proposed new second level school for Kildare Town, with specific regard to the commencement date for construction and the proposed date of opening; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13719/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Final tenders for the second bundle of Primary/Post Primary schools consisting of six schools including the school referred to by the Deputy were received by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) on the 1st July 2009 and following evaluation, Macquarie Partnerships for Ireland (MPFI) were appointed preferred tenderer in early October 2009.

Planning applications were submitted by MPFI to the relevant local authorities and final decisions on a number of sites, including the school referred to by the Deputy are awaited. Subject to the successful completion of the planning process and the subsequent finalisation of the tendering competition it is envisaged that construction work on all six schools will commence in mid 2010 with the schools becoming operational in late 2011.

420. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the progress made to date regarding the provision of a new school (details supplied) in County Clare; when she expects construction to commence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13721/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to give full details of the project for the school referred to by the Deputy.

The project is currently progressing through the stages of architectural planning. However, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the commencement of construction at this time.

421. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science when finance will be sanctioned for an extension to a school (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13724/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to give the full details sought by the Deputy.

The progression of all large scale building projects from initial design stage through to construction will be considered in the context of the school building and modernisation programme. However, in view of the level of demand on the Department's capital budget, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of particular projects at this time.

Cycle to Work Scheme.

422. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the reason there is only a two week period when secondary school teachers can apply to her Department for the cycle to work tax relief scheme; if she will instruct her officials to extend the period for applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13726/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Cycle to Work Scheme was introduced for teachers in September 2009 when the terms of the scheme were outlined in Circular 54/2009. The Circular provides that applications for the scheme are to be forwarded to my Department not later than the 15th December. The deductions from salary are made during the following calendar year as outlined in the Circular.

Therefore in 2009 all teachers had in excess of a period of two months within which to apply for the scheme in order to avail of it in 2010. Teachers currently have until 15th December 2010 to apply for the scheme for the calendar year 2011. The period for applications is not limited to two weeks, applications can be made at any time during the year under the terms of the Circular once they are received by the deadline of 15th December.

Aitheantas Scoileanna.

423. **D'fhiafraigh** Deputy Brian O'Shea den Tánaiste agus Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta céard a dhéanfaidh sí faoin gcáineadh a rinne Gaelscoileanna Teo (sonraí iniata) ar an Aire; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [13770/10]

438. **D'fhiafraigh Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** den Tánaiste agus Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta an ndéanfaidh sí achomharc in aghaidh an chinnidh a rinne a réamhtheachtaí mar

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Aire nach n-osclófar aon ghaelscoil nua i 2010; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh.
[13851/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Tógfaigh mé Ceisteanna 423 agus 438 le chéile.

Tá ról maighdeogach le himirt ag an mbunscolaíocht i gcaomhnú agus i leathnú na céad teanga oifigiúla. Bhí cur chun cinn na Gaeilge ina haidhm mhór ariamh ag Rialtais na hÉireann i ndiaidh a chéile agus cosnaíodh i gcónaí a hionad sa chóras oideachais. Comhartha air seo an chaoi inar aithníodh líon suntasach Gaelscoileanna nua le blianta beaga anuas — 17 ar fad ó 2005 i leith.

Bhféidir go bhfuil sé le fios ag an dTeachta go bhfuil an Coimisiún um Chóiríocht Scoileanna ag athbhreithniú faoi láthair na nósanna imeachta do bhunscoileanna a bhunú. Nuair a d'fhóg-air mo réamhtheachtaí go raibh an t-athbhreithniú á thosnú dúirt sé nach mbunófaí bunscoileanna nua ar bith sula mbeadh an t-athbhreithniú curtha i gcrích agus nósanna imeachta nua curtha ar bun, ach amháin in áiteanna inar cheart scoileanna nua de bharr fás a bheith tagtha ar an daonra. De réir na socrúithe eatramhacha atá i bhfeidhm maidir le haitheantas a thabhairt do bhunscoileanna nua fad is atá an t-athbhreithniú ar na nósanna imeachta ar siúl, is cóir do Chathaoirleach an Choimisiúin um Chóiríocht Scoileanna comhairle a chur ar an tAire i gcásanna ina gcuireann níos mó ná pátrún amháin in iúl gur mian leis scoileanna a oscailt in áiteanna inar gá scoileanna nua de bharr fás a bheith tagtha ar an daonra.

Tá staidéar mar gheall ar an dtír déanta ag an Rannóg Pleanála Chun Cinn chun a fháil amach céard iad na ceantair inar fhéadfadh gá a bheith le cuid mhaith cóiríocht breise insna blianta amach romhainn. Thug an staidéar seo le fios nach raibh gá ar bith le scoileanna nua sa scoilbhliain 2009/10 de bharr athruithe a bheith tagtha ar an daonra. Ní hionann sin is a rá nár tháinig méadú ar an gcohort freastal scoile i gceantair áirithe. Tar éis na hanailíse mionsonraithe seo ba léir go mba chríonna an rud é pleanáil a dhéanamh do bhunú scoileanna nua, a thosnódh ag obair i Meán Fómhair 2010, chun riar ar éileamh méadaitheach i gceantair sainaitheanta áirithe. Bhí comhairliúchán mionsonraithe ann i rith 2009 leis na pátrúin go léir maidir leis na ceantair a bhí á machnamh. I gcás formhór na gceantar seo ba í tuairim lucht na gluaiseachta Gaelscoileanna nár leor an t-éileamh breise ar sholáthar lán-Ghaelach chun údar maith a bheith le bunú Gaelscoile nua.

Rinneadh iarratas sainiúil ar bhunú Gaelscoile i Ráth Tó, Co na Mí. Tar éis anailíse mionsonraithe ar an méadú i líon na ndaltaí i Meán Fómhair na bliana seo, agus ar chumas na scoileanna atá ann, áfach, ba léir nár ghá scoil nua a bhunú chun riar ar an bhfás deimeagrafach. Bhí mo Roinnse deimhin de gur féidir leis na scoileanna atá ann riar ar an méadú réamheasta deimeagrafach i Meán Fómhair 2010. Déanfar athbhreithniú ar an scéal roimh Mean Fómhair 2011 ag tógaint cúrsáí riachtanais san áireamh agus taréis dul i gcomhairle leis na comhluchtaí patrúnachais.

Higher Education Grants.

424. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the difficulties experienced by students with disabilities in Colleges of Further Education who apply for supports to the Higher Education Authority, due to the fact that their courses are normally of 12 months duration and the applications for supports may not be processed for up to three months after commencement of the course; if she will request to the HEA to be more flexible in dealing with such applications so that they are dealt with in a more timely manner; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13773/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) provides funding to both further and higher education institutions for the provision of services and supports for full-time students with disabilities. In recent years, the demand for the fund has grown considerably. Provisional data for 2009-10 suggests that between 2008/09 and 2009/10 there has been an increase of 34% in applications approved for support. It is anticipated that approximately 5,450 students will be supported through the fund in 2009/10.

Applications from the further education sector have contributed to the overall increase in applications in recent years. For example, in 2003/04, funding was allocated to further education institutions to support 136 students. By 2009/10, this had increased by 338% to 596 students. A total of €3.4m has been provided to the further education sector to support students with disabilities from the fund in 2009/10.

Institutions apply to the HEA under FSD for supports on behalf of students. Applications are then assessed by the HEA years the HEA has prioritised the assessment of applications from the further education sector on the basis that most students are completing one year courses. The HEA operates an early application round for further education colleges. Between August and mid-October assessment of applications received from further education colleges takes priority. From mid-October current resources within the HEA are also allocated for assessment of applications received from the higher education sector. The HEA currently receives over 1,500 applications for assessment. However, throughout this period, the HEA continues to prioritise the assessment of applications from the further education sector to ensure that colleges receive funding as quickly as possible to support their students.

The HEA has also introduced a system of approval whereby institutions now receive a per-capita rate for certain categories of disability. This has been welcomed by the disability sector and has assisted in largely maintaining the assessment timeline process for further education students despite the continuing annual increase in the number applications each year. The HEA is currently working with my Department and other stakeholders in developing a new model of allocation for the fund. One of the aims of the new model, in the context of projected increases in applications for support in the coming years, will be to provide a quicker response to all institutions in relation to applications for support.

Further Education.

425. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if she will allow staff of Colleges of Further Education to access development events provided by the Special Education Support Service and Second Level Support Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13774/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Generally the continuing professional development supports under the remit of Teacher Education Section, including the Special Education Support Service and the Second Level Support Service, are targeted at qualified teachers working in primary or second level schools, as relevant. Where Further Education Colleges are providers of second level curricula, qualified teachers are also eligible to attend support service events, where capacity exists. In addition, the support service websites contain a wide range of resources that are available to all teachers for reference and use.

The Deputy might wish to note that a dedicated Further Education Support Service is available to Further Education Colleges which provide support specific to that area. This support

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service also has a dedicated website for FE teachers and tutors which contains a range of resources including publications, online tutorials etc.

Special Educational Needs.

426. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the number of primary schools in the country that have seen an increase in their enrolment since 2003; when the General Allocation for Learning Support was determined in respect of the number of hours per school; the reason that those schools which have seen an increase in their enrolment since 2003 cannot obtain additional resource hours under the general allocation model; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13776/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): There is an extensive amount of statistical information for recent years on my Department's website in relation to primary schools, including the enrolment for all primary schools for the school years 2006/07 to 2008/09.

The level of detail sought by the Deputy would take some time to collate within my Department. My Department's Teacher Allocation Section is currently focused on the initial work for the allocation of staffing for the coming school year and I do not propose to divert them from this work at this key time in the allocation process.

The General Allocation model was introduced in primary schools in September 2005 to ensure that each school has learning support/resource teaching support available to meet the needs of children with high incidence special educational needs. The allocation to schools is however enhanced in the case of schools experiencing large increases in enrolment and which satisfy the conditions under my Department's Developing School Criteria.

The review of the General Allocation is at an advanced stage and is being considered within my Department.

Questions Nos. 427 and 428 answered with Question No. 401.

School Accommodation.

429. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the position regarding an application for a new classroom by a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13817/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to give full details of the project for the school referred to by the Deputy.

The school was approved a grant for a temporary classroom last year and it is open to the school authority to make a further application to the Department should they have additional accommodation requirements. The relevant application forms are available on the Department's website and all such applications will be processed by my Department.

Questions Nos. 430 to 433, inclusive, answered with Question No. 407.

Schools Refurbishment.

434. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the position regarding an application (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13825/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to give full details of the project for the school referred to by the Deputy.

The timetable for the Summer Works Scheme 2010 has been published as part of the governing Circular Letter for the Scheme. This Circular Letter (0057/2009) is available on my Department's website www.education.ie.

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.

In accordance with the timetable, it is my intention to publish a list of successful SWS applicants shortly.

Special Educational Needs.

435. **Deputy Michael Noonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science when she will change the policy requiring children to leave special schools by the age of 18 years in view of the decision S2009-050 of the Equality Tribunal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13837/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department is currently reviewing its policy relating to school leaving age with a view to developing a consistent approach for all students whether they are attending a mainstream post primary school or special school. Pending the conclusion of this policy review, I am pleased to confirm for the Deputy that my Department will advise special schools that they may retain students over 18 years of age who are following courses leading to accreditation on a case by case basis.

Higher Education Grants.

436. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the action that she proposes to take in regard to the concerns of a union (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13840/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The issues raised by the Deputy relate to the passage of the Student Support Bill and changes in rates and eligibility under the student grant schemes announced in Budget 2010.

The Deputy will be aware that a number of amendments to the Student Support Bill in relation to legal and policy issues which have arisen since Second Stage are being advanced by my Department in close consultation with the Office of the Attorney General.

In light of the commitment to put the grants on a statutory footing, I am anxious to provide a statutory basis for all student grants, pending transition to new administrative arrangements. This transitional period will necessitate retention of the existing administrative structures in the immediate term. In bringing amendments to Committee Stage, I will therefore be endeavouring to provide for existing administrative arrangements for this transitional phase, while progressing to a single scheme of grants as provided for in the Bill at the earliest possible date.

In the context of the Government's wider programme of public service reform, I am also re-assessing organisational options for the grants administration function in the longer run, with a view to revisiting the current proposals provided for in the Bill. Possible options for a more significant centralisation of functions are now being explored with a view to streamlining operations and maximising administrative efficiency. This examination is being undertaken as part

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of a business process re-engineering exercise being conducted under the Transforming Public Services agenda.

These developments have required consideration of a complex set of legal options in relation to further amendment of the Bill and my Department has been working closely with the Office of the Attorney General to address the issues in that regard. I would like to assure the Deputy that these proposed amendments are now at an advanced stage of preparation and it will be my intention to proceed with the Bill on this basis in the shortest possible timeframe.

Subject to the technical, drafting and legal considerations arising, my Department hopes to be in a position to have these amendments advanced sufficiently in order to move to Committee Stage as early as possible in the current session.

The current difficult economic circumstances have necessitated tough choices to control public expenditure and to ensure sustainability in the long run. In these circumstances, from September 2010, as announced in the Budget, all new applicants who are in receipt of the Back to Education Allowance for all schemes, and the VTOS allowances for those pursuing PLC courses, will be ineligible for student maintenance grants. The cost of the student services charge and any fees payable to colleges will continue to be met, for eligible students, by the Exchequer on their behalf. Students should apply to their assessing authority to have their eligibility assessed.

Students currently in receipt of the BTEA or VTOS allowances and the maintenance grant will continue to be eligible for both payments for the duration of their current course provided they continue to meet the terms and conditions of the schemes. Students progressing to a new course, with effect from 2010/11, will no longer be eligible for student maintenance grants but can apply for assistance towards the cost of the student services charge and any fees payable.

It was decided to discontinue the practice of allowing students to hold both the BTEA or VTOS allowance and a student maintenance grant simultaneously as this represents a duplication of income support payments.

As announced in Budget 2010, a reduction of 5% was applied to the rates of student grants and scholarships. This reduction was implemented in respect of all grant-holders from January 2010. This reduction is broadly in line with reductions in other income maintenance payments including those for the unemployed. The reductions in the rates of student grant were necessary to ensure that the system is not extended beyond what current resources will allow in a climate of overall pressures on public finances.

Students who qualify for maintenance grants will continue to receive substantial grant funding, together with full support for payment of the student service charge. Those on particularly low incomes will also continue to receive a “top-up” in the special rate of maintenance grant.

Schools of Music.

437. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science when she proposes to appoint a new director to the Royal Irish Academy of Music, Westland Row, Dublin 2; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13850/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Royal Irish Academy of Music is in discussions with my Department concerning the arrangements to be applied to the appointment of a new Director on the expiration of the current Director's contract on 31 August next. Any such appointment must be made in accordance with the terms of the revised employment control framework (ECF). It is envisaged that early agreement will be reached in relation to such arrangements.

Question No. 438 answered with Question No. 423.

Higher Education Grants.

439. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if students in receipt of the back to education allowance will continue to be eligible for fees and maintenance grant; if they are no longer to be eligible the way this affects current students; the way same affects students who have started a certificate and or diploma with the hope of progressing to a degree; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13859/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Students currently in receipt of the BTEA or VTOS allowances and the maintenance grant will continue to be eligible for both payments for the duration of their current course provided they continue to meet the terms and conditions of the relevant grant schemes.

Students progressing to a new course with effect from 2010/11 will no longer be eligible for student maintenance grants but can apply for assistance towards the cost of the student services charge and any fees payable.

School Enrolments.

440. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if she will make a statement on a recent meeting with a group (details supplied) in relation to their proposals. [13860/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Forward Planning Section of my Department has carried out a study of the country to identify the areas where, due to demographic changes, there may be a requirement for significant additional school provision at both primary and post-primary levels over the coming years. This study has been conducted using data from the Central Statistics Office, the General Register Office and the Department of Social & Family Affairs with reference to recent schools' enrolment data. The study indicates that the requirement for additional primary provision in years 2010, 2011 and 2012 is likely to be greatest in more than 40 identified locations across the country based on significant changes to the demographics of those areas.

Forward Planning Section is in the process of carrying out detailed analysis and reports for each of these locations in order to identify the school accommodation requirements for each area up to and including the school year 2014/2015.

When the required reports have been completed for the initial areas Forward Planning Section will continue to work on preparing reports on a priority basis for the remainder of the country. Overall primary and post primary accommodation requirements in the area specified will be analysed as part of this process.

Research Funding.

441. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the steps which will be taken to transfer the funding for the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation; the amount of funding provided for the PRLTI in this year's Book of Estimates; the number of staff, that will be transferred with the allocation of responsibility for this programme from her Department to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13861/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Taoiseach announced the transfer of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions from my Department to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment last week. Discussions are ongoing between my Department and the Departments of Finance and Enterprise, Trade and Employment in relation to the arrangements for this transfer. It is intended that the transfer will be concluded as soon as possible.

An allocation of €50 million has been included in the Revised Book of Estimates for the Programme in 2010.

Departmental Staff.

442. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if the Secretary General of her Department will become the Accountancy Officer for FÁS and become accountable to the Committee of Public Accounts and the Comptroller and Auditor General; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13862/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): In line with the changes announced by the Taoiseach in relation to the transfer of certain responsibilities from the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment responsibility for FÁS as a State Body and the funding related to training and skills will be transferred to my Department which will be renamed the Department of Education and Skills. Responsibility and funding for FÁS Employment Services and Employment Programmes will be transferred to the Department of Social Protection.

The necessary changes will be finalised shortly by Government Order and appropriate funding adjustments will be made in the Estimates. In the meantime current reporting arrangements and responsibilities continue to apply.

The position of the Director General of FÁS in relation to the Committee of Public Accounts and the Comptroller and Auditor General as set out in the Labour Services (Amendment) Act 2009 will remain unchanged on transfer.

The Secretary General of my Department will be accountable to the Committee of Public Accounts and the Comptroller and Auditor General for the disbursement of monies from the Vote of the Department of Education and Science to FÁS. As my Department will have responsibility for FÁS as a state body she will also be accountable to them for issues in this area.

Departmental Reports.

443. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the list of all proposals in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure relating to her Department or to bodies or agencies under her remit which have been implemented to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13881/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The recommendations made in the report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes were considered in determining the expenditure allocation for my Department for 2010, which was announced in Budget 2010. These recommendations, together with estimated savings yields for 2010 where relevant, are set out in the table.

Department of Education and Science

Implementation of recommendations of report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes	Comment regarding allocation for 2010
Staffing efficiencies in the primary/post-primary sectors	Savings from cessation of supply teacher scheme at primary level and changes to uncertified sick leave for teachers. In addition, €20m arising as a result of estimating reductions in light of projected 2009 outturn.
Reduction in the number of Special Needs Assistants	While savings will arise due to a reduction in the number of Special Needs Assistants it is not possible at this stage to quantify the amount of these savings until conclusion of the nationwide review of SNA posts being undertaken by the National Council for Special Education. No change has been made to the current criteria for assignment of SNAs.
Integration of Senior Traveller Training	Reduction of 300 in number of Senior Traveller Training places
Staffing efficiencies across third level sector	Savings estimated in respect of pay and non-pay efficiencies
Merge Higher Education Authority (HEA) into the Department of Education and Science	No merger but HEA allocation reduced
Reduction in the allocation for teacher training colleges	Savings estimated in relation to pre-service teacher education
Reduction in the allocation for Research and Development	Partial reduction
Reduction in the allocation to the Strategic Innovation Fund	Partial reduction
Reduction in the allocation to Student Support Grant	5% reduction in rates of student grants and scholarships applied, providing €10m in savings. Further €4m in savings effected by removal of eligibility for student support grants from recipients of Back to Education Allowance and certain persons pursuing PLC courses. (Note — overall allocation for student supports for 2010 was increased to take account of an anticipated increase in the number of eligible students at third level).
Reduce allocation to school transport	Partial reduction
Reduce allocation for teacher training & funding for education centres	Savings and efficiencies effected in relation to teacher in-service education support
Absorb National Council for Special Education (NCSE) into the Department of Education and Science	NCSE not absorbed but allocation reduced
Reduce allocation to certain Local Drugs Task Force (LDTF) Projects	Funding for 2010 reduced
Reduction in allocation for National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Funding for 2010 reduced
Discontinue National University of Ireland and transfer functions	Bill to establish a new qualifications and quality assurance agency for the further and higher education sectors is being prepared

School Staffing.

444. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the number of special needs assistants employed in the schools of County Kildare for each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13893/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information requested by the Deputy on the number of special needs assistants employed in County Kildare schools is not readily available in the requested format.

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As the Deputy will be aware, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENO) for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

The allocation for any school and any adjustments to that allocation depends on a number of factors such as the number of pupils with care/medical needs leaving, the number of new pupils, the changing needs of the pupils and any surplus identified. Furthermore, schools can make applications at any time with the result that the individual situation of any school can change and allocations are not static. The Deputy may wish to liaise directly with the NCSE in the context of his enquiry.

I want to take this opportunity to emphasise that children with special educational needs will continue to receive an education appropriate to their needs. The NCSE will continue to support schools, parents, children and teachers and resources will continue to be allocated to schools to meet children's needs in line with my Department's policy.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme.

445. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science if she will review a decision taken by the Dublin City Vocational Education Committee in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 in view of the fact that this person's financial circumstances have continued to deteriorate since they began their third level education in 2006; the reason this person's own earnings for 2008 were means tested; and if additional support will be available to assist this person. [13895/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Due to industrial action on the part of some staff in the Department of Education and Science, I am not in a position to address details of the case referred to by the Deputy.

State Examinations.

446. **Deputy Mary Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the percentage of each of the Irish and French exams in the 2010 junior certificate examination that are written, oral, and aural; if it is planned to change this percentage in 2011 or in future years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13896/10]

447. **Deputy Mary Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the percentage of each of the Irish and French exams in the 2010 leaving certificate examination that are written, oral, and aural; if it is planned to change this percentage in 2011 or in future years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13897/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 446 and 447 together.

In March 2007 the then Minister for Education and Science announced changes in relation to the proportion of marks awarded for oral Irish in the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations with effect from 2010 and 2012 respectively. These changes are set out in circular letter 0042/2007 which issued to schools in 2007.

The marks for the oral examination at Higher and Ordinary levels in the Leaving Certificate examination will be increased from 25% to 40%. Marks for the aural will be reduced to 10% at both Higher and Ordinary levels, and 50% of the overall marks will be awarded for the written papers.

At Foundation level in the Leaving Certificate examination, the marks for oral Irish will be increased from 25% to 40%. Marks for the aural will be reduced from 30% to 20%, and the written paper will attract 40% of the marks. In the case of the Leaving Certificate Applied, the marks for oral Irish will be increased from 33% to 40%, marks for the aural will be reduced from 30% to 25%, and 35% of the overall marks will be awarded for the written paper. Where students take the oral examination in the first year of their senior cycle programme, the changed marking arrangements will come into effect in 2011.

The changes will also apply to the Junior Certificate where the oral Irish examination will continue to be a school-based optional examination. In the case of the Junior Certificate oral, the marks will be doubled from 20% to 40%. Marks for the aural will be reduced to 10%, and 50% of the marks will be awarded for the written paper(s). Where no oral examination is held, marks are awarded on the basis of the written paper(s) and aural only.

The State Examinations Commission has issued details to schools setting out the format of the Junior Certificate Examination from 2010 in Circular S73/09, a copy of which is on the Commission's website at www.examinations.ie

The intention of the increase in marks for oral assessment is to promote a significant shift in emphasis towards Irish as a spoken language, where students can communicate and interact in a spontaneous way, and where Irish is spoken every day in schools

There are no changes in the marks for examinations in French. In the Junior Certificate, the optional school based oral attracts up to 20% of the marks, up to 35% is available for the aural component, and 45% for the written examination. Where a student does not sit an oral examination, the marks are 44% for the aural component and 56% for the written component.

In the Leaving Certificate at Higher Level, the marks for French are 25% for the oral component, 20% for the aural element and 55% for the written paper. At Ordinary level in the Leaving Certificate, the marks are 20% for the oral, 25% for the aural and 55% for the written paper.

Departmental Expenditure.

448. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science the information technology investment that has been made to both primary and secondary schools in County Meath in each of the past four years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13906/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Mary Coughlan): While the specific information sought by the Deputy is not readily available, I can confirm that primary schools in Co. Meath received more than €0.8m in ICT Infrastructure Grants in November 2009. As the Deputy may be aware, this capital investment is a key component in a broader capital and current funding programme for ICT in Schools, which is being pursued in light of recommendations made in the ICT Strategy Group and Smart Schools=Smart Economy reports. In this context, I am pleased to advise the Deputy that a second tranche of ICT infrastructure funding will be provided in the coming months, in respect of post-primary schools, including those in Co. Meath.

Apart from the above-mentioned ICT Infrastructure Grants, my Department has provided substantial supports for ICT in Schools over the past four years, from which schools in Co. Meath have benefited. These supports have included the provision of a national Schools Broadband Service and associated Helpdesk; the funding of a programme of continuing professional development in ICT for primary and post-primary teachers through the National Centre for Technology in Education; the provision of technology grants in relation to the new Technology

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subjects at leaving certificate (T4); and the procurement and dissemination of a range of curriculum-relevant digital content resources, primarily through the national portal for ICT in Schools, *www.Scoilnet.ie*.

Specific additional funding has been provided to schools for purchase of assistive technologies in respect of individual pupils with special educational needs. Targeted investment in ICT Infrastructure has been provided through Dormant Accounts (Educational Disadvantage) funding to schools serving disadvantaged communities. Additionally, primary and post-primary school building projects have received ICT capital funding, and it has been open to primary schools to use their Minor Works Grants to procure ICT equipment.