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

Paidir.

Prayer.

Business of Dáil: Motion

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy John Curran): I move:

That, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, the Order of Business be taken immediately after Leaders' Questions today.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed?

Deputy Finian McGrath: It is not agreed. Why are Independents being excluded once again from the debate on the economy? This is a simple question for the Government and Opposition parties. They have been talking about Dáil reform in the House for the past 20 years, yet democratically elected Independent Members are not allowed to speak on a major financial crisis in this State. It is appalling, disgraceful and unacceptable.

An Ceann Comhairle: After Leaders' Questions, I will proceed to the Order of Business, which may be more appropriate for considering the matter raised by the Deputy.

Deputy Finian McGrath: It is very important that people wake up, smell the coffee and recognise the reality that democratically elected Members are not allowed to contribute. In recent opinion polls, Independents comprise the fourth highest grouping. This is very important. If one is a democrat, one listens to the voices of all the people.

An Ceann Comhairle: We hear the sentiments.

Question put and agreed to.

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Enda Kenny: The days of bluffing and false promises are over and the harsh reality of truth has dawned. The major parties in the Dáil have accepted the need for a reduction in the deficit to 3% by 2014. I have not heard the Taoiseach comment on this matter. Will he indicate whether the announcement by the Minister for Finance regarding the €15 billion in cuts to be imposed on the Irish people during the next four years represents a decision on the part of the Government or whether that decision was imposed on it by the European Commission?

The Taoiseach: This is a decision reached by the Government.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I thank the Taoiseach for that confirmation. I noticed the Ministers of Government arriving at Farmleigh on Monday last like members of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy returning to the big house. In the aftermath of two days of deliberation at Farmleigh and Government Buildings, has the Government reached a conclusion on the cuts that are likely to be imposed this December and for the following three years? Has it arrived at a decision with regard to how the total of €15 billion in cuts is to be broken down? I recognise that all the relevant tax receipts have not yet been taken in and that the Government will be obliged to wait for a period until this happens. However, is the Taoiseach in a position to inform the House — to within €200 million — of the total amount of the cuts to be imposed in the December budget? Will he also outline the Government's proposals for the following three years?

The Taoiseach: As the Opposition spokespersons were informed by the Minister for Finance yesterday, the Government, having considered all the relevant matters, came to a decision that €15 billion is the amount of the adjustment that will be required between now and 2014. We have also stated clearly that we will set out the annual components of the four-year plan that will be published in the coming weeks. Those components will be informed by ongoing discussions among members of the Government and will be based on various variables and incoming data.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: For the past two weeks or thereabouts, the Government has offered briefings to the finance spokespersons of the Opposition parties in respect of budgetary matters. These briefings have been represented as the Government opening the books to the Opposition. It is fair to say that what the opening of the books to the Opposition has amounted to is three meetings in the Department of Finance. The first of those meetings related to the process involved and to seeking undertakings that the confidentiality, etc., of the information being provided would be respected. The content of the second meeting could be summarised by the three-page document which was given to the finance spokespersons and which contains lists of tables. At the third meeting, which was held yesterday, the spokespersons were presented with a folder of information, most of which was already in the public domain as a result of replies given to parliamentary questions.

There is key information which we have not been given. We have not been given the definitive growth forecast for next year, nor have we been given the detailed macro-economic growth forecast for the next four years. The latter would include forecasts and projections relating to consumption, investment, interest rates, wages, exports, imports and unemployment. We have also not been given the proposed adjustment for next year, nor have we been given a template

for the four-year plan, final information on how the cost of the bank bailout is to be treated in the Government accounts or details on the proposed savings to be made on foot of the Croke Park agreement.

The House is due to take statements on the macro-economic and fiscal outlook. It will be difficult to debate such a matter in the absence of the information to which I refer. The Taoiseach just informed Deputy Kenny that the Government has decided that the total adjustment for the next four years will be €15 billion. Did the Cabinet have access to the information to which I refer when it made its decision?

The Taoiseach: The Cabinet, as the Deputy is aware, has been considering these matters for some weeks. As has been stated, officials from the Department of Finance have been made available to the relevant Opposition spokespersons during that period. Those spokespersons, as they seek to formulate the proposals they wish to have costed or considered, will continue to have access to the officials between now and the introduction of the budget in order that any queries they make have with regard to various policy options can be dealt with.

In in the middle of November we expect to publish a four-year plan which will outline in detail, based on Government decisions to be taken in the interim, how best to deal with this adjustment. The debate today offers a very strong opportunity to consider, on the basis of an adjustment of €15 billion and taking an average GDP growth rate of 2.75%, how the adjustment should be dealt with in regard to taxation, expenditure, prospects for growth, whether people agree with the figures and updates on the international scene. It also offers the opportunity to air microeconomic policy views or initiatives that would be of assistance and should be incorporated into any plan.

That is the state of play with regard to current deliberations and I do not believe any of us are disbarred from coming forward with strong views on all those areas. When the plan is provided and finalised we will clearly have the opportunity for a detailed debate in that respect as well.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Taoiseach has completely avoided the question I asked him. I listed key information that the Labour Party has not been provided with, including the definitive growth forecast for next year, the projections on which macroeconomic growth forecasts for the next four years would be based, the proposed adjustment for next year, the template for the four-year plan, the way in which the bank bailout money is to be dealt with in the Government accounts and the proposed savings from the Croke Park agreement.

The Cabinet had a meeting in Farmleigh and the Taoiseach has told us it decided that the overall adjustment would be €15 billion. Did the Cabinet have the information I listed when it made the decision? It would be extraordinary if it made a decision for a €15 billion adjustment in the absence of the information I have indicated. If the Cabinet had the information, why has it not been provided to the Opposition parties?

The Taoiseach: I have explained to the Deputy that the basis upon which that decision has been taken is a result of the assessment by the Government based on advice from the Department of Finance and its consultations with international organisations, as well as views from the Central Bank, etc. The level of adjustment required is based on an average growth rate of 2.75% of GDP as a realistic figure upon which one could project increased output in the economy over the period. Working back from that, the adjustment from taxation, expenditure or the impact of growth is calculated in getting the deficit figure back to 3% of GDP in 2014.

I am thankful that all the main Opposition parties have indicated a commitment to getting a figure of a 3% deficit by 2014. This debate affords us an opportunity to translate, if we like,

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how we can go about making those adjustments for that commitment which we estimate to be in the order of €15 billion between now and 2014. The four-year plan will outline in detail that position.

The final assessment on growth next year, as well as some other issues being raised by the Deputy, will depend on final Government decisions on the component years and the movement to that figure over the period. That can have its own impact.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The €15 billion figure is a guess.

The Taoiseach: The €15 billion figure is a forecast, like every other forecast. If we perform better than 2.75% annual growth, the level of uplift we must take with regard to cutting expenditure and raising taxes will not be as great. We believe one must take a prudential view, acceptable based on forecasts that others make of prospects for world and European growth in the coming years. Based on all the discussions we have had, we believe that prospect is provided for.

Order of Business

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No.14 — statements on macro-economic and fiscal outlook. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the following arrangements shall apply in relation to the sittings of the Dáil today and tomorrow: Oral Questions shall not be taken; matters may not be raised under the provisions of Standing Orders 21(3) and 32; Private Members' business shall not be taken; there shall be no Order of Business tomorrow within the meaning of Standing Order 26; the proceedings on No.14 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 4.45 p.m. tomorrow and the following arrangements shall apply: the statements of the Taoiseach and of the Leaders of Fine Gael, the Labour Party, the Green Party and Sinn Féin, or a person nominated in his stead, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 30 minutes in each case; the suspension of sitting under Standing Order 23(1) shall take place after the Leaders' statements for 60 minutes; the statement of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Sinn Féin, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 30 minutes in each case; the statement of each other Member called upon shall not exceed 20 minutes in each case; a Minister or Minister of State shall take questions no later than 3.30 p.m. tomorrow for a period of 60 minutes; and a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed 15 minutes.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are two proposals to be put to the House today. Is a proposal for the arrangement in relation to the sittings of the Dáil today and tomorrow agreed?

Deputy Finian McGrath: It is not agreed. I want to raise briefly the matter of the speaking rights of Independent Members of the Oireachtas. I asked the Government and major political parties in the House why no provision is made in this very important debate for Independent Deputies to speak on the issue.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, I have a second proposal which might be more appropriate at that stage.

Deputy Finian McGrath: They are given a lousy 15 minutes, which is five minutes each.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: What about the rest of us? We only get five minutes each.

Deputy Finian McGrath: At least you get it.

The Taoiseach: If any Independent Deputy wants to speak on the debate, if he or she speaks to the Whip, arrangements will be made. It is important that people can speak if they want to.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for the arrangements in relation to the sittings of the Dáil today and tomorrow agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 14, statements on macro-economic and fiscal outlook, agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Enda Kenny: In Monday's *Irish Independent* the Taoiseach seemed to cast doubt on the Government's commitment to hold the three by-elections on the one date. The Taoiseach committed to the Donegal South-West by-election but did not refer to the other two. I ask him to confirm now that what the Government Whip said in response to the motion here will stand. If it gets that far, is it the intention of the Government to move the writs for the three by-elections and hold them on a date some time in the spring?

In respect of the fact that the Taoiseach's Department is the sponsoring Department for the Moriarty tribunal, can the Taoiseach indicate if any person in his Department had any function in the appointment of new counsel for the tribunal? Is he of the opinion that, with the reopening of the hearings of the tribunal and the possible court action in respect of the appointment, it may delay the Moriarty tribunal from coming to its findings for a considerable period of time?

The Taoiseach: The position of the Chief Whip outlined on the day is the position. In regard to the operation of the tribunal, the matter of appointments of people to it is a matter for it.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: On that matter, it is my understanding — the Taoiseach can correct me if I am wrong — that the Department of the Taoiseach is responsible for the administrative budget of the Moriarty tribunal, which would include the costs of legal counsel for the tribunal. I would be surprised if——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gilmore, could I dissuade you from going down this road? We are opening up a whole area which the Deputy could raise at other times, but maybe not now.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I would be surprised if the appointment was made without at least informing the Taoiseach and his Department or perhaps seeking their approval, at least for the cost of the appointment. Was the Department informed or was its approval sought? There were reports in newspapers at the weekend that property developers with NAMA-bound loans are enjoying multi-million euro benefits by exploiting a loophole that allows them to claim tax deductions on interest payments even if they are not making payments to their banks. Is this the case?

An Ceann Comhairle: I wish the Deputy would pursue this matter in another way and perhaps bring it up directly with the line Minister.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: With regard to the budget, has the Government given any consideration to closing off that loophole if it exists?

An Ceann Comhairle: Before I call the Taoiseach I must state that the Chair has ruled on a number of occasions that issues currently before a tribunal are not a matter for the Dáil.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I did not raise an issue before a tribunal.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Dáil must not attempt to have a parallel tribunal on any of these matters.

Deputy Alan Shatter: This is not an issue. It is a former ministerial colleague of his appearing to represent the tribunal and undermining any concept of——

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have a parallel tribunal. We cannot be running the tribunal here and having it sitting somewhere else.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: This is not about the tribunal.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I raised no issue which is before a tribunal.

Deputy Alan Shatter: Thirteen years.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I asked the Taoiseach a question in respect of the responsibility he and his Department have for the administrative cost of the tribunal, including the cost of the appointment of counsel. It is a perfectly in order question.

The Taoiseach: On that matter, the appointment of a tribunal request to have someone appointed for the purpose of cross-examining that witness would of course be obtained from the Taoiseach's office and that was granted. However, the actual decision as to who is appointed by that tribunal is a matter for the tribunal.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: They never told the Taoiseach.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: The little elite.

The Taoiseach: I am not involved in that.

Deputy Alan Shatter: The conduct of this tribunal is increasingly more bizarre.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Ó Caoláin.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I waive any questions I have; I believe we should get on with the business we have already agreed to address here today.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Deputy for his co-operation.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: A number of Bills are before the House——

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to be brief. I am most anxious to move on.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I would assist the Ceann Comhairle greatly if he did not interrupt me——

An Ceann Comhairle: I told the Deputy before that the Chair does not interrupt, the Chair intervenes.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: ——because then I would be able to say exactly what I have in my mind.

The Taoiseach is muttering something. There are also mutterings from my right-hand side. The five minute man is on the right-hand side.

On the Order of Business and promised legislation, a number of Bills are before the House the introduction of which could alleviate the debt situation with which the Government is faced. Would it be possible to isolate those Bills and bring them forward as a matter of urgency

with a view to the State availing of the benefits of their passage? An example is the legal costs Bill.

The Taoiseach: The legal costs Bill will be next year.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will move on to statements on——

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I did not hear that.

The Taoiseach: The legal costs Bill is next year.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: What about the principle that I raised?

The Taoiseach: I ask the Deputy to advise me of the Bills he has in mind.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: There is a principle involved.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to postpone detailed debate on the matter until the Bill emerges on the floor.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is what is wrong with this country; everything is postponed for far too long and the Ceann Comhairle knows this as well as I do.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Before we move on, everybody in the House welcomes the return of Deputy Ardagh in good health.

An Ceann Comhairle: We all agree.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Macro-Economic and Fiscal Outlook: Statements

The Taoiseach: As the people of Ireland look to this House today they do so with understandable concern. Our people are concerned about their future, about the prospects for their children, about the well-being of their neighbours and of the country as a whole. They are looking to this House with hope and with expectation. They hope the political leaders of this country have the capacity to steer us through this period of unprecedented economic challenge. As they expect, there will be a clear plan, a pathway which charts our course to economic recovery and secures confidence in our country's future. The people need to hear from the Members of this House what we are going to do to fix these problems.

As the House is aware, I invited the Leaders of the Opposition to meet with me and my colleague, Deputy Gormley, last week, to discuss the budgetary crisis. I proposed that the Opposition should have full access to briefings by the Department of Finance, so that they could appreciate fully the scale of that challenge. I believe it is important to afford other parties in the House the opportunity to formulate their proposals for putting the public finances on a sustainable footing. I am also seeking to build external confidence in the determination of Ireland to achieve fiscal and economic stability through a broadly expressed commitment on the part of Irish political leaders.

It is, therefore, particularly important and beneficial that the leaders of the main political parties in this House have expressed their commitment to the target of reducing the deficit to 3% of GDP by 2014. That commitment will underpin confidence on the part of investors and workers and the community generally. I acknowledge that commitment and the spirit in which it was reiterated at our discussions last week. It is a sure sign of the strength of our democracy,

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and of the widely-shared recognition in the House of where the national interest lies at this critical moment in our economic history.

We should reflect on how far we have come in our efforts to overcome this unprecedented economic crisis — a crisis that has affected all the developed economies of the world. Since 2008, we have achieved budgetary savings of €14.5 billion in full year terms, in just two years. The economy is emerging from recession, with growth returning and the prospect of stronger growth next year and thereafter. There have been significant improvements in our competitiveness as Ireland prices itself back into the markets we sell to and a remarkably strong export performance is being recorded this year over last year.

The budgetary figures for this year are broadly on target. Despite all that has happened, our debt to GDP ratio in 2014, forecast to be about 110%, will not be significantly out of line with many other developed countries. Taking account of the National Pensions Reserve Fund, and cash reserves in the NTMA, our net debt position is forecast to be about 83% of GDP, lower than many other developed countries. However, our borrowing costs have increased significantly and our public finance position still requires a major additional correction to put it on a sustainable path.

The State, therefore, continues to be faced with an enormous budgetary crisis. Against that background, the Government has decided that an overall budgetary adjustment of €15 billion over the next four years is warranted in order to achieve the target deficit of 3% of GDP by 2014. This is based on a projected average annual real GDP growth rate of 2.75% over the period 2011 to 2014. It is also based on a working assumption that the budgetary adjustment will be somewhat front-loaded in 2011 and that it will be weighted more towards reductions in spending rather than tax increases.

It is the Government's judgment that while a degree of front-loading may dampen economic growth in 2011, it will give the necessary confidence to the international markets and secure our funding position which is, of course, fundamental to sustaining public services for our citizens and achieving sustainable economic growth in future years. The key reasons for the significant increase in the required consolidation are lower growth prospects both at home and abroad and higher debt interest costs. The size of the adjustment for 2011 and the distribution over the remaining years will be announced in the four-year plan, which the Government is currently discussing and preparing for publication in mid-November. However, more work needs to be done and more up-to-date information will be assessed, before a final decision on the precise figure for 2011 is made.

The projected adjustment for each of the four years is not arrived at lightly. It is based on a rigorous assessment of the balance between what is credible to the markets and to international institutions and the inevitable impact on potential economic growth in the economy. It is severe, but it is a necessary next step to economic recovery.

No one can forecast with complete accuracy how the Irish economy will perform next year, never mind over a four-year period. There is also considerable uncertainty about the international economic outlook, which has a powerful influence on the performance of our economy. For instance, last year we ourselves predicted a contraction of minus 1.3% in our budget and if one considers what others were saying about a medium position of about minus 1.1%, it looks like we will have perhaps zero or small growth rather than that. This is just with respect to the one-year forecast. However, there is also considerable room for continued action here at home. We are not passive spectators, watching helplessly as events unfold. On the contrary, I believe the four-year plan we will publish will be a call to action for our entire economy and society. The plan is not only about

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bringing order to the public finances by 2014, which is vital. It is also about bringing together our growth strategy, as set out in the smart economy plan, our jobs strategy and our proposals for structural economic reform. It will demonstrate how growth in the economy and in employment will be fast-tracked by building on the key competitive strengths I mentioned earlier. If we can do that, we can reduce the scale of the €15 billion adjustment that is necessary if we are to achieve the 3% target by 2014.

I emphasise that the best way to reduce the deficit is to accelerate a major programme of structural reform in our economy, aimed at increasing employment and national income. If vested interests wish to oppose reform, all they will do is help to deepen our problems. If they proceed with such an approach, they will help to condemn our society to persistent unemployment, deteriorating public services and reduced support for the most vulnerable in our society. Our problems are so serious that no vested interest and no section of society can escape from their consequences by trying to protect narrow sectional interests. We all have a part to play. Everyone is in this together. The public service has a critical role to play in achieving the goals of the plan we are preparing.

Deputy Michael Noonan: Does the Taoiseach intend to circulate his script?

The Taoiseach: Yes. It should be here. It is on the way.

I fully acknowledge the contribution that has been already made by individual public servants across the system as a whole. There has been a significant reduction of 11,000 in the number of staff in the public service. Staff have seen significant income reductions. Staff numbers will fall further over the coming years, as the cost of the public service is reduced and service delivery is radically reformed. Crucially, we have agreed with the public service unions a framework, in the form of the Croke Park agreement, which acknowledges the need for greater flexibility and faster change in underpinning jobs and living standards in the public service. The agreement is an instrument not only to enable the public service to live within its means, but to transform it to meet the needs of our citizens in the future.

The Government is looking not only for a slimmed down and less costly public service, but for a total transformation. We need a transformation in what the public service achieves for our citizens. We need a transformation in the targets that are set and outcomes that are achieved for our people across every stage of the life cycle. I refer to children, people of working age, people with disabilities and older people. We need a transformation in how such targets and outcomes are delivered so the overall cost of the public service is sustainable for the economy. We will need extraordinary leadership, creativity and flexibility from management and staff if the commitment to avoid further pay reductions and compulsory redundancies is to be honoured. The Government has no desire to back away from the commitment into which it has entered. However, it can meet that commitment only on the basis of full and comprehensive delivery by all of the parties.

We need to give our people hope. It is important that the country is taking credible, thoughtful and resolute action. This debate can and should be about finding the right solutions to our problems. We need to implement solutions that are right for our country at this time. My absolute and firm conviction is that the challenges we face can be met and overcome. They will be overcome through the resilience and capacities of our people, through the inherent strengths of our economy, through the intrinsic values of our society, through a commitment to courageous, innovative and responsible policies, and through the formulation and energetic implementation of a plan which demonstrates to our people and to the world how we will survive our present difficulties. The scale of the challenge is clear. It is reflected in the significant drop in economic activity and the output of the economy in recent years. That is why we

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must continue to plan for growth. It is reflected in the increase in unemployment and the reduced prospects for young people who are leaving our schools and colleges.

Deputy James Reilly: They are leaving our shores.

The Taoiseach: That is why policies and actions to create and sustain jobs are of paramount importance. It is reflected in the loss of national competitiveness in recent years. That is why we will introduce proposals for further reducing costs and improving competitiveness across the economy. It is reflected in the extent of the repairs that are required to our badly damaged financial institutions. That is why we must conclude the process of banking reform and recapitalisation. The scale of the challenge is reflected in the size of the gap between our income and expenditure as a State. That is why we need to continue the process of reducing the deficit, with measures to increase growth, jobs and revenue and to reduce public spending. We will not be overwhelmed by the realities we must face. We take great encouragement from the significant progress that has been already made in tackling this unprecedented crisis. Our objective now must be to build on the decisions we have taken and the stabilisation we have achieved. Now we must push ahead to grow our economy, create jobs and bring down the deficit.

A crucial element in building confidence in our capacity to overcome these problems is to realise the strengths we have and the strong performance which continues in many parts of the Irish economy. We still have 1.86 million people at work today, which is approximately 480,000 more people than were at work in 1997. This is a highly qualified and productive workforce, working in an economy where a high proportion of our output comes from the innovation-intensive, high value-added and growing high-technology sector as well as in an indigenous sector that is now more efficient and competitive than it was when the economic and financial crisis hit us in 2008.

That is reflected in our export performance, which has recovered rapidly this year, despite the very difficult international trading conditions. Today's figures from the Irish Exporters Association show a 12.8% growth in merchandise exports in the third quarter and a 9% increase in total exports on the same period last year. It is expected that the balance of payments of the Irish economy will move into surplus next year. The level of exports and capital inflows is set to exceed imports and capital outflows from next year on. That fact tells us our economic relations with the rest of the world are firmly pointing towards our capacity to pay our way, to service our debts and to achieve economic and fiscal stability.

Ireland's real competitive strength is further reflected in the continuing flow of investment announcements and the expansion of employment by world leading international companies which still see Ireland as the location of choice for many of their activities. Last week an IBM survey stated that Ireland was the best location for direct investment. Many of the best and largest companies in the world have decided to locate their higher value-added activities in Ireland and we are seeing a high and growing proportion of firms engaged in research and innovation. That inherent competitive strength also reflects the realism and flexibility of our people at work across the entire economy.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: On a point of order, can we suspend until the Taoiseach's script arrives in the Chamber?

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot suspend the House. That is not in order. I call the Taoiseach.

Deputy Alan Shatter: Never mind organising an economy, he cannot even organise his script.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Alan Shatter: On a second point of order, and I will be very brief—

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot set out to disrupt the proceedings of the House in this manner.

Deputy Alan Shatter: I wonder if we will be joined by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, who was so interested in consensus.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy Shatter resume his seat?

The Taoiseach: I apologise. The script is on the way.

The Irish workforce has adapted to the international economic crisis and the very changed circumstances at home. In many cases, work practices have changed, working hours have been altered, pay rates have been reduced, especially premium earnings of various kinds. Employers and workers have got together at local level to agree how to adapt and to preserve jobs.

As a result, the unit labour cost of production in Ireland has reduced while it has continued to rise elsewhere. That improvement in cost competitiveness is already being reflected in the more positive way in which operations in Ireland are being viewed by international companies.

The Government has been also taking a range of actions to help return the economy to the path of sustainable growth. In December 2008, we published our economic plan, Building Ireland's Smart Economy. It identified five action areas as the basis for the Government's response to the crisis. Since then, we have been assiduously implementing that framework.

We have acted aggressively in all these areas to tackle short-term difficulties while laying the basis for future recovery. We have introduced supports for business, for example, the enterprise stabilisation fund and the employment subsidy scheme, while seeing large gains in international competitiveness.

We have acted decisively to stabilise the banking system in very difficult circumstances and ensured a continued flow of credit to business, albeit not yet back to its optimum, and work continues in this critical area. We have begun to re-position Ireland as a global innovation hub, based on the work of the innovation task force, notably through the establishment of Innovation Fund Ireland and improvements to our research and development and intellectual property tax regime. We have invested heavily in renewable energy infrastructure, while developing new market opportunities in areas like electric vehicles and the SmartGrid. We have sustained high levels of capital investment to support economic activity during the past two years, completing the inter-urban motorways and delivering new projects at reduced cost.

The decisions we have already taken, and the reforms we have already introduced, will greatly benefit this country in the years ahead, and there are many reasons to be hopeful and optimistic about the future of our country and her people. Our mission now is to translate our economic strengths into economic recovery. We must be hopeful, optimistic and energetic, and yet we must be clear-eyed, realistic and thoughtful. Hope and optimism are the essential ingredients of our future, but they do not blind us to the realities of the present.

We must recognise that the rapidity of the recent economic decline and the scale of our budgetary deficit have created real doubts about the State's capacity to pay its way. These financial problems have overshadowed our real economic and competitive strengths. The reality is that we must convince those who lend to the State, who fund our banks and who do business with Ireland that we have a credible plan to close the gap between Government

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income and expenditure, and to meet the cost of servicing our increased debt. There is no other choice, it must be done and the Government is determined that it will be done.

We are entering a crucial period. Together, we will have to make some of the most significant decisions in our recent economic history. Those decisions will shape the future for all of our people for many years. If we shirk the necessary decisions, or if we make the wrong judgments, the consequences are very difficult to contemplate. That must not happen, and I do not believe it will happen.

When the Government presents its budget, it will set out the specific adjustments, in terms of income and expenditure, which will demonstrate progress towards our 2014 target. Achieving budgetary balance will require difficult decisions, based on a clear view of economic and social priorities and, crucially, on the principle that the burden must be shared.

As I have outlined, we all have a part to play in contributing to recovery. The gap between what we are spending and what we are collecting in revenue is too big for anyone to escape sharing the burden of adjustment but the society that we have built has at its core a commitment to help the less fortunate. The Government is determined that the major gains in social protection and support for the vulnerable in recent years will be maintained as far as is possible in present circumstances.

For example, between 2005 and 2010, the contributory State pension rose by 37.7%, the lowest rate of welfare payment rose by 45.4%, the qualified child benefit increase rose by 77.4% and the national fuel scheme payment rose by 122.2%. Inflation in the same period was just 10.3%. Those gains are real and substantial. There have also been major improvements in public services such as health and education, in care for our elderly and in support for people with disabilities.

Given the budgetary crisis we are now in, I do not believe that we can protect every aspect of health, education and social welfare spending. Unfortunately, that is impossible given the scale of spending in those areas relative to the reduced Exchequer resources that will be available. However, many, if not all, of the gains of recent years can and will be preserved, and once financial stability is restored and sustainable economic growth achieved, we can improve our living standards again also. Every measure we consider over the coming weeks will be assessed with this in mind.

We must aspire to the goal that all of our citizens have an opportunity to work and to be valued in our society, to be well-educated and to be properly cared for when needs be. To do this, we must get more from less, and not to be afraid to change things around to get the best possible outcomes for the resources we now have available.

The four year plan is about demonstrating how we will achieve a return to growth and jobs in line with the capacities and ambitions of our people so that we can meet our social objectives on a sustainable basis. While this is a national plan, to be presented by the Government and containing a range of measures requiring the approval of the Oireachtas, we will also seek support for it from the EU institutions. That is prudent and it recognises the reality of the international situation, as well as the support we have already received from those institutions.

A viable plan, with the approval of this House and the support of the EU institutions, is the surest way forward to economic recovery. Responsibility lies with the Members of this House and ultimately, the Irish people. We all need to understand and believe that we can have a powerful influence — as we have had before — on our own economic fortunes.

As a small open economy we have to pay our way in the world through trade and exports. This means we must ensure our costs are not out of line with our competitors, focus our

investments and energies on sectors and activities with scope to secure more jobs and organise our business and industrial relations practices in a way that unleashes the full potential of the economy.

We will continue the process of reducing the costs of doing business. While we have seen significant improvements in many areas, some significant costs are out of line with our competitors. This is true of parts of our sheltered domestic economy which are not exposed to international competition. We will look, in particular, at the costs of professional services and charges levied by public bodies of all kinds. We will adopt a focused and determined approach to drive down costs which are unreasonably out of line with those of important competitors.

Many employers, including the public service, have had to take steps and sometimes unpalatable decisions to reduce payroll costs. Labour costs in the economy, like other costs, cannot be sustained at a level which is out of line with our international competitors when account is taken of productivity and other relevant factors.

I welcome the fact that a framework for engagement between employers and trade unions in the private sector was agreed between IBEC and ICTU. Negotiations have also produced adjustments in a small number of sectoral agreements which are underpinned by the institutional machinery of the State. It is time to look closely at the terms of some of these agreements to ensure they are fair by reference to what has happened in the rest of the economy and appropriate to the task of sustaining and growing employment.

As part of an overall competitive economy, there are sectors where specific opportunities arise at this time if we focus particular effort on taking advantage of them. These have been identified in a series of strategic initiatives on the part of the Government over recent months. For example, we are determined to ensure the environment for innovation in existing and new businesses is as positive and productive as possible. This is as important for Irish SMEs as it is for the high-tech sector.

Our economic policy framework is not only about new industries and high-tech capabilities. It applies just as much to what we might regard as our traditional businesses of agrifood, tourism and construction. These industries have the benefit of involving people right across the community and all around the country. They are sustaining communities and families and have the potential to do so for many years ahead as they evolve in line with market realities. They face challenges but their potential for further growth and development is significant. We must ensure those capabilities are fully realised in order that these traditional sectors can also play their part in growing jobs.

The four year plan will, therefore, set out concrete and tangible ways in which key sectors of the economy are being supported and mobilised to grow our economic base in the period ahead. Their vitality will build the credibility of our overall economic and fiscal commitments. Achieving our budgetary targets will, in turn, build a better business environment for investment in these sectors. This can result in many thousands of new jobs which, in turn, can facilitate a much less severe budgetary adjustment. This virtuous circle of budgetary performance, competitiveness and economic development is the dynamic which will drive a successful economic future for our country.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It is a pity the Government did not discover virtue five years earlier.

The Taoiseach: Democratic government is, in essence, about choices.

Deputy Alan Shatter: This is like a lady of the night preaching virtue on the streets of Dublin.

The Taoiseach: With hindsight, we can see that the sustained boom period of the Celtic tiger misled us all into believing we could avoid difficult choices. We now know differently. As a consequence, the choices we now face are, unfortunately, very stark. It is essential at this time of severe economic difficulty that our people understand the choices facing the country, the decisions being taken by the Government and the reasons for them.

Deputy David Stanton: Will the Taoiseach apologise?

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

The Taoiseach: It is also important and appropriate that the Government can show to this House and Irish people that it is listening to all points of view and considering all policy options.

Some have expressed the view that we can reduce the severity of the fiscal consolidation by extending the 2014 deadline. While the Government understands this view, it is simply not grounded in the reality of the political and economic situation in which we find ourselves. It also disregards the implications of the consequent rise in debt service costs for the economy.

There is a lively debate about the scale and pace of changes to public spending amid fears that austerity could create a deflationary spiral. Reducing public spending on the scale envisaged will temporarily dampen economic growth but we must recognise that even with the proposed adjustment of €15 billion, we still intend to borrow tens of billions of euro between now and 2014. We simply cannot afford to increase borrowing further. If we tried to do so, we would run a very real risk of not being able to borrow.

There are, however, many good ideas to which the Government has been carefully listening and about which it has been actively thinking. While respecting the absolute need to meet the deficit target, we are considering new initiatives to promote employment in various sectors of the economy. We are looking at how we can reduce the abnormally high savings ratio and release some of those resources into the economy. We are examining the entire asset base of the State to make sure it is being used to maximum effect to drive investment and to help our competitiveness. Moreover, the Government is acutely aware of the role of small business in providing employment and the need to make sure we support our indigenous companies by helping to reduce their costs and administrative burden. We are evaluating our capital investment plans to make sure we make the right investments for the future as well as helping employment in the short term. Consequently, all our decisions on taxation, spending and growth will be made with an open mind. There are many choices still to be made.

In bringing forward the four-year plan, the Government will set out its ambitions for the future of the country and our society. In doing this, we will be part of the broader Europe 2020 strategy for jobs and growth to ensure that our economy and society develop to meet the ambitions and aspirations of our people. We will outline an approach to budgetary policy which is not just about balancing the books in line with our commitments but about trying to transform and restructure our economy and ultimately to improve our society. In addition, the Government will set out a new vision for social partnership as a process that can mobilise commitment and energy to support economic recovery and a fair and decent society. Our social dialogue will thereby return to its roots as an important part of the process of building up the real economic and social strengths of our economy and society.

This is a moment with very few parallels in recent economic history. It is a moment when the Government will act clearly and resolutely in the national interest.

Deputy Alan Shatter: There is no parallel for a Government to singlehandedly destroy the economy—

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Shatter.

Deputy Alan Shatter: —of the country and ruin the reputation of this State.

The Taoiseach: I truly believe that the present difficulties, daunting as they appear—

Deputy Alan Shatter: One would think the Taoiseach—

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Shatter, please. The Taoiseach is in possession.

Deputy Alan Shatter: — was a passive observer of the disaster.

The Taoiseach: I truly believe that the present difficulties, daunting as they appear, represent an opportunity to rejuvenate our institutions, to refocus our energy and to inspire the people.

Deputy Alan Shatter: One would not know he had been the Minister for Finance or is Taoiseach.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Deputy Shatter sounds like an unhinged observer.

Deputy David Stanton: The Taoiseach should apologise.

The Taoiseach: There is a realistic prospect of achieving, within a reasonable time, not merely budgetary balance and economic security but an Ireland worthy of the sacrifices our people are currently being called upon to make.

Deputy David Stanton: Where is the apology?

The Taoiseach: We can build such an Ireland, that is capable of meeting our ambitions for our children and their future in this country.

I remain open to the possibility of a broad measure of agreement on the details of a pathway to recovery and am very open to hearing and acting on sound proposals that may be aired in this debate.

However, I stand before the House in the full knowledge of my own responsibilities as Taoiseach and I will do my duty. I will discharge my responsibilities to the best of my ability. I will do so with my Government colleagues in the best interests of the country at this important time. I trust this debate will be a constructive and solid contribution to meeting the challenges our country faces at present.

Deputy Alan Shatter: Not a single identifiable or specific proposal.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Kenny, without interruption please.

Deputy Alan Shatter: Not a single identifiable or specific proposal to be discussed in this House.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I listened carefully to the Taoiseach's contribution, which did not contain a single proposal the Government intends to carry out despite having held two days of meetings at Farmleigh House and Government Buildings. At present, depression, anxiety, concern and fear stalk the land. This is because of the Government's catastrophic failure to deal with reality in the clear-eyed fashion to which the Taoiseach referred. Hundreds of thousands of people have genuine fears and concerns about their future and security. They have concerns about their resolve to keep a roof above their heads and about jobs, employment and an economic future for themselves and their families. The reason for all this is the Government

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cannot be believed and has no credibility or truth left. On the day Deputy Cowen was appointed Taoiseach, I stated that he should put his new mandate to the people for their approval. The real difference now is that the present Government, which practically is at the end of its life, has run out of time and credibility. Neither the international markets nor the people believe it.

The version from Ministers, who arrived at Farnleigh House in sleek transportation in a manner reminiscent of the Anglo Irish coming back to the big house, is to state repeatedly that they want to do what is fair and to make decisions that are in the interests of the people and the country. They state that each Minister is looking at all other Departments — so we will all hang together instead of hanging separately — which is a complete change from the manner in which Ministers used to approach budgets in the past. Moreover, this morning I heard the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport stating that the Opposition parties should now accept the €15 billion.

The leaders of the Fine Gael Party and the Labour Party, who attended the meeting last week with the Taoiseach and the absent Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, have accepted the target to reduce the deficit to 3% of GDP by 2014. However the Government will not be successful in any attempt to browbeat Opposition parties into accepting all the elements of the budget or the cuts on which it now must make decisions. It is about time for the Government to face this crisis rather than running from it, as it has done repeatedly. Every single projection put forward by the Taoiseach, the Government and the Minister for Finance, who now has lost considerable political momentum, has been wrong. One was told that NAMA would make a profit and that the deficit would be €3 billion, €5 billion or €10 billion but on each occasion, this figure has risen far beyond Government projections.

We now have reached a point at which emigration is back on the agenda. Irrespective of what has happened, the really sad fact about this political situation, arising from the billions that have been wasted by an incompetent Government and by Ministers who neglected to oversee public expenditure, pertains to the hundreds of thousands who are leaving this country with the consequential transfer of the investment in education and training of graduates across all walks of Irish life who now will give of their talent and their futures to other jurisdictions. Added to that is the depression, anxiety and concern of the many people who put their belief in the present Government on the last occasion by a majority. However, it has failed utterly to live up to the trust placed in it through the ballot box. As far as the present Government is concerned, the moral of the story is that everyone should leave, be they bankers, regulators, governors of central banks or bank boards, except for the Government itself. Its time is coming and when the people get their chance they will exercise their mandate appropriately.

There is much talk on the part of the Taoiseach and other Ministers on the need to restore Ireland's credibility in international markets and Members on this side of the House share that concern. However, yesterday's announcement of the need to commit a further €15 billion from the public finances in the coming years constitutes an indictment of the disastrous failure of the Government to restore Ireland's credibility both at home and abroad. The credibility of our country is on the floor and the reason the Government is unable to enter the bond auction markets is because there is no belief in its strategy for growth in the Irish economy over coming years. This is not because of anything that the people have done. It is because of the continuance in office of a Government the policies of which not only led us into this crisis but which at every turn have made that crisis much worse. Our credibility is on the floor because each projection made by the Government has been proved to be wrong and each announcement of recovery has been premature. The Government stated that the corner has been turned, that

there was a light at the end of the tunnel and that the only way was up but each time, this has been proven to be wrong.

The colossal failure of the Government's banking strategy also has damaged our credibility. After two years, most other countries have cleaned up their banking problems and people have been put in prison. However, the Government has failed to restore credit availability and now has lumbered Irish taxpayers with a €40 billion mortgage, the cost of which at approximately €1.5 billion must be met each year in perpetuity. Many Ministers could do a great deal of work with that kind of money, were it available to be spent on Irish infrastructure and jobs. Ireland's credibility has been hammered by the paralysis of the Government in the face of the huge reforms required in the public and private sectors to make the economy competitive enough to export our way back to full employment and sound health in the public finances. Six months after finalising the Croke Park agreement, not a single euro has been saved by its provisions as the entire public sector waits for some political leadership and a credible reform plan. After two years of blundering, paralysis and catastrophic misjudgments in almost every area, Ireland now stands at the edge of an economic abyss, threatened with the loss of our economic sovereignty, led there by an incompetent Government incapable of managing the affairs of the people.

The Taoiseach says Irish people must restore Ireland's damaged credibility through massive cuts in services and entitlements and tax increases. He outlined three of them in general terms today — social welfare, health and education. I note the Minister for Health and Children made the announcement of a cut of between €600 million and €1 billion in the health area outside the House. We were promised a world class health system. We know we have world class doctors and nurses but we do not have a world class system to back them up. The Minister calmly announced a cut of between €600 million and €1 billion in the health area, and let them eat cake after that.

The Government has imposed these cuts in services, tax increases and losses of entitlements on people. We must recognise that there are no painless solutions to the crisis in which we now find ourselves. It has become depressingly clear that everyone in our society will be affected by the measures required to undo the damage the Government has inflicted on the Irish people. There is a way to restore at least some of the country's lost credibility. That is by showing that the Irish people will hold failure to account and that there will be political consequences for disastrous economic management. A new Government with new ideas and a new mandate would, at least, have the impact of reducing Ireland's borrowing rate by 0.5%, as happened in Britain a few months ago.

The Fine Gael Party remains committed to reducing the deficit to 3% of GDP by 2014, as agreed with the European Commission. Reopening negotiations at this point with the EU to extend the period of fiscal adjustment beyond 2014 could lead to a further loss of international confidence in the Irish economy in 2011, with disastrous consequences. We know that Ireland is now likely to borrow more than €60 billion over the coming four years, pushing our debt to GDP ratio to well over 105%. Irrespective of the views of the European Union, there is no guarantee that markets will be willing to lend Ireland the additional resources required to extend any period of adjustment. The credibility of any four year fiscal plan is dependent on the likely growth path over the coming years. Largely reflecting the colossal cost of its banking policy and its failure to restore credit availability, the Government now projects higher debt-servicing costs and lower growth — an average of 2.7% — than hoped for last year. As a result, it has doubled the estimate of the spending cuts and tax increases required in order to hit the 3% borrowing target in 2014 from €7.5 billion to €15 billion. There are better possible outcomes. For instance, if the ESRI's updated high-growth scenario of an average growth of 4.5%

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were to materialise, a smaller package of fiscal measures would be needed to hit the 3% target by 2014.

That is why Fine Gael believes it is necessary, over the coming weeks, to put a relentless focus on the ways to support growth and jobs as the country attempts to repair its public finances. That is why Fine Gael believes that any fiscal plan has to operate in parallel with a credible growth and jobs plan to turn the present downward vicious cycle into an upward virtuous cycle. We have a different approach from the Government. Fine Gael offers real hope that we can rebuild our economy and restore trust in politics and in Government.

I recognise the need for a new start. The language and circumstances of the past cannot deal with the crisis we now face. This crisis has to be dealt with but we have to have a new start based on politicians telling the public the truth about where we stand as a country. The Fine Gael Party will open the books to the public when we get the opportunity, tell them the truth and point out how their country was run for the past decade or so. We are not a prisoner of any big business or powerful union. Our only interest is the public's interest. More than that, we can offer hope for the future because unlike any other party we have done a detailed analysis and made detailed plans to restore our country's fortunes. The central pillar of our plan is the commitment to making the protection and creation of jobs the first and last priority of a new Government.

There is a simple truth that appears to have escaped those in Government Buildings and the Department of Finance. If we do not grow our economy and fix our jobs crisis we will never fix our financial crisis. This is not just about fiscal consolidation, as they call it, or cuts, in the Taoiseach's language. This is about our own society, our people, our country and what the endgame is. The endgame has to be a country that works, a people who have career opportunities and where there is a sense of security, confidence and the hope to which the Taoiseach referred. The endgame will not be easy to achieve. We have been led to this point by the bluffs, untruths, negligence and incompetence of the Government over the last number of years. That is why we are committed to an enterprise society, where small businesses and entrepreneurs are supported by ensuring that banks are the servants of enterprise.

When we look at what creates jobs in our country we recognise the need for a number of key factors. There must be a favourable macro-economic environment that comprises a competitiveness profile, an advantageous tax position, a sharp industrial policy, a superior education system, support for entrepreneurship and a first rate public sector, particularly where it touches on jobs issues. There must be a targeted policy where it is possible directly to create jobs, or boost or support job creation, in specific areas.

We used to have a number of advantages over all other countries. Some are still in place, others are in areas where we have clearly slipped, some are outside our complete control and others are not. We need to be brutally honest with ourselves in evaluating our position and deciding what measures we have to take if we are to look at a credible growth pattern with a concentrated focus on jobs and on getting people back to work. The low corporation tax has been a fundamental lever for foreign direct investment into Ireland. I was honoured to be a member of the Government that introduced that low corporation tax rate. Many other countries now have a similar position. We must defend our position here. This party, in government, will defend that position. From speaking to business interests abroad, it is perfectly obvious they value the low corporation tax rate. It is still a matter of fundamental importance to our jobs policy.

We have, clearly, slipped in the area of cost competitiveness. The Government lost sight of the impact of cost control and cost competitiveness in business, whether of local authority rates

and charges, red tape or bureaucracy. Many of our 80,000 small businesses are nearing bankruptcy. Many are struggling to remain in business. They have never been written to by Government saying: “These are the supports or encouragement we can offer you. This is what we want to do for you if you can take on one extra employee”. They have never been contacted and assured that Government recognises the importance of small business and of what small and medium enterprises can do for our country.

I recently spoke to business people in the United States, where there is still huge interest in investing here and ensuring that Irish small and medium enterprises can export to that country. The IDA has always done a fine job in attracting foreign direct investment but we have slipped in some respects in recent years. We have to examine the trends to find out why we were No. 1 and what we have to do to make this the best small country in the world to do business.

Last week in City West, I attended the Ernst and Young entrepreneur of the year awards. Somebody who flew in solely to attend that function would be blown away by the potential, initiative and creative ingenuity shown by many small and medium enterprises around the country. In Government, Fine Gael will remove the shackles from people who want to work and create jobs but who are being impeded by a lack of encouragement and obstacles put up by Government bureaucracy.

There has been much discussion of our diaspora. Last year, people from all over the world gathered in Farmleigh House. It is a pity that event was hijacked by the Department of Foreign Affairs, which never had the competence a Department of trade and industry might have in dealing with these matters. Unless we bring from that meeting specific initiatives and results, people will not attend another one. Diasporas have had an impact on Taiwan, India and Israel in terms of serious investment and job creation. The Irish diaspora, whether in the United States or elsewhere in the world, is willing to contribute and wants to help our country. That has not been harnessed to the extent it should.

Fine Gael has pointed out on numerous occasions that our education system has both strengths and weakness. Major employers in the technology sector have voiced concerns about the position of science and mathematics. The rote learning of many aspects of the leaving certificate has led many potential employers to state that our students display less capacity for imaginative and independent thinking than those of other countries. That issue needs to be addressed for the sake of the fine qualities of our thousands of young people who can and will measure up to the competitive pressures of their peers around the world if they are given the opportunity.

The entrepreneurial culture of which Fine Gael speaks must be maintained. In the 1980s, Ireland had one of the lowest percentages in Europe of people who wanted to run their own businesses but by the late 1990s and the early part of this decade, we had one of the highest percentages. That transformation, and the development of a broad entrepreneurial culture over the same period, was one of the most important developments in Ireland’s economic history. Many of the elements of this culture are still in place but others have run into difficulties. The entrepreneurial culture survived the boom and bust of the dotcom bubble. Even now, in the face of domestic and international crises, I regularly come across small and medium enterprises which want to expand, change direction or get into exports and new lines of business, yet the Government voted down the loan guarantee scheme which Fine Gael introduced last week.

We have investigated the job creation potential in semi-State bodies through our NewERA economic recovery strategy published two years ago by Deputy Coveney. I note the British Prime Minister, Mr. Cameron, has launched a £200 billion investment programme in major

infrastructure, with a £50 billion contribution from his Government. Fine Gael's programme for water, broadband and renewable energy, which involves commercial semi-State bodies providing infrastructure facilities and charging commercial rates at the end of their provision, will mean increased attractiveness for investment and job creation, both locally and internationally. Up to 100,000 jobs can be created through that additional infrastructural investment.

I have previously referred to the impact that international education can have on Ireland. The demand for education beyond boundaries has increased hugely in the past several years and is forecast to reach more than 6 million students by 2020. The number of US students attending college overseas increased from 90,000 in 1995 to 250,000 in 2007. Approximately 300,000 international students attended British universities in 2008, paying almost €4 billion in fees. International education contributed €11 billion to the Australian economy in 2009. We are bogged down with visa bureaucracy and restrictions on students entering this country. It is past time that was addressed. These are areas in which we can change the way we do business.

Deputy Bruton will shortly publish a serious document on public service provision and cost. In dealing with the provision and cost of Government, it is essential that we start at the centre and the top. This is why Fine Gael has published our own document on changing the way we do our business, reducing the size of the Dáil and putting the abolition of the Seanad to the people in a referendum. By changing the way this Chamber does its business, we will make it the centre of Irish politics rather than a place where the Government does not want to be.

We want to bring the Dutch health system, which is the best in Europe, to Ireland. We are now told that between €600 million and €1 billion will be cut from our public health service without reference to protecting the front line services that save lives. Fine Gael's health plan, which we call FairCare, will eliminate hospital waiting lists, as was done in Northern Ireland, and will put the patient front and centre by paying hospitals for what they do rather than what they did last year. We will eliminate the unfair two-tier health system by making health insurance affordable for everyone. People will be able to access care on the basis of need rather than wealth. Our new approach is based on a system that is not fantasy and which works in the Netherlands.

We will change politics and the public service. Fine Gael's programme for political reform will start at the centre and the top to ensure the political system never again lets us down so catastrophically as it did in the past few years.

The Government has on many occasions claimed that the recession is at an end. This claim is no longer credible. However, there is a world of difference between the Ireland that will be ground out by the relentless forces of credit starvation, long-term unemployment and emigration and the country that could emerge if we adopt a more decisive, creative and innovative set of solutions which harnesses our entire community to the task. In every city, town and parish in this country, people want to contribute and assist. It is that contribution which gives people a sense of satisfaction. The days of the Celtic tiger are long dead and its values are not the values of the future. People who want to give their time and experience to their communities will pull this country through. This Government has failed absolutely to recognise the intrinsic values that are held deep down by the Irish people and the old meitheal spirit that is part of a tradition based on emigrant trends over two centuries.

The last recession officially ended in 1983 but it took six years before investment in job creation significantly reduced the dole queues. The Government strategy appears to have only two planks: the first is writing whatever cheques are necessary to bail out banks and the second is cutting the budget deficit each year through savage and insensitive cuts. I did not hear a

significant proposal of any proportion from the Taoiseach today in his contribution to this macroeconomic debate. These two planks of the Government add up to a strategy of national retrenchment. There is nothing positive, nothing ambitious, nothing creative to restore confidence in Ireland's economic future and nothing that will add any sense of hope or confidence to people out there, who do not see any security up front despite the fact savings continue to accumulate in Irish banks.

We have a very different philosophy, which is that the people's potential can and will flourish here in this country. The Fine Gael plan states that the crisis must be viewed as an opportunity for the political and economic transformation of our country. To do that, we need to focus not just on, as the Taoiseach calls it, fiscal consolidation and on cuts in the cost of Government and the way we deliver public services, but also in the value of those services and by creating an enterprise society.

In the early part of the last century, the Government, led by the forerunner of the party I now lead, created and built the institutions of this State, such as with the establishment of the ESB in 1927, the Shannon scheme at Ardnacrusha in 1929, the dramatic acceleration of rural electrification in 1955 and the air transport liberalisation in the 1980s that launched Ryanair as Europe's largest airline. Now is also a time for re-imagining our economic future. For me, the end game is not the red line or where it is drawn. The end game is a country where pride can be restored, where people have hope and confidence that they can have a future in this country, if that is what they wish, where we can restore sound public finances, where there is a banking system that works and lends credit to business in circumstances where it should, where there is a health system that measures up and is not a black hole opening up and sucking in relentlessly all of the taxes from all areas of Irish society, and where there is an education system that is competitive and able to stand up to measure against the competitive forces of the world.

We pointed out in our plans how we can fund that enterprise society through the sale of assets that are no longer necessary for the future, through a leaner, more skilled banking situation where credit is lent to business, where necessary, and through a re-balancing of the tax system to offer greater support to enterprise, innovation and employment. As I said, a 51% marginal tax rate is much too high.

Fianna Fáil and the Greens, supported by a number of Independents, have led our country to the edge of an economic abyss. It is ironic that within six years of the centenary of the 1916 Rising, which was the beginning of the opportunity for Ireland to have economic independence, the so-called great republicans have led us to a point where there is no credibility, faith or belief in the strategy of this Government to rectify our problems. As I have said before and say again now, it is time to consult the people, time to give them their opportunity and time to have a new mandate. The Government should go. It has failed in its duty, it has broken the trust given to it by the people and it has failed to implement the policy situations which would keep Ireland proud, strong and clear. We should not be the focus of this international recession; we should be but a backwater of it. We are here because of neglect, incompetence, lack of management skills and a failure to recognise that politics is not just about keeping a party in power, it is about people, about a society and about our country. Fine Gael will measure up to that responsibility when the people give us the opportunity.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Yesterday, the Minister for Finance told the Irish people that the Government has decided to make a €15 billion adjustment in the budget over the next four years, double the amount that was previously expected. Where does this €15 billion come from? When I asked the Taoiseach earlier today for the detail of the information and projections on

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

which that figure must be based, he either would not or could not give me the information. How, therefore, are we to rely on the figure of €15 billion? How credible is it when it comes from the same source that has already told us we had the cheapest bank bailout in the world, that we had seen the last of the really difficult budgets, that the worst was over, that we needed only one more push and that we had turned the corner? Some corner.

What we still do not know is what is the basis for this €15 billion figure. According to the Government, the Opposition has been shown the books. Two meetings lasting a total of three hours and now the Opposition is supposed to know everything. After three hours in the Department of Finance, the Opposition parties are expected to have the same level of knowledge and information about the public finances as the Government has after 13 years in office.

Let me put on the record what we were actually given. The kernel of the briefing last week was three sheets of paper, with a table on each, containing nine rows of figures. The first table shows what would happen if one went ahead with the €7.5 billion plan, and what would happen to the deficit and GDP with a €15 billion plan, assuming a €4.5 billion adjustment in 2011. That is it and no more — GDP figures in ranges. On another page, we were given the same table, this time assuming a €7 billion adjustment in 2011. The GDP figure for 2011 in this table is lower, as one might expect, but the figure for 2012 is higher. What explains this particular form of “bounce back economics”? We do not know because the table contains no data on consumption, investment, exports, imports, inflation, wage growth, interest rates, exchange rates or growth in the US, European or world economies.

When one asks how it could be the case that a massive hit on the economy in 2011 — we are told the reductions in spending are to be front-loaded — is going to produce higher growth in 2012, the answer is one word, “confidence”. Not a worked out spreadsheet showing how different levels of interest rates will affect investment or consumer spending, just “confidence”, or what Professor Krugman calls “the confidence fairy”. While five-year olds in Ireland are understandably prepared to believe in the tooth fairy, it is unwise for a country or an economy to put its faith in the confidence fairy.

Despite all the damage done to the economy, Fianna Fáil still insists on playing political games. The Fianna Fáil spin machine is putting it about that it has opened up the books to the Opposition and now it is up to the Opposition to produce the answer, based on a few so-called scenarios about how the deficit might possibly be reduced, depending on two possible sets of adjustments and two possible sets of growth forecasts — possible, not probable or definitive. We have not yet been given the official growth forecast for next year because, we are told, the Government is still negotiating it with the European Commission. We have not yet been given the official forecast for the three years after that, and we have not yet been given the figure for cuts in next year’s budget. Nor have we been given what the Department’s estimate is of the additional impact of extra budget measures on jobs and growth. We have simply been told to believe in the confidence fairy.

We do not have a template for the four-year plan. We do not have a figure from Government on what Croke Park will save next year. We do not have an answer on how the bank bailout will be treated in the national accounts and how that will affect the deficit target. If one asks for projections for 2011, one will be told that they do not have the October or November Exchequer returns.

The horrifying thought is that this might actually be the kind of information that has been used to inform Cabinet decision-making over the past few years. Either Fianna Fáil is genuinely uncertain about these key figures, which would be extraordinary after more than 13 years in

office, or it knows them and is simply not willing to tell the Opposition or the public because it does not suit its carefully worked out political choreography.

After everything that has happened up to now, one would have to be naïve not to be sceptical about any figures that come from this Government. What we do know is that after Black Thursday, there has been an enormous bill to pay for the banks, of at least €45 billion. We know there has been a catastrophic loss of confidence in Ireland abroad and that the cost of Government borrowing has shot up to the point where the Government feels unable to continue borrowing money. We know there is to be a four-year plan and a budget that are supposed to restore order to the public finances and confidence in the country. However, beyond that the Government has provided very few specifics. There were no specifics at all in the Taoiseach's speech today. The Opposition parties are, justifiably, often challenged over specifics. It is astonishing that, in the opening of today's debate, the Taoiseach did not set out a single specific measure under consideration by the Government. Today's debate should be about solutions. The economic crisis we now face is the worst in the history of the State. Disastrous mismanagement of the economy and the catastrophic error of the blanket bank guarantee have brought the country to the edge of bankruptcy. The reality is that we face a fight to hold on to our economic freedom and the right to make decisions about our own future if the Government cannot convince investors to lend money to Ireland at reasonable rates again.

This crisis is not about economic jargon, or graphs or numbers; it is a human crisis. It is a crisis for the hundreds of thousands who have no work, for families at risk of losing their homes, for people who have lost their businesses. If we are going to solve this problem, we need clarity on numbers. However, we also need clarity on objectives and a serious, sustained approach to achieving solutions.

What I and the Labour Party have been saying throughout this crisis is that there must be more than one objective. We need to lower the deficit to 3% by 2014, but not just for the sake of it. It is a means to several ends. Our objectives must be to get people back to work, re-start economic growth, increase exports and restore our reputation abroad and confidence at home so people will invest and spend in Ireland.

We need to come up with a plan not so much to satisfy our partners in Europe, but to convince international bond markets to invest in Ireland while we go about the difficult work of restoring our public finances. We must combine deficit reduction with a strategy to re-start economic growth. We must do all of this in a way that is fair.

Ever since the Government made its agreement with our partners in Europe to reach the 3% target by 2014, the Labour Party has supported it in that objective. We have done so because we believe it is extremely important that Ireland send a united signal to the wider world that we are serious about dealing with our deficit. People who invest in this country do not necessarily follow our politics or have any understanding of what a change in Government might mean. The Labour Party wants to make it clear that a change in Government in Ireland will not result in the goal of deficit reduction being abandoned. I regret that Fianna Fáil has taken so long to grudgingly accept that this is the case. Had it done so earlier, it could have made more of it, to the advantage of the country.

It is important to be clear, however, about what Ireland has actually signed on for. We have agreed to try to lower our deficit to 3% by 2014. That means having a credible multi-annual plan that addresses the problem over a period. It does not mean we are tied to any particular deficit figure for next year. We will not solve this problem by resorting to ever-greater and ever-more-crude adjustments. We will solve it by having a strategy that combines reduction in the budget deficit with a programme of action on jobs and growth, and which puts in place

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reforms that signal to the wider world that Ireland is a serious country that will not allow this disaster to happen again.

Bond investors are just like any other investors. They want to see the whole story. If they invest in a country, they want to know how much debt it has and how big its deficit is, but they also want to know whether the country will be able to pay the money back. They will look at headline numbers, but they will look also at the medium-term story. They will want to know whether this country has a growth model that is going to ensure it can service its debts. It is the presentation of that story — of a credible plan to reduce the deficit while re-starting economic growth — that should be the focus of debate and of the four-year plan.

The figures produced by the ESRI and what we have been given by the Department of Finance make it clear that the position is extremely challenging. A fundamental rethink of every aspect of the budget is required. The problem also calls for purposeful and sustained action. What must happen now, and what should have happened long since, is the adoption of a multi-annual approach to budget policy, not just a set of announcements every December and a set of projected multi-annual figures, but continual and determined action on a multi-annual basis. We know we are not going to fix this overnight. We know also that 2014 is a long time away. Relying on the forecasts of a Government that cannot forecast one week ahead for four years from now is a bit uncertain, to put it mildly.

What we need now is a credible multi-annual plan for stability, growth and jobs that gets the economy moving again. That means looking at each aspect of the budget and how savings can be made while limiting the damage to the economy, and promoting jobs and growth. It means cutting expenditure but it also means raising additional revenue. Unfortunately, taxation must be part of the mix. This is a point that Labour has been making for the past two years while others were trying to pretend that the whole adjustment could be achieved by cutting spending. We are finally seeing some rational thinking on this issue. It is regrettable that extra taxes are necessary, but they are nevertheless. While everyone will have to contribute in some way, I do not subscribe to the notion that the only people who should pay more are those on modest incomes.

We should aim for an even split between additional revenue raising and lower spending, roughly at a ratio of 50:50. Given the scale of the deficit, we need to spread the burden of adjustment for it to be economically or socially credible.

We need completely new approaches to both capital and current expenditure. In respect of capital spending, it is clear that the Government will have to go back to the drawing board once again. Our current level of capital spending is still high by European standards and, unfortunately, that will now have to be reviewed. A reduction of approximately €2.5 billion over three years would leave us with capital expenditure of just under 3% of GNP, or approximately the same as the eurozone average. However, if capital spending by the Exchequer is to be reduced, as it must be, until we stabilise the public finances, we should be looking for ways to replace it from elsewhere.

There have been numerous proposals put forward in this area to find alternative funding for capital projects. Labour has proposed taking €2 billion from the pensions reserve fund to provide the capital for a strategic investment bank that could give the lead in this area. Similar banks exist in other countries, and the UK Government is establishing a green investment bank on a similar model.

It no longer makes sense to make payments into the pensions reserve fund. We are now borrowing money on the international markets at an interest rate of 6% to invest back into the international marketplace through the purchase of shares by our own National Pensions

Reserve Fund. Borrowing at this rate for this purpose is the wrong way to use our depleted resources and should be suspended until we return to some form of normality.

In the area of current spending, we must stop lurching from budget to budget with crude cut after crude cut. What we now require is a proper comprehensive expenditure review with a three-year time horizon, such as has been carried out by the new Government in the United Kingdom, but using the Canadian model. The truth is that the Government-commissioned *bord snip* report has been a failure because it has not produced either the savings it promised or the reform we need. It was never likely to do so because it never sought or received buy-in from Ministers and Departments. The problem with the *bord snip* approach is that it started by looking at the level of expenditure and asked what can be cut. What we actually need is a process, such as was developed in Canada, that is led by Ministers themselves and by the managers of Departments and agencies. They started with the opposite question: what service do we want to provide? We must have a root-and-branch examination of spending that identifies what we believe is really important, such as keeping the schools open and maintaining a decent health service.

A proper comprehensive spending review would lead to a reduction in both pay and non-pay costs. It would very likely result in a reduction in the number of agencies and to a merger of back-office functions in several of those remaining. The results of a comprehensive spending review would then provide the basis for sustained and ongoing reform of the public service, which should include negotiation with staff to bring about change. That was supposed to be the idea behind the Croke Park agreement, but it is not happening. It is now abundantly clear that having spent months attacking the Labour Party for not telling people how to vote on the it, once the agreement was accepted, the Government has done little or nothing to work it. We cannot keep lurching from one budget to the next, inflicting crude cut after crude cut. If we want to reduce costs in the public service, including head counts and payroll costs — but also input costs — while minimising damage to front-line services, then it must be done in a determined and sustained way.

The Revised Estimates for 2010 show that total current spending, excluding social welfare and public sector pensions, was budgeted to be some €31.6 billion. A programme to reduce both pay and non-pay costs by only 3% per annum would yield savings of €2.8 billion over three years, including payroll reductions of €1.4 billion. That is readily possible and the process relating to it should have begun long ago. Public sector workers have already endured big adjustments in their pay and the Croke Park agreement contains a commitment to the effect that there will be no further pay cuts prior to 2014. At this stage, however, it is unlikely that the necessary payroll reductions will be achieved through natural wastage and redeployment. A voluntary redundancy scheme in the public service will, therefore, be necessary. Such a scheme should be strictly confined to areas of identifiable over-staffing and should be tailored to ensure that critical front-line public services do not have their essential staffing levels eroded.

Non-pay costs will also have to be addressed as part of the review. There are a number of areas that have long cried out for reform, particularly the cost of drugs in the health service, which the Irish Medical Organisation, IMO, estimates could be cut by €300 million through use of generics. It could be further reduced by a more robust approach to negotiations with drug companies that uses the State's bargaining power more effectively. Professional fees are also a serious issue. The *bord snip* report estimated that GMS fees could be reduced by €370 million over time.

The social welfare budget must also be curtailed. It is possible to achieve considerable savings in social welfare by reforming the way in which the system works. Labour's spokesperson on social protection, Deputy Shortall, recently produced a report for the relevant Oireachtas

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committee which shows that major savings can be saved by more robust and modern enforcement of anti-fraud measures. Savings of at least €100 million can be made in this area. A second area for potential savings is rent supplement. The State is now spending €500 million per year to supplement the cost of private rented accommodation at a time when there is an overhang of residential property. A saving of at least 10%, or €50 million, could be achieved in this area. The most effective way to reduce the social welfare budget is to get more people back to work. Every job lost costs the State €20,000 a year in tax foregone and direct payments. The number of jobs lost since 2007 stands at 288,000, which costs the Exchequer an additional €5.8 billion per annum.

We now face a difficult challenge to gradually raise the total level of tax revenue as a share of GNP without hurting employment. This will be difficult but not impossible. As the Governor of the Central Bank has pointed out, our ratio of tax to GNP has been higher in the quite recent past when the economy was still performing extremely well. For example, if Exchequer revenues as a share of GNP this year were to be the same as they were in 2001, then an additional €5 billion would be coming in. That does not mean that we should just return to the tax rates that were in force at that time. Instead, the place to start is with broadening the tax base. It is time for a major programme of reform to finally curtail the network of tax breaks and tax expenditures. A recent paper by Micheál Collins and Mary Walsh again highlighted this issue which my colleague, Deputy Burton, has been addressing for many years.

Some €3 billion is being spent in the area of pension reliefs. This amount should be curtailed by at least €500 million, particularly by limiting the total amount of relief that can be claimed by any individual in order to make the system fairer. The reliefs for property-based investment, which cost €380 million, should simply be scrapped and interest relief on rental income from investment property must be significantly curtailed by at least €430 million. An entire series of minor reliefs, mentioned in the report of the Commission on Taxation and including relief on trade union subscriptions, should be scrapped. The relief on patent royalties, which is an avenue for avoidance that costs €50 million, should be abolished.

Labour has been arguing for some time that, in the area of taxation, those who have the most must contribute the most. We have proposed a 48% tax rate for the highest earners. There is also a need for a system whereby a minimum effective tax rate is applied to high earners to limit the total relief that any one person can obtain from all tax breaks combined. The Government claims to have done this but the system it is full of holes and deliberately so. There must be more equality of treatment of earned and unearned income in order that income from capital gains is subject to PRSI and levies in the same way as earned income.

There is room to increase the tax on second homes. It should also be possible to phase in water charges on a metered basis as part of a broader reform of how we manage and deliver this vital environmental resource. In addition, we should plan to introduce a new bank levy when the capital levels in the banks are adequate. These will be extremely profitable businesses again and they are not just going to be allowed to ride off into the sunset and leave the rest of us to sort out the mess.

We must make hard decisions but they must be the right ones. They must include the decisions that are required to bolster economic growth. This is the hard work of economic management that really matters. Such work was recently described by Will Hutton as involving “the policies that sit between the glories of headline-catching changes in tax, spending and interest rates, and the habitual invocations of labour market flexibility and deregulation”.

One of the reasons for the gloom in economic forecasts is the level of price increases in the economy that is depressing nominal GNP. However, we should not assume that there is no

work to do in dealing with the cost base and competitiveness. Wages may fall on average next year but underneath that average we are likely to see wage pressures re-emerging in more sheltered sectors. As of now, the Government effectively has no pay policy outside the public service. I favour a return to social dialogue, in a new format with a far more limited agenda than before. Arising from that, I would like to see a negotiated pay freeze for three years.

We must also tackle the level of fees and prices in the protected professions. While some in the legal profession have taken a major hit, I am concerned with regard to what seems to be happening in respect of NAMA, which has an enormous budget for professional fees. In this economic crisis, emergency measures are needed. Such measures must include the State exercising its right to control fees, in areas such as law and medicine, through a temporary fees commission. If we are to deal with the crisis fairly, then everyone must play his or her part. The medical consultant who charges €150 for a ten-minute appointment must be reined in.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: Hear, hear.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: These cost controls must also be applied in the public sector, where there must be stronger efforts to control input costs, including professional fees, but also costs such as those relating to drugs and other elements of supply chain management.

For all the doom and gloom of this emergency, the Irish economy actually has a great future. The real Celtic tiger was an export-led boom before Fianna Fáil turned it into a property bubble. Last week, I had the opportunity to meet with officials from the Irish development agencies based in New York. They are doing excellent work and it is clear that there are enormous opportunities for Ireland in sectors such as food, tourism and alternative energy.

Ireland is, and will continue to be to be, an attractive location for foreign investment. Our relationship with the US is vital but we must also recognise that the centre of gravity in global trade is shifting to the east. The new world economic powers — Brazil, Russia, India and China — present a great opportunity for Ireland to develop new export markets. However, building up our business with these countries will require greater resources and strong political commitment, including trade missions led by Government Ministers. This is an area where the Government must lead.

Labour has been strongly supportive of the knowledge economy, if not of the increasingly discredited buzz phrase “the smart economy”. A knowledge economy is one where innovation is pursued in every sector and region not just in a small number of specialist areas. We must maintain our investment in science but we must do far more to promote applied and downstream research, which is focused on commercialisation of new ideas.

We must get away from the notion that innovation only happens in laboratories. Innovation can happen in any business and in any region, and tourism is a key example of this. There are tourism businesses in every county in Ireland offering career opportunities across a range of skill levels. Whereas core values such as good service are essential, the industry has been profoundly affected by the information technology revolution, and that change will continue. Having a coherent tourism strategy and delivering on it is essential, as has been proposed in Deputy Upton’s excellent document on the subject.

Equally, Ireland has natural advantages in areas such as clean technology and food. Our food sector is still too reliant on exporting goods with limited value added to the UK. We must see agriculture as Ireland’s great raw material and develop our food industries accordingly. We need a whole of enterprise approach but we must also look in detail at specific sectors and how they perform.

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The role of the industrial development agencies will be critical and we must encourage the agencies to take more risks, be prepared to fail and to take a longer view on where they put their resources, particularly in building up our presence in India and China. We need a network of enterprise support that covers firms of all sizes, including start-ups but also focusing on scale-ups. Ireland needs to do more to keep the companies that we develop and grow rather than getting a start-up to a certain size and then selling the company to a multinational. We need to look at providing more support to firms that are over the size limit to avail of support from country enterprise boards but which are not now getting support from Enterprise Ireland.

To create jobs, we must have investment in infrastructure, firms and people. Given the limits on resources, that investment will have to come in new ways and must be strategic. Labour's strategic investment bank will act as a source of investment finance for major projects and for companies. Even with the constraints on resources we must also prioritise investment in people, and we cannot stand by as 442,000 people are looking for work. We must make a national effort, including both public and private sectors, to offer educational, training and work experience opportunities to our people. Many are already highly educated but need experience. Some have been working but need to address educational needs. There is no "one size fits all" scheme that will deal with this need. What we need, as outlined in Labour's policy document *Just the Job*, is a range of schemes meeting a range of needs. This costs money but relatively small amounts. Our proposals would cost approximately €230 million in the short term but would save money because people will get off the dole queues more quickly.

Labour has been responsible in Opposition and we will be responsible in Government. We opposed the banking guarantee because it handed the banks a blank cheque and we have been proven correct in doing so.

Deputy Frank Fahey: The Labour Party has not been proven correct. It has been proven completely wrong.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: We opposed NAMA and we have been proven correct in doing so, just as we watch the developers continuing to enrich themselves through more tax breaks on interest they have not even paid. We supported the Government on the Lisbon treaty and we have supported the plan to bring down the deficit to 3% by 2014 because it is right that we send the signal to the world that a new Government will tackle the deficit.

Unfortunately, it has taken too long for Fianna Fáil to grudgingly acknowledge that commitment. We should be clear, as the Government is still less than forthcoming about the kind of basic information that should have been available weeks before this debate, regarding growth forecasts for next year and the years beyond, as well as figures on the adjustment to be made in 2011. We should also know details of how the Croke Park deal will reduce costs or of how the bank bailout is going to be reflected in the deficit target. This is all information that in other countries would be provided to Parliament and to the public as a matter of course.

What I have outlined is an approach to budgetary policy that will allow us in a balanced and consistent way to start getting the deficit down. It will be an approximate 50-50 balance between taxation and spending and new approaches to current spending, capital spending and taxation. These are reforming measures that would allow us to make steady and consistent progress on the budget deficit while getting the country back on the road to recovery. It is on this basis that we can devise a credible plan for stability, growth and jobs.

Fianna Fáil has been in office for 13 years and it has left an enormous mess for the next Government to sort out. It has done so before but the scale of this disaster is unprecedented even for Fianna Fáil. Ireland is not the only country where an outgoing government has left a

mess for an incoming government but it is surely the only country where the Opposition is asked to fix the problem while the Government that created it remains in office. This is a great country and we can sort out this problem. We can create jobs and growth but it is clear that will not happen until we have a strong and stable Government with a mandate from the people measured in years rather than months.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I firmly believe it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the Irish people to come through the coming few years of economic crisis without some form of common approach. We need some kind of consensus about how we are going to fix our economy. The Irish people have wearied of the blame game and are tired of bickering politicians who appear more interested in scoring points than addressing the significant problems faced by the Irish nation.

For more than a generation the Irish people have not been served by politics as usual. For a long time we have needed a new way of ordering our affairs. Now, as we face the biggest economic challenges in the State's history, we very urgently need to go beyond the short-term political party interests. We must identify common goals and frame a strategy to work towards them. As the leader of a smaller party which has fought an uphill struggle for three decades working in politics in this country, I know I am asking much when I say it but I am genuinely prepared to make common cause here.

Let us for a moment honestly identify a few simple facts. We have got into this position through fundamental errors which were made as far back as 1977 with the infamous give-away budget and election setting us on a course of auction politics, where politicians sought to outbid one another for voter support. It led us to accept bad planning as a fact of everyday life and in time we fell into a very poor system of financial regulation. It gave us endemic crony capitalism and the blurring of boundaries, which meant those in important jobs did not uphold the people's interest.

It is very sad to reflect now that we did not learn the lessons of the economic slump in the 1980s. That grim experience forced me, like tens of thousands of others, to leave this country to find work and should have taught us enough to put in place systems to ensure it would never happen again. We failed to learn one lesson from economic recession in the 1980s; the imperative to ensure it did not happen again. Are we now about to fail to learn an even more important lesson from that era? Are we about to repeat our failure to take tough, appropriate and timely action to deal with our problems? Are we about to relive the 1980s worst-of-all-worlds approach where we take half-hearted and belated measures which gave us lingering pain but no long-term remedy?

It is abundantly clear that we as politicians have also failed to take on board another more useful element from the 1980s experience. The noble stance adopted by the then Fine Gael leader, Alan Dukes, in 1987 was a once-off stab at consensus. He put aside short-term party interests so that the necessary tough policies could be implemented, although it was all too short-lived. In the macho world of Irish party politics, Alan Dukes's Tallaght strategy has all too often been derided as political weakness, and Fine Gael very recently acknowledged that the Tallaght strategy was good for the country but bad for Fine Gael. It must also be said that the other parties did not reciprocate Mr Dukes's generosity of vision and short-term political goals remained central to Irish politics for the following two decades. They must take their share of blame here.

Most of the political parties — I say this without a hint of rancour — were part of this system and part of this malaise which has brought us to where we are today. Most parties joined in the auction bidding that characterised and were central to the 2002 and 2007 general elections, as parties sought to buy the voters' support with various incentives and blandishments. I do

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not remember anyone warning of an impending economic crash in the property price spiral. I do not recall anyone raising a flag about poor and inadequate financial regulation. I do not have any memory of anyone calling for root and branch reform of our planning system. Like the Green Party, many Members were not part of a Government which made errors in handling this country's affairs. However, most parties joined in propagating and institutionalising politics as usual. Politics as usual played a significant role in getting us to where we are. Just this week, the main political parties in Portugal engaged in negotiations on a common budgetary approach. These talks are proving very difficult, but they are taking place and we could learn a lot from a country and people first approach.

After weeks of deliberation and many long meetings, the Government has decided we need to bring in measures totalling €15 billion over the next four years. We must do that to meet the 2014 target to cut the budget deficit to 3% as agreed with the European Union. We have considered the arguments for extending this timescale. If we in the Green Party thought there was a benefit for the Irish people in that idea, we would have backed it, but we honestly and sincerely do not believe it is the correct thing to do. We believe it would replicate the 1980s experience, making the recession last much longer than it needs to.

I acknowledge the honesty that led Fine Gael and the Labour Party to agree the target and timescale to reduce the deficit. I further acknowledge their courage in maintaining that commitment despite recent calls for a change. However, I am determined that this is not enough. It is not enough to say that we must achieve that target without agreeing a basic roadmap to take us there. The figure of €15 billion is double the one set out in last year's budget but it will maintain the confidence of our EU partners and lenders on international money markets. This confidence is vital to our short-term and longer-term prosperity and it is crucial to our efforts to protect and reassert our independence.

The main reasons for this significant increase are the reality of lower economic growth prospects at home and abroad and the higher costs of paying interest on our debt. The Government must bring the deficit down to 3% of economic output by 2014 to come back in line with EU rules. I welcome the fact that the EU Monetary Affairs Commissioner, Olli Rehn, will be in Dublin early next month to discuss the four-year budgetary framework plan with the Opposition and the social partners. The Government intends to publish formally the four-year plan shortly after that.

The spending cuts and revenue raising measures needed will impact on peoples' living standards, but it is a matter of conviction for me that it is neither credible nor realistic to delay these measures. We must restore and maintain confidence in our ability to meet our obligations and responsibilities. We cannot repeat the experience of the 1980s and delay a return to sustainable growth and full employment in our economy. It is true that a significant front-loading of the €15 billion correction will be needed next year. We will continue to work with our Government partners in producing detailed plans which will be published in the middle of next month. We in the Green Party are working with two main imperatives in mind. First, there must be a balance in the measures to ensure that the economy is not unduly impaired in the medium to longer term. Second, spending cuts and revenue raising must be fair and impact most on those best able to bear the strain.

There is no denying the difficult choices have to be made, but the job of everybody in the House now is to get a budget that works and that gets Ireland out of the economic difficulties that it is in. The Green Party in Government has managed to protect a number of key areas from the deepest spending cuts. We have reversed the education cuts, a key feature in the programme for Government and the reason that so many in my party endorsed it.

We protected actions taken to combat homelessness. In fact, we ensured extra spending in this area. Protecting the most vulnerable at home and abroad has to be priority and that is why the Green Party, as part of this Government, has protected overseas development aid. We have also recognised that the creativity of the Irish people is undoubtedly our greatest asset and that is why we have protected the arts. This is an investment that leads to sustainable growth, particularly when linked to tourism opportunities.

Our job is to get us out of this crisis and plan for the recovery which will be green. That is why we are protecting investments in modern public transport and environmental infrastructure. This is what we have done thus far and we intend to stick to this path. As I have said, I realise only too well that the adjustment required is painful and indeed may seem right now to be overwhelming. I am also aware of the difficulties of persuading people of its necessity when trust in the political system has broken down. That trust has to be restored. It can only be done through fundamental change to business of politics.

We cannot and we will not tolerate the *status quo*. We need to see changes to ministerial transport, the salaries and expenses of Deputies and Senators and the working times and productivity of the Oireachtas. Members of the public are also justifiably angry about what they perceive as the inequality of treatment for white collar criminals in this country. My party has always said that this is intolerable and the Government needs to show purpose in this regard.

No Government Department will be immune from cutbacks and other changes, but in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government over the past two years of major challenge, we have maintained a strategic focus on supporting economic recovery and assisting those in need of support. Focus has been kept on sustainable economic development. As a party which has a fair proportion of people who run their own businesses, we understand the need to keep the rates base low for those in business and the Government has done this. The Taoiseach has convened meetings on the issue and we understand the need to continue with the policy because many people in small businesses are feeling the strain.

My Department is now finalising proposals to give effect to the commitment in the renewed programme for Government to introduce charges for water services. We intend doing this in a way that is fair, significantly reduces waste and is easily applied. The installation of water meters in households connected to public supplies will encourage householders to conserve water and will result in savings in the significant operational costs faced by local authorities in providing water and waste water services. It will also complement the significant increases in investment on water conservation measures in the water services investment programme 2010-12 which I announced earlier this year. I am proud to say that, even in these straitened times, this programme brings a fivefold increase in funding for conservation measures to €320 million.

The roll-out of meters to more than one million homes around the country will require significant resources and I will be analysing the various options to ensure the delivery of the metering programme in the most cost-effective manner. A number of funding options are being considered and the achievement of value for money will be a key factor in determining the approach to be taken. The programme will also provide a very significant job creation opportunity in the construction sector. It is estimated that every €1 million euro per year spent on installing water meters will provide employment for a minimum of ten people. The metering programme will take a number of years to complete, but every effort will be made to complete it in as short a time as possible. My aim is to ensure that, once meter installation commences next year, we will have a significant proportion of the programme completed in two to three years.

Also regarding water services, we have made available over €1.5 billion since 2008 and with this investment much has been achieved. In 2009, for example, we saw completion of 40 major

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water and wastewater schemes, with 108 other major schemes under way at year's end. In the period 2000 to 2009, we added the equivalent of over 1 million population to the capacity of water treatment systems and the equivalent of 3.7 million population in wastewater treatment capacity. This high level of expenditure reflects our commitment to protecting our water resources, meeting EU standards and putting critical infrastructure in place to support development and jobs.

In the housing area, we have made available a budget of over €4 billion since 2008 to spend on a range of measures. This reflects the high importance the Government attaches, in difficult times, to the provision of social housing and meeting the needs of homeless people and other vulnerable groups requiring housing support. Our strategy has been to maintain output through more flexible approaches, and to prioritise the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. We are shifting away from new build projects and towards initiatives such as leasing and the rental accommodation scheme. Available capital funding is increasingly targeted at special needs housing and improving the environmental performance of our housing stock.

We have also maintained a high level of ambition for local authority regeneration and improvement works in some of the most disadvantaged and neglected areas of the country, aimed at helping to replace failed estates with vibrant, sustainable communities. Nearly €200 million is being provided for this purpose in 2010 alone. Major improvement in recycling performance can be seen in the fact that the latest available statistics, for 2008, show the municipal waste recovery rate at 37.5%, 65% of our packaging waste is being recycled and 9 kg *per capita* of household electrical and electronic waste is being collected. All of these figures exceed European and national requirements.

My Department has also introduced a range of policy measures to help better target Exchequer investment and facilitate economic recovery. The national spatial strategy update and outlook sets out a revised implementation framework aimed at maximising the spatial planning and regional contribution to economic recovery, long-term national competitiveness and sustainability. A key element in the Planning Act 2010 is the introduction of a requirement for an evidence-based core strategy in development plans. The location, quantum and phasing of proposed development must be shown as well as growth scenarios, details of transport plans, retail development and policies regarding development in rural areas. This requirement will help target scarce Exchequer resources on sustainable economic development. We introduced this legislation to ensure we will never go back to those dark days of overzoning and ensure that we learn from the severe lessons of the past.

The multi-agency local government-led county development boards, CDBs, have established economic development sub-committees made up of representatives from FÁS, Enterprise Ireland, the IDA and local business interests including chambers of commerce, to develop and co-ordinate economic plans and strategies for their areas. When required, they also act as the local-based inter-agency task force constituted in response to significant issues in the area and to provide a focal point for economic promotion of the county. I have agreed that these sub-committee will also operate as a business users forum in each county and city.

The CDBs also work closely with business support units or similar arrangements which have been put in place in all county and city councils at my instigation to act as a point of contact to ensure quick co-ordinated responses to businesses from local authorities in areas such as planning, water and roads. In this way, business interests will have the opportunity to discuss issues with a range of relevant bodies including the local authorities. The units provide assistance to individuals and businesses seeking advice and direction on business start-up and expansion and signpost them to the most appropriate organisations to ensure they get the necessary support.

Despite the very obvious difficulties, there have been significant achievements in recent years and these should be acknowledged. They give us confidence that even with the challenges we now face we can meet the objectives we have set. Ultimately, this work will also help set the country on the path to long-term sustainable growth but in the immediate term we have to face the challenges of completing the four-year programme and the budget for 2011. We in this House need to make common cause in facing these challenges. Unfortunately, to judge by some of the debate so far, it is adversarial politics as usual and sometimes these debates can produce more heat than light.

In this time of crisis we need to move beyond business as usual politics. We are far more likely to beat this recession earlier and better with some form of cross-party approach in the actions we must take. I have not given up hope of getting something moving in this direction. I state to the parties opposite in all sincerity that huge changes will be made in the coming years. They may well be in government and find the choices they have to make are extremely unpalatable. They may and will argue that they are in the national interest but if we have politics as usual those challenges will be extreme and it will be extremely difficult to implement. This is why I continue to ask for some form of consensual approach.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Sinn Féin stands as the real opposition in this debate. Deputy John Gormley's call for talks between party leaders and all that followed served one very useful purpose; it cleared away the smokescreen of false party rivalry and exposed the alignment that exists in Irish politics. It is now very clear that Fianna Fáil, the Green Party, Fine Gael and the Labour Party stand together in their economic approach. They form a consensus for cuts. Sinn Féin stands apart from that consensus for cuts but we do not stand alone. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions and its constituent unions, the community and voluntary sector, the ESRI and a range of economists have warned against the strategy of attempting to cut the budget deficit to 3% by 2014.

Sinn Féin joins with those seeking real recovery and a fair way forward and we are convinced that there is a better way. We recognise that the deficit caused by the disastrous policies of the Government has to be reduced. However, the plan to reduce it by 2014 by imposing savage cuts to front line services and social supports will be hugely damaging. It will further deflate the economy and worsen the recession. Furthermore, the approach the Government is taking in its four year plan of front line and capital spending cuts as well as flat regressive taxes is the same approach it has taken up to now and it has not worked. Deepening the cuts will only compound the problem.

We need a different strategy and a longer timeframe. We want a realistic deficit reduction strategy based on a fair taxation system that ensures the wealthy pay their share, on investment in jobs which will increase State revenue and reduce the social welfare bill, and on the elimination of wasteful public spending. Our approach is based on the reality that there is wealth in the State and that 1% of the population controls 20% of that wealth. If that inequality had been addressed a decade ago we would not now be in recession. It is possible to reduce the deficit to 3% over a longer timeframe, provide real stimulus for jobs in the short term, raise revenue from wealth, eliminate wasteful public spending and ensure the delivery of public services while protecting those on low income.

The Minister for Health and Children has threatened cuts to our public health services of between €600 million and €1 billion. Our health services face devastation if this is allowed to proceed. I have no doubt that cuts to services on this scale, especially as they affect our public acute hospitals will cost lives. In Sinn Féin's pre-budget submission we identify €600 million that can be saved in the health system without affecting patient care. Take the drugs bill for example; tackling profiteering, waste and over-prescription and increasing the use of generic

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drugs can make huge savings. However, what is the Government's approach? It is to target the patients, such as those on the medical cards who had prescription charges imposed on them.

The report of the Comptroller and the Auditor General earlier this year on the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, exposed the waste that is involved there. It stated that of the procedures performed in public hospitals in some cases the patient was treated privately in the same hospital where he or she had been on a public waiting list. Even more extraordinary, and surely a conflict of interest, is that in 8.5% of treatments arranged by the NTPF, the consultant referring and treating the patient is the same. In other words, in a public hospital a specialist can refer a patient under the NTPF to himself or herself, thus ensuring the consultant a higher rate of remuneration for the work because it is being done so-called "privately" even though the State pays the bill. This surely exposes the folly and waste that is the NTPF.

In a reply to a Dáil question received from the HSE last week, I was told that to date a total of 296 hospital consultants had been written to by clinical directors and hospital managers regarding the need for them to address excessive levels of private practice. These excessive levels are of course in breach of their contract. This is only the number of consultants that hospital management has detected. Here is another indication of the massive waste of public money involved in the two-tier public-private hospital system. In another reply, the HSE admits that in Carlow it is paying rent of €1,000 per day to a private landlord for a primary care centre rather than develop the centre rent-free on an existing HSE site in the town. The reason for this expenditure is purely ideological; it is because developing the centre on HSE premises would not be in line with the Government's policy of developing all new primary care centres through public-private partnerships, even if these cost more than the fully public method. Sinn Féin has demonstrated that elimination of waste and delivery of equity and efficiency can go hand in hand. We will set out our proposals in detail in our pre-budget submission next week and my colleague, Deputy Arthur Morgan, will refer to them further in his contribution to this debate.

The enormity of what has been done to this economy by the reckless policies of the past decade and a half is difficult to grasp. Yet the stark reality is that Fianna Fáil and the Greens have brought the country close to economic ruin since 2007, their so-called solutions having made the situation worse. They have introduced four successive budgets, as well as emergency measures in February 2009, and the result is as follows — a total of 450,000 people are now out of work; a total of 100,000 more will have emigrated by next year; tax revenues have collapsed; almost €90 billion between recapitalisation and NAMA has been promised to bail out the banks; the interest rates being paid by the Irish Government on the international bond market are three times those paid by Germany.

This Government is planning a budget in December that will attack people on low incomes and devastate vital public services. The Government has decided that someone who earns €300,000 a year contributes enough but a person on the minimum wage, or someone who has lost his or her job and is receiving €196 a week, must survive on less.

The Government has signed up to a four-year timeframe for deficit reduction which it knows it cannot meet and which the IMF, OECD and ESRI, know it will not meet. Fine Gael and Labour have once again followed the Government's lead, just as they did in the general election in 2007 when they, too, offered to cut taxes and just as they did in the Lisbon referendum in 2009 when they promised there would be jobs if people voted "Yes" to Lisbon.

This is not just a question of the 3% by 2014 target being too short in time; it is also about how the Government proposes to go about reaching that target. It is preparing a slash and burn approach to the economy that will cause untold damage. It will attack the least well off

but it will also attack the overall economy and delay recovery. The consensus for cuts parties are determined to plough on, tying this State's future to a formula brokered with the EU Central Bank, regardless of the consequences. It is no coincidence that these are the same parties who campaigned for a "Yes" vote in the second Lisbon treaty referendum, having refused to implement the people's decision to reject that treaty when first put to them. In Lisbon Two they urged the people to, "Vote Yes for Jobs". We ask where are those jobs as we contemplate the reality of over 450,000 people on the dole queues and emigration on the rise. Those young people forced to emigrate, the hundreds of thousands unemployed and the people struggling on low incomes are ill-served by the capitulation of the so-called main Opposition parties. Slash and burn and all will be well by 2014, is the new mantra and anyone who does not accept it is being labelled as economically insane.

Sinn Féin was labelled as economically illiterate in 2007. Yet, had our policies been taken on board in 2007 and before it, we would not now be in the depths of this recession. Alone among the political parties in this Dáil, we did not call for tax cuts. We called for Government housing policy to be based on the need for decent housing for all the people, not a policy of inflating the property bubble. We called for wealth to be shared on the basis of a fair taxation system. We called for the banks to serve the economy and the customer and for the unbridled greed of financial institutions to be curbed by Government. Fianna Fáil-led Governments pursued exactly the opposite policies, driven by greed and totally devoid of any real vision for the future of the Irish people.

When we spoke of a golden circle we were derided but such a golden circle existed and what we have found out since shows that we and others actually underestimated the extent of the corruption and the avarice at the top of the ladder in this economy. The so-called regulators were in collusion with the bankers and developers. Ministers and top civil servants allowed it all to go on unhindered. The elite executives at the top of the public service and the semi-State companies were awarded massive salaries and perks on a par with the high-flyers in the private sector. Auditing and accountancy firms played their part and profited handsomely by it. What has changed? In many ways, very little. I will give one concrete example. Loan valuation for NAMA is being carried out by Ernst and Young. Last April in the Dáil I raised this issue with the Minister for Finance. Ernst and Young was the auditing firm for Anglo Irish Bank when accounts were published in February 2009. That report effectively gave Anglo Irish Bank a clean bill of health, yet we now know that the 2008 year-end figures included cash that had been transferred from Permanent TSB. We know that directors' loans were concealed and loans were given to shareholders to buy more shares. Loans were also given to directors, senior executive members of Anglo Irish Bank, to buy more shares, yet none of those matters was exposed in the end-of-year accounts presented by Ernst and Young. KPMG is now audit co-ordinator for NAMA. KPMG audited Irish Nationwide. Its 2008 results, announced in April 2009, showed a pre-tax profit of €300 million after having set aside €500 million for bad debts. In April it was confirmed that Irish Nationwide required €2.6 billion in funds from the Exchequer, a mere 11 months after KPMG gave it a clean bill of health. I asked the Minister for Finance at that time how it came about that these firms got the top contracts for NAMA, given the questionable role they played in presenting figures allegedly as facts when we now know they were nothing of the kind. I asked if those auditing and accountancy firms were being investigated for their specific roles in what some would suggest was an orchestrated cover up of the facts on those financial institutions.

The Minister replied that the questions raised by me were legitimate and that he would ask NAMA to examine what I said about the professional advice involved. He said the matters to which I referred are serious and will require investigation both by the accountancy bodies and the banking inquiry. Where stand those investigations now? If the situation were not so serious

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it would be amusing to listen to the Taoiseach and his Ministers talking about the need for us to preserve our economic sovereignty. Whenever we in Sinn Féin pointed to the erosion of economic sovereignty as a result of successive EU treaties, we were ridiculed.

Successive Governments have abandoned economic sovereignty. They have allowed international bondholders and the European Central Bank to determine how many euro go into the pockets of the least well-off in our society. We should not doubt that it comes down to that. In the last budget the Government, which is tied to a doctrine of fiscal rectitude, took €8.50 per week from the pockets of those who care for elderly, ill or disabled relatives in their homes. It halved the level of assistance given to the young unemployed. It took the Christmas bonus from social welfare recipients and cut welfare payments across the board.

Fitch Ratings recently called for more evictions in Ireland in order to enhance the reputation of the banks. This is what happened when we had landlord rule under the Union Jack. It is only one step removed from what the Government is doing to the least well-off. Far worse is

1 o'clock planned in the next four budgets. I put it to the Minister for Finance last week that international bondholders are now more important than the Irish people in the consideration of this Government. The Minister indicated in May that he could not say who the bondholders are; I have a list of 80 possible suspects. I cited a number of them on the floor of this House last week. They include Alliance Global Investors France SA, Barclays Wealth Managers France, BlueBay Asset Management Limited, BNP Paribas Asset Management, Brown Shipley & Co. Limited, Credit Suisse Asset Management, Deutsche Asset Management Investmentgesellschaft, European Credit Management Limited, Frankfurt-Trust Investment, W & W Asset Management and WGZ Asset Bank Luxembourg.

I understand that this list of 80 suspects contains Anglo Irish Bank bondholders, and that the composite figure of the face value of the bonds they hold exceeds €4 billion. These people, rather than ordinary taxpayers, should have taken the hit from the collapse of Anglo Irish Bank. The Minister replied that many of them are also subscribers to Irish Government bonds. We rely on them for the Government's massive borrowings. I understand that Goldman Sachs, which advises the Government on its approach to bondholders, also appears on the list of Anglo Irish Bank bondholders. The next time Mr. Peter Sutherland, who is the chairman of Goldman Sachs International, descends on us from the clouds to give his advice, perhaps reporters from RTE and *The Irish Times* will ask him about the conflict of interest that is certainly involved. In the meantime, the Minister might like to address this conflict of interest in his contribution at the end of this discussion. The bondholders invested in a bank and not in a state. They should have read the disclaimer at the bottom of bank advertisements, which we all know off by heart. It states the value of one's investment may go down as well as up. What part of that did they not understand?

The budget plan that the Government is working on has nothing to do with deficit reduction. For every cent that is cut from front line services next year, at least 10 cent will be redirected into the Government's bank bailout. If spending cuts could fix the deficit problem, we would not have a growing deficit. What has happened after had three years of spending cuts? The deficit has grown. The Government, with the support of Fine Gael and Labour, is planning a savage four-year timeframe in which to fix the deficit problem. Sinn Féin is advocating a different six-year approach which could see the economy recover sooner. The consensus for cuts believes that to grow a little, one must cut a lot. We believe that to grow at all, one must invest. The relationship between jobs and the deficit is a clear one. If more people are in work, more tax is brought in and fewer welfare payments have to go out. It does not take a genius to work out that reductions in expenditure put people out of work, bring the tax take down and increase welfare spending.

The policy of cutting social welfare is a false economy that ultimately causes misery for those on the receiving end. People on social welfare spend every cent of their income in the local economy. If one cuts their welfare, one inflicts cuts on the local economy. Rather than targeting welfare, the Government should target wealth. It has been estimated that there are approximately 33,000 millionaires in this State. In the five years since 2005, they have been the main beneficiaries of approximately €20 billion as a result of tax break schemes introduced by Governments led by Fianna Fáil. The schemes in question include tax relief on pensions, a myriad of property tax reliefs, reliefs on private nursing homes and hospitals, capital allowances and the PRSI ceiling. On 17 October last, Dr. Michael Collins, who is a member of the Commission on Taxation, reiterated that 110 of these tax breaks are still in place and are costing the public purse €11 billion per annum. If this millionaire section of the Irish people paid a 1% wealth tax, the Government could receive €1.2 billion in 2011 and every year thereafter.

We believe that the parties of the left should be joining trade unionists, those involved in community and voluntary organisations and other progressive voices in demanding an alternative way forward. We are calling for the abandonment of the unrealistic and damaging target of 3% deficit reduction by 2014. We want revenue saving and raising to be based on fairness and efficiency. We demand stimulus measures to protect and create jobs. Vital front line public services, including health, education and social supports, should be supported. I thank the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Minister of State with responsibility for children for staying to hear my contribution. I hope they will heed some of the arguments I have presented this morning. A consensus for real recovery is needed now more than at any time in our shared political experience as elected voices. We do not need a conspiracy of political parties against the people.

Sitting suspended at 1.08 p.m. and resumed at 2.08 p.m.

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In the past two years, this Government has had to deal with the consequences of the most severe economic downturn in the history of the State. The crisis has primarily related to the public finances and the banking system. In a consistent way, the Government has acted swiftly and with determination to deal with each episode of the crisis as it emerged.

As a result of these actions, stability is being restored to the banking system, economic growth has resumed, albeit on a limited basis, and the economy has regained a considerable amount of the competitiveness it had lost. Notwithstanding these favourable trends, the interest demanded on Irish debt has risen and is set to remain high unless further decisive and credible action is taken soon to stabilise the public finances and establish the basis for sound economic growth for the years ahead.

The impact of the economic downturn has been severe. In the past two years, 2008 and 2009, gross national product per head is estimated to have fallen by more than 16%. Despite the severity of the downturn, however, I do not want to be negative about the economy because although last month's quarterly national accounts data were somewhat disappointing, they were not so in a uniform manner. For example, the quarterly GDP decline of 1.2% comes on the back of a very strong increase of 2.2% in the first quarter of the year, which essentially indicates that the level of economic activity has stabilised in the first half of the year.

The quarterly figures also point towards a bottoming out of gross national product, which is the most appropriate measure of Irish living standards. Gross national product fell by just 0.3% in the second quarter, a considerable improvement on the fall of nearly 11% last year. In summary, the national accounts figures for the first half of this year point to stabilisation as a prelude to growth.

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The latest information on labour market trends also provides evidence of stabilisation. The Quarterly National Household Survey for the second quarter of this year showed that the downward trend in employment is slowing rapidly and that in some sectors the underlying trend has become positive. Even in unemployment, the latest figures point to stabilisation; in September the unadjusted live register fell by a record figure, and there was also a substantial fall when account was taken of seasonal factors.

In addition, the data confirmed another strong export performance in the second quarter of this year following a good performance in the first three months. This is encouraging. It is clear evidence that the improvements in competitiveness in recent years are having the desired effect. An especially welcome feature of the export figures was that they showed a broadening of our export performance, with strong growth recorded across a number of sectors.

Although the latest economic indicators point to a resumption of economic growth, this growth will — initially at least — depend on exports and will be at a modest pace because investment and consumption will take some further time to recover. We cannot rely on economic growth alone to stabilise the public finances in the short to medium term. In fact, and this is the key point, there is a structural gap in our public finances and without concerted action we will not repair the deficit and that would mean a continued drain on economic growth.

The impact to date of the downturn in growth on the public finances has been drastic. Despite the considerable efforts of the Government in the course of the last two years to bring stability to the public finances, additional and even serious adjustment measures are still needed over the next four years. A few figures will help to explain why so much adjustment is needed. Total current public expenditure increased by almost 150% in the period 2000-2010, with a near tripling in expenditure in the social protection and health areas as well as major increases in the education area. Over the same period the economy only grew by 40%, while consumer prices increased by just under 28%. Having recognised at an early stage in the downturn that action was needed to deal with the public finances, the Government has been engaged in a process of significant re-prioritisation and consolidation of all areas of expenditure since 2008. The measures introduced have reduced all aspects of Government spending, including public service pay and operating costs across Departments and State bodies. As a result, annual growth in public expenditure has fallen from 12.1% in 2007 to an estimated contraction of 1.8% this year. This major consolidation has been achieved in the face of significant pressures associated with rising numbers on the live register, increasing debt interest payments and a downturn in the economic cycle. This process of expenditure realignment has not been painless and has required a wide range of sometimes unpopular, but necessary, actions by the Government.

Ireland is now into the third year of a multi-annual consolidation period, and the Government is busily making preparations for the four year plan. It may be useful to recap the main initiatives undertaken by the Government over the past few years.

Shortly after coming into office, I put a range of efficiency and savings measures into effect in July 2008, including those identified as a result of the efficiency review process initiated by my predecessor in budget 2008. These savings included a 3% reduction in payroll costs for all Departments, State agencies and local authorities other than front-line health and education services and a 50% reduction in expenditure on consultancies, advertising and public relations by Departments and agencies.

Budget 2009, which was brought forward to October of 2008, continued the objective of continuing to restore the sustainability of the public finances. A significant tax package to raise almost €2 billion in 2009 was introduced. I also announced the setting up of the special group

on public service numbers and expenditure programmes in November of 2008 with a remit to identify potential savings in all areas of Government expenditure, including a thorough reduction in the numbers of staff working in the public service.

By the start of 2009, international forecasts for the global economy had been revised sharply downwards, reflecting the effects of the worldwide upheavals in the financial markets. In this context, the Government set out a multi-annual fiscal plan in January 2009, with the objective of bringing the overall deficit back within the 3% ceiling in a credible manner. That plan remains in effect today, and our subsequent policy actions have been designed to implement and to underpin our consolidation drive.

Accordingly, further programme and payroll savings of the order of €3.5 billion were announced in the first half of 2009. The main element of the February package of measures was the introduction of public service pension-related pay deduction. Additional capital and efficiency measures were also announced, including a 25% reduction in the rates of the domestic travel and subsistence allowances, and an 8% reduction in fees paid for professional services. The supplementary budget in April 2009 continued the process begun by these earlier measures, consolidating the expenditure reductions through a range of programme savings.

Budget 2010 continued the process of implementing a multi-annual plan, with an expenditure reduction of €4 billion delivered. This was achieved through a combination of payroll, social welfare and other programme reductions, reflecting the sharp fall in the price levels across the economy over the course of the year. The special group report, published in July 2009, has been a central point of reference in the Government's consideration of overall expenditure strategy in budget 2010, with savings of some €2.1 billion in 2010 arising from the report to date.

No doubt the Government has had to take some difficult measures in order to stabilise our budgetary position. Nonetheless, we are still well aware that it is vital for us to continue to invest in key infrastructure so that we can best position ourselves to take full advantage of the economic recovery.

Despite our straitened budgetary circumstances, the capital allocation for 2010 amounts to almost €6.5 billion or 5% of GNP, which is very high by international standards. While it is inevitable that further adjustments in the capital allocations are now required, I still expect Exchequer capital investment to remain at a significant level and be a key source of infrastructural investment in this economy. This Exchequer capital programme will be supplemented by projects part-funded by private investment in the PPP programme and by the investment programmes of the commercial State-sponsored bodies.

Notwithstanding a scaling back of the investment programme, which will build on the high level of public sector investment which has taken place over the past decade, it still represents a major ongoing stimulus to the economy. The Government is determined that, in addition to scaling back on expenditure as necessary for fiscal correction, we continue to build the economic capacity for strong growth, to take full advantage of the recovery as and when it gathers strength. Government capital investment will, therefore, support those projects which will help the development of a productive and internationally competitive economy; the development of the smart/green economy; support sustainable long-term employment; and provide a modern social infrastructure.

Evidence that the Government's efforts to stabilise the public finances are now having a positive impact was provided by the most recent Exchequer returns of revenue and expenditure, covering the period to the end of September. These figures show that the overall Exchequer position is in line with target. Encouragingly, total tax revenue is exactly in line with profile, expenditure is approximately €1.6 billion down year-on-year and the underlying general Government deficit this year is expected to be in line with the budget target; in other

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words, after experiencing an unprecedented shock to the economy we have stabilised the public finances. The second phase of our task is to build on the measures we have taken, narrow the gap between day to day spending and what we earn and therefore bring longer-term sustainability to the public finances over the next few years.

Notwithstanding these encouraging figures, the position remains serious and a few crucial details clearly demonstrate why we need to change the path of the public finances. At the end of 2007, total national debt was only 23% of GNP and the Exchequer deficit in that year was only 1% of GNP. By contrast, in 2010, we expect revenues will be €35 billion and net expenditure is likely to be €54 billion, leaving a gap to be filled by borrowing of €19 billion — an average of over €4,200 for every man, woman and child in the country. As a result an underlying general Government deficit of 11.9% of GDP is expected this year.

On a purely headline basis, the general Government deficit this year will be extremely high — currently estimated at 32% of GDP. This is due to the accounting treatment of capital support being provided to some of the financial institutions. However, it should be stressed that no additional borrowing is required this year as a result of this large headline deficit and the Exchequer is already fully funded through the first half of 2011. In addition, the funding costs of the capital support are being spread out over the next ten or so years, thereby lessening the impact on the Exchequer and they are manageable in that context.

While these costs are manageable, the overall position is that the debt to GNP ratio is estimated to be 75% at the end of this year. With high interest rates, the annual interest bill is big and is getting bigger. If we were to allow this trend to continue, it would not be long before we were at debt levels last seen in the 1980s which, as we all remember, well exceeded 100% of GDP. This time, unlike in the 1980s, while we benefit from being a member of a strong global currency, the euro, we cannot unilaterally devalue. Furthermore, the prospect for strong global growth is mixed, inflation is low and, above all, the indulgence of the markets to build our rapid build up of debt levels is not available.

While substantial progress has been made in tackling our public finance difficulties, the Government is fully aware that the scale and speed of the deterioration in the public finances mean we have to make considerable adjustments now in order that we will not have to make even bigger ones later. We remain fully committed to reducing the general government deficit to below 3% of GDP by the end of 2014. This means we have to take many essential decisions. Despite the scale and urgency of the necessary adjustments that have to be made, however, Irish people will still hold on to most of the gains built up in the many years of strong growth we have enjoyed since the mid-1990s. Over that period, we took many steps forward; we are now taking only one step back. Also, and most important, despite the urgent need for large-scale adjustments to the public finances, the Government is going about making these decisions to ensure they will be fair and will enhance the economy's growth prospects.

I have made officials from my Department available to the finance spokespersons of all the parties across the floor to explain to them and some of their colleagues the current macro-economic position and the prospects and scale of the adjustment that needs to be made to the public finances over the next four years. I am pleased with the response from the main Opposition parties to this series of meetings in that they share with the Government a recognition of the scale of the adjustment that needs to be made, even if we do not have a shared view of the specific actions needed to achieve this adjustment. The first series of meetings on 18 October was followed by another meeting yesterday and I expect my officials and I will be available to Opposition parties between now and budget 2011.

Deputy Gilmore made a number of points this morning to which I would like to reply. However, in the time available I can address only a few of them. The Deputy makes the general point that insufficient figures have been provided to him by my Department and that the Government's proposals lack credibility. At this point, I can only reply that he will be provided with all the figures he could reasonably want when these have been finalised. I can also guarantee one thing about the Government's four year plan; it will not lack credibility.

On a more specific point, Deputy Gilmore cites a recent report identifying a claimed €11 billion of tax expenditures. More than 90% of these tax expenditures are the tax allowances from which all taxpayers benefit, such as the PAYE credit and basic income tax credits. It does not serve public debate well to misrepresent the basic PAYE credit or credits available to income tax payers as in some way a tax shelter enjoyed by the very rich when they are a basic entitlement of every taxpayer.

Deputy Gilmore proposes the introduction of a 48% income tax rate. It should be borne in mind that such an increase would raise only €410 million in the next year. One of the great advantages of the multi-annual, four year plan approach is that one projects tax revenues over a four year period. If one thing is abundantly clear, it is that a 48% tax rate, in addition to the current levy and PRSI systems, would effectively mean an effective marginal tax rate of 62%, which would lead to a reduction in tax receipts in the subsequent years of the plan. The initial figure of €410 million would decline over the four year period as higher income tax earners, faced with income tax and impositions of tax from the State in excess of 60%, flee the jurisdiction. Deputy Gilmore needs to face reality when he claims that the deficit target of 3% can be met without examining any tax increases on incomes under €100,000.

A proposal for a strategic investment bank was referred to again. It is unclear from where the funding for such a bank would come. While the capital is to come from the National Pension Reserve Fund, it is unclear from where the funds would come. In essence, the bank would compete with our two established banks and the State for increasingly scarce funding. The cost of borrowing to the State, as a sovereign, is at a very high level, while the cost of borrowing for the banks is at a higher level. The strategic investment bank, once capitalised, would face the same difficulty the banks and State already face. Every euro the bank would attract would mean one less euro for existing banks and the State which must now borrow €2 in every €5 spent on providing our public services. It makes little sense for the State to set up a new bank to perform the functions we are now correctly demanding of Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Banks in return for the support given to these institutions by the taxpayer.

I will now address the proposed four year plan. The urgency, scale and duration of the adjustments required to stabilise the public finances demand a response that matches this challenge. It is vital that this response shows we have a clear, credible path for doing so. This response will be presented in the Government's four year growth and budget plan, which will be published in the next few weeks and presented to Dáil Éireann.

Yesterday, I announced the Government's decision that to achieve the 3% of GDP deficit target by 2014, an overall adjustment of €15 billion is now warranted and this figure will underpin the four year plan. The focus of the Government at this stage is on finalising the size of the necessary adjustment for 2011. The Government is conscious of the need to strike an appropriate balance between continuing to bring order to the public finances while, at the same time, taking account of the economic impact of budgetary adjustment. However, as I stated, there needs to be a significant element of front-loading in the 2011 budget given the scale of the adjustments.

In broad terms the plan will set out clearly the revised annual headline targets and necessary adjustments to adhere to a credible deficit reduction plan in the medium term. It will take on

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board the most up-to-date economic and fiscal data and the implications for the fiscal process. It will also chart the path of the economy and public finances towards recovery over the years 2011 to 2014. To underline the strength of our resolve, budget 2011 will contain a significant consolidation effort and the size of this, as well as the distribution of the adjustments over the remaining three years, will be also presented in the plan.

The plan will show in a detailed and credible manner how we can correct the imbalances in the public finances, while showing a pathway to sustainable increases in living standards and demonstrating to the markets that we have the vision and capacity to address our public finances problems and resume economic growth. As part of the budgetary plan, we will set out a strategy for underpinning and encouraging sustainable economic and employment growth in the medium term.

It is only through adopting policies that enhance our economic growth and job creation prospects and improve our competitiveness that we will achieve the necessary targets. To ensure the fiscal targets we set are delivered the four year plan will also feature reforms to the budgetary framework. I thank the Opposition parties for their participation at the Joint Committee on Finance and the Public Service on the proposed budgetary framework. I understand the joint committee is finalising its deliberations on that subject and look forward to receiving its report in that regard.

While the details of the plan have not yet been finalised, I can at this stage outline what I envisage it will contain. To begin with, the plan will outline the current economic position and outlook and explain why the necessary budgetary adjustments have to be made. This will be followed by a statement of the economic growth strategy, fiscal targets, details of the expenditure and tax adjustments as well as a statement of the principles that will underpin these adjustments. It will also include a review mechanism which can make adjustments to the plan as circumstances change.

An important element of the plan will focus on structural reform. This is an issue that has not received the attention it merits in recent years because of the need to deal with more imperative matters. Structural reform is about making the economy — both the private and public sectors — work better. It is not only about dealing with macroeconomic imbalances. It is not enough to sort out the public finances and leave untouched the way the economy works, particularly, as is evident, when it is in need of change. We, therefore, have to take action to ensure our policies support the restructuring of the economy in the wake of the present crisis. We have to ensure no sector will be a drag on economic growth, competitiveness will be maximised and that which is under the direct control of the Government — our tax system, public expenditure programmes, budgetary procedures and public services generally — will be reconfigured to achieve optimal efficiency, economy and effectiveness.

Structural reform measures often take several years to have full effect but announcing a set of wide-ranging structural reforms in the four year plan will have the immediate effect of adding further credibility to the macroeconomic and budgetary framework it will contain.

In the context of structural reforms, it is also relevant to mention that on 12 November next Ireland will submit an initial draft of its national reform programme under the EU 2020 strategy to the European Commission. This draft, which will be considerably influenced by the four-year plan, will contain the set of key structural reforms which can be implemented most quickly and which will address the main obstacles to economic growth. The final and more detailed plan will be submitted to the Commission in the spring of next year.

Being a member of the European Union has benefits but also involves responsibilities. The Government takes these responsibilities seriously and, accordingly, I have made considerable

efforts to brief my fellow EU Ministers, as well as the Commission and the European Central Bank, on significant developments regarding our budgetary plans. Last Monday I visited Brussels to update Commissioner Rehn on the current economic position and on the progress being made in the preparations for budget 2011. As a result of these contacts with my colleagues, I am confident that they all have a clear and detailed understanding of Ireland's position and what the Government intends to do about it. The endorsement of the European Union Ministers, the Commission and the European Central Bank will be of key importance in demonstrating to the markets the soundness and credibility of our plan.

The language used in debating issues related to economics and public finances is often perceived by the public as lacking clarity, directness and impact. I wish to state the Government's position on its budgetary plans simply and as follows. The cost of the public services that we have been using is far higher than our current tax revenues. Economic growth will not on its own deliver sufficient revenue to close the gap for some years to come. This means that the difference between what we are spending and what we collect in revenue must be borrowed. The cost of borrowing is high and rising and unless we act soon to live within our means, those from whom we borrow may stop lending to us. Were this to happen, the continued provision of an adequate range of public services and social supports would be impossible to guarantee. Therefore, we must accept cuts in public expenditure and higher taxes. Even though these measures will be painful, we will continue to enjoy most of the substantial increases in living standards that were gained and secured in the past decade and they will provide the basis for regaining what we have temporarily lost.

There are those who, although they accept that strong corrective action must be taken to deal with the public finances, have argued that such action does not have to be taken now. Instead, they argue that it would be easier to put off the hard decisions which this action involves until economic growth has become established. There is, however, no better time than now to act. If we delay action, the problems will not only remain but will worsen and the necessary decisions will become harder to make and will have a more painful impact. Moreover, we will not fool the markets for an instant if we seek to defer any longer what evidently needs to be done now. We cannot backtrack on the commitments we have made to the European Commission and to the other European Union member states. In summary, in the real world in which we live, it is neither a credible nor a viable choice to defer the action that we now must take.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I thank the Minister for his speech and for his courtesy when my colleagues and I visited his Department yesterday. The Minister is always very courteous and easy to deal with and I thank him for this. Things are very bad and people are very down and depressed. When I went knocking on doors after the summer, people were angry but that anger has almost left them by now. They are down and do not see any hope of recovery. While this varies from family to family, I wish to stress at the outset how gloomy and down people are at present. Members of almost every family are out of work. Parents are deprived of the company of their adult children who are to be found everywhere in the world but in Australia, Canada, the United States and England in particular. Many grandparents have no contact with their grandchildren in far-flung places and their biggest thrill is to talk to them on Skype in the middle of the night. The statistics support the gloomy picture I am painting as 350,000 people are unemployed and more than 100,000 young people have emigrated. The banking system is crashed, banjaxed and in the hands of the State. Moreover, the country costs €20 billion more to run than is collected in taxes. The Government is swinging from crisis to crisis, there is no growth, no hope, no optimism and no economic plan. It was not always like this. When the rainbow Government left office in 1997, 100 people per day were starting work, there was a good standard of living, very good health services, fine schools and the budget under the guid-

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ance of Deputy Quinn was in surplus for the first time in two generations. Then Fianna Fáil came to power and the bubble economy was created by that party. Three years ago, the bubble burst and the rest is history. I do not intend to go through the high points as they have been rehearsed on many occasions.

The focus of today's debate is the economy and Fine Gael's priority is to grow the economy and to create jobs again. No country has cut its way out of recession or taxed its way out of recession but many countries have grown their way out of recession. Present Government policies are continuing the declining gyre and the downward vicious circle and it will require a major new initiative to shock the economy into reversing its downward spin, thereby spinning back up again in a growing economy in which the vicious circle becomes a virtuous circle. While I hope this can be done, it needs the dynamic of change and the dynamic of a new Government with new policies to begin the climb from despair to optimism and hope.

The first plank that must be put in place is that the public must be given absolute certainty about their future. I acknowledge that the Government now has started this process. While Fine Gael has been asking it to do so for the past three years, at least now it is setting and confirming the 2014 target and is committing to budgetary profiles to get there in instalments. Had some of the points contained in the today's speeches by the Taoiseach and the Minister been done three years ago, it would have given hope and optimism. However, the Minister's biggest problem when trying to provide certainty is that no one believes him any more. He has been wrong so often, his figures have been so outlandish so often and his forecasts have been so off the rails so often that no matter what he says now, he lacks credibility. I do not wish to personalise this but I make the point that the Government lacks the credibility to provide such certainty. However, the first plank is certainty and if Fine Gael can co-operate with the Government in providing some certainty by reconfirming the 3% target for 2014, then it will do that.

Once certainty has been established, the second thing that must be done is to restore confidence. Again, there is no confidence at present. The savings ratios in deposit accounts by Irish citizens used to average out at approximately 8% but now have risen to 11%. This constitutes an increase in saving of just under 40%. No one will spend or invest if they are unsure about the future. One fundamental of personal behaviour is that one does not take a punt in the dark unless one is a total gambler and one needs to be certain about what is happening in the future before spending one's money. Another amazing statistic demonstrates that in the words of the industry, Irish people have begun to deleverage or in other words, they are paying off their loans. A recent Central Bank report indicates that over the last 12 months Irish citizens, in a series of personal decisions in individual households, have paid off €6.8 billion in credit card balances, overdrafts in banks and so on. This is an amazing amount of money but when people fear the future, they pay their debts and save money and the consequence of people so doing is that very little money remains in circulation. I forget which eminent Sunday newspaper columnist referred to the origin of the word "currency". He observed it derives from the Latin verb *currere*, to flow. I note the Minister is a classical scholar and that there are very few of us left.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The Deputy is aware that the word "credit" is derived from the verb, *credere*, to believe.

Deputy Michael Noonan: The verb is *currere*. It is not a currency unless it flows. Unless money is flowing, it should not be described as a currency. If everyone is saving and paying off their debts, there is no flow. If the nationalised banks do not give credit to small and big

businesses there is no flow, no current and no currency. That is the situation the Minister has got himself into.

I will try to be less gloomy and a little helpful. Fine Gael remains committed to reducing the budget deficit to 3% of GDP by 2014, as agreed with the European Commission. We believe that re-opening negotiations at this point with the EU to extend the period of fiscal adjustment beyond 2014 could lead to a further loss of international confidence in the Irish economy in 2011, with disastrous consequences. Ireland is already likely to borrow more than €60 billion over the coming four years — an awful lot of money — pushing our national debt to well over 105% of GDP. Irrespective of the views of the European Union, there is no guarantee that markets would be willing to lend to Ireland the additional resources required if we were to extend the period beyond 2014. I would say to the representatives of the trade union movement, whose views are sincerely held, and to our colleagues in Sinn Féin, whose views are also sincerely held, that to try to extend the target beyond 2014 could bring about a situation where we would not get the money to run the country next year.

We are taking in €30 billion and spending €50 billion. I do not know what the Minister's correction will be next year but if he pulls expenditure back by €4, €5 or €6 billion we will still be borrowing a significant amount. The bond markets are closed because, in the estimation of Irish financial authorities, if they were open we would not get investment. When they re-open in January, it is essential that they lend to us again. If the deadline is extended from 2014 to 2016, for example, there is a danger that Ireland will not get money when the bond markets re-open and instead of an adjustment of €4, €5 or €6 billion, or whatever the Minister has in mind, we will have to go for the whole lot. If we do not get the money we will have to bridge the gap and the gap is between €30 billion and €50 billion. That is a scenario I would not like to be exploring in January. We would have no sovereignty left if that were to take place.

The credibility of any growth path depends on the growth that is likely to take place. This is where the Minister's €15 billion comes in. This morning, the Taoiseach said the expenditure cut of €15 billion was a forecast. He is right. It is not a target; it is a forecast. While Fine Gael agrees to the 3% target we do not agree to the forecast of €15 billion, which is a forecast of the ways and means to get to the 3%. The forecast can shift, depending on what growth figures are put in. The Ministers for Justice and Law Reform and Finance have suggested that the €15 billion expenditure cut is based on an annual growth forecast of 2.75% for the next four years.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: That is an average annual figure.

Deputy Michael Noonan: Yes, it is averaged out. We both know the predictions for next year are 2% and perhaps 3% annually from 2012 to 2014, inclusive. Three threes are nine and two makes eleven, and a quarter of that is 2.75. That is where we are getting the average. It is significant that the 2% figure for next year is not sufficient to allow the Minister to take a quarter of €15 billion as the correction for next year. The Minister will have to do more up front, as he says himself.

A very small variation has a huge effect here. Davy's growth forecast for 2011 is 1.9%, and 2.2% for the subsequent years up to 2014. That would drive the correction up to over €20 billion. On the other hand, the ESRI has updated its high growth target to assume an average annual growth of 4.5%. Maybe it is right or perhaps it is wrong. They have two scenarios of high growth and low growth. If its high growth scenario is right and instead of 2.75% the annual growth rates were 4.5%, a smaller package would be needed. We would achieve the 3% budget deficit target in 2014 with a cut of only €9 billion. That is a long way short of €15 billion.

I think the Minister can understand the position of the Opposition. When the €15 billion is a forecast and when minor adjustments in the growth rate can make such vast variations, would

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we not be desperate clowns to tie ourselves in to the Minister's figure, especially when the Taoiseach could not answer Deputy Gilmore this morning when he asked what was factored into the estimate of growth? Deputy Gilmore asked about all the elements of growth and the Taoiseach looked blankly at him. We do not know whether the Cabinet had a punt in the dark on their way out of Farmleigh and came up with €15 billion or whether it was handed down to them by the EU Commission when the Minister visited Brussels.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Neither hypothesis is correct.

Deputy Michael Noonan: Is it one of the Department of Finance scenarios? Departmental officials mentioned €15 billion fairly strongly, among other scenarios. Is it an ESRI prediction? It also mentioned €15 billion. The key element is the forecast for growth and there is a vast variation between Davy's forecast, which would take us over €20 billion, and the ESRI high growth forecast, which would bring us down to €9 billion. The Minister is on the mid point so maybe he is right, but we are not buying in. We need more information. We certainly need to know how the Minister built up his forecast and we need answers to Deputy Gilmore's questions on the elements and factors that were put in to build up that forecast.

The concentration is now on the €15 billion and the ways and means. The Minister says he will front-load the 2011 budget, which he will introduce on 7 December. A month ago a correction of €7.5 billion was announced, and look what has happened in a month. At that time, the Minister stated that he would make a €3 billion cut in the first budget. When he went to Galway on that infamous occasion, he said €3 billion was a minimum figure. The figure of €3 billion is 40% of €7.5 billion, so the front-loading was to have been 40%. An equivalent front-loading of €15 billion would be €6 billion. Will the Minister take €6 billion out on 7 December? Will he do the same proportion of front-loading as he intended a month ago, or will he do something less? If he is looking for some element of ongoing co-operation from the Opposition, that is an absolutely essential figure for us to know. We also need to know the other intermediary annual targets up to 2014.

What is the actual deficit for 2011? The ultimate target is 3% by 2014. However, when a race or contest is being organised, it is not enough to know the finishing line. One also needs to know the starting position. What will the starting position be on 7 December? It was Government policy to bring the deficit below 10%. In the last budget, the Minister announced that the deficit for 2011 would be less than 10%. This contained a suggestion that if we did not have a deficit low enough to convince the markets to lend, we would be in difficulty in January. Now that we have agreed that 3% in 2014 is the finish of the race, what is the Minister's starting point on 7 December? Will he go soft? Will the budget deficit be 11%, 11.5% or 10.5% of GDP? Will he go below 10%? He needs to come up with this figure pretty quickly. I will not press him any harder on this; I am simply speculating. I have no information as to his thinking on this but this is an essential piece of information. Unless we know the starting point we do not know where the Minister is going.

When we move away from the targets we can look at an economic strategy to get the country moving again and to give it the shock that will turn the declining circle into an ascending circle. The Minister falls down badly in concentrating all the time on fiscal correction. If the debate is only about how much we will cut and how much we will tax, all the people with money on deposit in the banks will neither spend nor invest. We have to get onto a more optimistic programme which provides jobs and economic growth in parallel with the fiscal correction.

The economic plan for jobs and growth will be along the lines of the NewERA document authored and published by Deputy Coveney. I appreciate that circumstances in the semi-State

sector have changed since that document was published two years ago and it will have to be updated but the concept remains the same, namely, the need to invest in new infrastructure. This country needs to find the wherewithal to invest in all the things that are important to a modern economy.

We have resources, such the money that was put into the National Pensions Reserve Fund for a rainy day. I recall Charlie McCreevy's thinking when he established the fund. His assertion that it would preserve our pensions for the future was really a sales pitch for taking money out of circulation because he was afraid of inflation. I am not saying the money will not be needed for pensions but given the way the economy is going, there will be nobody around to draw pensions. The fund was always intended for investments in Ireland as well as in the four corners of the world. The reason it did not invest in this country, even when large sums of money were earmarked for the domestic economy, was because Ireland was awash with cheap money on the interbank market. That flow of money is what got Anglo Irish Bank and the rest of the financial institutions into trouble.

It is possible now to invest in domestic infrastructure on a commercial basis while giving a boost to the Irish economy. I will give one example from the greens around the House. People do not want domestic water charges but we are prepared to charge them for wasting water on a metered basis. One can boil the kettle, take a shower or use the bathroom for nothing but it is fair that one should pay for washing the car or running the hose over the allotment for three days to grow greener cabbage than the woman next door. The essential element of any pension fund is a revenue flow because that facilitates investment through a PPP scheme.

The NPRF is not the only solution. Some of our semi-State organisations have healthy balance sheets, despite the crazy politically driven investments in things like grids in Northern Ireland which upset the ESB's balance sheet. The advantage of semi-State companies is that they always have capital programmes and can invest in new infrastructure.

Another solution is suggested by the review conducted by Colm McCarthy to identify the State assets and agencies that are no longer essential or strategic and, as a result, can be sold off. I do not propose that we sell at the bottom of the market. We could use the NPRF money and, if we feel we have to replenish it subsequently, we can do so through the sale of assets. That was done on previous occasions.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Greece tried it with the Acropolis.

Deputy Michael Noonan: Funds for a stimulus package can also be found in the private pension funds which have been lobbying for changes to the law. They believe the restrictions currently in place on their investments in Ireland require them to take bigger risks abroad rather than spread them, which was the intention of the legislation, and they want more scope to invest domestically.

We are all in politics and we have been around a long time. The conclusion I have reached from knocking on doors is that we cannot sell hardship. No matter how good we may be, and the Minister is very convincing, the problem is that the jury keeps returning to the trial. The more they get used to him, the less convincing he becomes.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: Eventually they convict.

Deputy Damien English: They will convict soon.

Deputy Michael Noonan: That will happen. We cannot sell hardship but everything that has been said about fiscal adjustment is an attempt to sell hardship to the Irish people. It has to be accompanied by a strategy that gives a shock to the economy in order to get it growing

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again. We will have to take a sectoral approach to the economy and take what the economists call supply side initiatives. I am sure the Minister heard the business lads in Trinity speak about supply side economics while he was studying law and liberal arts. The stimulus package is a demand side measure but the advantage of supply side initiatives is that they are small and do not cost a lot of money.

I will outline a very simple example. London is full of Chinese tourists at present. The city is like the Ireland of 30 or 40 years ago, when one would get a belt of a camera from a Japanese tourist if one looked at the Blarney stone. Is Fáilte Ireland asking why these tourists are not adding three days in Ireland to their packages? The reason is the difficulty in getting visas. If there was a way of fast-tracking their visas, it would cost nothing because it would only be an administrative matter for the Department of Justice and Law Reform and the Department of Foreign Affairs and we could attract more tourists. It will not have cost anything even if it did not work.

I am aware the former Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, was offended by being held up to ridicule in the advertisements that Michael O'Leary placed in the newspapers.

Deputy Joan Burton: So was our friend, President Sarkozy.

Deputy Michael Noonan: The Deputy should not be upset because once he went into the press, Michael O'Leary could do no more to him. If the Government has a vendetta against Mr. O'Leary and is keeping the travel tax in place because it does not want to give him the satisfaction of saying it was wrong, that is bad politics. It could be a good supply side initiative, however. If one takes the tourism sector, five star hotels around the country are empty and nobody is using our golf courses other than the odd fox or rabbit. We have excellent self-catering accommodation and underutilised airports all over the country, including the second terminal at Dublin Airport. The investment has been made in the tourism infrastructure but it is not being used because the missing ingredients are the tourists. They have to be brought into the country. Was the Government to sit down with Michael O'Leary, the gentleman from Aer Lingus and the heads of the other carriers and offered to removed the travel tax if the airlines committed to deliver tourists, that would be a basis for negotiation. At a minimum, we could ask for €20 million to promote Ireland in Germany given that Germans are beginning to spend money again and they might fly here. These are the supply side initiatives to which I refer.

I will describe another initiative that would not cost money. The law states that rents can only be adjusted upwards. It always struck me as bizarre that a tenant cannot negotiate. Businesses are closing as a result of this law but nothing is being done about it. We will list these and other initiatives in our own policy programmes.

It appears the Government is suffering from paralysis whereby individual Ministers cannot come up with low cost, or no cost, supply side initiatives such as tweaking taxes.

Is he doing as his colleagues in Mr. Cameron's British Government are doing? There, since the election, they have had a "patent box" approach, which involves a new treatment of patents and intellectual property. If the Minister talks to those he knows in IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, he will know we are already at a competitive disadvantage. The "patent box" involves only tweaking and changing the rules, which kicks into research and development and makes Britain more attractive for research and development than Ireland. It is a supply side initiative to fix this problem and it costs nothing because there is no great return on it in any case. It is very important that we would do this.

We need a credible fiscal policy going forward. I hope the Minister will, some time in November, bring forward the profiles for four budgets. He has said he will set targets for the individual budgets when he does so. I strongly suggest that when he is bringing out the budget, no matter how harsh it is, he accompanies it with a jobs and growth strategy for the economy. Otherwise, we are all going down the tubes together.

Deputy Joan Burton: Like many Members of the House, when parents and citizens stop me in the street, they generally tell me about their worries for the future. They worry for the future of the country but, above all else, they worry for the future of their children. Most of us here are parents and we all went to see the best for our children. We want to believe and we want our children to believe that they are not being condemned to that old path of emigration by this Government. We are looking for a sign of hope, a ray of light and confidence that the sacrifices Fianna Fáil have laid out have some meaning.

We must remember that over the past two and a half years Fianna Fáil has already taken some €15 billion or €15.5 billion out of the economy. Like the hamster——

Deputy Brian Lenihan: It is €14 billion, I believe.

Deputy Joan Burton: It depends on how it is counted. Like the hamster on the wheel, people have given all that sacrifice to find out that after all the promises of green shoots and turn-arounds from this Minister, and all the bag of tricks in regard to the cheapest bank bailout in the world and everything looking rosy in the garden, this particular gardener did not really do the spade work of laying the ground for real growth and real recovery.

Fianna Fáil suggests we are facing into an age of austerity. Perhaps it is the Japanese lost decade. That is the wrong way for Fianna Fáil to present it because it is to deprive of any hope thousands of young people who are out of work or on the verge of graduating from college. That is wrong. Our young people, with their quality of education, are world beaters. Many of the 400,000 people who are languishing in unemployment are shocked. These are people who have been used to looking after themselves and to having expectations. They now find that on Wednesday of any week, they may have to borrow from their parents or others to try to get to Friday or Saturday, when they will get some money again.

That kind of thing went out not in the 1980s but in the 1960s. It is why somebody like President John F. Kennedy was such a ray of hope to Ireland because he came here, wonderful looking and well dressed and, just as “The Cosby Show” did for black Americans, he represented something that came from us and something we could become, and which in due course we did become.

Fianna Fáil’s sense of pervasive hopelessness is killing the country. This is why I had hoped to hear more about a balanced approach to the economy. We say “Yes” to cutting and pruning expenditure, getting better value for our money and having all of us work harder, whether in the public or private sector, but also “Yes” to growth, to stimulus, to the future, to the skills of our young people, to the education in which we have invested and to the fact we are in the EU. We have an attractive corporation tax rate. Our diaspora, particularly in regard to Irish America but also those of our people who have gone to live in Australia and New Zealand, want to be told by us that we have a plan for recovery and that they can help with that plan. I did not hear mention of any of this.

For all of the language about a smart economy, give me a smart Government that helps to generate hope and employment and I would settle for that. We seem to have one of the most pathetically stupid Governments of the recent period. It inherited a good economy and an easy

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task. For about five years it followed roughly what the Rainbow Government had done and then, once we went into the euro it lost the run of itself. Now, we must change from that.

Irish politics is now almost entirely dominated by the economy. Consider the business of Dáil Éireann. Already in this single year we have gone through two game-changing moments. First, in the week before Easter, the Minister made his shock and awe announcement about the first disclosure of the Anglo Irish Bank losses. Then, a few weeks ago, there was Black Thursday and yet another stunning set of losses that have been dumped on the citizens of this State. Today's debate is a foretaste of the pre-budget debate we must have in a few weeks when we get the details from the Government of the four-year plan to be sent to Brussels. Then, on 7 December, we will get the 2011 Budget Statement.

Even the most addicted of politically minded citizens have become numbed by the sheer scale of what has happened, while the economics profession has retreated into its own exclusive language of multipliers, deflators and technicalities that rivals the language of lawyers in its obscurity.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: It far exceeds it, I suggest.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Cabinet will make the budget decisions and will have to live with their consequences. Nobody can have any sympathy for the plight of this Cabinet. Members should read the report by Messrs Regling and Watson. Mr. Regling is now the man with the money in the stabilisation fund. He said that our problems were "home-grown". He has laid out the scale of the policy errors of the years since 2000, particularly the property tax shelters that drove the construction boom and the light touch regulation that encouraged the reckless lending practices of the banks. We know the impact of the Government's fiscal tightening will be to depress growth in the coming years. What we do not know yet is whether the country's credit rating internationally will be more affected by the evidence of weakening activity or by the stubbornly high level of the budget deficit. This is why it is a balancing act.

Portugal does not have anything like our fiscal problems, does not have a banking problem at all and has a forecast deficit for next year of below 5%. Why can it not borrow at reasonable rates and why is its borrowing limited? It is because it cannot show enough growth prospects in its economy.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: It has a current account deficit on its balance of payments.

Deputy Joan Burton: The point is that our difficulties are not unique. If one decides to follow the deficit hawks and kill the economy, one will not gain kudos from the bond markets. What they really want is a twin-track approach. Whatever option is chosen has immense risks. As the Taoiseach is fond of saying, we are where we are. It is where he and the Minister have brought us. The Minister does not like to be reminded of that but it is the undeniable truth. He does not deserve and will not get a moment's peace in this House from the Labour Party. This is his legacy.

Earlier today the leader of the Labour Party, Deputy Eamon Gilmore, reaffirmed the Labour Party's commitment to the four-year timetable for deficit reduction. He did so because we know the country needs to be able to return to borrowing at reasonable rates of interest between mid-January and mid-February. There is more than one timetable involved. In many ways, we do not just have a four-year timetable to meet but a four-month timetable.

The 3% deficit target has been the core of public policy since the starting round of emergency budgets in 2008. There have been four-year plans aplenty sent to Brussels. There is nothing

unusual in this procedure as it is a long-standing part of the Stability and Growth Pact. We are subject to the excessive deficit procedure.

The plan that must be submitted in a few weeks will be subject to a tougher-than-usual stress analysis. This is because the last two budgets, despite the pain the people took as a consequence and despite the painful measures we all have had to endure on foot of the various special budgets since the summer of 2008, failed to reach the intermediate targets set out.

I have to hand the Minister's previous effort. One line refers to €2 billion for 2011, €2 billion for 2012, €1.5 billion for 2013 and €1 billion for 2014. This is why the Opposition has problems with the Department's arithmetic. What does such a line mean? I am referring to the book the Department of Finance presented to us. All I can say is that it is a short book and it is not convincing. We are seeking information that is credible, presented with conviction and which allows us to explain the position of the Government.

The dismal and repeated failures of Government banking and budgetary policies have left a cloud of international doubt over the capacity of the Government to deliver the goods. This is the Minister's problem. Only a change of Government, a new Administration, will make the bond markets feel Ireland is again on the up. This would be because the Government's mentality would be characterised by freshness, vigour and a desire for change. Credibility must be the principal feature of any revised four-year plan. The plan must not be about cuts and more cuts.

The most depressing feature of this debate is that our national predicament is presented in Parliament as a choice between one extreme and another. One side maintains the country must be purged of its crippling debt in a really tight timeframe regardless of social or long-term economic consequences while the other side refuses to acknowledge that international creditworthiness is an issue at all. Then there are those who wilfully ignore the continuing fragility of the banking sector, as if it were not an issue at all in budgetary calculations. In this regard, one should consider what the Bank of Ireland had to pay yesterday and today for raising some funding. It is paying the shadow rates the Irish Government is being asked for. The ordinary citizen watches in considerable bewilderment as the argument rages.

My party accepts the necessity for spending cuts yet remains alarmed at the prospect of a prolonged recession and social disruption. If the right balance is not struck in the coming budget and if public spending is cut by too much too fast, the knock-on effect on business and consumer confidence will surely make matters worse. One should remember that private businesses are the main beneficiaries of public investment. Private builders build and maintain our schools and hospitals and small private suppliers sell goods and services to local authorities and Departments. If this source of custom is cut off, businesses will fail in every county. People in both public and private sectors are not spending but hoarding cash, as is evident from the level of savings in the country. They are worried about their jobs, their children's jobs and whether they will have to help out by meeting extra mortgage repayments. Many mothers in my constituency tell me they are giving their children so much money per week to help with the food bill to allow them to concentrate on trying to pay the mortgage. This is a reality for many people in my constituency.

One can measure the loss of confidence in the Government through the RED C polls and others and one can note the same loss of confidence in the tales from the front line of businesses, big and small shops, hotels, suppliers and contractors, and from the anxiety of parents who are watching sadly as their qualified children, including graduates and apprentices, prepare to emigrate. The Government's economic policy is a wild gamble. Banking policy has failed utterly. The promissory notes tactic to fund the Anglo Irish Bank bailout has blown up in the Minister's face at a huge cost to the State.

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

If ever there ever were two rogue characters in this Hallowe'en horror story, they must be bankers FitzPatrick and Fingleton. We now have a €31 billion mortgage for this country, payable over a ten-year to 15-year period. The deficit has increased from €7.5 billion to €15 billion largely because the Minister or one of his advisers did not account for the approximately €1.5 billion per annum that the promissory notes would cost. This is the main reason the Minister's figures have gone adrift. He acknowledged this by talking about the rise in interest costs. If interest rates continue to rise as they are doing, the country may well be paying up to €6 billion in interest costs next year.

When I popped into the Minister's Department to meet the very pleasant and courteous officials, they were not able to pull out a sheet of paper stating the figures. I had to drag out of them the €1.5 billion annual interest charge on the promissory notes. That is not good enough. Perhaps the Minister told his officials to invite us but not to tell us too much. We do not know what their briefing was but we certainly wanted the kind of information I have outlined.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: The Minister is not denying it.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: They were not given any briefing.

Deputy Michael Noonan: He has such control he did not have to brief them.

Deputy Joan Burton: Ministers insist that public spending cuts are vital to protect confidence in the country until our debts can be repaid. The other issue is that the negative impact of these cuts will be compensated for by a surge in private sector activity. How can that happen if business remains so deep in the doldrums? There is a simple equation being considered, particularly in right-wing circles, to the effect that when one cuts the State sector, the private sector surges. However, ours is a small complicated economy in that much of the private sector depends on public spending to keep its activity at a reasonable level.

Yesterday's announcement of the greater-than-expected hole in the public purse puts every Member of this House under pressure. The Labour Party will respond to the new situation when it has a reasonable opportunity to assess it and when it receives a considered answer to two vital questions. The first concerns the growth and employment anticipated for 2011. The other is the expected outturns in revenue for this year and next. It is amusing that journalists want instant answers from me and my colleagues in respect of what we will do. Are they seeking back-of-the-envelope calculations that would be carried out in the absence of proper analysis of the most recent data? Ministers are allowed time and space to consider their responses. However, Members on this side of the House are criticised if they indulge in the slightest hesitation. This really is a curious form of politics. I put it down to the Government's very skilful and well-paid advisers spinning very successfully on its behalf.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: They are too busy preparing the national plan.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: That is an awful reflection on the Minister's Department.

Deputy Michael Noonan: The national plan was launched three months ago.

Deputy Joan Burton: I am sure it did not escape the Minister's notice that the individuals to whom I refer are earning handsome salaries and are doing a very good job spinning matters on his behalf.

The tax code requires a major overhaul in order to yield the additional revenue that will be needed to meet our debts and for investment. For over a decade, the tax code has been infected

by the poison of the type of tax shelters which have facilitated the tax planners in ducking and weaving at will in order to evade and avoid paying their fair share. Regardless of the degree to which Ministers pretend that these shelters no longer exist, the truth is that they have left a long legacy which will continue to cost us billions in the years to come. This week, I obtained an admission from officials in the Department of Finance to the effect that the notorious property tax shelters will cost us close to €400 million this year alone. That amount is equal to the total cost of the free fees policy in the area of higher education. However, those who demand an end to this policy are curiously silent about and ignorant of the true cost of the tax breaks that have caused so much damage in the past decade.

Tax planners placed large advertisements on the front page of one of the Sunday newspapers last weekend and the weekend before in which those with spare cash were urged to hurry up and take the last remaining opportunity to use the tax shelters to which I refer in order to minimise their exposure for tax. These advertisements reminded me of the slogan employed by Moore Street traders in the week prior to Christmas and encouraging people to “buy the last of the Cheeky Charlies”. Tax experts are exhorting people to avail of the last of the tax breaks while they remain in place. The figure of €400 million to which I refer is not insignificant.

I wish to refer to the absurd tax breaks that exist for very high income earners who have private pensions. Mr. Fingleton is the most famous case in this regard and he has a private pension pot of €27 million. All of this money has been carefully sheltered within structures put in place by the Government. These tax breaks are another cause of vexation on the part of ordinary PAYE workers and, in full, they cost the Exchequer between €1 billion and €2 billion each year. They must be amended in order that the costs to which they give rise can be substantially reduced. They must be focused on low and middle income earners rather than on those who earn high incomes. I am in favour of one measure that has been introduced by the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government in the UK, namely, the imposition of a cap on the amount of relief that can be claimed under this heading, regardless of whether it is contributed to taxpayers or by the owners of companies by which proprietary directors are technically employed. I urge the Minister for Finance to follow the lead provided by the UK Chancellor, Mr. George Osborne, MP, in this regard.

We are continually reminded that a high percentage of wage earners at the lower end of the pay scales pay no income tax at all. It may well be that there is scope for reform in this area and that a well-structured universal levy could have a significant role to play in order that savings might be achieved. The Minister previously referred to a universal social contribution, a matter in respect of which the ESRI recently compiled a paper. I would add the proviso that there is no change of securing consent under this heading when there is such rampant evasion and avoidance at the top end. Get that part of the equation right and we can then discuss a thorough application of the principle that everyone must pay a fair share.

It is astonishing to consider how the rampant organised tax avoidance to which I refer remains so embedded in our culture. One need only consider the recent stories relating to NAMA. All of the guys — and they are guys — whose loans were taken over by NAMA are each going to be given €200,000 per year in order that they might continue to live in the style to which they have become accustomed. A sum of €200,000 represents a large salary by most people’s standards. The majority of those to whom I refer will not pay any tax on that money because they still have access to a range of tax shelters which they utilised in order to pay little or no tax during the period of the boom. It is all a question of balance. If one wants to cut child benefit, one must clearly show that one intends to act tough on this type of rampant tax avoidance.

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

In comparison to other eurozone countries, the overall gross tax take here, as a share of national income, is way below what it ought to be. The position in this regard must be changed in a planned and coherent way in the coming years. Many of those to whom I would refer as “deficit hawks”, and who inhabit television and radio studios, do not want to acknowledge that this is the reality shown by all of the statistics produced by the OECD and other bodies in respect of Ireland. This reality is the result of the various tax breaks and tax shelters and the way in which our tax system evolved under Charlie McCreevy. Essentially, we should have moderate taxes, the effective tax rate should not be distorted by tax shelters and everyone should contribute. In this way, we could raise our tax revenues to reasonable heights without the necessity to have excessively high marginal rates.

The IMF has a fearsome reputation as an institution that will take whatever action is considered necessary if it is called upon to manage a failed economy. When I worked in a number of different countries in Africa, I witnessed the kind of restructuring the IMF tends to employ. It is not a pretty sight. The IMF’s template is very simple: get to a zero-based budget in something of the order of one to three years.

When I visited the Department of Finance, I became depressed as a result of the quietistic mood that appears to obtain among the staff there. When I visit a school, I can nearly gauge, as I walk in the front door, the vibrancy of the children and the levels of hope and expectation that obtain. I did not feel that kind of vibrancy when I visited the Minister’s Department. I am sure the officials who work there are the reservoirs of vast levels of knowledge and expertise in respect of public expenditure. However, none of them stated “Joan, we can do this. We can pull matters out of the fire. We know we are going to do it.” Far be it from me to state that someone with a salesperson’s approach should go into the Department. However, it is obvious that the Government is not inspiring the officials to whom I refer to come forward with serious plans to regenerate this country.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: That is very unfair.

Deputy Joan Burton: Why is it the case that when I — I am sure the other Opposition spokespersons did the same — inquired about——

Deputy Brian Lenihan: It is a monastery, not a supermarket.

Deputy Joan Burton: ——the Croke Park agreement, no figures could be provided? Why did the officials not state that they are driving the process relating to the agreement?

Deputy Dara Calleary: Fine Gael and Labour supported the agreement.

Deputy Joan Burton: The Minister and his absent colleagues are the leaders of the various Departments.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: I do not believe that the Minister of State, Deputy Calleary, and his colleagues require affirmation from Members on this side of the House.

Deputy Joan Burton: When we met the officials, we were informed that there are no real plans. Ministers are meant to lead their Departments. They are supposed to inspire civil servants and encourage them to develop ideas. I am quite convinced that there are many ideas and a high level of capacity among civil servants. However, the staff of the Minister’s Department have been allowed to become utterly depressed by what lies in store for the future. If those who are making the plans are suffering from depression, they are not going to generate

the kind of ideas that will assist in getting the country back on its feet. It is the Minister's responsibility, as the leader of his Department, to inspire civil servants to give of their best.

Last week the IMF stated, "Fiscal plans should be fair. There should be specific measures to protect the most vulnerable from the effects of the consolidation." A similar bias lies at the core of the Labour Party's approach to the coming four years. Unless there are reforms affecting the very wealthiest in the country, people on lower income levels cannot be asked to shoulder the bulk of the burden.

The Minister responded in a very negative way to Deputy Gilmore's contribution and the Labour Party proposal for a strategic investment bank. We did much research on this and considered models in four or five European countries. Coincidentally, today's leading article in *The Guardian* is related to this. The Minister used to quote all the time flattering comments from the *Financial Times* before it cottoned on to him.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: And *The Guardian*.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Not any more.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: *The Manchester Guardian*.

Deputy Dara Calleary: The Deputy will not quote last week's *Irish Times*.

Deputy Joan Burton: It states "Far better would be a state development bank along the lines of Germany's KfW." The Minister is averse to new ideas and changes because he is addicted to whatever happened in the salad days of having money to throw at everything. That may have been new centres in Punchestown or the Bertie Bowl. Those days are gone but we need realistic and fresh hope to turn this economy around. What depresses me about today's speeches is that although we accept the smart economy, where is the smart and inspirational Government? Where is it giving leadership, to the public service in particular, that will enable public servants to believe that a reform programme will be adopted giving value for money, making savings, keeping public service jobs and, in particular, giving the people who are using our services the quality and standard of service in health and education that they are entitled to expect?

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I thank the Minister and his officials for their courtesy on the number of visits we paid to the Department of Finance recently with regard to the ongoing budgetary process. The information has been useful although it is certainly far from complete. I regard this as a small step to opening the budgetary process and I hope there is substantially more of it in coming years. There is certainly room for a more comprehensive approach to the business.

I suppose we should be grateful because at least the Minister today avoided the reference to patriotism. I am sure he recalls the reference from a couple of years ago when he told youngsters going across the border to Newry or Enniskillen to buy a can of beer that they needed to be patriotic. There was no mention of patriotism when it came to wrecking the economy of the State for a generation.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: They are not going to Newry now.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: That was the Minister's reference and if we want to measure the patriotism of the people of this island or this State, we must recognise the reality and have some level of proportionality. The Government has betrayed the trust of the Irish people, or at the very least the people of this State who voted for it. The Government decisions in recent

[Deputy Arthur Morgan.]

years and particularly over the past two years have amounted to economic treason. It watched as gangsters masquerading as bankers shovelled billions of euro out to corrupt speculators and developers to build houses where planning permission was often acquired through corrupt payments to councillors, although not all councillors are corrupt by any means. The rezoning of such land for housing purposes should not have happened. It is no wonder that there are consequences for the tolerance or encouragement of corruption by this Government.

Some context is needed as a backdrop to the clamour for cuts to the welfare and low-income families from the whole consensus for cuts brigade, which will take place in the days just before Christmas next December. The consensus parties are preparing to impoverish the poorer people of this State for decades. The Government has no mandate to do so because it and the other parties in the consensus for cuts cluster went into the 2007 election promising the people of this State tax cuts and sunshine forever more. The Government was elected on that mandate and was not elected on a mandate of impoverishing swathes of people on welfare and low or middle incomes.

The Government has no mandate, although the Minister may indicate that the Government will squeeze through on a technical aspect of democracy and how it works. The Minister knows his Government does not have a mandate. Coming up to the NAMA business last year I called for a referendum on the agency and the vast sums it would cost our people. The Government did not hold it because it knew the result that would come out. Sinn Féin put down a motion as a parliamentary device to force that referendum but there was no support, particularly from the Labour Party, and I remain disappointed in it.

There is an economic nightmare bearing down on people so this Government should immediately seek a fresh mandate before it does any more damage to the economy. We can think of the details of the consequences of what will happen after the 2011 budget. Who will pay for it? Those who will pay for it in the first instance are the people who are currently languishing in hospital accident and emergency units. People who need acute hospital beds will be staying for two or three days on a hospital trolley — or at least that is the current rate — before getting into the system. It will probably be double or triple this number by the time cutbacks are felt.

I was in an accident and emergency department with a relative approximately six weeks ago for most of the day and into the night. It was Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda. At one point there were 38 people in trolleys and when the trolleys ran out, the staff had to get chairs. The staff asked the family of the ill people if they would mind going to the public area and bringing back a chair. There were not even enough chairs to hold those people. My heart went out to the older people in particular, who are very proud and are conscious of their dignity. They had blankets across the chairs barely covering them and they slipped off the people as they dozed off. It is a nightmare scenario that is now occurring and I hope the Minister will tell us at the conclusion of the debate what the scenario will be for those people after the December budget.

I do not want to make this a health debate as other people will pay for it. Children with special needs will pay for this and already are paying because special needs assistants are being laid off. The consequences of that are that teachers in the classroom pick up the slack and bring children to the toilet and ensure that the children keep up to some degree. The other children in the classroom will suffer enormously as well. There are people with disabilities, with families already carrying substantial burdens, and others with mental health issues. They are already suffering isolation and torment, very often in Victorian buildings and grossly inadequate conditions. Those people will suffer.

When a Minister tells us the measures will be widely spread and the poor will be protected, we can see it as nonsense. These are the very people being attacked by this Government. Almost everybody, except the wealthy, must contribute in a disproportionate way. That is a scandal.

This is not about the people but the economy. It is flat and there is no prospect of growth in the immediate future. The strategy is to hang on in there and hope there will be a global bounce, with some growth here on the coat-tails of that growth. There will not be any substantial growth in this economy—

Deputy Brian Lenihan: The Deputy's party would need to cut €20 billion.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: —for at least 18 months. If there is more than 2% growth in the next 18 months, it will be good going. That will not be enough because even a substantial global bounce will have a lag of 12 to 18 months before it will impact on the huge numbers of unemployed people in this State.

It is wonderful that as we come up to Hallowe'en the Minister is appropriately scare-mongering to some degree. In the course of his contribution he said that a higher rate of tax for top earners would cause them to flee the jurisdiction. That is interesting. It is causing the Minister substantial worry. Is the Minister worried about the people who have just graduated leaving the State? They are leaving in droves every month. Fully qualified nurses are leaving the jurisdiction every month but neither the Minister nor any of his colleagues has expressed concern about those people leaving the jurisdiction. However, if there is a marginal tax rate on very wealthy people the sky will fall in because they may leave the jurisdiction. I do not buy into that hypothesis for a moment.

I will refer to the Minister's speech because it was fascinating. In it he told us, "Irish people will still hold onto most of the gains that we have built up over many years of strong growth and that they enjoyed since the mid-1990s. Over that period we took many steps forward. We are now only taking one step back". If the Minister thinks that somebody losing his or her home is one step back from where he or she was five or six years ago, I can tell him it is several more steps than that. That is another of his phrases which I can no longer accept, any more than the phrase, "the worst is over" or the other comments he made which I will not go back over because I will waste everybody's time and I want to give the Minister some of our perspective on the economy.

On the phrase, "one step back" the Minister should go out onto the doorsteps and canvass if people are not coming into his constituency office. I do not mean to personalise the debate to the Minister, but his backbenchers should be telling him what is going on in the real world if the Government does not know because I can tell him what is happening. There is a high level of poverty out there. Substantial numbers of people are struggling to feed their children. I am meeting people and dealing with some of their issues and I can assure the Minister that what I said is absolutely correct. To talk about taking one step back is missing the point regarding the level and extent of the deprivation which is out there.

There may be a bounce in the economy but the real test of the economy is employment, growth in employment and a reduction in unemployment. We see the huge numbers of unemployed, some 449,000. We know that figure will continue for some substantial time and that is the real measure of the economy. We have economic indices and all the rest of it but if the Government wants to count it in real terms, it should count it in human terms because we are dealing with society.

The Government has cut and slashed in the past three budgets. It has imposed levies and taxes on low income families and what were the consequences? I will tell the Minister what

[Deputy Arthur Morgan.]

they were. We now have a flat economy, huge unemployment, revenue is still falling and there is no strategy in place to deal with it. The cost of borrowing is 6% or more and still growing. Why is there is no market confidence in Ireland? It is because the markets know that the Government has told lies and bluffed for so long that they have no confidence whatsoever in it.

We need to get back to a point where politicians have some integrity and when they speak people will at least believe what they say. There is no respect out there for politicians generally, and certainly none for the Government side and what has been wrought on the people of this State. Is it any wonder that the international markets do not have confidence in the Government? It started off with €4.5 billion to bail out Anglo Irish Bank, which increased to €9 billion, then €12 billion and the Minister now claims it is €29 billion but I estimate it will cost €37 billion, as have a number of other people including Peter Matthews and other people of integrity.

Whatever measures the Minister puts in place, until we get to a point where the characters on the Government side of the House can be believed — they cannot be believed at the moment — the markets will have deep suspicions about our capacity to work our way out of this economy. People out there believe that the Government could not lie straight in bed at night, much less exercise some integrity regarding the economy.

I will briefly deal with the Sinn Féin proposals. I thank Deputy Ó Caoláin for agreeing to bring forward our pre-budget submission to Monday of next week because we want to ensure that the Government has the maximum amount of time possible to examine our proposals. Unlike the Minister we do not think that there will be a huge flight of very wealthy people from the economy if we introduce a 40% tax band on individual incomes in excess of €100,000. The proposal was in our pre-budget submission last year and will be there this year. We are not expecting the Minister to accept that given his comments today.

We want to see a 1% wealth tax but only on assets in excess of €1 million which is income linked. What is the thrust of that? It is asking the wealthy and those who can afford it to pay rather than what happened in the budget last year. We know what is coming this year. The Government is going after people on €15,000 per annum with levies and taxes. That is grossly unfair on the people who cannot afford to pay. We will standardise discretionary tax reliefs which will raise over €1 billion.

We will have some very sensible measures for a stimulus. A stimulus is absolutely essential for growth and we will be offering a substantial proposal in regard to it. I do not often agree with Fine Gael but I have to agree with Deputy Noonan on the pension fund. To use some of it to invest in the stimulus package to try to make sure we get the economy moving again is a sensible move. Government blather about protecting the less well off when it means the complete opposite will not wash with me or my colleagues.

What is the Government talking about? We hear some rumbles about potentially having a property tax. Swathes of people are struggling to pay their mortgages. I hear in my constituency office on a weekly basis that people are going to the St. Vincent de Paul. I have gone to negotiate some kind of moratorium for constituents who were being threatened with foreclosure by the banks. That is a growing problem; it is not reducing. To talk about the prospects of a property tax in this environment is nonsense. We heard the Minister, Deputy Gormley, refer to prepping for water charges. I know he can wrap it up, as he did with the carbon tax, in some kind of green cloak but he is once again affecting poorer people from low-income families. In doing so, he will squeeze the life out of the economy.

People refer to front loading the so-called adjustments. I will have to get some explanation of what the word “adjustment” means. In this context it seems to be a cut but the Government

will not call it that. The next time I need a haircut and go into the barber I will ask for a hair adjustment. I guarantee that he will produce a pair of scissors and hair will fall to the floor in no time. Whatever about the terminology, what the budget is really about is going after the poor and using language to disguise the savage cuts which will take place.

The people who advocate front-loading are those who are invariably on incomes well in excess of €200,000 per annum. Does an income like that not soften the blow of these adjustments? I believe it does. However, those people being on salaries of €200,000 will not soften the blow for the person on €196 euro per week, as Deputy Ó Caoláin rightly referred to in his contribution. That will be no comfort for them and they will be scrimping and scraping and trying to barely make ends meet, yet we are told the less well-off will be protected.

The Government's policies will undoubtedly lead to a significant economic contraction. The fairest people to quote are those at the ESRI, a Government-funded independent body. The ESRI stated that its calculations suggest that savings of up to €15 billion could be needed, which is twice the sum under discussion at the time Ireland and the Commission agreed to the 2014 deadline. It expressed concern about the potential negative impact on the economy of this scale of adjustment over the period of time while accepting that the 2014 deadline is unlikely to change. This will be particularly punitive.

The ESRI states that when the package was signed off with the 2014 date the debt was only half of what it is now; it was €7.5 billion and not €15 billion. A sum of €500 million either way matters little to those who will face these cuts. The ESRI also accepts that it is unlikely to change. This is because the Government has indicated to it that it will not go back to Europe to try to negotiate a more reasonable approach. There should be a reasonable timeframe for dealing with the financial crisis bearing down on us. No person in his or her senses would undertake a huge mortgage over a 15 year period, he or she would want to repay it over a substantially longer period, such as 30 years.

I was going to deal with the behaviour of the auditors of some of the banks but I thank Deputy Ó Caoláin for dealing with Ernst & Young and a number of others in his contribution. There is no accountability whatsoever because those auditors, like the bankers, are working in the economy and getting paid huge sums of money like the developers and the speculators who are on €200,000 each from NAMA to keep them in luxury, this after what they have done to wreck the lives of so many people in this land. On it goes. We know the bankers have gone off with their huge pensions and bonuses. Michael Fingleton was mentioned. He is supposed to be returning his bonus of €1 million. However, he has not yet done so. He is still flying around the world enjoying himself with no sign of him giving us back that money.

In his speech, the Minister stated that the people will have to accept cuts in public expenditure and higher taxes. I agree with that sentence and he is right. However, where should those higher taxes be? The Minister for Finance tells us he will widen the tax net. He will bring those on the minimum wage into the net. When I state that I agree with him, I agree with the sentiment of the statement but we should be taxing higher income families because they can afford to pay. Higher income individuals are those earning in excess of €100,000 per annum. The current levy system will mean a substantial contribution from this category but those in it are better able to carry it than somebody on €196 per week. We hope it will be for a relatively short period, we estimate it will be for six years. We would make cuts in the public sector in particular and we would put a cap on people earning in excess of €100,000. We would also trim the salaries of Ministers, Deputies and Senators.

Two years into its purge, Ireland has a budget deficit of 32% of GDP. It is 11.9% if one strips out the bank bailouts. Ireland's debt is ballooning while its capacity to pay has collapsed. The current debate is on implementing a programme of extreme austerity versus austerity.

[Deputy Arthur Morgan.]

However, moving towards austerity is an ideological choice and not an economic reality. There is a need for sustained, substantial and smart stimulus instead of “timely cuts” as they are called. When we are told that the economy is shrinking significantly, that Government spending is far too high and Government borrowing is becoming unsustainable, that the economy is becoming uncompetitive, that workers are being paid too much, that the minimum wage must be lowered and that social welfare rates are too high, we should know that this is not common sense, it is the agenda of an ideology that serves the interests of a small wealthy class in our society.

The establishment is united in the need for cutbacks in workers’ pay — although it is much more hesitant about cutting executive pay — for cutbacks in Government expenditure including in health and education, for cutbacks in social welfare rates and for increases in taxation that affect those on the lowest incomes, to the extent of drawing low income earners previously outside the tax net into it. This is because it wishes to preserve the present system.

The demand that countries balance their budgets is a euphemism for selling off the public domain and slashing pensions and public spending on education, medical care and the other basic preconditions for raising labour productivity. The drain of payments to creditors and absentee investors forces countries to balance their budgets by selling off their public domain. Credit rating agencies threaten to downgrade countries that do not play ball by giving up their basic infrastructure, along with their gas, water and other natural resources on the cheap. That has happened in plenty in this State.

Under austerity, Government revenue is used to pay debt service, bail out banks and make other transfer payments or subsidies to the finance sector at home and abroad rather than being spent to raise productivity. Banks and financial institutions should have been let fail. Private deals were made between them. As Deputy Ó Caoláin stated, the value of one’s investment may go down as well as up. The Government is indifferent to real businesses and the SMEs, which are failing, but has made every concerted effort to help the financial pirates. It seems we have a banks’ spokesperson rather than a Minister for Finance.

NAMA is using large amounts of the wealth produced by taxpayers to bail out the stakeholders of the banks and the speculators who invested in them now that their reckless lending has left them facing huge losses. This reckless speculation was also socially destructive as it drove up house prices creating the now collapsed property bubble, leaving many households with punishing debt.

Pension funds need to be used productively to lessen the reliance on fickle foreign investors. We need to have in place instruments that are fit for investment. That we are dependent on bond vigilantes and international capital markets is perverse. Countries should not be brought to their knees because of the whims of these international players.

It may seem astonishing that we face such economic and social deficits after 15 years of boom but these are the consequences of pursuing a failed low-tax, low-spend model which sought short-term gains from the speculative activity of a small but very powerful golden circle.

Choices were made in the late 1990s and in the early 2000s by Fianna Fáil which diverted the economy away from industrial upgrading and new investment priorities, onto a path of speculative booms, a weakening tax base and public finances that were dependent on boom-time growth rates.

Supporters of Government policy argue that there is no alternative, having learnt their economics from Mrs. Thatcher. The Government wants all stakeholders to accept its assumptions and policies — the expenditure cuts and the recapitalisations — all of which the Government deems to be necessary to mitigate recent policy mistakes and excesses which occurred on its

watch. This happened over the past 13 years on its watch. To date, the Government has introduced three austerity budgets. On each occasion it has argued that we are living beyond our means and that it has no option but to cut public spending.

It is argued that cutting spending will reduce the State's borrowing requirement and that fiscal rectitude will also convince the markets that the Irish State is a sound investment and in turn, will reduce the cost of borrowing. Some chance. Unfortunately, none of this is supported by the facts. With each austerity budget the Government has pushed the economy further into recession. Cuts to wages and social welfare mean less money in people's pockets. Less money in people's pockets means less money spent in the real economy. Less money spent in the real economy, means more people out of work. As unemployment rises, tax revenues plummet, from €47.8 billion in 2007 to an estimated €30 billion in 2010, pushing up the deficit and the State's borrowing requirement. There is a clear disparity between the economic policies of the Irish Government and those of the other industrialised countries. While most countries in the G20 adopted some form of stimulus measures, Ireland's unique experiment in contraction continues to depress activity and tax receipts, boosting only the unemployment level and the budget deficit.

Rather than realise the error of its ways, the Government, supported by Fine Gael and the Labour Party — I hope that situation changes — is determined to continue cutting public spending in order to reduce the deficit to the agreed 3% of GDP by 2014. These kinds of policies squeezed into a four-year timeframe will have a devastating impact on both our economy and society. Unemployment will continue to rise. Tax revenues will continue to fall. The deficit will grow larger. The cost of borrowing will increase. Hundreds of thousands of people will be pushed further into poverty. It is happening on a daily basis. Ultimately, such policies will jeopardise the economic viability of the State itself. When it becomes apparent that the Government will be unable to meet the 2014 deadline and that the efforts to do so have caused great damage to the long-term capacity to recover, there will be another convulsion of confidence. The international markets may well choose to come back after us at that point. Is the Government approach feasible in terms of where the economy is now situated, and should the emphasis continue to be on deflating demand?

An Ceann Comhairle: Tá an t-ám beagnach caite.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I will conclude with this point. Sinn Féin has put forward an alternative approach to this mess, the Government-created economic mess. Our alternative is sensible and does not involve a policy of slash and burn. It involves a greater contribution from those people at the top who can afford to pay. We will give the Government our submission next week and I hope the Minister will take heed of at least some of the very sensible, well-costed proposals.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister for Transport, Deputy Noel Dempsey, and Deputy Seán Haughey are sharing time of 20 minutes.

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the House on the macro-economic and fiscal outlook. In reference to what Deputy Morgan said, I look forward to Sinn Féin submitting its plan to the Department of Finance for costing. We can then have a debate on real issues on how to tackle this crisis. I am particularly interested in seeing a justification for the introduction of a 48% tax rate for individuals earning over €100,000 a year. Deputy Morgan did not have time to outline fully his party's proposals but I ask him to explain how two people living in the same house both earning €99,999 would

[Deputy Noel Dempsey.]

escape this 48% tax rate while one household with an income of €101,000, will face the full hit of that rate. I wonder how this will work out and how fair it would be.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: It is €410 million.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I welcome the fact that Sinn Féin has indicated it will publish that plan. I hope other parties will do likewise and that the Government will be in a position to put its plans forward so that the House can have a real and balanced debate. The scale of the commitment we have made in the House to reduce the deficit to 3% of GDP in 2014, will be a very difficult one. As has been said by many speakers today, it equates to an adjustment of €15 billion over the next four years. We do not need to tell anybody either inside or outside the House how big a challenge this will be but it is a challenge we must manage and to which we must face up as a country. The process will not be painless nor can it be painless, despite what some people might like the public to believe, but it is manageable. If I had been told two years' ago in 2008 when the scale of this crisis began to emerge in Ireland and around the globe, that just two years' later I would be able to tell this House that we had €14 billion of adjustments in that two-year period, I would not have believed it. That is the scale and the measure of what has already been achieved. At a time when people are worried and concerned and many are probably depressed about the situation, we should take some heart from how people have responded. The public has shown its mettle. People have dealt with very difficult decisions which the Government has had to take. What has happened in the recent couple of years underlines the fact that people will accept difficult decisions if they understand them, if they think they are fair and if they think they are the right decisions for the country in the longer term. People know that without the decisions taken by the Government, the country's situation would be significantly worse than it is. If we had not taken those decisions, the country would lack any credibility when trying to convince the markets that we are capable and willing to work out our own affairs. This message has to be constantly repeated. We have to show by example that we are prepared to take on the difficult decisions.

It is most important that having taken those difficult decisions, we continue on a credible path to show we propose to meet this commitment of a 3% deficit in 2014. This will be evident in the four-year budgetary and growth plan to be announced early in November. This will incorporate annual measures and information. It will not make pretty reading as it will involve a number of very difficult decisions and difficult measures will be required to be implemented. The certainty it will bring will help people to plan for the future.

The four-year plan will need to strike the correct balance between reducing the deficit through targeted spending cuts, increasing taxation, obviously, and trying to put in place a package to allow for growth in the economy. This is a very delicate balance. I agree with the leaders of Fine Gael and the Labour Party that we must try to strike the correct and delicate balance between the spending reductions and cuts and increases in taxation. We need to try to do that in a way that does not hinder growth. It is obvious that in the first year or so, the expenditure reductions and the removal of moneys from the economy will have an effect. In the longer term, it will be extremely important to get the balance right.

I was somewhat amused by some of the coverage I saw, as well as some of the statements I heard in the House earlier, to the effect that the Government has all the answers at this stage, having had just two meetings on this issue. The Government has been meeting twice a week for some weeks now to work through the plan and the budget. We intend to make the difficult choices with which we are faced. We will look at all aspects of the matter to try to ensure our decisions are fair to everybody. We have to meet our economic responsibilities. We have to

protect the fabric of our society, which involves protecting the most vulnerable to the greatest extent possible.

It is important that we facilitate economic growth, which is the best guarantee for the future of this country and its people. We are focused on getting people back to work as quickly as possible, and economic growth is the optimum way of achieving this. That is why, when we hit the full force of the fiscal crisis in 2008, we set out a four-cornered plan which involved restoring the banking system, getting the public finances in order, protecting and creating jobs, and restoring competitiveness. Despite many distractions and difficulties since then, the Government has focused on each of the four objectives. Our approach has been consistent and methodical. We have been creating the conditions in which economic growth can drive employment and reduce the debt burden.

The various steps we have taken have been working. The circumstances are changing. It is important that our four-year plan continues to deal with the four issues I have mentioned. We hope the banking issue is largely settled at this point. We have to give our constant attention to the other three issues. It is important to try to reach as much consensus as possible in this House. I do not expect the Opposition to decide to take the odium for the decisions we will take. I accept that the first step it has taken in accepting the 3% deficit is an important one. There could be a great deal more consensus in this House. The Government will take the decisions that are needed. The Irish people, and those further afield who are watching this country, should be certain that the four-year plan that is to be put in place will send the right messages to the markets, nationally and internationally. I believe it should receive the support of this House.

Minister of State at the Department of Education (Deputy Seán Haughey): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this pre-budget debate. I will mention some of the initiatives in which I am involved as Minister of State with responsibility for lifelong learning. The Government's proposed four-year budgetary strategy, which will last until 2014, has been the subject of widespread commentary in recent days. The Government moved swiftly yesterday to reveal the amount of money involved in the planned correction. It is conscious that the financial markets now expect significant reductions in this country's deficit. If we fail to deliver those reductions, it will have negative consequences for the economy, including high interest rates.

The creation and protection of jobs is a political priority for the Government. The four pillars of our approach to the jobs issue are as follows: activation measures, employment schemes, training and upskilling; the promotion of exports and inward investment; the targeting of improved competitiveness and productivity; and reductions in the cost of doing business. There is a consensus among the major political parties about the need to achieve the 3% deficit target by 2014. If we are to demonstrate to the international community that we are competent to manage our own affairs, it is of the utmost importance that we plan for this deadline.

The projected growth in the economy is not expected to be as positive as previously forecast. Consumer demand is likely to be affected as personal households and businesses prepare to save scarce resources or reduce personal debt. Tax revenues might not be as buoyant in future years as we previously anticipated. Despite these uncertainties, the Government is committed to restoring sustainability to the public finances in order to underpin future economic growth and recovery.

Unemployment, which continues to impinge on families in this State, remains a political priority for the Government. Unemployment is an attack on self-esteem. A lack of employment opportunities can lead to heartbreak and hardship for people who are out of work, regardless of whether they are young or old, married or single. As the level of unemployment increases, it has a double impact on the public finances. Not only does the income tax take decrease as

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

the number of people in work declines, but the number of people who depend on State unemployment payments and other allied benefits increases, which places a huge strain on limited Government resources.

I wish to concentrate on aspects of my ministerial responsibility, such as training and upskilling, that are relevant to this debate. I will also outline the steps the Government is taking in this respect to tackle the unemployment crisis. Following the Taoiseach's restructuring of Government Departments, responsibility for the training aspects of FÁS has moved to the Department of Education and Skills and is now within my remit. This allows for a more co-ordinated alignment of activation measures and training policy. The Government has moved swiftly to improve the plight of the unemployed. FÁS has introduced measures to double the annual JobSearch referral capacity to 154,000 places per annum. My Department will fund the provision of over 160,000 training and work experience places for the unemployed in 2010. This represents an increase on the 66,000 such places that were provided in 2008.

We are prioritising four categories of the unemployed in order to minimise the drift into long-term unemployment. These are as follows: those who have low skills or education levels; those who have been on the live register for more than a year; those who are under the age of 35; and those who used to be employed in sectors like construction, manufacturing and retail. Employment levels in the three sectors I have mentioned, which have been severely affected by the downturn, are unlikely to return to their previous levels in the short to medium term. Last March, my Department launched the labour market activation fund, which will target the specific priority groups I have mentioned. Following a tender process which received 370 entries, some 59 organisations in the private, not-for-profit and public sectors successfully secured funding. The organisations in question will provide up to 12,000 training places.

An additional 500 community employment training places were announced earlier this year, bringing the number of places that are available to 23,300. Community employment is designed to give the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people an opportunity to engage in useful work in their communities on a fixed-term basis. The programme helps the unemployed to return to the labour market by breaking their experience of unemployment and giving them a work routine. It helps them to enhance and develop their technical and personal skills. This year, Skillnets and FÁS will provide almost 10,400 training places to the unemployed and those on short hours.

The issue of youth unemployment is of particular concern. In light of the increase in the number of unemployed people who are under the age of 25, the Government has decided this category will receive preferential access to State supports such as FÁS employment and training services. This agency is prioritising services for the under 25s and an initiative has been put in place to immediately activate measures for 18 to 19 year olds without needing to wait the usual three months for automatic activation. The main provision continues to be at community training centres and VECs under the Youthreach programme. Some €110 million is being invested in Youthreach and will provide 6,000 places.

The work placement programme provides up to nine months work experience to 2,000 unemployed persons, including graduates. The Government also introduced a range of measures that will enable 4,000 redundant apprentices to progress their apprenticeships. Among these are 30 apprentices formerly employed by SR Technics who are being taken on by the Air Corps to complete phases five and seven of the on-the-job training element of their apprenticeships. I am delighted this specialist branch of the Defence Forces has had the vision and willingness to engage in partnership with FÁS to initiate this programme.

An estimated 166,000 learners, including those who are unemployed, will benefit from full-time and part-time further education opportunities. The total number of full-time enrolments in universities and institutes of technology will be in excess of 140,000 this year. Investment in further education provided by the VECs has increased by 60% between 2002 and 2010 to €426 million, enabling 170,000 learners to participate in a range of part-time and full-time courses in 2009. An additional 1,500 new places were provided on post-leaving certificate courses from September 2009, bringing the total number of places nationwide to 31,688. Adult literacy is extremely important in this context and the budget for that is now €30 million.

The back to education allowance is very important for those wishing up-skill and reskill and return to education and training. There are approximately 21,000 people in receipt of the back to education allowance.

The European globalisation fund is another imaginative fund being utilised in an Irish context. The Government is moving to reskill redundant workers formerly employed in large-scale operations by availing of EU co-financing support under the European globalisation adjustment fund. In recent weeks, I was able to announce that up to €11.5 million in funding will be available for former workers in SR Technics for measures implemented since their redundancies. An application for the construction sector, based on 8,000 workers and for €63 million, was submitted in June 2010 to the European Commission.

The Government is acutely aware that positive measures to promote employment are essential if economic recovery is to proceed sooner rather than later. If we have learned anything from the 1980s, it must surely be that selected developmental measures to stimulate the economy must run parallel to any programme to tackle the crisis in the public finances. The national skills strategy and the activation and training measures outlined also have an important role to play if the economy is to recover quickly.

The Government has already shown it has the capacity and resolve to address our current economic difficulties. Since July 2008 budgetary savings of €14.4 billion have been achieved. Positive growth has been forecast for 2011. Economic recovery will lead to a strong export performance, which continues to exceed expectations. That we face intimidating difficulties is not disputed but this Government, led by the Taoiseach, has shown that it is ready and willing to meet the tough economic challenges. It has moved to take corrective action, it has the drive and commitment to implement further necessary measures and it will not be influenced by short-term political or any other sectional considerations.

The Government continues to put the country first and I have no doubt history will judge that it is doing the right thing at the right time and in a forthright and fair-minded manner. The Government remains committed to its budgetary strategy to protect our economy for future generations. It will not be deflected from its course of action.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I am glad to speak in this debate, although it is frustrating that I only have seven minutes. I will endeavour to try to make some points which I hope will hit home with the Deputies opposite. Everyone in this House accepts Ireland is on an unsustainable path as unemployment continues to increase and businesses find the going tougher. Ireland spends approximately €55 million per day more than it earns and we need to borrow the difference. Currently, we are surviving on reserves because of money we borrowed earlier in the year and, potentially, the reserves in the National Pensions Reserve Fund, which will not last forever.

Everybody recognises Ireland will need to go back to the bond markets in the first quarter of next year, as the Department Finance has confirmed, to borrow money, regardless of the level of cutbacks in the first of four tough budgets. I find it extraordinary that nobody from

[Deputy Simon Coveney.]

the Government side dealt with the key issue in regard to our capacity and ability to borrow from the bond markets next year. My understanding from the briefing from the Department of Finance is that the key requirement from bond markets to allow Ireland to issue bonds is that we will need to bring our deficit below 10% of GDP next year from our current position. No Government speaker, including the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance, addressed that issue as to what figure will be necessary in the 2011 budget to bring down the deficit to 10% or less of GDP. That is the guideline figure we have been given to issue bonds and raise money in order that we can keep Ireland functioning and keep our economic and political independence in terms of budgetary decision-making. Nobody on the Government side addressed that point and perhaps Ministers who will speak later in the debate will do so.

There must be a twin track approach, about which many Deputies, including Government Ministers and Deputies, have spoken. We need to bring our deficit down and the Government has set itself a figure of €15 billion over four budgets, but we do not agree with that yet because we do not have the full figures, in particular the growth figures. However, we agree that by 2014, we need to get the deficit down to 3%, or less, of GDP. Time will tell whether €15 billion will be enough or perhaps too much. Fine Gael will make its position clear well in advance of the budget. However, at the same time, there can be no future with optimism in Ireland unless we can get growth into the economy as we are dealing with structural deficit problems which are the result of insane Government policy over a number of years.

I wish to comment on some recent Government policy. There are two problems here — first, there is the policy itself and, second, there is the execution of policy which is an even greater problem. Even when the Government gets something right in principle, the execution of that policy is incompetent, inefficient or does not meet targets. I refer to the Croke Park agreement, for example. In principle, it was a good idea to get agreement among unions and employers to try to bring stability in a time of recession. What has happened? Six months later there has been no delivery. The Government still cannot give the Opposition a figure on how much it estimates it will save by public sector reform next year.

I refer to NAMA. The principles behind it made some sense, although there were problems. It required the banks to crystallise their losses and their bad lending. It was to provide capital to banks in order that we could get liquidity back into small business and so on. What has happened? There has been an absolute freeze on liquidity. Banks are being financed on a week-to-week basis by the lender of last resort in Europe, the European Central Bank. They do not even have money to lend, never mind a willingness to take risks again and lend money to the marketplace. That is largely because of NAMA which, we were told at the start, would attach a hope value to certain properties. It is now undervaluing properties so that it can get headlines such as those in the past week stating that it is making a profit of €130 million on a property that it acquired from Anglo Irish Bank. Such news is not a win for the country. It means that the bank has crystallised an even bigger loss that taxpayers need to bail out because we own Anglo Irish Bank. Either way, the taxpayer is losing.

On deficit reduction policies, Ministers, one after the other, have complimented themselves on the great achievement of reducing the deficit by €14.5 billion over the past two and a half years. I would like to check the figures.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy has one minute left.

Deputy Simon Coveney: The calculations of those figures have been wildly inaccurate. Up until two months ago there was talk of the need to reduce the deficit by €7.5 billion over the next four years but now it is to be by €15 billion. Some in the European Union state the figure

should be €20 billion. We need to concentrate, not only on getting policies right in this House but also on their execution, which is crucial.

On banking policy, a new CEO will be appointed to AIB. I would like a Minister to tell this House what is that person's job remit. I am not sure whether it is to run AIB as a commercial entity in the interests of a future bank system or for the benefit of the economy. If a CEO going into AIB were to run it for the shareholders of the bank he or she would probably cut the staff by one third, raise interest rates and do away with the existing defined pension schemes for staff, but the State will not allow a CEO to do that because it now has a majority stake in the bank. Banking policy in Ireland has totally distorted the market because now politics is determining banking policy, which means that there will be no new banks without capitalisation problems coming into Ireland to lend into the Irish economy in the foreseeable future. We have a totally false banking system, which is a false economy and which cannot work. I hope Ministers will try to address some of the issues that I have only had seven minutes to raise.

Deputy Damien English: Ministers are coming in here stating that the people can take bad news, they will put their shoulders to the wheel and they have taken €14 billion of cuts already. I do not accept the latter point, certainly not in the past two years. That needs to be corrected. It may be the case over three years, if the Government wants to go into that, but I still do not think there were such cuts. There were many cutbacks in capital projects and maybe the Government is including private capital spend in those cutbacks. On my figures, that is not the Government spend.

The people of this country can accept tough news. They know we have problems and they are willing to help out but they and I have a serious issue with believing anything the Government says. Even now, with the €15 billion figure, there is a lack of data on how that was achieved. I have a fair idea because I went to the confidential briefings at the Department Finance. I can add a few figures together and I know exactly from where they got it but we are not allowed to say.

The Government will not state what it will do in the budget yet it brings us all in here for a two-day debate to discuss cutbacks without the figures we need to achieve. There is no finishing line. It is like running a marathon at the weekend without knowing where it will end and running all day for fun. I will not do it, and nobody else will do it either. Let the Government give us the figure because the Minister knows what it is.

Deputy Coveney is correct in stating that we must bring the deficit down below 10% of GDP next year, and I ask the Government to give us the figure now. Tell us what it is, whether it be €5.5 billion, €6 billion, €5 billion or €4.5 billion, and let us work to that. The people need to believe what the Government is telling them, and they do not believe the Government. It is difficult for me to believe the Government because it is still only opinion unless the Government gives us the facts to back it up.

In trying to figure out how we got here, I looked at the figures for total expenditure from 2000 to 2008. For example, the health spend went from €5.3 billion to over €15.3 billion in eight years, an increase of 187%. The Exchequer pay bill went up by 118%, from €8,880 million to €19,330 million. The figures go on. Those eight years of writing cheques without proper reform or proper policy are the root of the problem, and the people need to be told that.

There is a need to explain what this figure of €15 billion is about. It is separate to the banking bailout, although part of it is the interest on bailing out the banks. The bulk of it is to address the wrong decisions made from 2000 to 2008 to spend money on public services built on false foundations or once-off revenues from housing, as if the Government applied for a mortgage based on overtime earnings only. It does not add up.

[Deputy Damien English.]

I question what was going on in Government during those eight years. Deputy Bertie Ahern needs at some stage to come in here and explain what he was doing as Taoiseach, as does Deputy Brian Cowen as the former Minister for Finance, and every other Minister who sat around the Cabinet table and watched these figures rise and rise. Nobody shouted stop. That is why we are here. When people have made their commitments, borrowed money, and got credit card and other personal debts, they will be hit with massive cutbacks over the next couple of years because of the decisions taken wrongly during those years.

I question what was going on in the Department of Finance as well. I can only assume they were told to keep quiet by Ministers and Taoisigh because nobody with financial training would sit back, watch this happening and not ask, "Hold on a minute, what is going on here?"

I accept there were improvements in some services, but these should have been achieved based on sound foundations, reform of the public sector and savings, rather than by continuing to write cheques left, right and centre. The Department of Finance blames the partnership process and states many of these demands for increases in services were in the context of the social partnership process and reflected in programmes for Government. Ministers and the Government are in charge, not the social partnership process. The social partners are not in charge. They do not run the country. They were there to discuss issues, iron out difficulties, etc. They are not to be blamed for matters going wrong.

On numerous occasions during my nine years in the House, I tried to introduce minor amendments to various Bills and Ministers told me that they could not accept them without going back and checking with the partnership process. That is a joke, and now the Government is trying to blame them. Those are matters that will be confined to history. The people know who is at fault here. They know it is Fianna Fáil and they will deal out that punishment.

The problem is that we in this House are always left trying to close the gap and fix this, and we need the will of the people to do so. That will be difficult to achieve with Fianna Fáil still over there calling the shots because the people do not believe them.

We understand we must try to work with this and we have agreed to the consensus to reduce the deficit to 3% of GDP by 2014. We accept that and we will put forward our ideas to achieve it, and we will work with that. However, the Government must understand that the people do not trust it and we will have a difficulty, even when we know we have the answers, in believing that the Government can implement them.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time has expired.

Deputy Damien English: Hopefully, we will get a chance to go through all the ideas. I could not do so in seven minutes.

We accept the adjustment must be front-loaded and we must try to take on an extra chunk of the deficit in year one, but we must also front-load growth in the first two years. These are the toughest budgets in terms of seeking to protect growth and jobs. There must be a front-loaded growth strategy. We in Fine Gael have plans for that and the Government knows them. The Government has read them but has never tried to discuss them properly. I would ask the Government to read them and let us have a proper debate on them. We have more plans to add to them. We can use private and public pension funds, among other initiatives, to fund growth. The Government must not close the door on good ideas when it is calling for a consensus. Let us debate these ideas properly, as we have tried to do in recent weeks. I ask the Government to give a commitment that the budget will include proper growth strategies alongside cutbacks and other changes.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: While I am the first to admit that I have no formal education in the area of finance, as a housewife and mother, I have learned the art of running a home and family on a budget and the cold, hard fact that one can only spend what one has in one's purse and not one penny more. The Government has spent the contents of many a household purse and makes no apology for doing so. Every man, woman and child must now pay the price for its reckless spending and greed.

A generation of people will have to leave home to work abroad because they cannot afford to stay. Our youngest and brightest will leave these shores and many will never return. Fear has become a familiar word, one I hear on the doorsteps of every street as people relate to me their fears for the future. They fear for their children and whether they can afford their education. They fear for their health and whether they can afford to pay medical expenses. They fear they will not be able to pay back bank loans. They fear old age and whether they will have any money to live on in the years ahead. Senior citizens are afraid they will not be able to pay their bills or keep themselves warm and that services, such as home help provision, which allow them to live independently will be removed. Above all, they are afraid the State pension will shortly be cut. Nobody deserves to live in fear, especially when he or she is not responsible for creating the problem.

Those who are guilty of creating the economic crisis have got away scot free. They have been allowed to go abroad, leaving behind their responsibilities and debts. They are enjoying holidays in the sun while their greed and dishonesty have left the country in a shambles. It is not fair that ordinary people have been left to clean up their mess and pay their bills. The reason people are so angry is they want fairness above all else.

As we face into budget 2011 this December, we know the economic outlook is very bleak. Members of the public want to know that we, their representatives in Dáil Éireann, are doing everything we can to improve the economy and lighten the burden on individuals and families who are struggling with bills and debt.

We all know the banking and economic policies pursued by the Government caused a major financial crisis. It is time to put in place a plan for recovery. People want to believe there is light at the end of the tunnel. We need to give them hope but hope is in short supply from the Government benches. The billions of euro in expenditure cuts and tax increases we need to be found by 7 December must not come at the expense of low income families and those on social welfare. The budget must be fair and must protect those who are most vulnerable, namely, the old, sick, young and disabled and those who cannot find employment.

Demands on social welfare assistance are increasing by the day and the annual social welfare bill now stands at an unsustainable €21 billion. We need to address unemployment head on and create new opportunities for young people who are completing school or college and for older people who want to return to the workplace.

The number of people on the live register stands at approximately 450,000, which is a substantial figure. We must get people back into employment. The Government must give a commitment to attract investment and enterprise and support home-grown enterprise. Banks must also open their doors again to small businesses.

I take issue with the manner in which FÁS treats young apprentices who cannot complete their training and obtain the certification they require to move abroad.

The current crisis was summed up for me and my family at the weekend when my young grand-niece was taken as an emergency case to Tallaght hospital where she was resuscitated and placed on a ventilator. She could not be transferred to Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin because staff were not available there and had to be transferred to Temple Street Hospital where she has been in intensive care for the past five days. Diagnostic tests could not

[Deputy Catherine Byrne.]

be analysed in the laboratory because staff were not available to do so over the bank holiday weekend, which means we still have not received any results. This is but one story arising from the crisis caused by the Government's poor management of the national finances.

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): Ba mhaith liom mo chuid ama a roinnt leis an Aire, an Teachta Pádraig Ó Ciardha.

The Government strategy to deal with our current economic challenges and put Ireland back on the road to growth has three main elements. These have been set out in previous debates on this issue. The most important of them is the element that is currently under consideration, namely, the stabilisation of the public finances. The second element is the restoration of the banking system to ensure it is operational and we are able to do business international as a small, open economy. There is widespread acceptance that the measures taken in this regard have been necessary. The third element is to restore and enhance Ireland's competitiveness.

In the context of the four year plan, which is the background against which this debate is being held, one of the questions frequently asked relates to the growth figures that will underpin the programme. These figures are determinants in setting the €15 billion target we must meet in reducing the Government deficit. It is worthwhile recalling that the growth targets on which every Government operates are based on figures provided by bodies such as the ESRI, Central Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and other central banks, the European Commission and a host of banks and brokers active in this area. Officials at the Department of Finance analyse the figures provided by these institutions and, on the basis of the available evidence, produce a likely scenario against which decisions must be made.

Many people have been seeking definitive trends and forecasts. Anyone who does not accept that the business of forecasting is based on the best available information and data is refusing to face reality. We must also remember that Ireland has commitments under the Stability and Growth Pact which predate our current difficulties. This is the background against which measures will be taken.

The current shortfall in the public finances is of the order of €19 billion. This raises two difficulties. First, we must access funding of €19 billion to be able to provide services to the standards we currently enjoy. The second difficulty, which is extremely important in the current climate, is that we must be able to access funding at a reasonable cost. One of the difficulties we have encountered in recent times is that the cost of borrowing has increased dramatically. This has an impact on our capacity to provide the type of services we need.

On the positive side, we do not generally give ourselves credit for the fact that we have, over the past two and a half years, managed to make adjustments amounting to approximately €14.5 billion. This figure is close to the cumulative value of the adjustments we must make in the coming four years. We made the previous adjustments successfully, although I concede that they created difficulties for people and had an impact on growth projections. Nevertheless, we have de facto reached the halfway point in terms of achieving our objectives in that regard, which is highly encouraging. A host of other encouraging figures also need to be considered.

It should be acknowledged that we are trying to achieve growth and address the nation's finances against a difficult economic climate. Across the world, growth levels are negligible and in some cases negative. This creates difficulties for small, open economies such as Ireland. That we need to export 90% of the goods and services we produce — in some sectors the figure is higher — makes the challenge even more difficult for us. In addition, it is an external factor over which we do not have control.

We must also acknowledge that Ireland's GDP figures are in deficit to the tune of approximately 12%. The banking crisis has a once-off impact in 2010 and will not arise in subsequent years. If one considers the historical position in 1986, the GDP deficit then was in excess of 13%. Two years later, however, in 1988 on foot of the adoption of strong measures and of cuts in particular, that deficit had been reduced to 3.3% with a negligible impact on growth. There are counterintuitive indications that, in some circumstances, addressing the fundamentals of a country's finances has the opposite effect to what one might expect in respect of elements of growth. However, in the case of other elements it is clear that cutbacks in expenditure in particular are likely to have a negative impact on growth and this is a judgment that must be made as one goes along.

In another positive feature, particularly when one considers the late 1980s, it must be borne in mind that at present, 1.8 million people are employed in Ireland, which is very close to twice the number who were in employment at that time.

The projections, which are based on there having been little or no growth internationally and less growth in Ireland than was expected, have led to the position whereby we face €15 billion in adjustments. If one looks back at the reasons for the different forecasts made last year, one does not even need to look back that far to find considerable growth, because in the first quarter of 2010, GDP grew at the extraordinary rate of 2.25%. This rate then was followed by a fall in GDP of 0.25% in the second quarter. It is clear, therefore, that a trend did not emerge of growth either quarter on quarter or year on year. However, if one considers the impact on GDP during the recession, I note the decline in GDP in 2008 was approximately 4% while it declined by a further 10% in 2009. This year, in 2010, this fall in GDP value will have reversed and the figure will come out roughly even, that is, either slightly above or below the zero mark. However, this is a strong indication that notwithstanding the removal from the economy of the huge sum of approximately €14.5 billion in real terms, we experienced that change from a decline of 10% to the zero mark.

At one level, therefore, highly encouraging signs are evident. They are even more encouraging if one considers manufacturing output or the growth in exports. There have been quite extraordinary achievements in that regard, particularly given that many Irish exports go to economies in which there is no real growth or that face extraordinary challenges regarding their capacity to buy goods and services. Moreover, one must take into account the currency fluctuations that have created enormous difficulty in some markets for Irish exporters. While it must be acknowledged that the decline in the value of the euro has benefited exporters to the United States market and some others, there has been considerable volatility in the world markets.

When one considers the events of the past year, the cost of addressing the banking crisis has been established, satisfied, done and dealt with. For the next decade or so, there will be an additional ongoing cost of approximately 10% arising therefrom. However, this means the cost of addressing the country's finances constitutes approximately 90% of the problem. Therefore, the great bulk of the problem relates to the issues arising from our own national finances and this is an issue with which one must deal and to which one must face up.

An important element in respect of growth is translating such growth into job creation with as much speed as possible. Against the highly difficult background in which we have operated last year and during the first half of this year, a little more than 50 foreign direct investment announcements, accounting for more than 4,000 jobs, have been made, which is a positive achievement. Moreover, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation is on a three-city tour of the United States at present to meet foreign direct investors and he will go on to the Middle East next week with the agencies. One must bear in mind that the impact of such visits

[Deputy Tony Killeen.]

and the work of the State agencies is highly positive and succeeds in bringing people into Ireland with foreign direct investment, thereby giving rise to huge job creation opportunities.

One must balance the message. One must realise that notwithstanding the difficult and somewhat daunting challenges we face, the experience of the last two and a half years demonstrates that the policies pursued by the Government have brought us a considerable number of steps along the way. Moreover, continuing to adhere to such policies undoubtedly will address the difficulties that have beset the national economy and will return us both to appreciable GDP growth and to a jobs spin-off therefrom.

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis seo labhairt faoin bplean eacnamaíochta atá againn chun tabhairt faoi na dúshláin ollmhóra atá romhainn mar thír. Mar Rialtas, ní chuireann muid aon fhiacal ann faoi na fadhbanna seo agus míneofar go beacht cad atá le déanamh agus cén fáth. Tá an plean seo bunaithe ar an tír iontach seo a chur ar bhóthar a leasa arís. Is é an plean ceart é agus is é an t-aon phlean atá inchreidte má tá fúinn na dúshláin atá romhainn a shárú. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue. It certainly is the most important period in the economic and social life of Ireland since I first entered the Dáil in 1997. I listened with interest to as many previous speakers as possible and thought that most contributions were both reflective and thought-provoking and that they will contribute to a greater consensus on the serious plight with which the Government must deal.

The Government has stated its intentions clearly to the people. It has outlined its goals and has explained its reasoning and will continue do so in the coming weeks. It has been up-front about the magnitude of the challenges we face. It has engaged constructively with the Opposition and has been clear that there are no easy options or soft decisions, as to pretend otherwise would be to mislead the people about the seriousness of the challenge we face. It would be an unthinkable failure of government to pretend that we somehow can wish away our current difficulties. This is not a challenge that we can put off until some magical tomorrow but we must act swiftly and decisively. While the Government has listened to various alternative views, both inside and outside the House, on how it should approach the task that now faces our country and people, the plan it has set out is the only credible one. It will not be a painless task but any attempt to postpone that pain or sugar the pill would put the economic future of our country at risk. This is not a risk the Government is prepared to take and I do not believe the people wish to do so either. I am not being condescending but wish to comment positively on the worthwhile solutions I have heard thus far. They will feed into the Government's discussions both in respect of the four-year framework plan and regarding the preparation of the budget later this year.

Recently, the Government drew a line under the uncertainty in the banking sector, thereby allowing it to concentrate on getting the public finances back on track. This is not just about gaining the trust of the international markets and ensuring our ability to borrow, but also is about job creation. We have learned from our experiences in the 1980s that unless businesses have faith in the viability of the Exchequer's long-term position, they will not create new jobs. This is the reason the Government is stressing, above all else, the credibility of its plan. Its ability to get people back to work and return the economy to growth depends on that credibility. Again, this is not just about impressing the faceless markets but is about creating jobs for citizens and securing their future. In order to create employment and growth, we must show that we have the courage to be credible and that we have the courage of our convictions. In so doing, we must get the balance right to ensure that our potential to return to growth is not damaged. However, the consequences of failing to act now cannot be ignored.

There is no question but that the Government will strive to be as fair as possible in the decisions it will make. As Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, I have seen at first hand the important role played by communities across Ireland in developing the economy. Our communities are the building blocks of our economy and society and the strength of such communities always will depend on their ability to protect their most vulnerable. Both the House and the Government will strive to protect the most vulnerable among us and I reject the simplistic notion that a severe budget is by necessity going to be an unfair budget or one that targets the most vulnerable. Research by the ESRI has analysed the distributive impact of the tax and welfare changes of the 2009, 2009 supplementary and 2010 budgets, and while those budgets were characterised in some quarters as unfair or as excessively targeting the less well off that is simply not the case.

That research shows that households in the bottom half of the income distribution maintained their position and in some cases recorded modest income gains of between 1% and 3%. By contrast, better-off households saw falls in their income of around 3%, with the richest households losing the most, at 6%. This shows that Government budgetary policy during the fiscal crisis has protected the living standards of lower income groups and placed the burden of the tax and welfare adjustments on better-off households. We will continue to make every effort to protect the most vulnerable. So, while we must all bear the burden of these necessary savings, our economic priorities will continue to be informed by our social priorities.

A recent report commissioned by my Department has shown that in recent years Government intervention through social transfers has made a real difference to the lives of the marginalised and has helped to tackle poverty and social inequality. While all sectors of society will have to bear some of the burden of budgetary savings we are also conscious of the need to ensure that the significant progress made in tackling inequality is not squandered.

The Irish people have shown great backbone and resilience in dealing with this crisis. As a people we have held our nerve and as a Government we must continue to hold our nerve. There is no point whatsoever in giving people unrealistic hope about the scale of the challenge we face. The Irish people deserve better than that. There is no point in peddling wishful thinking. We are not playing fantasy budget here. This is a very real crisis that requires a decisive and pragmatic response.

The Opposition parties now accept the need to return to the 3% of GDP deficit figure by 2014. We are also, I believe, in agreement that this target has to be achieved without jeopardising the ability of our economy to return to growth. That consensus is welcome but we should not now return to the type of posturing that only adds to our problems. Our present situation demands more than platitudes about change and making a new start. I welcome what I have heard today.

We need real solutions to real problems. We know that the best way to get people back to work is to get our house in order and we are doing that by fixing the banking system, restoring order to the public finances, regaining our competitiveness and creating jobs. As my colleague, Deputy Killeen, has said, our economy is emerging from recession with the prospect of stronger growth next year. Our return to competitiveness has been led by our export performance with new figures today showing a 12.8% growth in merchandise exports in the third quarter of this year and a 9% increase in total exports.

Our stability plan is vital to our efforts to return to growth but it is important to stress that it is not being undertaken in isolation from our growth strategy, our smart economy plan, our jobs strategy and our plan for structural economic reform. Our growth and jobs strategy is a comprehensive plan to get people across Ireland back to work and to secure the jobs of those currently in employment.

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

In my own Department, for example, we have responsibility for the Leader programme which will create 12,000 jobs in rural Ireland. I have seen this programme at work all over the country and I am determined that every last cent of the €440 million available will be spent on job creation in rural Ireland. Leader has the potential to transform rural Ireland, village by village, parish by parish, town by town and job by job. We can see the benefits of Leader already, for example in the work of Farrelly Willow, Ireland's leading company in willow production, based in Kells, County Meath. I visited it recently. The company will be among the biggest producers of biomass in the country and will be selling biomass into the new electricity generating plant in Ferbane in County Offaly. One of the problems which I freely acknowledge we need to resolve, is the excessive regulation faced by such companies. Other companies benefiting from Leader are Spring Water in Lisseycasey, County Clare; McCarthy's Ice-cream in Ballybunion, County Kerry; Dooley Wool Limited in County Offaly; and O' Donnell's Crisps in Clonmel in Tipperary. These are real examples of putting enterprise to work.

In my Department, we are also currently reviewing our White Paper on rural development to ensure that it meets the changing needs of rural Ireland. In the last two weeks I met the EU Agricultural Commissioner and the EU Commissioner for Regional Development about the many issues that face rural Ireland. I am convinced that we are getting a very good hearing from the Commission.

In 2009, Údarás na Gaeltachta, which also comes under the remit of our Department, created 710 new jobs, despite the change in the economic climate and total full-time employment in Údarás na Gaeltachta-assisted companies at the year end was 7,472.

In the coming weeks, I hope to finalise the Government's ambitious 20 year strategy for the Irish language. This strategy is not just about promoting and preserving the Irish language, it is also about ensuring that we benefit from one of our great natural resources.

The Government will ensure that the great qualities of the Irish people continue to flourish. That is the reason we are taking these difficult steps. Our guiding motivation is to return our country to the levels of stability, employment and growth that the Irish people deserve.

Cuímhním ar an seanfhocal cáiliúil: Ní neart go cur le chéile. Tuigeann muintir na hÉireann fírinne an ráitis sin. Tuigimid mar Rialtas chomh maith é agus déanfaimid beart de réir ár mbriathar.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Molaim don Aire Stáit imeacht as seo chomh tapaidh agus is féidir leis, in ainm Dé.

Deputy Denis Naughten: With the agreement of the House, I wish to share my time with Deputies O'Dowd and Clune.

Let me put some scale on the deficit we face. If we pay back one euro every single second it will take us 465 years to pay back the €15,000,000,000 deficit we will face next year, and that is only one year's deficit. Things are not beyond hope. In the 1980s, the International Monetary Fund was at our door and there was much doom and gloom, perhaps even more than now because everything seemed impossible to overcome. However, we did overcome and we had sustainable job creation throughout the 1990s. Then of course, we had the Progressive Democrat philosophy of the noughties, which was shared by some of the leaders of Fianna Fáil who led us down the road of destruction to where we are today. I remember the comments that were made about my colleague, Deputy Richard Bruton, who was ridiculed when he raised genuine questions about what was happening. A former leader of the country told Opposition Members they should consider committing suicide because we were asking genuine and real questions that needed to be asked.

The blame game will not get us out of the mess we are in. Our jobs, as politicians, must be to give a future to young people. The Government is currently focused on the urgent and not on the important. We need to focus on the future, on jobs and on medium-term growth plans not just on the fire brigade action. Without this we cannot provide hope. The most vulnerable in our communities, the working poor, those who cannot work, children, disabled people and the elderly must not be sacrificed to address the budget stabilisation measures. They did not cause the problems or the mess we are in today and they did not benefit from the boom.

We need a Government that is willing to make a real difference and help those who want to help themselves. We have enough of Government being run for the people who are in it. Instead, we need a Government that will work for the people who elect it and pay for it. Deputies and those who are not covered by the Croke Park agreement must lead by example and have their wages cut significantly. We will get absolutely no thanks, or even an acknowledgment, for it but we need to be seen to lead by example. This must be done.

I look to my own constituency of Roscommon-South Leitrim, which is similar to every other rural constituency. The likelihood of creating jobs by bringing a big multinational player into the constituency is slim. In the current climate, we need to focus on what we are good at by supporting local indigenous employment, small businesses and the agri-food and tourism sectors. For example, we should use the public tendering process to support indigenous businesses by making it easier for Irish SMEs to win public tenders. It is critical that an environment be created in which SMEs can cost-effectively participate in public tendering processes. If the system is cost-effective for the small or medium enterprise, it will also benefit the purchasing agency. The tendering process has been structured in such a manner across Europe but this Government never considers indigenous companies.

We need to promote entrepreneurship at all levels of our education system and support access to loans and bureaucracy-free public funding. The Minister spoke about the Leader programme, the problem with which is one needs a degree to complete the application process. Surely it makes sense to streamline the 70 agencies which are at present involved in supporting small businesses.

We need to acknowledge that our agri-food sector is a vital part of the indigenous economy and, with 20,000 people dependent on it for employment, crucial to small and medium enterprises. These are real businesses. We need to get rid of the unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape that surrounds the food industry. A legally binding code of practice should be put in place for the grocery sector to promote fairness, balance and transparency.

Other speakers will address aspects of the tourism industry, such as the air travel tax, but I will focus on the contribution that the artistic and creative economy can make to our economic recovery and to counteracting the negative image fostered by the Government's gross economic mismanagement. On the basis of the report of the Western Development Commission thousands of jobs can be created in this sector, which employs more than 600 people in County Leitrim and a further 500 in County Roscommon. Irish artists can help to portray more positive images of Ireland and its capacity to create and innovate. One of the winners of the Your Country, Your Call competition, a screen writer and digital media consultant called Neil Leyden, proposed a global media hub which would foster the development of an Irish content industry association and anchor the creative economy in this country.

We have to focus on our strengths because we will never balance the books until we create employment. The fundamental flaw of the Government's policy was that it ignored the issue of job creation while writing whatever cheques were required to support the banks in the hope of getting us out of our economic mess. However, this strategy has made our situation even worse and it is galling for the most vulnerable in society to see reductions in the small amount

[Deputy Denis Naughten.]

of money they receive simply to bankroll those who got us into the mess in the first place. It is time we focused on the indigenous companies that can get us out of the mess by becoming the international players of tomorrow.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: This is one of the most important debates to have taken place in this House for a long time. Our country was never before in such dire difficulties and never was there such a need for leadership from Government and Opposition Members and everybody else associated with public life.

Regardless of who was in power since the foundation of the State, former taoisigh were patriots who had fought in parliamentary elections or, indeed, on the battlefields of the 1916-22 period. They were held up as icons of the nation. Our State was founded on the struggles of Pearse and Connolly and the ideals of Wolfe Tone and others. Now, however, instead of the image of Pearse and Connolly in the office of the Taoiseach, the IMF and the European Central Bank are stalking the corridors of power. The Government has ceded our sovereignty with the bankrupt policies they introduced during the boom to benefit builders and bankers. Now we are left at the mercy of international bankers and the European Union, which, thankfully, are being positive and constructive towards us as we address our difficult financial challenges. We are no longer in control because of the Government's policies in the Galway tent. The Minister can smile if he wants.

Deputy Pat Carey: I am not smiling.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The close relationship between the rich and powerful and successive Fianna Fáil Governments over the past 20 years has destroyed this country and left ordinary people at the side of the road.

Deputy Pat Carey: Let us have a constructive debate.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Tens of thousands of people are facing negative equity or have loans which they will never be able to repay because they were in effect sub-prime borrowers. There is no getting away from that fact.

The IMF is deciding the limits of what we can do and the next budget will have massive impacts for those who have the least in our society. The Government's policies during the boom fed the avarice of a small number of rich people.

Deputy Pat Carey: Read the ESRI reports on social policy.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The Minister may not want to listen to me but he will have to listen to the people when he knocks on their doors. We will insist that the Government produces the facts in advance of the budget so that we can understand the basis of its €15 billion projection and hold a transparent and open debate. As the Taoiseach noted today, the €15 billion figure is a forecast but we do not know the basis for it. Fine Gael will set out our budget proposals in this House but only when the Government has given us the full facts. As we cannot base our future on forecasts, we need to know the truth. The Government should not expect us to go along with policies about which we do not have full knowledge.

It is my responsibility to address issues pertaining to education, including FÁS. If anything broke the link between unemployed people and their retraining needs, it was the policies that allowed FÁS to waste much of its €1 billion budget during the boom, both at the top and in the system. We now know that training contracts were often corrupt. We will transform the training system for young people, something which this Government has abysmally failed to do.

Let us have an election in which the Government and the Opposition can present their budgets so that the people can make up their minds. The Government has no mandate and the people want change. Its time is up. Tá súil agam nach mbeidh a leithéid de Rialtas — cosúil leis an Rialtas atá againn anois — againn arís go deo.

Deputy Deirdre Clune: This debate is probably the first of many as we head into very difficult times in trying to get the economy back on track. Fine Gael is committed to the target deficit of 3% of GDP by 2014 and in the coming weeks we will be outlining our plans for implementing change and economic policy, particularly in terms of job stimulus and getting this country working again.

It is a sad fact that the recent reckless policy pursued by the Government and the banks means we now find ourselves at the mercy of the faceless markets. We must act now, as we face budget 2011, to ensure we can access funding from these markets in the future, given they are dictating our budgetary policy. The Taoiseach stated earlier today that the figure of €15 billion that must be found between now and 2014 was arrived at by Government decision. However, it is merely a forecast and we do not know what growth factors were included, what decisions were involved, how the Government forecast growth and unemployment or how the money is to be found.

Earlier today, the leader of my party, Deputy Enda Kenny, outlined Fine Gael's plans in various areas, with a focus on an enterprise-led economy. The export figures released today are very good, as noted by many Government speakers, and exports will remain our focus. While competitiveness has improved, it has not improved due to anything the Government has done but because of the relationship of the euro to the pound and dollar, and because wages in this country have decreased voluntarily. However, Government charges, local authority charges and red tape all contribute to a distinct lack of competitiveness. It does not matter whether one is exporting a pound of butter or financial services, all the products and services we hope to export from this country are competing in European and global markets and the weight attached to them by excess Government charges is that of a millstone.

Now is the time to support the indigenous SME sector. Last week in this House, Fine Gael put forward a well thought-out motion, proposed by Deputy John Perry, outlining a State-backed loan guarantee facility for small and medium businesses throughout the country but it was rejected by the Government. We have been asked to come forward with positive suggestions and this is supposed to be an era of consensus. Last September the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation, Deputy Batt O'Keeffe, stated publicly that he wanted to introduce such a scheme yet he rejected Fine Gael's scheme last week. Why not take it on board? Not every aspect was perfect, but why not work with the Opposition in terms of implementing a measure that would give succour and support to small and medium enterprises?

The return to global growth will be crucial to achieving our targets but that is outside the control of whoever governs this country. What is within our control must be acted upon, however, and barriers to activity must be tackled. For a small open economy such as ours, particularly when domestic confidence is so low and will drop further, our exports are the key component that has the potential to provide growth and to bring known benefits and create jobs in the local economy, thereby creating a ripple effect for small and medium enterprises and resulting in increased revenue for Government. This is the track we should follow but we have allowed ourselves to come off the rails in this area. Property, development and land acquisition was too easy and, as a result, we lost much expertise across the economy in the last decade. We lost expertise in our banking system in regard to dealing with small business and enterprise and we lost the ability to manage a small, open economy that depends on the European and global market to sell its goods and services.

[Deputy Deirdre Clune.]

The Taoiseach in his earlier contribution referred to exports. I hope this was not mere rhetoric or grasping at straws but a serious intent to manage this area. Many reports have been produced, including those of the innovation task force and the recent Forfás report entitled “Making It Happen”, and these have outlined the areas where local indigenous enterprises can be supported in terms of productivity, research and development, innovation and education attainment. We must develop an approach across certain viable sectors, such as communications, business, finance and insurance services. We have strength in these areas on which we need to build. The area of health care services is one where we have developed much expertise. We must also recognise that there are growth areas, including in regard to clean energy, green technology, the marine and maritime services, health care, particularly e-health care services, and IT, in which we have developed huge expertise. We need to tap into these and sell those services abroad, as well as supporting development in those areas. The area of education services is important and was highlighted today by Deputy Kenny. We can sell this nation as an education island in terms of exporting those services and bringing foreign students here.

Small and medium enterprises are the key to the growth of this country. The Government has the responsibility to create and develop the environment in which those enterprises can function and thrive.

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Tá áthas orm deis a bheith agam labhairt ar an ábhar tábhachtach seo. I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak in what is a very important debate. There is no question but that we face huge challenges. However, we should analyse all of the issues we face in a dispassionate manner because, if we do so, we might find solutions to the very difficult problems we face.

On the credit side, the budget targets that were laid out last year in terms of income and expenditure of the State will be achieved. The big challenge we face, however, is that both internationally and nationally the growth forecast for the next four years is not as was expected. What will happen in the future is, of course, unknown and a matter of conjecture. What is important is that whatever budgetary strategy we have for the next four years is based on figures that are credible at home and abroad. For that reason, we have had to change the growth forecast.

It was Galbraith who said that economic forecasting makes astrology look respectable. Nonetheless, the big challenge we face is that no matter what we think of economic forecasting, it has a huge effect on the markets and, therefore, we have had to readjust our tack. I compliment the Fine Gael Party for recognising that there is no going beyond the budget deficit target of 3% of GDP by 2014. That is a very important consensus. There is no need for consensus on every issue and a bit of debate and difference is healthy. However, it is important that people can agree on the basic fundamentals and particularly important that this fundamental is agreed upon.

With regard to the extrapolation from there to the figure of €15 billion, the position is quite simple. A forecast of growth has been made — it is no big secret what that forecast is — and that inevitably leads us from where we are at present to a €15 billion amount to be made up. Again, on the credit side, it is important to recognise that Ireland’s economic performance has improved dramatically in the past year. We have gone from negative growth of 9% to zero or slightly better growth this year, which is very important.

I listened to Deputy Fergus O’Dowd ask where the money went. It is important to recognise that whereas financial issues arose that we would all have preferred did not arise, the main expenditure increases are very clearly identifiable. Nowhere are they identifiable more clearly

than in my Department, which makes transfers to pensioners, those with disabilities, lone parents and the unemployed

The increase in the social welfare budget since 2000 is very significant. In 2000, the expenditure of my Department was €6.7 billion whereas it is €21 billion this year. This represents a threefold increase over a period during which there was nothing like a threefold increase in the rate of inflation. Thankfully, the social welfare rate improved dramatically over the period in question. People will say that is easily explained because there is much more unemployment but when one examines the unemployment cost, one will note the unemployment bill for job-seeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance is €4.3 billion. Allowing for the fact that there were always approximately 200,000 people on the live register, the extra cost would be somewhere in excess of €2 billion. This explains a small fraction, approximately 10%, of the extra expenditure. The vast majority of the extra moneys spent by the Department of Social Protection were spent because we improved the system.

Carers are very dear to my heart because all of us have family members who are involved in caring for loved ones, relatives and others we know. Caring is a very arduous task. The figures in this regard are very dramatic. In 2000, we were spending €99 million on caring. This year, the figure will be €726 million, which represents a sevenfold increase. When people ask where the money went, they must analyse the figures and recognise that the bulk of it was spent on additional investment in education, health and social protection. These are worth protecting and securing for the future. This is where we face the challenge. If we were to arrive in circumstances in which we could not borrow the money required for day-to-day expenditure while reducing the deficit on a scaled basis and opting for growth, the cut we would have to impose would be horrendous altogether. Therefore, the Government is endeavouring to find a middle way, that is, by trimming expenditure now and encouraging growth to try to find a way to reduce the deficit over time with the minimum impact on our vastly improved services.

When one takes into account the statistic that approximately one in every three euro allocated for day-to-day expenditure is borrowed, it becomes obvious to one what would happen if one's ability to borrow money at a reasonable price on the market were to diminish or, as the Taoiseach said this morning, if one could not borrow at all. Therefore, it is imperative that we make the tough decisions required, even though they are really difficult to make, particularly in my Department, given that one is more than conscious of the effects of those decisions on people. In this case it is a question of the old adage that a stitch in time saves nine. By making the adjustments now and front-loading them, we will save the people from much greater cuts and adjustments in the future.

With regard to my Department, there are other ways of saving money. We must work increasingly harder on control measures. I am introducing many more control measures. I hope to have the identity card in the new year. Every euro saved through keeping social welfare away from somebody who is not entitled to it is another euro that can be paid to somebody who is entitled to it. One of the messages we must get across to the people is that conniving with or supporting people who are defrauding the social welfare system is literally taking money out of the pockets of those who are disabled, old or genuinely unemployed. The black economy can and does do great damage to us. It also has a great effect on those in the legitimate economy because they cannot compete.

I have received support from Members of different parties for ensuring that we employ ever-better activation and control measures in order to abolish opportunities to cheat the social welfare system. I have been working very hard on the question of activation whereby a win-win scenario is achieved and whereby opportunities are given to those who are genuinely unemployed and want to be involved in community work. There is an opportunity to identify

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those who are not interested in working because they already have an income. We are currently running a number of pilot schemes in this regard and doing much more intensive activation work. It will be very interesting to see the results.

Let me make an analogy concerning what we must do, which analogy my colleagues in the Green Party will like because it is derived from nature. Often, if one wants a tree to grow, one must prune it. If one does not prune it, it will not grow the following year. On the other hand, if one prunes the tree too tightly, one might kill it. Our challenge is to prune correctly such that we will stimulate maximum growth. The means of stimulating maximum growth are those that will allow us to borrow cheaply on the international markets so we will not waste taxpayers' money on unnecessary interest and which will earn international credibility such that people will invest in our country. Such a method of pruning will, in the longer term, achieve the best balance and allow us to maintain the fundamental systems we have put in place.

This leads me to a point about which Fine Gael is particularly exercised and on which I agree, namely, that employment growth and economic growth comprise the key to emerging from our problems in the longer term. I agree with Fine Gael in this regard although I do not agree with every detail of its plans. It is telling us there is money that is not available.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I believed Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were thinking of a merger.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Labour Party was quick enough to jump into bed with Fianna Fáil——

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Deputy would probably find it was probably a bit to the left of the Labour Party, not to mind being left of Fine Gael.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Does the Minister want an application form?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No, because there are aspects of the Labour Party with which I do not agree. It is not looking after ordinary people. I fully agree with the Deputy in that regard. I will stand over my record of over 30 years in this respect.

As I stated, growth is the key. When we consider growth and attempt to create jobs, we must realise there are a number of basic requirements other than grants and other instruments. The first is that foreign investors must believe we have sustainable and stable growth. It is imperative that we get the message across that we do not intend to change the rate of corporation tax. This country has been very successful, over very many years, in attracting foreign direct investment, and we need to continue to do be so.

The second area of growth is within indigenous industry. In recent years, despite the difficulties with the sterling exchange, which were a great impediment to our indigenous industries, we have seen considerable resilience in the agriculture, forestry and marine industries. We must continue to support these industries and encourage native entrepreneurship. One of the great advantages of these industries is that they provide employment of good quality in every corner of the country. We have not exploited fully the potential to upskill and improve the quality of products in these industries. There is a lot of work we can do in this regard although much good work has been done in recent years.

Another industry with potential is the tourism industry.

There has been a major growth in people's interest in rural recreation and marine leisure activities. Tourism is an area in which we have an abundance of natural resources. People from

a number of nearby tourism markets wish to come and visit this country. By continuing to invest, through various schemes, including the Leader programme, in the natural resources to which I refer, we can create a large number of jobs.

There are good and bad aspects to the position in which we currently find ourselves. We face both challenges and opportunities. On the downside, we are facing into a huge budget deficit. It is fair to point out that this deficit is far more down to the decline in incomes than to the direct cost of the banking crisis. The international banking crisis led to the collapse of many countries' economies, while the crisis at home led to the collapse of the economy here. When one considers the direct cost in this regard, one discovers that the collapse in tax incomes to the State was the major factor. I accept that it is a significant imposition on taxpayers to oblige them to pay for the restructuring of the banks. The latter is perhaps one of the greatest challenges we face.

A second challenge relates to the need to ensure that the banking system proceeds to function once again. Businesses cannot operate without access to funding. The road in this regard has been slow and rocky. However, I am of the view that we are getting there.

I always believe that one should consider one's strengths. On the upside, therefore, we should consider our most important resource, namely, the number of young and well-educated people living in this country. It is important that we should continue to invest in education in the future. The second positive factor I would highlight relates to the strength of our balance of payments. Of course, this is led by the performance of our exports, which is a huge plus because it helps offset some of the problems we face.

People may not want to admit it, particularly as it is a legacy of the Celtic tiger, but the third positive for Ireland is the physical infrastructure that has been put in place. Deputy Ring and I have on many occasions been lobbied by the owners of factories in the west, including those in County Mayo, with regard to the condition of the roads. All of those involved in industry will admit that their ability to transport goods throughout the country has been transformed in recent years. There is now a motorway in place from Galway to Dublin. The motorway runs all the way to Mullingar and the remainder of the road includes some highly improved sections. I am as anxious as Deputy Ring to ensure that roads in counties Mayo and Sligo will continue to be improved.

Deputy Michael Ring: The N5 from Westport to Longford must be improved.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Yes. De réir a chéile a thógtar na caisleáin.

There are also motorways to Limerick, Cork and Waterford. In addition, there are motorways which run almost all the way to Wexford and the Border. All of these roads have more or less been connected to each other and this has led to two major transformations. The first of these relates to the physical advantage of being able to transport goods and people from east to west.

The second transformation to which I refer involves the psychological advantage — this is incredibly important in my opinion — that has arisen in the context of foreign companies that are considering establishing operations here. Setting up a factory or whatever in any of the regions of this country is similar to establishing operations in the outer part of a city in the United States of America. I have often stated that the motorway system we have constructed means that the position is completely different from that which obtained ten years ago. When representatives from companies in the US consider establishing operations in Galway, Cork, Waterford or Limerick, they are of the view that asking people to travel to these places is

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

similar to requesting that individuals in their home country travel from Chicago to Milwaukee, from New York to New Jersey or from San Francisco to San Jose. In other words, if one is travelling on a good-quality road, one's journey time is reduced. The Americans do not see the satellite cities to which I refer as being in any way isolated or difficult to service. This has made a major difference to our economy.

We must work through the difficult circumstances in which we find ourselves. Those in the farming community recognise more than most that there are good times and bad times. The times in which we are living are extremely difficult. The challenge we face is to build on our strengths and deal with the difficulties that have arisen. I am of the view that this country has major strengths. It is a complete misreading of the situation to compare our current position to that which obtained in the 1970s and 1980s. The country and the services that are provided within it have been transformed.

In the 1990s or early 2000s, if one had informed people that we would have anything similar to the social welfare system that is currently in place, they would have stated that it would never come into being. We have taken huge strides forward and what we want to do is retain, to the best of our ability, the ground we have gained. If this means making short-term adjustments in order to preserve our long-term future, then that is the correct route to take. I appreciate the support the Opposition has given to the main propositions we have put forward in respect of the basic targets which must be achieved, particularly in the context of reducing the deficit to 3%.

I do not doubt that as those in opposition study the position, they will realise that €15 billion in savings will be required. Any amount below that would not be viewed as credible internationally. I have a very simple message for those who ask why we are pandering to the markets rather than to the people of Ireland. If we cannot borrow money at a reasonable rate, we will not be in a position to pay for education, health or social welfare.

Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghlacadh as ucht deis a bheith agam an cúpla focal seo a rá. Creidim gur am dúshlanach é i saol phobal na hÉireann. Credim go mbeidh an pobal tuisceanach ar na fadhbanna ata romhainn. Tá jab mór le déanamh againn iad a mhíniú. Déanfaimid ár ndícheall é sin a dhéanamh chomh maith agus is féidir linn. Tá mé buíoch don tacaíocht atá le fáil ón bhFreasúra don bhunreásunáíocht atá ag baint le sin. Tá súil agam gur féidir linn tuilleadh comhoibriú a chothú agus muid i mbun gnóthaí na tíre.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I wish to share time with Deputy Costello.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Noel O'Flynn): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The starting point for the current debate on the economic crisis is centred on the 2014 target for cutting the budget deficit to 3%. I do not believe that the Government has yet made any kind of economically persuasive case in respect of the 2014 deadline. As Deputy Gilmore stated, we simply do not possess enough information to frame a one-year budget not to mention a four-year fiscal programme. Why has the Government not presented a proper cost-benefit analysis for the 2014 deadline, as well as alternative growth scenarios including a longer time period for the achievement of this massive proposed adjustment to the national economy? I am glad that ESRI and ICTU economists, among others, are now also questioning the reality of a 2014 target.

Everybody agrees that there is clearly a structural budgetary gap that must be bridged. However, we must not forget the devastation that has already been wreaked on our economy and society by senior bankers and their friends in Fianna Fáil. The September 2008 blanket

bank guarantee given by Fianna Fáil and the Green Party has resulted in the absolute ruination of our national accounts for the better part of a decade. We will be obliged to spend billions, year on year, to pay just the interest bill for the zombie banks that acted in such a criminally dangerous manner during the past ten years.

Almost 450,000 of our citizens are unemployed and thousands of our younger citizens are once again emigrating. Canada, Australia, the US and the UK, among other countries, are again benefiting from the skills and talents of our educated young people. Core education, health and transport services have been under sustained attack for the past two years. As the Taoiseach stated, the Government has already taken an astonishing €14.5 billion out of the economy in that time. There is a very real danger that the its new €15 billion cutbacks plan could have a further devastating deflationary impact. It is not possible to just slash a further €15 billion out of the economy — on top of the previous €14.5 billion — and expect to see economic growth and jobs to magically appear. There is always the grave danger that a total of almost €30 billion in cuts will fatally injure and enfeeble the Irish economy for half a generation.

This discredited Government is extremely keen to encourage everyone to sign up to a four-year budgetary plan. However, it continues to hide the true total cost of its shocking mistakes from the people. The interest bill alone for the national debt repayments over the next decade will be an incredible financial burden. The Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, recently informed me that the forecast for the 2011 interest repayment on the national debt is €5.7 billion — that is, of course, if we are lucky in the international markets after Christmas. Let us consider the current position in the context of the fact that debt servicing interest cost in 2007 was just €1.6 billion and only €1.5 billion in 2008.

My colleague, Deputy Burton, has repeatedly raised the long-term cost to the State of the use of promissory notes, particularly in respect of the recapitalisation of Anglo Irish Bank, Irish Nationwide and the EBS. I understand that a total of €30 billion will be injected into these three financial institutions. As Deputy Burton has noted, the annual promissory note payments of perhaps €3 billion, plus the interest payments of at least 5%, will turn the ten-year payment plan into a financial noose around the necks of the people for the next 15 years at least. To listen to the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, last week, it is as if the cost of these promissory notes are some sort of a virtual accountancy exercise. The Fianna Fáil and Green Party Government seems determined to make ordinary low and middle income households pay for the disastrous approach to bailing out the banks.

There are credible alternative ways to address the economic crisis. I commend the many groups in civil society, the many academic economists, constituents and citizens who contact me regularly with their valuable ideas on how to address the crisis. The think-tank TASC, for example, has submitted a pre-budget document that sets out a path for recovery through job creation, an economic recovery fund and a fundamental rebalancing of the taxation system grounded in fairness and equality for all citizens. The recovery fund echoes our consistent Labour Party plans for investment, jobs and a strategic investment bank, which this Government has ignored since early 2009.

Analysts like Michael Taft and Fr. Seán Healy have produced proposals that envisage bringing as many as 100,000 new jobs on stream to assist citizens leaving the live register, modelled on Labour's part-time job opportunities programme from our last time in Government in the middle 1990s. Economist Dr. Tom O'Connor of the Cork Institute of Technology has provided a very valuable analysis of the current economic disaster as well as a comprehensive range of suggestions for stimulating the economy and getting people back to work. It is clear that our core focus should be on employment, infrastructural development and rebalancing taxes rather than swingeing cuts.

[Deputy Thomas P. Broughan.]

We repeatedly hear the mantra from Fianna Fáil, the Greens and their supporters in the media asking what would we do. Ministers talk of there being no sacred cows in budget 2011 in terms of front-line health, education and transport services, social welfare benefits and infrastructural investment. Let me once again state my bitter opposition to further cuts to social welfare benefits, public sector pay and pensions given the sacrifices that have already been made and the likely pay freezes well into the future. There should be no untouchables or sacred cows on the taxation side either.

For example, if necessary we should at least have a cost-benefit review of the corporation tax rate. Economist Dan O'Brien of *The Irish Times* and formerly of *The Economist* has suggested that an increase of 2% or 2.5% would generate up to €650 million in tax revenue per annum without harming inward investment. TASC has also estimated that we could raise €1.5 billion on an annual basis by reducing the current exorbitant number of property and pensions-based tax reliefs. We know that the standardised rating of pension tax relief would yield perhaps at least €1.3 billion.

A constant mantra of would-be economist journalists, the modern equivalent of Noel Browne's public house dialecticians, is the demand for a site value tax or for a residential property tax. Such a tax, as always in Ireland, would in real terms impose most heavily on families in modest urban homes like those in the constituencies of the Acting Chairman and myself. Yet that commentariat will never consider an assets tax levied on the most wealthy or a simple wealth tax, which Dr. O'Connor estimates would raise at least €1 billion and which I believe should be part of the solution.

Most tax experts agree that by closing ongoing loopholes in the taxation system to reduce the numbers of tax fugitives we could raise at least a further €300 million. I note that the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. George Osborne, has reached a new and tighter agreement to access funds of UK tax fugitives in Switzerland, following a similar deal with Liechtenstein. On a comparable basis to the UK, is there perhaps another €1 billion of Irish tax fugitive funds escaping our Irish tax system? Have we made a similar agreement with Switzerland? There is an EU agreement but is there a specific agreement between Ireland and Switzerland dealing with tax fugitives? There is also a clear argument for a new third rate of tax for the highest earners, perhaps at 50%, and we know from the response of the Minister today to Deputy Eamon Gilmore that Labour's proposed new 48% rate will raise a very valuable €410 million.

The current crisis must be used to thoroughly reform the market economy. One of the more significant areas in need of reform is that of excessive pay in both the public and private sectors. The new leader of the UK Labour Party, Mr. Ed Miliband, has put a high pay commission at the heart of his agenda for reforming the dysfunctional compensation system. It is obscene that senior management in any organisation can earn a salary that is a multiple of a couple of hundred of the lowest paid worker in that organisation. As the great Polly Toynbee long ago noted, the cancer of outrageous pay and bonuses comes directly from the private sector and especially from financial services.

There should be a cap on public sector and semi-State salaries at a maximum of perhaps €150,000. Clearly we want effective, dynamic people leading our commercial semi-State and public sector organisations but a high pay commission that invigilates and regulates pay in the public and private sectors could be a mechanism for curbing excessive salaries that may discourage dynamic people from considering leading public sector positions.

At the opposite end of the public pay spectrum are many low and middle income public and civil servants who signed up to the Croke Park agreement because they believed it would protect them from any further devastating pay cuts and new income levies. As a past member

of the Committee of Public Accounts for eight years I am aware of major savings which can be made in enhancing efficiencies in the delivery of public services, which the Government has been incredibly lethargic in addressing. The Croke Park agreement should be adhered to and the pay of hard-pressed low and middle income public servants should not be targeted for a further savage attack in the 2011 budget. It is true there remains an astonishing level of inefficiencies and waste throughout the system of governance and administration. The Parliament and Government could clearly work just as effectively with the Dáil as a single Chamber, with 12 Ministers and five junior Ministers.

To get out of this recession and to create jobs there simply has to be continued investment in key infrastructure, including our critical communications and transport networks. I therefore welcome the Minister's comment this morning that he expects Exchequer capital investment to remain at a significant level in the budget on 7 December, and that PPP investment would continue. There is a clear case for using the metropolitan area networks project to develop a publicly-owned national fibre optic backbone to be fleshed out by Eircom and other providers. I have had debates with the Acting Chairman on the area in the past. We should ensure that small, medium and big enterprises in every part of the country have access to the highest quality broadband services. The construction of major transport projects, in themselves, provides a massive economic stimulus and jobs boost to the economy. As a long-time northside supporter of metro north, I note that €140 million has been spent on the project so far; that the enabling works for metro north will cost just €80 million in 2011; that CPO costs have been wildly exaggerated by vested interests; that the first implementation payment will not be incurred until late 2012 or early 2013 at the earliest; that the detailed cost-benefit analysis is massively positive and that both final bidders have strong Irish-connected companies. The Government would probably be sued by the bidders, as was the case in Slovakia recently, if the metro is axed or badly delayed.

I strongly believe in terms of the ratio of tax adjustments to cutbacks, it is fairer to aim for a balance which is strongly loaded towards tax adjustments given the €14.5 billion already taken from the economy. I reiterate my total opposition to the Government's policy of making low and middle income households take the biggest brunt of the economic pain it is currently doling out. The balance must be tilted towards those who can afford to pay and also the senior banking and developer interests who got us into this mess in the first place. Economic recovery must be centred on a stimulus package that includes an economic recovery fund, as well as the major infrastructural projects that include broadband and transport.

Deputy Joe Costello: I thank Deputy Broughan for sharing his time and welcome the opportunity to speak on this debate on the macroeconomic and fiscal outlook for Ireland. The economic outlook over the past two years has been very dire indeed and with every day that passes, unbelievably it gets worse. Financial statistics and economic projections emanating from the Department of Finance and the Central Bank have been so wide of the mark as to be virtually worthless. The plethora of economists and ESRI pundits are so hit and miss that they almost sound like astrologers.

The entire banking system, including Anglo Irish Bank, AIB and Irish Nationwide, have been telling such porkies and acting so criminally irresponsibly that the Criminal Assets Bureau should be mobilised and directed to their respective boardrooms. The taxpayer is the beast of burden pressed into service to bail out the private sector which controls the financial pillars of the economy. That elite sector worked in tandem with Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrat allies, who turned a blind eye to the activities and smoothed the legislative and regulatory path for these actions.

[Deputy Joe Costello.]

In the past two years the debt burden placed on the taxpayer from defaulting banks has been over €50 billion. The deficit shortfall in the balance of payments for 2010 alone is close to €20 billion, and we have been told after the Farmleigh meeting that €15 billion of cuts rather than €7.5 billion must come from the taxpayer and the unemployed over the next four years if we are to reach the 3% stability pact deficit agreed with the European Union.

Some €14.5 billion, an incredible sum, has already been taken from the economy and the pockets of the Irish people in the past two budgets. To compound the surreal scenario, the Government is proposing after Farmleigh an even more austere front-loading budget for 2011 to reassure bond markets so they can lend billions to the same financial institutions which got the country into a financial mess in the first place. This is capitalism at its worst and is the legacy of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher to the world.

We thought we had a regulated mixed economy in Ireland with checks and balances that would protect our economy and people from the excesses of the marketplace. It was, as we now know, a mirage.

However, we must now learn the hard lessons and move forward. We must resolve that we will never allow a similar meltdown of our financial system to occur again with the consequent impoverishment of our people for a generation. We must make common cause with our allies in the European Union and elsewhere to exert benevolent political regulation and control of the global marketplace. People must come before profit and we must agree the national and international mechanisms to achieve that. We must rewrite the rules of international finance so that the entire population of the country is not suddenly plunged into crisis and poverty by powerful forces within that country outside of it which are outside it went beyond its control.

6 o'clock

The first step for the Irish people is to elect a new Government——

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Joe Costello: —— with a fresh five-year mandate. Those who have been in charge of the country the past 13 years have ruined the economy. They created the problems and are unable to resolve them. The chauffeur driven cavalcade of Ministers to Farmleigh this week shows just how out of touch they are with the recession-hit lives of ordinary people throughout the length and breadth of the island.

Hope, vision and leadership can only come from a Labour Party led Government which has the interests of the ordinary people of the country at heart and will regain their confidence. A Labour Party led Government will ensure that the full rigours of the law would be brought to bear on those responsible for this amount of collapse with imprisonment the penalty for the main perpetrators. It is essential that justice is done and seen to be done where white collar criminal antisocial behaviour is involved. We would review existing commercial law with a view to strengthening investigative powers and increasing penalties. Our Labour Party led Government would introduce an effective regulatory framework for our financial institutions.

The current Government's budgetary policy of front-loading cuts across the board is flawed because it squeezes money out of the economy, reduces spending and consumer confidence and deflates the economy. Its assumption that the crisis is a global one and that once world trade picks up Ireland will be able to export itself out of the recession is flawed. Ireland retained a substantial export surplus of €39 billion in 2009 over 2008 figures according to recent CSO figures. Yet, Ireland remained in recession.

Figures provided by the Irish Exporters Association to date indicate a healthy export market in 2010 but there appears to be little or no impact on the economy or employment. Foreign direct investment produces high volumes of exports in pharmaceutical and information technology goods and they are holding up well. However, they produce a poor return on jobs created and tax garnered. The recent revelation that Google made €3 billion extra profit because it was able to manipulate the Irish corporation tax regime to such an extent that instead of paying the exceedingly low 12.5% corporation tax is only paid 2.5% is totally unacceptable. It is a scandal and it has to be dealt with. The Labour Party in Government would ensure that no foreign or domestic business paid less than 12.5% corporation tax.

Export led growth is not the panacea that the Government expects and it has little effect on employment unless indigenous small and medium enterprises can get involved. Our small and medium enterprises are starved of credit and find it difficult to survive at the current time. The Labour Party in Government would target that sector through our new proposed strategic investment bank, availing of the European investment bank funds. We would ensure that small and medium enterprises were sufficiently funded to retain the existing workforce of 800,000, which is well over 50%, and expand into new enterprises and markets including overseas markets in emerging countries which would create real worth and real jobs.

State capital funding would be directed into labour-intensive projects that would breathe new life into the construction industry. Urban regeneration projects, school building projects, while energy, retrofitting, public transport projects and wind and wave renewable energy projects are ready to go. They are only awaiting a stimulus package which the Labour Party would provide by cherry-picking the national development plan and capital investment programme.

The extent of the recession is evidenced by the fact that the haulage of goods throughout the country declined from 246,000 tonnes in 2008 to only 148,000 tonnes in 2009 according to recent CSO figures. This marks a colossal drop of 40% in a single year. The distribution of goods throughout the country is a very good indication of the state of the economy. The economy is not just flat, it is in freefall. Our stimulus package for small and medium enterprises and our capital funding for labour-intensive projects would rapidly pick the country out of the recession and restore consumer confidence.

In the meantime, while this Government remains in office we must seek to protect the less well off, the 450,000 social welfare recipients on the live register, including the 100,000 on disability, and those on low wages and the minimal wage. Ireland remains a wealthy country. Any new taxes must be directed at 33,000 Celtic millionaires, or what is left of them, the 400,000 tax exiles and those with salaries and pensions above €100,000. The new 48% tax which the Labour Party proposes can raise close to €500 million and should be introduced with for those who are well off.

The 148 tax reliefs identified by the Commission on Taxation, which have been recently estimated amount to approximately €11 billion annually, need to be reviewed urgently. Property tax relief should be abolished entirely. If we take 50,000 people off the live register it will save the State €1 billion annually. There are 288,000 people who have lost their jobs since 2007. Clearly, a restoration of the 2007 figures would amount to approximately €6 billion which would be €6 billion less of a burden on the social welfare system.

There can be substantial savings from the Croke Park agreement. It is high time the Government put in place mechanisms to quantify and achieve the savings. Unfortunately, the Government has taken no action to date on any of these issues. It is rudderless and leaderless. It is incapable of action and can only claim to seek consensus on the way forward from the Opposition at the 11th hour of its term in office. The Fianna Fáil and Green Party coalition cannot do the job and should step down.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): At least we learned something from the last contribution, namely, that Labour Party Ministers would do without cars and drivers to drop them at meetings to do with the budget.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: You will see us on our bikes.

Deputy Martin Mansergh: The purpose of this debate is to clarify the choices we have to make over the next four years and the fundamental reasons for them. There are, unfortunately, no relatively painless exits from the situation in which we find ourselves. To clear up one persistent misrepresentation, State underpinning of the banks, while adding tens of billions of euro to the national debt, is not a main contributor to the general Government deficit that has to be reduced from an underlying 11.9% of GDP this year to 3% by 2014. Interest on those payments to the banks do, however, add to the problem, and have been one of the reasons for the markets' focus on Ireland, not least because the capital injections have led to a spike in the deficit to 32% this year.

Some 90 years ago, between the Government of Ireland Act, 1920 and the Treaty, the two parts of Ireland went their separate ways. By majority choice, Northern Ireland remained part of Britain, with devolution since restored after a long breakdown on a much different and consensual basis. Northern Ireland faces serious difficulties, in terms of allocating expenditure with a budget much short of what all would claim it was promised by the previous British Prime Minister. The Executive and Assembly have almost no responsibility for raising taxes or the public finances as a whole, for banking supervision or the health and well-being of the much larger economy of which it is a region.

In 1920, Home Rule was also put in front of the people of the 26 counties on the Statute Book. Instead, the people chose, and fought, to become separate and independent, to be ultimately responsible for their and our own economic viability and financial creditworthiness. For a long time, we were relatively poor and fiscally conservative, but we lived within our means, so there was never any question of default no matter what the pain, neither following the Civil War, during the economic war nor the Second World War, although in 1925, as part of the boundary agreement, Britain agreed to write off our estimated share of their national debt. For a long time, we were even a creditor nation.

Partial default is not an alternative to pain. The measures taken two years ago and since to underpin our banking system have so far succeeded, albeit at a previously unimaginable cost. As former President Clinton said on a recent visit to Ireland, "If you do not have a banking system, you're toast". Unless we want to reclassify ourselves as a Latin American country of the 20th century, we have to stick to the hard road. In future crises across the western world, the treatment of bondholders may well be handled differently, by agreement among the EU and the G20, but we cannot change the rules now, unilaterally and midstream acting as a guinea-pig, except at great cost to ourselves and to our reputation as a country in which to invest and to which it is safe to lend. Even the valid and reasonable distinction between senior debt and subordinated debt is, as we have seen, not entirely unproblematic for everyone concerned.

There are three reasons we need to achieve the 3% deficit target by 2014. The most fundamental reason is that it is the level that equals stabilisation of the public finances. At 3%, given minimal levels of growth and inflation, the economy is growing faster than the debt. For 20 years from 1988 to 2007, when the Exchequer was borrowing 3% or less or was in surplus, the national debt reduced steadily in gross terms as a percentage of GDP from a peak of 118% to a low of 23% in 2006 and 2007. The cost of servicing the debt, which was a third of all tax revenue and a quarter of the current expenditure in 1987, declined to a low of approximately

5% in both cases 20 years later. The main reason for reducing both debt and deficit is that otherwise we pre-empt and sterilise large amounts of taxpayers' resources for interest payments, which could be better used for economic and social purposes.

One does not have to be a member of the eurozone to be concerned to bring down the budget deficit to 3% of GDP or under. The British Government has announced a four-year plan to achieve the same in order to stabilise its public finances. As a eurozone member, we do not have the same degree of discretion. The second reason we have to reach the 3% target by 2014, which is already a one-year extension, is that we have agreed to do so with the EU Commission in the first instance and as a commitment *vis-à-vis* our eurozone partners. It has been clear, particularly since the sovereign debt crisis erupted earlier this year, in the first instance with Greece, that the health, indeed survival, of the eurozone depends on each individual member state, regardless of its size or centrality, taking the appropriate action.

As part of the criteria for membership of economic and monetary union, a deficit of no more than 3% of GDP has been a critical component. That figure first emerged from an informal Finance Ministers' meeting during Ireland's EC Presidency in 1990 in Ashford Castle, County Mayo. It was subsequently written into the Maastricht treaty of 1992, and ratified by the Irish people, with part of the package consisting of very substantial Structural and Cohesion funds, which we have well absorbed.

As a result of the global financial crisis, many countries are in deficit far in excess of that figure. It is not a valid argument to say that because France and Germany marginally exceeded that figure in the early years of the previous decade, the rule no longer applies. It clearly does, since we and others have to find a path back to complying with it. We have been given reasonable, but not unlimited latitude, as our situation cannot simply be attributed to external factors, but was as a result of imprudent behaviour by this country. The third, and even more compelling reason, is the expectation of markets, from whom we will be looking for borrowed funds again from January to be able to maintain public services, incomes and income supports, on which our people and the quality of our society depend.

I welcome the commitment of the main Opposition parties to the 3% target by 2014. It is an acknowledgement by them of the political reality that would immediately face them in Government. There is a public expectation that their approach be set out in more detail. The only comment I would make is that it would be unwise for them to rule out too much in advance, as otherwise there is a risk, as happened with the British Government recently, of having to accept apologetically that in certain particulars they would have misled the country.

The economic argument made by ICTU and the ESRI is that the pain should be more spread out over time. There would be a significant financial cost to that but more importantly, the approach would not be accepted by the Commission, our EU partners, or the financial markets. Heavily indebted states are unfortunately not as in complete control of their affairs as those which are relatively unencumbered. Nevertheless, we want to make the detailed consequential decisions ourselves, not leave them to the IMF.

There is no convincing evidence that Keynesianism works in an Irish context. It did not work in the middle or late 1970s, it did not work in 1980 and 1981, nor was it going to work in the initial phase of our present crisis in 2007 and 2008. The best boost to our economy and to confidence will be to put our finances in order, and take full advantage of recent improvements in Irish export competitiveness, together with any measures we can take to support jobs and improve performance.

Among more extreme and defeatist solutions put forward by one or two commentators are that we should leave the eurozone to permit devaluations, or leave the EU, or become the 51st state of America. Attempting any of those things would be far more damaging and disruptive

[Deputy Martin Mansergh.]

than anything we must do now. They would effectively spell an end to Irish sovereign independence. We do not have the natural advantages of Norway and Switzerland to stay outside the EU. Few of us want to become an Anglo-American dependency or island tax haven. Geographically, culturally, and politically, we belong to Europe. How few of us would volunteer to apply to join a nuclear superpower militarily engaged all over the world, with the large divides in wealth that characterise the US, and, for all we know in the future, with a “Tea Party” President in the White House? The reality we must face for the moment is that we are closer to Frankfurt and Brussels than Boston or even Berlin. The social market economy patented by Ludwig Erhard and refined by Helmut Schmidt in post-war Germany is a good and successful model for us to adhere to. Unlike the editor of the *Sunday Independent*, and apologies to one of its columnists, I have no phobias about Ireland becoming more like Germany, as we belatedly internalise the logic, disciplines, and advantages, short-term and long-term, of euro-zone membership.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I shall pass on the apologies of the Minister of State to the editor of the *Sunday Independent*. I must state that I do not necessarily share all the ideas put forward in the editorial section of the *Sunday Independent*.

Deputy Martin Mansergh: Of course not.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: Incidentally, I must compliment the Minister of State, Deputy Mansergh, on stating he learned something from the contributions of the Labour Party Members. I have to state he is a smarter man than I am; I did not learn anything because I heard nothing except the usual lack of specifics. The game of hide and seek continues.

An interesting debate has taken place on whether the deficit should be reduced to 3% by 2014 or possibly extended to 2016. This is interesting but largely irrelevant. Whether the 3% deficit can be achieved by 2014 or 2016 without running the risk of deflating the economy to destruction depends almost exclusively on the level of growth in the Irish economy in the years in between. If the level of growth is not sufficient to enable us to do what we have promised to do then it may be possible to acceptably stabilise the deficit at a higher level. However, as Deputy Noonan mentioned earlier today, if the growth turns out to be in the higher range projected in the recent ESRI report then it may be possible not only to stabilise the deficit to 3% by 2014 but to do so for much less than the €15 billion figure put forward.

The point is that we have committed not only to the EU Commission but also to the European Central Bank that we will achieve this target in the timescale we have agreed, which is 2014. It is also a fact that the people from whom we will borrow money, the international bond markets, expect us to honour and reach that target. We are in a position where the European Central Bank, which guarantees the massive borrowing we have already undertaken and the people from whom we will borrow in the future, demand we adhere to this timetable, so we have no choice but to try and be seen to try.

It would be the height of folly for this or any Government to think an austerity package on its own will be acceptable to the people or that it will work. What we want and what the country needs is an austerity package accompanied by an appropriate stimulus package. I am not speaking about the stimulus package introduced by a Fianna Fáil-led Government in the 1970s, which was clearly unworkable and which the country could not afford. Such a package introduced today would be even more unworkable in the present circumstances and it would certainly be unaffordable. However, there is a type of stimulus we can use. We can target certain areas and do certain things that are not of themselves very expensive — some of them will cost nothing — to stimulate and re-ignite growth and create hope again among the people

of the country. We must do this and we are morally and politically obliged to do so for two reasons. The first is that growth is an essential part of the equation. We will not stabilise our debt in 2014, 2016 or 2020 or at all unless we create sufficient growth in the Irish economy.

There has been insufficient emphasis in this debate on the fact that in the interests of the people, we now have to confront the scourge of unemployment. Prolonged, mass unemployment is catastrophic, not just for its victims but for society as a whole. Several learned studies attest to this fact. One of the most notable and most interesting I have read was done by the great Harvard sociologist, William Wilson. He demonstrated graphically how the disappearance of low skill jobs in the United States during the 1970s led to the social collapse of the black ghettos. In this country, we have seen this process in reverse. Rising employment turned what had been sink estates into decent, if not wonderful places to live. Finding a job does more for a person than an army of social workers. It restores a person's dignity and sense of self-worth.

The benefits of the Celtic tiger, despite protestations to the contrary, did not go exclusively to the wealthy; they went overwhelmingly to ordinary people in the form of abundant employment opportunities in their own region, something this country had never experienced before. I have mentioned some of those studies and there have also been interesting studies on the effect of the last decade on the psyche of the Japanese people. However, there is now a danger that we will soon be able to produce our own studies because this country stands on the threshold of an unplanned and unwelcome social experiment. The social experiment will be how mass unemployment impacts on crime, on domestic violence, drug abuse, suicide and a litany of other social calamities.

Along with other people I have been promoting incentives which include a proper workfare programme, not a punitive programme such as a local scheme for cutting grass or cleaning footpaths and if a person does not participate, he or she will lose their dole. It must be something that gives people dignity. Such jobs could be paid for by the State, by a premium on top of the standard social welfare payment, to enable people to be gainfully employed in their own area of expertise and not just a social type of employment. I am referring to everybody, to those with doctorates, for example, a considerable number of whom are unemployed. It could mean everybody could be taken off the live register by postponing one particular capital project I have in mind, called metro north, which is a ludicrous project. The very notion that it is going ahead is ludicrous——

Deputy John Perry: I agree entirely.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: ——at a time when we are talking about cutting social welfare is wrong.

Another idea would be to look at the banking situation. There is a continuing credit crunch and this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Apart from anything else, and apart from the capitalisation and the banks trying to repair their balance sheets, there is the imperative that the Irish banking system will have to bring loans back into line with deposits. This will involve considerable deleveraging. If somebody were to ask me today at what point in time would the Irish banking system be able to give sufficient credit to enable us to get the proper level of growth to reach this target by 2014, I could not honestly answer but I could say that there are alternative sources of funds available. For example, the system has been used in the United States whereby business owners have been allowed to temporarily tap into their own personal pension funds to source much-needed working capital without penalty from the tax authorities. In this country, small and medium enterprises are failing almost daily. Their failure is not the result of unprofitability in the medium term but rather because they cannot source the necessary cash flow. I estimate that approximately €80 billion is in Irish managed pension

[Deputy Willie O'Dea.]

assets. Having a temporary and regulated access to this money now would help thousands of viable but struggling small to medium businesses to survive.

A new approach to mortgage repayments has been put forward. I support this approach and I have written about it and I understand it is now the subject of representations to the National Treasury Management Agency and to NAMA. Many people who bought their homes at the peak of the property market are now in negative equity. It is likely, if more remedial action is not taken now, that thousands of families will have high debt levels over the coming decade. Such widespread debt levels will have considerable social and economic consequences so it is vital we take action now to alleviate it for everybody's sake.

A number of solutions have already been suggested, including allowing people to extend their mortgages over longer periods and giving some people the option of renting back their houses from the bank. We need to look at this problem differently. It appears there are two distinct and independent identifiable component parts to a house purchase: the house structure itself and the land on which the house is built. By separating the two parts we can devise a solution where the mortgage can be reasonably discharged on the house structure within an acceptable period but the house builder continues to pay a lease on the land on which the house sits for a 90-year period. This approach, or an adaptation of this approach, would not only help to re-ignite the housing market but it would protect people who are trapped in negative equity.

On the subject of turning intellectual property into profits, the path from research and development to economic success is first, research, second, invention, third, intellectual property and fourth, commercial success. Ireland should now adopt a policy of becoming a world leader in the latter half of this path, specifically in the process of commercialising intellectual property and making Ireland a centre of excellence in turning intellectual property into profits. We have the structures, the reputation, the expertise and the people to take intellectual property which has already been developed and turn it into a real income stream.

Time does not allow me to speak about other proposals in detail but I will articulate them both here in the House and elsewhere. I refer to encouraging immigrants to invest in new businesses here; turning the migration of graduates into a positive rather than a negative which it is at the moment; radical reform of the bankruptcy laws; a study of the tax systems of other countries to see where tax changes are being made which would benefit us if we adapted our taxation system, such as the recent measures outlined by the United Kingdom Government regarding a tax on video games. Cash on deposit amounts to €100 billion and it could be a source of business credit. The Institute of Taxation has advanced very interesting proposals in this regard.

This austerity package is needed by the country but it has to be accompanied by measures to create hope and which will give people the belief there is a future in this country. It has to be accompanied by an appropriately targeted stimulus package otherwise, instead of the light at the end of the tunnel, we will be talking about the tunnel at the end of the light.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Noel O'Flynn): The next 20 minutes time slot is being shared by Deputies Ring, Deenihan and Perry.

Deputy Michael Ring: I came into this House in 1994 from a by-election and in 1995 we were in Government until 1997. Every time a Fine Gael or a Labour Party Minister would rise to speak on the budget, the Fianna Fáil backbenchers would go back in history about what Fianna Fáil had done when they were in Government. I want to put a history lesson on the record of the House about the Government from 1995 to 1997. The media sometimes forget that it was

the first time since the foundation of the State that a Government actually had a surplus. This meant we were not borrowing money for the day to day running of the country. We were creating 1,500 jobs a day, from 1995 to 1997. I remember that general election when the *Irish Independent* headline read, "It's Payback Time". The newspaper was 13 years ahead of its time because it is payback time now——

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: They will not print it now.

Deputy Michael Ring: ——and we will be paying back for the next 30 years as a result of what this Government has created. It is sad because we had it so good. We had a good country and a great workforce and a great economy. The *Irish Independent* and its like, with their economic policies, has got us into this mess. The great leader of the day, the then Leader of the Opposition, Deputy Bertie Ahern, adopted the policies of the *Irish Independent* and now we are in this mess. Low-paid workers are being asked to pick up the tab. Those who are struggling are about to be attacked in the forthcoming budget.

Some journalists have suggested that Fine Gael should say what it would do in government. We will do so when we are in a position of power on the other side of the House and have Ministers. During those times over the last 13 years when the economy was going well, no Minister for Finance, education or agriculture asked Fine Gael or the Labour Party to outline their ideas of what would be good for Ireland. When there was money in the country, we were not asked what it should be spent on.

I remember the day the Fianna Fáil choir applauded the then Minister, Charlie McCreevy, at length after he had made his Budget Statement. They nearly broke the place down in celebration of the wonderful budget the Minister had given to the people of this country. Many people, including journalists, have short memories. The following year, the then Minister said the giveaway budget was going to be one of many. Again the choir got up to clap. Given that he was probably one of those clapping, I am sure the Acting Chairman, Deputy O'Flynn, remembers the day of the decentralisation announcement. Those who were applauding Mr. McCreevy thought he was the greatest Minister they ever had — the Houdini this country needed — but look at the mess this country is in now.

It has been suggested that the Queen will come to Ireland on a state visit next year. Although we have our independence now, perhaps we should hand the country back to the Queen and apologise for the mess we have made of it. When Britain was running the country, at least it did not leave us in such a mess or in the hock we are in now.

I am sick and tired of people saying that we are all the same and that we all created this problem. We are not all the same. I was one of the Fine Gael backbenchers who criticised the Labour Party Minister for Finance, Deputy Quinn, for not opening the purse strings more, or for not doing more in areas like taxation and social welfare. If the coalition had not lost five or six seats in 1997, we would still be in government and this country would not be in the mess it is in now. Deputy Deenihan, who was a Minister of State in that Government, will agree that it acted responsibly and put the country first. We are putting the country first again.

I remind the various commentators that since the foundation of the State, Fine Gael has always put this country first when it has been in government. We will do it again. We will not be dictated to by those who think we should put everything on the table even though we do not know what the Government will put on the table. We were told last week that there might be an over-run of €15 billion. It seems this week that it might be €20 billion.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: A figure of €30 billion has been mentioned.

Deputy Michael Ring: We do not know what the level of growth will be. Other figures will be published by the Department. I know what Fianna Fáil, the media and the Government are doing. They are trying to spread the blame game. They want people to believe we are all the same so that when the election takes place, they can compare what the Government has done with what Fine Gael and the Labour Party proposed in their pre-budget estimates.

I know this country is in a serious position. Like every citizen in the State, I want to get this country back to where it was. We want to get our people working. We want to give a bit of hope, create a bit of employment and get rid of the depression that exists at present. People are frightened out of their lives about the proposals that are coming down the tracks. As my party's spokesman on social protection, I want to make sure those who did not cause the mess we are facing are not penalised most. I ask the Minister of State, Deputy Mansergh, to ensure marginalised people who need to be protected are protected. They did not create the problem.

The Government should go after the bankers and their wives, who have billions of euro. They are enjoying themselves in the sun, reading newspapers and drinking wine and champagne. We are doing nothing about it. We need a few bankers to go to jail to show there is law and order in this country.

Deputy John Perry: Hear, hear.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: I agree with Deputy Ring that those of us on this side of the House are prepared to share the pain but not the blame. If just one thing comes from this debate, it should be that this House needs to retake responsibility for the running of this country. When it comes to job creation, this House does not have any say as IDA Ireland is responsible for the matter. When it comes to tourism, we have to defer to Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. If one goes right across the spectrum, one will always find other agencies to which these duties have been devolved. This House does not have any responsibility in most areas. When one is in opposition, one does not get an opportunity to contribute. I agree with Deputy Ring that when the country was going well, nobody asked us for ideas

I had a good experience when I was my party's spokesperson on defence. Every question I asked of the Minister for Defence had to be answered in the House. By contrast, when I ask a question in my current capacity as spokesman on tourism, culture and sport, I find that an agency is responsible for the matter. The sooner this House reclaims total responsibility for public affairs, the better. The Minister for Health and Children, for example, should have to answer to this House when there is a problem in a hospital. When things go wrong, Ministers should take responsibility and resign if necessary. This country's public service will not function properly until that happens. This House has reneged on its responsibility to those who elected its Members to do a job. We are allowing others to do the job we should be doing. We take the credit when they do something good and we run when things are going bad. That is what is really happening in this House.

I would like to mention the latest independent indicator of how well we are doing. The figures we get from the Government are inaccurate because they are all over the place. We do not know what the position is. An adjustment of €30 billion was mentioned this evening following the bond market review. It was suggested that we should provide for such a cut in public expenditure over the next four years. I suppose the company in question, Davy, is fairly neutral in this regard. It has been reasonably accurate to date. It was quite optimistic last year. According to the account it published yesterday, GNP is expected to decrease by 1.5%, in volume terms, in 2010 and to revive slightly in 2011. GDP will be almost flat this year, with growth of just 0.3%. Next year could see volume growth of 1.9%, supported by demand for exports.

If those figures are correct, we face major trouble as we attempt to sustain the services we currently provide.

As Fine Gael's spokesman on tourism, culture and sport, I would like to focus on tourism before I conclude. If leadership is shown in Ireland and in overseas markets, we can regain some of the tourism market share we have lost. Ireland is not realising its full potential as a tourist destination. If its wide range of natural and cultural assets were developed in a sustainable manner, Ireland could acquire a clear position in the market and be re-established as an outstanding tourist destination. The significant downturn in overseas tourism demand since 2007 has had a detrimental impact on the tourism sector and the wider Irish economy. In the three years since 2007, Ireland has lost 2 million overseas visitors and at least €1 billion in revenue, with a consequential loss to the Exchequer of approximately €500 million in tax revenue. That is an indictment of those who are supposed to be attracting tourists to this country.

The difficulties currently being experienced by the tourism sector go back further than the current recession. Marginal growth rates in overseas tourism since 2000, allied to a net decline in overseas holiday trips, have resulted in the loss of profit share to key competitors. It is all about competitiveness. One of the reasons people are not coming here is due to competitiveness. In its Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2009, the World Economic Forum benchmarked the tourism and travel sectors of 133 economies. While Ireland is the 18th ranked country in terms of overall competitiveness, a closer examination of these rankings reveals issues of concern for Ireland. These issues can be summarised as follows. Ireland is ranked seventh out of nine countries in overall competitiveness within the north western European competitor set behind Sweden, the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland and Iceland.

In regard to access, as we know the €10 travel tax is definitely having an effect on the number of people coming to this country, and I have mentioned it on a number of occasions. Whether one agrees with Michael O'Leary of Ryanair or not, he stated that if it was removed, he could bring an additional 6 million tourists to this country over a five year period and create 6,000 jobs.

I heard Deputy Noonan mention that a large number of Chinese people are visiting the UK but they cannot use the same visa to come to Ireland. Surely, given the relationship between both islands that the visa, which will have been well checked by British intelligence and so on for security purposes, should entitle them to come to Ireland as well. They are two very simple initiatives which the Government could take in the morning that would certainly boost the number of tourists coming to this country.

Deputy John Perry: I am pleased to speak in this very important debate. Arising directly from the incompetence of a succession of Fianna Fáil-led Governments, our country has been hit by a savage economic crash. The consequences of the failure of Fianna Fáil are visible everywhere in the country, including in the record unemployment levels, in the resumption of forced emigration of a new generation of well-educated young people, in the massive drop in the standard of living for ordinary citizens, in the closed down factories, in the empty housing estates and in cutbacks in health and education and services for the disadvantaged in society. No part of the economy and no public service is safe from Fianna Fáil cutbacks and close downs. There is no confidence and credit in the economy.

We had a budget in October 2008 which was presented as a minor adjustment to facilitate a soft landing for the economy. Then in April 2009 we had a supplementary budget. It is now clear that this budget was also based on an evasion of reality. The April 2009 supplementary budget was followed by the NAMA legislation and then by the 2010 budget. For some national and international commentators, the 2010 budget was acknowledged as the first budget to

[Deputy John Perry.]

truly face the reality of the economic crisis now engulfing both the national economy and the Government finances. The 2010 budget was followed by the emergence of the true scale of the banking disaster and the cost of bailing out the banks, which is immense at €50 billion. There have also been indirect costs in that it has stifled enterprise and closed the economy. As we await the 2011 budget, we see that everything until now was just the calm before the storm.

This debate is a lead-in to the toughest budget in the nation's history, not only for 2011 but for the next four years. With the emerging picture for the 2011 budget, we all clearly see how far Fianna Fáil has failed. This budget is almost exclusively about starting to fix the Government finances, with little or no reference to protect existing jobs and create new jobs.

In terms of specific policy areas, I would like to see more attention being given to the local small business sector which employ one to 50 people. From the small acorn, the large oak grows but there is no respect in this country for the business person and entrepreneur who is creating a small number of jobs. There is nothing for them.

If the economy is to grow again, we must create jobs in small companies and especially in the six emerging sectors of health care, creative industries, bio-technology, post modern agriculture, green energy and tourism, all of which are full of potential. Small and medium sized local companies are of central importance in economic policy because of their degree of integration into the national economy. Our party leader dwelt very much on the role of small companies in his contribution.

There is an urgent need to review the effectiveness of the policies and incentives used in the development of the small business sector. The Government must bring forward a range of measures to tackle the challenges faced by the small business sector. These policies must unlock their potential for long-term sustainable growth and job creation. We are back to the acorn and the small company.

There must be an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and be rewarded. We must put the interests of small companies at the top of the political agenda. Over the past number of years, the emphasis has been on Enterprise Ireland and IDA backed companies. We must have a new direction for small enterprises and companies. We must think big in regard to small business. The significance of the sector must be formally recognised and we must examine closely the structure of the support service delivery for the sector.

To make self-employment a potentially attractive career option for young people, we must provide them with the necessary supports and skills to turn their ambitions into successful ventures. Successful transfers of existing businesses preserve more jobs on average than those created by new start-ups. The transfer of businesses and the skills associated with them should be simplified and should, therefore, be given the same support as setting up a new business. We must look again at issues around taxation policy to ensure that it supports the transfer of businesses from father to son or otherwise.

A large number of small companies are going out of business in the current recession. Each of these business owners has a worthwhile re-start potential and that must be recognised. We must give them a second chance. Making a new start, however, is a lengthy and complicated procedure — it is almost impossible. We must urgently reform our bankruptcy laws in order that in the case of non-fraudulent bankruptcy, entrepreneurs quickly get a second chance and are treated on an equal footing with new start-ups.

The biggest complaint from small business is about compliance with administrative regulations. Small companies believe they bear a disproportionate red tape burden in comparison to larger companies. Urgent Government action is required to eliminate the red tape burden on small business. In addition, there are a range of other costs arising from direct and indirect

Government imposed charges on the small business sector, such as energy costs, rates, leases, rents and dispute resolution procedures. To date, Government efforts have not delivered lower costs for business. The Government must take action to save small companies time and money, thus freeing resources and time for innovation, business growth and job creation.

Raising the right kind of finance can be a major difficulty for small companies and entrepreneurs. The Private Members' motion last week related to support for small companies but it was voted down by this Government. Risk aversion often makes investors and banks shy away from financing firms in their start-up and early expansion stages. Small companies must be better assisted to fully unlock their potential for long-term sustainable growth. Access to finance for small companies must be facilitated.

In addition, small companies are often undermined by a late payment culture. Much insolvency is directly due to late payment. There is an urgent need for Government action on late payments and a credit guarantee facility. So far, all we have is talk but no action.

Given the expected weak state of domestic demand over the next few years, small manufacturing and service companies will have to look to export markets for growth. The Government must give more support and encouragement through identifying business opportunities, providing advisory and networking services and upgrading of personal skills in the areas of market development and management competence. That is very important. These are some of the policy areas where the Government can bring forward practical proposals for the development of small companies and job creation. There are other opportunities in other areas.

Fine Gael is the only party with a sense of urgency that the country needs bold new approaches to tackle the growing jobs crisis. It is the only party to present concrete, effective measures to protect existing jobs and create new ones as well as bringing down business costs and helping struggling companies to stay afloat. What the country needs most of all right now is an election, not a budget.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Noel O'Flynn): There is 20 minutes in this slot. I understand the Minister of State, Deputy Peter Power, is sharing time with Deputies O'Brien and Byrne.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Peter Power): That is correct, ten minutes for me and five minutes for each of my colleagues, with the permission of the House.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Noel O'Flynn): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Peter Power): I very much welcome this debate in Dáil Éireann.

It is hard to think of many debates in Dáil Éireann which have assumed greater importance than the debate we are having today and tomorrow. What needs to emerge from all parties, irrespective of our differences, is a clear pathway which has credibility and can be executed with confidence.

Firstly, I want to put on the record of the House my absolute conviction that we, as a nation, have the wherewithal to deal with all of our own issues, independently and without outside intervention. I, for one, am tired of the complete sense of defeatism, which is propagated throughout the media on even an hourly basis, when any sense of objectivity or impartiality has been long since abandoned, even by former respected pillars of the Irish media.

There is another reason I welcome this debate, that is, that it provides us with an opportunity to have a real contest of ideas between the Government parties and the Opposition. The politics of being against everything and for nothing are over. The fact is that it is decision time now and hard choices need to be made.

[Deputy Peter Power.]

Nobody is asking for the Opposition to set out exactly where every cut should be made and where every euro of tax will be imposed, but rather to set out a macro-economic position which has real credibility and is capable of execution, whether we agree with it or not. That said, I welcome the Opposition's firm commitment to the target of cutting the deficit to GDP ratio to 3% by 2014.

For those outside the House who do not subscribe to this target, I would say the following. First, it is simply not credible at this stage, when every other European country has agreed, to abandon the 3% target by 2014. This is a simple issue of credibility which is not negotiable.

Second, to abandon that target now would, not alone close the bond markets to Ireland in the new year but, effectively, close off any opportunity for foreign direct investment. We should remember that even in the midst of an extremely difficult recession, Ireland still remains perhaps the most highly attractive place for global companies to do business. Unless we send the clearest of clear messages that we will credibly address our budget deficit issues, global investors will simply not invest here. I would appeal to those who suggest that there is an easier longer way of doing it to reflect on the reality of the position in which we find ourselves.

As a nation and as a people, we must stand up, be totally honest and state that we are serious about this business. My own view is that if the crisis is tackled head on and take much of the pain up front, then the burden will lighten over the four years of the programme. The opposite is also true. If we take the easy option at the outset, the burden will get increasingly difficult over the latter years of this programme.

I accept others hold a radically different view. They state that this programme should be suspended or expanded out over for another three or four years. That has no basis in reality and flies in the face of the position in which we find ourselves.

It is not as if we are in unknown territory here. One may draw direct comparisons between the perilous state of the public finances in the mid to late 1980s and where we are now. At one stage in the 1980s our debt to GDP ratio stood at 129%. We are nowhere near that figure now, and yet within a relatively few short years we brought the situation under control and below the 60% debt to GNP ration in the Stability and Growth Pact guidelines. If we adopt fair, but tough, and equally-spread policies, we can achieve that success again.

Equally, the public and business particularly will respond if we demonstrate in the clearest possible way that we are serious about this. If there is a clear pathway towards getting our own house in order, it will provide a major injection of confidence into the economy, both in terms of inward investment on which we rely so much in these times and also in terms of indigenous business.

The simple reality confronting the country is not so much the extent of the adjustment which needs to be made, although that will undoubtedly be profound, but rather the message we wish to send to those who invest in Ireland and those from whom we borrow, that we have a clear understanding of the nature, size, magnitude and scale of the problem and the measures necessary to correct it, and then, most importantly, to execute those measures with decisiveness and authority.

The question of whether to front-load out not to front-load the fiscal adjustment has been much discussed in the media in recent days. I am firmly of the view that we need to front-load this adjustment and made bigger corrections at the outset of this path of economic recovery. As I mentioned, our own economic history in the 1980s proves this to be the best way of doing so. More importantly, not to do so at this time would be to take a risk in terms of the global confidence in this country. It is my strong conviction that this would be an unacceptable risk

for a Government of any colour to take, and the initial correction needs to be in the region of a reduction to 10% in the deficit to GDP ratio.

Having said that, it is also my view that if we take sharp corrective action in the short term, the fundamentals, which have caused so many problems for us, for example, in the banking system, the bond market and the world economy, and which cost us so much on a weekly basis, will be to stabilise and improve. In these circumstances, we could easily foresee a lessening of the load in the latter part of the plan, in other words, much can be gained by taking very decisive action now.

In my view each party needs to set out, over the coming two weeks, how this front-loading should be done. As this is a macro economic debate, no party should be asked — would it be realistic to do so — to set out exactly where they would make cuts on a Department-by-Department basis.

However, it is absolutely vital for each party to set out its position in four broad areas: first, the extent to which it would cut capital expenditure; second, the extent to which it would cut current expenditure; third, revenue raising and taxation; and fourth, which is linked to the third one, pro-growth policies which promote increased revenue. In this respect, I have a real issue of the Fine Gael position and I have been critical of it. The Fine Gael leader has consistently ruled out tax increases. His finance spokesman has consistently stated that the capital budget will be protected. That can only leave the bulk of adjustment to be made on the current expenditure side, in areas such as health, education and welfare which make up by far the biggest proportion of Government spending.

7 o'clock

Deputy Seymour Crawford: The Minister of State must not be listening to them.

Deputy Peter Power: The Fine Gael position is unbalanced. The Fine Gael Party will have to adjust this position because——

Deputy John Perry: Job creation stimulus.

Deputy Peter Power: ——while over 50% of the adjustment will have to come from reductions in current expenditure, the balance should be divided more or less equally between reductions in capital and increases in revenue. The Fine Gael position is very unbalanced in this respect.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: The Minister of State should check what it is before he——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister of State without interruption. He has one minute remaining.

Deputy Peter Power: I am reluctant to increase personal income taxes too much. It has not worked in the past and it has always proven to be a disincentive to work.

This debate is properly called a macro-economic debate, but we simple cannot ignore the core values which we have as a society in making the choices which confront us. We must have uppermost in our minds the need to provide the greatest possible protection to the poorest and most vulnerable in our society, especially the elderly, consistent with a solid foundation upon which to protect the vulnerable in the future.

The Government is rightly proud of the major gains in social protection and support for vulnerable people in recent years, especially in the area of the State pension. Of course, a key part of the plan should be incorporate a total focus on a return to growth and jobs, but — this is where we fundamentally differ with the Fine Gael Party — to not reduce expenditure and

[Deputy Peter Power.]

to not increase taxes does not give enough room in which to bring about required economic and fiscal adjustments. This means also that we need to increase our competitiveness, continuing to reduce our unit labour costs — huge progress has been made here — and providing a business environment conducive to foreign direct investment.

Each party must credibly demonstrate four key ingredients. First, it is an absolute prerequisite that the plan is credible to the international markets. Second, it must convey a message of determination to the international community. Third, it needs to protect the most vulnerable and, fourth, it must have the protection and creation of jobs at its core.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: This debate is being watched by members of the public who want answers. They want us to seek consensus and show generosity to the Opposition. I believe the Government has shown such generosity in listening to ideas from the Opposition and providing its spokespersons with figures and information. I note with interest the welcome statement by the Minister for Finance that the Opposition will be given access to any figures or information it requires.

The Government side does not have a monopoly on wisdom. Some of the ideas presented by the Opposition must be taken into account. A job of work remains to be done to convince people of the scale of the challenge facing us. This applies equally to parliamentarians and public representatives. Have we asked ourselves what €15 billion in savings will mean over four years? Will we all be shocked by the extent of the four-year plan that is vital for economic recovery? It is difficult to imagine €15 billion in cuts and tax increases.

The most important part of the four-year programme is economic growth. Cutting expenditure and taking a creative approach to the tax system present opportunities to secure economic growth. Without wishing to take a Thatcherite view, I believe the private sector would do better in some areas in which the State is involved. In doing so, it could contribute to economic growth and reduce costs to the State.

As the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív, stated when he visited Kells in my constituency, we must protect the poor, the weak and the most vulnerable and examine in a creative manner those areas in which the private sector could do a better job than the State. We must focus specifically on areas of current expenditure in which the Government should not be involved. If the private sector could become involved in these areas, it would generate economic growth while reducing costs to taxpayers.

There is no doubt that we face massive problems in terms of our budgetary strategy for the coming years. The announcement of €15 billion in savings was shocking. I do not have any desire to make cuts for the sake of it. We must, with determination and without any doubt in our hearts, meet head on the challenge of bridging the gap of €15 billion over the next four years. To do otherwise would be to derail the hopes, dreams and aspirations of future generations.

We must treat the challenge facing us as an opportunity to get our house in order. We have to ensure we balance our books and avoid national bankruptcy. The prize at the end of the process will be to restore hope and confidence to citizens. While the task ahead is a cause of worry and concern, people should be conscious of the ultimate goal which, as the Minister stated, is the maintenance and improvement of our living standards.

Failure to reduce our deficit would undermine confidence in Ireland's ability to meet its obligations and responsibilities and delay a return to growth. It is vital that we do not delay because to do so would stall growth. On the other hand, getting our financial house in order will facilitate economic and employment growth.

We have choices to make. We can increase the tax burden on those who are working or we can cut expenditure. While neither option is palatable, the gap must be bridged. The Fianna Fáil Party, the Green Party, Independent Deputies, Fine Gael and the Labour Party have given a commitment to the European Commission and other European countries that the deficit will be reduced to 3%. This figure must remain our target and cuts in expenditure must be the main mechanism by which we achieve it, although there is scope for tax increases.

I concur with the Labour Party's proposal to introduce a higher rate of income tax of 48%. The problem, however, is that such a measure would close the gap by only 3%, leaving a balance of 97%. While the proposed initiative would grab headlines, the Government would still have 97% of the work to do to achieve the €15 billion target. Calls to tax the rich may sound great but the Labour Party's proposal would only solve 3% of the problem over four years. The party must accept that the problem is much broader than simply taxing the rich. If we had more rich people, perhaps we would not face such severe problems.

The Labour Party also points out that tax reliefs amount to €11 billion. However, tax credits or tax free allowances as they were known account for most of this figure. These reliefs are not shelters for hotels or property development but part of the tax code for ordinary people.

We should work together constructively to address the problem before us. The Government has taken a constructive approach and I welcome the fact that the Opposition is becoming more constructive by the day.

Deputy Darragh O'Brien: I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak in this important debate. I welcome the decision of the main Opposition parties, Fine Gael and the Labour Party, to sign up to the need to reduce the deficit to 3% of GDP by 2014. I listened with interest to Deputies argue that they do not have sufficient information to make decisions. All the information required is available and can be sought. Consensus, which I hope is attainable, is important because it would result in a reduction in the cost of borrowing for the State. While I do not expect to achieve consensus on every aspect of the forthcoming budget, a general consensus on the four-year budgetary plan to be published in mid-November would send out the correct message. In contrast, Portugal today sent out a message that it could not achieve consensus, a failure that affected the bond markets and the cost of borrowing.

In recent years, corrections amounting to €14.5 billion have been made, while a further €15 billion in adjustments is required. As Deputy Thomas Byrne and many other speakers noted, our job is to ensure that the vulnerable and those most in need are protected. This requirement must be the cornerstone of the forthcoming budget and all other budgets in the four-year plan. None of the decisions the Government makes will be easy.

The purpose of the corrections we have made and will make in the coming four years is to return the country to economic growth. While economic growth forecasts have been revised downwards, the situation has stabilised. Unemployment rates, although high, are lower than previously anticipated. Last year, for instance, the unemployment rate was forecast to reach 15% this year but currently stands at 13.5%. We must ensure the unemployed are given opportunities to return quickly to the workforce.

There are many positives. Costs have reduced and foreign direct investment in 2009 amounted to almost €20 billion or half of the total figure for the United Kingdom. Many more new investments are in the pipeline and I commend the IDA and Enterprise Ireland on the work they have done in this regard. The county enterprise boards have also provided support for the small and medium enterprise sector which employs more than 800,000 people.

We must be creative with regard to the SME sector in the budget by supporting indigenous businesses. This can be done in several ways, including through expenditure under the capital

[Deputy Darragh O'Brien.]

programme. In my constituency of Dublin North, I can see the benefits of the work being done to build new schools and work done by local contractors under the summer works scheme. The State is getting more for less, which must be at the centre of its efforts over the next four years. It is crucial, therefore, that we press ahead with the capital programme.

I concur with Deputy Burton on the need to cap tax relief on pension contributions. It is, however, incorrect to argue that €2.7 billion is given to wealthy people through tax relief pensions. We should also liberalise the options available to PAYE workers on retirement. At present, a PAYE worker who receives a tax free lump sum on retirement must effectively put the remainder of his or her pension into an annuity. Annuity rates have not improved and many people ask why the system cannot be liberalised to allow retiring PAYE workers to avail of other options. For example, they should be able to access the guaranteed returns available under the national solidarity bond. These are measures on which I believe broad agreement can be reached across the House and that would get more money for the State from the €80 billion that is sitting there. However, we must be creative on such matters.

One final area concerns procurement, as this State spends €15 billion per year on procuring goods and services. It would not take much to derive savings of 10% in this regard and many private sector experts believe this could be done. This also should be at the forefront of this budget, as 10% of €15 billion would yield €1.5 billion.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: I wish to share time with Deputies Creed, Connaughton and possibly McEntee.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Very good.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: At the outset, I congratulate my party leader, Deputy Kenny, for insisting on this necessary open debate regarding the crisis facing our country. Many young people now live in homes and have large mortgages that were based on the property boom. Consequently they now live in negative equity with either decreased income or with no job at all in some cases. During the boom, the Government transferred the national debt to personal debt. While all Members appreciate that the Taoiseach at last appeared to tell them a little more today than he has been in the habit of doing, the possibility of a necessary reduction of €15 billion over the next four years is extremely serious. Although it is vital to meet our commitments with Europe and elsewhere, equally it is vital to do so in a way that does not destroy growth but gives an impetus towards job creation, which is our only way out of the present mess. In the limited time available to me, I wish to concentrate on two areas, namely, the wanton waste in the health care system and the need to recognise the value of the agriculture and food industry to our nation.

As a supporter of the Monaghan General Hospital project in County Monaghan, I note the county has been the guinea pig for the removal of services to local people. While the HSE has cut the cost of running Monaghan General Hospital, it has increased the number of staff at management level right across its structures. No matter where one meets an individual in the HSE, one finds at least ten other people in the room, all of whom have great titles and travelling expenses. Although the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, has stated that up to €1 billion must be cut from the health budget, she has refused to deal with the cost of medicine. Can she explain the reason that a drug in a pharmacy north of the Border costs one third or less than the same drug south of the Border? Clear savings of up to €200 million can be made in the HSE with regard to this area alone.

Despite all the high technology that has been available to the HSE for the past 20 years, doctors on call in either a home or their dispensaries cannot get information from an aged

person's medical cards. As a result, such an aged person in Monaghan will finish up on a trolley in Cavan General Hospital, if it still is on call, or much further afield. However, had the basic history of the patient been available, a doctor may have been able to prescribe accordingly and save all the hassle. The list of areas in which savings could be made within the HSE is endless but this will require leadership. I assure the Leas-Cheann Comhairle that there would be an enormous change within a very short period under Deputy Reilly. The Dutch and others have shown this to be possible.

As for the farming issue, with proper leadership and new thinking, the Food Harvest 2020 vision outlined by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Deputy Smith, could become a reality, thereby retaining employment in agriculture and increasing employment in the food industry. We have a green industry of which we should be proud. It is vital that the Minister, Deputy Smith, and the Government recognise the farming industry is just emerging from an horrendous period of low incomes, due to the problems arising on foot of three years of extremely bad weather and prices. Farmers acknowledge that if they earn a reasonable income, they are liable to pay tax like everyone else. However, it is important for such tax to be based on actual income and not on gross output. It is important that the Government should think twice before introducing a property tax or similar measure that would completely undermine any possibility of growth in farming. For instance, in an area such as my constituency of Cavan-Monaghan, many farmers were obliged recently to invest major borrowings to ensure that all cattle were removed from the land during the winter. Such farmers would be much more heavily penalised by a property tax than would some of the farmers in the deep south. The agriculture and forestry sectors are key to the economy and must be supported.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House that I understand that Deputy O'Mahony will replace Deputy McEntee in this slot. I call Deputy Creed.

Deputy Michael Creed: There are many indicators that should send a clear signal to all Members that this is not a time for politics as usual. One such indicator to which reference was made repeatedly today is that more than 450,000 people are unemployed and this is the human face of the crisis that Members are attempting to confront. However, another statistic emerged on the news this evening. It is an abstract point with which people have had difficulty in grappling but is of great significance, namely, today the bond markets sought a yield of 6.9% or in other words, the cost for Ireland to borrow money has returned right to its peak. In itself, this is a clear signal that we cannot have politics as usual. The real challenge faced by the country is how to bridge the gap between annual spending of €50 billion and income of €30 billion. This debate is useful regarding the ideas that are put into the mix because unless the bond market can be reassured that Ireland will be able to effectively borrow at sustainable rates in January, it will not be a question of whether we must cut €5 billion or €7 billion. We would be obliged to bridge the entire gap in a single quantum leap, which would not be sustainable for the long-term viability of the economy or when balancing the need for growth with the need to get our fiscal policies correct. Our sovereignty, that is, our capacity to manage our own affairs is at stake, with the IMF at the door waiting to come in. Today I tabled a parliamentary question to the Minister for Finance on what the procedures would be in such an eventuality.

I have heard repeatedly in recent days from absent friends in the Green Party and more recently in tweets from the vanguard in Fianna Fáil about the need for consensus, to stretch the hand across the floor and to have greater co-operation on this national crisis. While I agree with that approach to politics, its cornerstone should not be another Tallaght strategy from Fine Gael. Its cornerstone should be that the same policy that applies to bankers, directors and chief executive officers of banks also applies to the Government in respect of accountability. I

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could hold my nose and countenance the idea, not of another Tallaght strategy, but of a national approach to government with Fine Gael members taking Cabinet seats. I could do so if I saw real intent on the backbenches of Fianna Fáil to have a palace coup and to tell Deputy Cowen and his cohorts, who have lead us into the mire we are in at present, that it is time to go, that democratic accountability applies to them as much as it does to Mr. FitzPatrick, Mr. Goggin and others in the banking sector, as well as directors. If the Government pursues that line with such individuals, it must apply the same or higher standards to its own members. I take with a grain of salt the tweets and public statements I read and hear on consensus when I do not discern the willingness for a palace coup within Fianna Fáil to have that level of accountability.

Were one to need any reassurance regarding the Government's culpability, one should consider the report by Professor Honohan on the banking crisis in which he states, "in short although international pressures contributed to the timing, intensity and depth of the Irish banking crisis, the essential characteristic of the problem was domestic and classic". He then continues with further evidence which, due to time constraints, I will not go into in greater detail.

Within the one minute that remains to me, I wish to deal with the Croke Park agreement. There has been much talk on the sustainability of that agreement, which obviously is something that comes into sharp focus today. However, one should make haste slowly as far as tearing it up is concerned because it contains much that is good. For example, it refers to how the parties will work together to implement it and how the introduction of new, improved technology service provision, and on-line and electronic fund transfers will be the norm. It also says merit-based competition and promotion policies will be the norm and promises significantly improved performance management across all public service areas. It contains a host of things that we have long advocated for the public service.

The number employed in the public service in 2000 was 247,343. In 2008, there were 319,000. That is an increase of 73,000 in eight years, built substantially on the basis of unsustainable tax revenues from the construction sector. We have a real problem there.

The missing chapter in the Croke Park agreement is any commitment to timelines or targets for savings. A document that is full of good intentions is being thwarted by the heavy hand of unaccountability. People who are charged with its implementation are thwarting the benefits that could accrue. When we are looking for billions in savings there is no commitment to timelines for achieving this. Trade unions and employers, whose interests it serves, would need to wake up to this fact. We need targets for its implementation.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: This is a serious debate. I listened intently to every word the Taoiseach had to say this morning. I was extremely disappointed and I will tell the House why. In the last two or three weeks, I had already heard every word he had to say today. I heard nothing new whatever today. With the build-up to this debate, I thought alternatives would be put forward and proposals made, loose though they might be, to raise the necessary tax. We did not get that. We got the same ráiméis we get all the time. The Taoiseach does not seem to be able to get across to the Irish people just how serious this is and what will have to be done.

In the last couple of days the only topic on people's lips is the sum of €15 billion, where it will come from and how it will be raised. We are all agreed that by 2014 our budget deficit must be 3% of GDP. I understand that in the last couple of hours an agency in London has suggested that we may not have any growth at all next year. I do not know where this came from but I am told it is currency around the world at present.

The Taoiseach goes to great lengths to describe any proposal that emanates from the Department of Finance, or wherever else, as a forecast. I did not hear too much about forecasts until lately. Before now, we were told that so much research was put into these matters that what was being said was likely to be the figure that would eventually turn up. We are now told these are forecasts. This brings us to the weather forecasting business. It could be right and it might not be right. Unfortunately, over the last two years the weather forecasts have been terribly wrong.

When I hear of the sum of €15 billion, I have no idea on a personal level whether that will be the figure or not. Unfortunately for most people in the country, I do not think anyone on the Government side of the House knows it either. It is against that background that Irish people are extraordinarily worried about what will happen in the first week of December.

There are so many variables in this matter. If there is average annual growth of 2.75% over four years we are told certain things will happen. What will happen if the growth rate is far less than that? What will happen with the bond holders and the interest rates? I heard the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Deputy Hanafin, on the radio this morning saying that while €15 billion is a terrible crucifixion on the Irish people we have already taken out €14.5 billion over the last two years. We did not get too many brownie points from the bond holders and bankers throughout the world for the €14.5 billion we took out because, as of this evening I understand the rate has gone up again.

This is a very difficult time for every Irish person. Various sectors must be protected in some shape or form. The Taoiseach mentioned that today. I am talking about the elderly and the disabled. I am also talking about one specific cohort, and I am sure everyone in the House will agree with what I say. They are the young people who bought houses at three times their value. Not alone are they not able to pay back their loans, they are not even able to pay the interest on their loans. Whatever deal is made on 7 December will have to ensure that some help is given to these people. They are hugely important to the country and we will ruin their lives forever if something is not done for them.

Deputy John O'Mahony: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. The majority of the 4 million people in this island are not economists or fiscal experts and they are probably fed up hearing about deficits, front-loading, GDPs, GNPs, €5 billion, €30 billion, etc. The only thing they know for certain is that in four weeks time they will face one of the harshest budgets in the history of the State. They are desperate for clarity and certainty as to how the budget will impact on them and their families. Along with that clarity and certainty, they have to be given some hope of a brighter future they can look to with confidence. Instead of clarity, certainty, hope and confidence, PAYE workers, business people and the unemployed are confused and uncertain. Many are in despair and lack any belief in their future.

I will illustrate with an example of a small businessman who telephoned me about two hours ago. He is a sole trader in a village in my constituency who breathed life into that community — I would call it a crossroads — 13 years ago when he opened a small grocery shop, adding to it gradually and sensibly over the years and increasing the number of his employees to 14 people overall. He never reneged on one debt or to any of his suppliers. He had an overdraft facility of €50,000 and facilities for direct debits to be paid to suppliers. At all times, he has been in communication with his bank and has done all the things bankers tell their customers to do. Last week, the overdraft and direct debit facilities were withdrawn without notice. The first he heard of it was when some of his suppliers telephoned him to say they had got a letter from his bank. He contacted his local bank manager, who know nothing about it. It had been done from headquarters. When contact was made with the decision maker that night, not only

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did he refuse to explain, he stated that he would sleep easily in his bed that night and accused the man of trying to put him on a guilt trip.

Is that giving hope to that sole trader, all of whose possessions are on the line, even though he is giving employment to 14 people in his local parish and breathing life into his community? Is it any wonder that small business people like him feel a disconnect with what is going on at Government level. I asked if I could use him as an example and promised not to use his name. He said I could give his name if I wished. I will not do so, for obvious reasons. He is willing to come before any committee and explain his case.

The Government has asked for consensus in this House in order to deal with the massive financial crisis. That would be a reasonable request, if the Government would put their hands up and say they got us into this mess. It is also reasonable for that businessman, whose example I have outlined, to look for a consensus approach from his bank on how he can face his problems. It is not acceptable for his bank guru, whom the taxpayer has saved from extinction, to act in such a high-handed and arbitrary manner. How dare he? Perhaps that hard-working shopkeeper would have got a better hearing if he had belonged to a large company that walked away and disowned a few hundred million pounds worth of debt. This is why there is such a disconnect between the people and politics. Let us have a consensus here, forcing the banks to be fair to our small businesses.

We in Fine Gael recognise the need to apply corrective measures sooner rather than later. We have committed to the 3% target for 2014 but the Government must send a clear signal that it is playing to the same rules as the people. That has not happened in the past. The waste and squander mania continues. Parliamentary questions I tabled in recent weeks have revealed that a number of Departments are not observing the job embargo. Twelve Departments paid out almost €70 million in hiring 4,268 agency staff over the past two years. This includes €16 million from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government but does not include the Department of Health and Children, which was reported to have spent €100 million on agency staff. Is that living by the same rules as the aforementioned businessman? I say "No".

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I wish to share time with Deputies Niall Collins and Michael McGrath.

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

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. It is clear that both sides of the House have reached a consensus that we are in a difficult situation with limited wriggle room. I pay tribute to Opposition Members who are prepared to leave politics to one side and put their shoulder to the wheel to reach agreement on addressing our problems. We owe that to the people we represent. We must develop a coherent policy framework and, even if we do not agree on the specific elements, we will go a long way towards giving confidence to the markets and to those from whom we seek to borrow if we can agree on the broad principles.

I agree with the previous speaker on the necessity to deal with the banks in concise and clear language. There is too much mumbo jumbo in circulation and Government Deputies owe the people an admission that mistakes were made in the past. However, we must also recognise the nature of the advice that was available to us at the time. We cannot dwell in the past or continue to flog ourselves for mistakes that were made in good faith.

We must work together to develop policies that will get us out of our mess. Deputy Connaughton spoke about the projections on which we must base a four year strategy that will give confidence on the market. Clearly projections can be wrong on occasion. The growth levels predicted for this year have not held up but the projections behind them were not picked out of the air to suit the Minister for Finance. They were based on international trends and expected growth in European economies. The global economy has not recovered to the extent we hoped. We should not blame politicians for getting economic forecasts wrong. Forecasts are scientific and are based on certain facts and assumptions.

While our current difficulties are often explained in economic terms, the biggest impact on many of our citizens and their families is the loss of employment. I agree with Deputy Connaughton that the most vulnerable elements of our society are families in which both breadwinners are unemployed. Their lifestyle was supported by single or double incomes and often they owed significant amounts on mortgages and loans. I hope specific measures are introduced in the budget to deal with these families. While those who are on social welfare are certainly in difficult circumstances, many have built lifestyles around their incomes, meagre as they may be, and have been able to support themselves. A similar argument may be made in respect of pensions. If an individual knows how much his or her pension will be, a change of 3% or 4% will not be the end of the world. However, the loss of a significant income can create a crisis for a family. The burden is on the Minister to introduce measures to support such people.

We must create a framework for job creation. I pay tribute to the tremendous efforts of the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, the county enterprise boards, local authorities and the Leader companies in this regard. Improved competitiveness is contributing to job creation, particularly in the export sector, but we must introduce additional measures to get people back to work. Deputy Joe Carey and I have witnessed significant job losses in the Shannon region in recent weeks and we want to see measures that give fresh opportunities to the hardworking people who have lost their jobs.

Deputy Niall Collins: The straightforward and frank exchange of views in tonight's debate has been very valuable. As public representatives, the feedback we get from people is that they are sick of bickering and populism. The blame game is important because someone must be made accountable. The sooner the ongoing Garda investigation results in people being brought before the courts to answer for the reckless behaviour of our banks, the better. However, there will also be political accountability. Members on this side of the House have accepted responsibility and, as public representatives, we are all accountable at election time. Judgment day comes to all of us, regardless of whether we are in Government or in Opposition.

I was appalled to hear the case outlined by Deputy O'Mahony in respect of the difficulties one of his constituents faced in getting credit. I was also appalled to learn that a mere 20 people made formal applications to the Credit Review Office for a review of credit refusal or reduction. We have a responsibility to make people aware of this independent agency. Last week I received a telephone call from a business person who was coming under heavy pressure from the banks but was not even aware the office existed.

Closing the gap between what we take in and what we spend will require a mixture of taxes and cuts. More importantly, we must encourage growth by stimulating areas of the economy. The National Pensions Reserve Fund can play a vital role in this regard and I would like to see its money being invested in Ireland. Much of the funds is invested in projects based outside the country. We need to invest it internally to have the money in circulation.

We need to see a sustained focus on the sale of some of our State assets. There are many assets that are in State ownership which are huge corporations and we need to expedite the

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process Mr. Colm McCarthy is examining at present in terms of moving on those assets and offering them to the market. Some of the major international corporations — the world players — will consider taking these off the State's hands for a fair price, which will give the citizen a fair return.

In the meantime, we need to see in the budget a clear focus on the salaries paid to some of the CEOs and senior management within these State organisations. We know of some who are paid a salary three times that of the Taoiseach. Nobody in the civil or public service, or any of the State agencies, should be paid a salary higher than the Taoiseach. Nobody in a Department should be paid a salary which exceeds that of the senior Minister of the Department. We have allowed that situation to pertain. These staff did not come under the pension levy or any of the different reductions in salary that have happened over the years. That sector is getting away scot free and we need a focus on it.

We must have a capital programme and, while it might have to be reduced, I would like more emphasis placed on public private partnerships, a model which has not been utilised enough. We have seen the delivery of some roads, school and hospital projects but we need to roll this out more and break it down into smaller projects and get the model working. The Department of Finance and the National Development Finance Agency are taking years to process these projects. I do not understand why it takes so long to cost a project or a model. We should bring it to delivery and get on with it. We are sitting back and the process is taking years. For example, sewerage schemes are often put into bundles. Six schemes were bundled in my county of Limerick and 15 years later we are still waiting for them to arrive. Why not give them a fast track model, get them out there and get them working?

With regard to the HSE, society wants to see a voluntary early retirement scheme for staff. We know it is a bloated administration. Much good has been done by the HSE, which has improved in many ways. It gets much criticism, which is unfair in that it works better than the old health board structure, but at the same time it is a very big organisation and it needs to be more streamlined. We need to get out that layer of middle management and administration which is not contributing to the overall goal of the HSE.

We need to consider other areas. The tribunals were mentioned on the Order of Business today. Tribunals of inquiry have been operating in this country for more than 15 years. At this stage, whatever they will find is irrelevant or confined to history. They were established by this House and we should have a serious debate about them in this House and work towards shutting them down. It is dead money. What they will tell us, we know already, and they will not inform us further.

Deputy Michael McGrath: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate. It is important to acknowledge that all of the political parties accept the need to reduce the deficit, and the main Opposition parties accept the target of reducing it to 3% by 2014, although the Sinn Féin party does not subscribe to that view.

We need to acknowledge just how dependent we are, as a country, on Europe for support at present. Our banks are relying almost exclusively on support from the European Central Bank, though I note Bank of Ireland successfully managed to raise some funding on the international markets today. The support of the EU is critical to Ireland's ability to continue to raise funds on bond markets and we can continue to bridge the deficit between income and expenditure with borrowing.

We have to accept that no one owes Ireland a living. At the end of the day, we have to show a commitment across the political system to reduce and over time eliminate the fiscal deficit that has built up. The cost of borrowing, which has crept back up again today to approximately

6.9%, is a crippling level of interest and underlines the scale of the enormous challenge we face, as politicians, in the weeks before the NTMA returns to the bond markets in the new year to raise money to ensure this country can continue to function. Clearly, those interest rates will have to come down because that is not a sustainable cost of borrowing for a sovereign country to pay. It needs to come below 6% and we need to do whatever is required in the coming weeks to convince the international markets of our commitment in that regard.

I want to be as practical as possible in my contribution and will cover some key areas of policy. First, I welcome the recent allocation of funding of €3.3 million for the enterprise boards. However, I was surprised how little money the Government is giving to enterprise boards in general — I understand the €3.3 million was on top of €15 million provided already in 2010. Given the intention is that the €3.3 million will create 450 jobs, that works out at a cost per job of €7,300, whereas if one is paying somebody jobseeker's benefit or allowance, one is paying a single person €10,000 a year. It represents excellent value for the Government to invest a lot more money in the city and county enterprise boards if they are delivering a return of that level of employment. I would like to see a far greater focus and emphasis in that area. Perhaps some of the money invested in the national solidarity bond, which has in the region of €260 million already invested since May, could be diverted to enterprise support across the country. We would benefit from a very significant dividend if we were to do that.

We need to divert as much capital spending as possible next year to labour intensive projects and, rather than focusing on a small number of large iconic projects, we should spread that money across as many individual projects as possible. When one considers the return we are getting from the home energy savings scheme, for example, which is an exceptionally efficient and effective scheme, as well as the housing grants that are made available, such as the adaptation grants for people with disability and the mobility aids for the older person scheme, we get a great return from those investments. If we spread the capital investment across schemes such as those, we will get a far better return in terms of employment and in terms of generating activity in the economy. I firmly believe that if we give people a small incentive to spend money, even if it is only a few hundred euro, they will end up spending multiples of that.

The other major issue I want to touch on is the black economy. My sense is that at present the black economy is thriving in this country. We have to devise a system to capture as much of the activity happening in the black economy as possible. It is impossible to quantify the loss of revenue to the Exchequer by the amount of activity in the black economy but it almost certainly runs into hundreds of millions of euro a year. One idea to tackle this would be for the end customer who can produce a valid VAT receipt for work done to be given a small refund of VAT, which would incentivise more people to ensure the work carried out is done through the system and, as a result, the Exchequer would benefit.

With regard to the Croke Park deal, we need to see real savings, a timeline, deliverables and the objectives being achieved. In general, we will have to aggressively tackle the issue of bureaucracy and red tape, which has become almost an industry in recent years. It is very difficult for anyone with a business idea to get up and running and to tackle all of the bureaucracy and red tape that must be confronted.

I have raised the issue of local authority costs in the House previously. We must be radical in this area and do something really ambitious in regard to local authority rates, water rates and development charges, which are stifling the enterprise culture that is in every community. If we do not get to grips with this, we will not come out of the economic downturn as well as we should. I welcome the very positive report today in regard to exports, which are doing exceptionally well, but we need to focus on stimulating domestic demand. We must try to rebuild consumer confidence and improve consumer sentiment. It is clear a lot of money is

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being saved and we need to give people targeted and imaginative incentives to spend that money, or at least some of it, such as the car scrappage scheme, which has proven very successful.

The Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Ó Cuív, is seeking to reform the social welfare system. He will have to ensure it is worth people's while to go to work. The reality is that a married couple with two or three children relying completely on welfare would need to be earning approximately €35,000 to €40,000 per year to make working worthwhile. We must ensure that, in whatever we do with taxation and welfare, we do not reduce the gap further between welfare and work and that we incentivise people to go to work. The economy in general will benefit if we do so.

Deputy Liz McManus: I wish to share time with Deputy Tuffy.

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

Deputy Liz McManus: This debate presents a welcome opportunity to consider the economic emergency we face as a society. People are desperately anxious about the burden they face not just in the coming budget, but also for years to come. They are looking for leadership and direction from those charged with running the country.

I took the time to read the Taoiseach's speech closely. I was at a committee meeting when he was delivering it. I regret that there was not much in his speech to inform us as to how the Government intends to lead us out of the mess. The Taoiseach promised us there would be a clear plan but we were none the wiser by the end of his speech as to what plan he has in mind. Instead of offering a plan, the Taoiseach stated: "We must be hopeful, optimistic and energetic, and yet we must be clear-eyed, realistic and thoughtful." This reads like an extract from the *Little Book of Calm*. Such an entreaty is actually an insult, coming as it does from the man who, as Minister for Finance, led us blindly into a financial sewer largely created by him and his predecessor, Deputy Bertie Ahern. Today, instead of providing clarity, the Taoiseach gave us clichés. The people deserve strategic leadership in these dark times. Surely, if that is not on offer, they deserve decent rhetoric at the very least.

The lack of ideas on the part of the Government is deeply worrying. It has battalions of civil servants, experts and consultants to advise it on the way forward. However, there was nothing concrete in the Taoiseach speech about public finances, job creation or economic stimulus. The Government is clearly past its sell-by date and should be thrown out of office.

In desperation, Ministers and their spin doctors endlessly criticise the Labour Party for not having proposals. Today's debate has shown that, despite our limited research capacity on this side of the House, and the limited information provided to the Labour Party by the Government, there were more clear-eyed, realistic and thoughtful solutions in Deputy Gilmore's speech than in any speech from the Government side. It is time for the media, in particular, to bury the canard about Labour not having policies and to start scrutinising the paucity of solutions emanating from Government Buildings.

We may be down as a country but we are not out. We have natural resources that can be harnessed to create jobs and get people off welfare. I refer to construction jobs in particular. The first step to recovery, however, must be a general election. A new Government with a mandate from the people will have the energy and drive to do what the current Government is incapable of doing.

We need a fresh start. The severe economic problems will still have to be tackled but the Labour Party in government will work more smartly to resolve them. There are opportunities.

Curtailed funding will be a real limitation on future growth but if we change the way in which public policies are delivered, without necessarily spending extra money, we can deliver on growth and jobs. In the energy sector, for example, there are continual complaints about bureaucratic slowness in responding to innovation. The wave and wind sectors, particularly the offshore wind energy sector, are hampered by the lack of a strategic approach and a streamlined planning process. A recent study by the European Wind Energy Association showed that the onshore wind farm developers in Ireland experience average delays in planning of 33 months. They are required to contact, directly or indirectly, 14 governmental or local authorities on average before they can proceed. This is simply unsustainable.

Another renewable resource is geothermal energy. It is also held back by the lack of legislation, despite a promise made by the Minister of State, Deputy Conor Lenihan, that legislation would be published early this year. There is no sign of it yet and I doubt that it will be published until well into next year.

According to Forfás, the global environmental goods and services sector is expected to be worth \$800 billion by 2015. This presents real opportunities for the economy to capitalise on the growth of the clean technology sector. In order to reap the benefits of the renewable energy revolution, there must be a co-ordinated, planned approach to maximise potential. We need a new Government but also a smart one.

I was struck by the extent of the measures and proposals made today by the leader of the Labour Party in his speech, but the key must still be job creation. The bulk of people who are unemployed have skills, many in the construction sector. Thousands of them could be put to work immediately if the Government lived up to its own commitments. In his budget speech of 2009, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, promised a national retrofit programme. There is still no sign of it although we are now approaching the 2010 budget. Thousands of people could be put to work under such a programme and energy bills would decrease. Energy efficiency would increase in every home, school and hospital if the Government had the drive and focus to deliver on its promises.

If one looks at the record, one will note circumstances are worse than one might imagine. The reality is that the Government could not even spend the money that it allocated for energy efficiency programmes last year. Some €35 million was handed back into the maw of the Department of Finance at the end of 2009 because the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Ryan, a Green Party Minister, was not up to the job of delivering on his own policy of energy efficiency.

We must ensure that our competitiveness is not hampered by a lack of IT infrastructure. The Minister, Deputy Ryan, promised a one-stop shop to enable the development of fibre connectivity across the country. It does not cost money and only requires Government intent, yet it has not materialised. Broadband speeds are disturbingly poor in large parts of Ireland, that is, in the parts where broadband is actually available. Good regulation, targeted investment and streamlined public processing can make a real difference in the growth of information technology.

All the main parties in the House agreed to the framework for reaching a reduction in our deficit of 3% by 2014. There will be hard decisions to be made but, as Deputy Eamon Gilmore said, they must be the right hard decisions. The first that should be made should be to allow the people to exercise their electoral mandate and choose who will govern them in these challenging times. This is the first stimulus we need to see to ensure we get the good governance, forward thinking and clear plan this country so desperately needs.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Politics should be about progress; that is the whole point. Why are we here only to make things better than they are? For voters, politics is about hope. At least these are what politics should be about. Politics is about optimism and it is an incremental activity. One does not achieve progress overnight but builds on the progress that has been made by our predecessors in the Dáil, Seanad, local authorities and local communities. Now when politics is discussed, the opposite of what I have described is regarded as a virtue.

People receive kudos in respect of the cuts they propose to introduce and the amount of dismantling they promise to do. When Deputy Varadkar announced that he would make €7 billion rather than €4 billion in cuts, he was the hero of the day as far as some members of the press were concerned. That is not the type of political discourse with which I wished to be involved when I became a member of the Labour Party. Politics has become so denigrated and people are so cynical about it because we have forgotten the fact that it is about progress. The latter is the aspect which is absent from the debate.

We are in a bad situation and it is difficult to resist the temptation to be extremely pessimistic about the future. However, progress can be achieved. This has been done in Ireland and other countries in the past. I am of the view that the greatest example in this regard is what the British Labour Party did in 1945. When Britain was in ruins at the end of the Second World War, that party won a landslide victory and went on to establish the National Health Service, NHS, introduce the idea of people making social contributions in order to pay for pensions and set up the comprehensive education system. These developments still stand as a testament to that particular Government and the fact is that the initiatives which brought them about were launched in extremely difficult circumstances.

The debate on ideas which took place in Britain both during and after the Second World War was quite different from that which is occurring in Ireland today. Such a debate did take place in this country in the past. Universal children's allowance was first introduced here in 1943. Ireland was not wealthy at that time and there was rationing of food, etc., but still the progressive move to which I refer was made. The welfare state was established — out of the ruins of two world wars — in very difficult times in Sweden and other Nordic countries. Those examples have stood the test of time.

If, during the Celtic tiger years, we had focused more on politics as a way to make social progress as opposed to any old type of progress, we would have built homes rather than constructed houses which we just do not need. My party and I have a social democratic view of what constitutes progress. However, whether one favours the type of politics espoused by the former Progressive Democrats or by the Labour Party, there is no doubt that all politics should be about progress.

Politics should also be about ideas. I do not refer here to a “Your country, your call” type of approach. A very good article was published in *The Sunday Tribune* during the summer. Even though it related to politics, the article in question was written by that newspaper's television critic and focused on the concept of people coming up with an idea that will solve all of our problems. It states:

For some time, we've been encouraged to think like consumers, not citizens (we've been calling the state Ireland Inc for over a decade now). It stands to reason that we might think we could remove our recessionary stains with some form of New Daz idea . . .

There is a need to reinstate the concept that politics is about ideas. One such idea relates to the type of society we might build out of politics. Lately, however, the debate has focused on numbers rather than ideas. Everything now appears to be about sums, subtraction, number crunching and reductionism. The debate appears to be an ideology-free zone but that is not

the case. In reality, it is the same old ideology we have had for the past 13 years and which has led us into ruin.

There is a need for a new approach based on old ideas. We must reintroduce the concept of social solidarity to our society. It does not come down to whether some judge or other is being paid child benefit, it is about whether it is good for society to invest in its children. We must focus on the idea that equality is a good thing and that we should do our best, through politics, to bring about equality in society. There is major evidence which shows that citizens — even the wealthy — in societies with more income equality do better over a range of indicators. Those to whom I refer live longer, have better lifestyles and quality of life and enjoy a better environment. In addition, fewer of these people go to prison and there are fewer teenage pregnancies. The societies in question also have better education systems, etc.

Everyone benefits from a public health service. People also benefit from investment in a good education system which takes individuals through from preschool to third level. It does not matter whether we or our children enjoy the upside of such a system. Everyone benefits if a society encourages people to think, develop and create. Some great cross-party ideas have been introduced to Irish society in the past. This could be the case again in the future. However, the current debate features very little ideology. What, for example, is the ideology which underpins what we are doing at present?

The budget should not focus on numbers. Rather, it should focus on the ideology which underpins it and the progress we are intent on achieving. As Deputy Gilmore stated, when the Canadians contemplated this matter, the question they asked related to the type of services they wished to provide. What services do we believe should be part of the public realm and what things should be a matter for the private sector or the markets? Asking this question is the starting point from which the debate on the budget should be launched. It is certainly the point from which the newspapers should start. However, they are not doing so. They are more interested in what cuts people will introduce and what they will dismantle or abolish.

We need to begin to consider the type of society we can build out of that which we possess. Our country has been brought to ruin but politics will extricate us from the mess. In that context, we must contemplate the type of society we wish to construct and the type of health system we want to develop. We must ask ourselves whether we are of the view that we should have a public health system or whether there should be universal health care. We have been well served by our investment in education. Before it draws up the budget, the Government should consider the amount it is going to invest in education. It should also give consideration to the type of skills it wishes people to learn and the type of training it wants to provide. Instead, the debate is focusing on the amount we intend to cut from the education budget.

The Government appears to believe that there is nothing wrong with people being on the dole. Much of the discourse in the media reflects the same view. It is all about satisfying the markets and then hoping the markets will solve all our problems. Forget about the human side of what it means to be unemployed. I have been unemployed in the past and it is not a good place to be. When I was unemployed, I would much rather have been working for nothing. We must focus our imagination on how we can ensure that there are opportunities for those on social welfare to move into the workforce. This could be done through community employment schemes, graduate placement, the creation of new jobs or whatever. Such considerations must be central to whatever budget is passed by this House.

Unfortunately, it does not appear that the approach I am advocating reflects the thinking of the Government. I read a number of newspaper reports this morning which highlighted the Taoiseach's comments to the effect that the focus is going to be on cuts rather than on changes in taxation. During the Celtic tiger period, it was all about the level to which taxes could be

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reduced. The same old philosophy is still being adhered to and certain people state that the tax system should not be reformed. Who is the Government afraid of offending by reforming the tax system in order that it brings about more income equality and a fairer society? What is its problem? The more we focus on cuts, the more people will become unemployed and the more those who vote for us to represent them in this House will suffer.

We need to bring back the passion for politics in this House. We must remember that politics is not about numbers or about being the most macho in respect of how much one can cut or the amount of things of which one can get rid. Politics should revolve around making social progress and should focus on the type of society we wish to build. It should also give people hope.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: I wish to share time with Deputy McGuinness.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Agreed.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Slowly but surely we are getting some degree of consensus, which is very welcome, although there are still people who want to throw criticism around. That is the nature of politics.

Today I listened to Deputies Enda Kenny and Eamon Gilmore; in his opening remarks to the Taoiseach Deputy Kenny said the days of bluffing are over and Deputy Gilmore argued that today's debate should be about solutions. I fully agree with those sentiments. The time has moved on from bluffing, spoofing and not offering solutions. It was quite ironic that Fionnan Sheehan in the *Irish Independent* today had a headline which read "Fine Gael's proposals for savings lack the ring of truth." He also criticised Deputy Gilmore for speaking out of both sides of his mouth.

We must move on as the country is in a fairly severe crisis. Criticising each other on what happened five years, ten years or 20 years in the past does not achieve anything and certainly does not provide a solution. The public has moved on and wants to hear solutions from this Chamber to the problems which they are experiencing, whether it is with a mortgage, a job or pay. On this side of the House we accept a share of the blame for the mistakes made with tax on property sales. I put on the record my abhorrence of the reckless banking decisions which led to buildings in the middle of nowhere; such decisions were wrong but they should be acknowledged and we should move on. Society expects us to formulate solutions to those problems.

I welcome the commitment given by the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, that he would give all financial data to all parties, including facts on taxation, employment etc. I would like to think that on 1 December, all the facts relating to VAT receipts and the self-employed tax receipts which have a deadline at the end of this month will be made available to the Opposition. It can then put forward a realistic four-year plan that we have all agreed with a target of a 3% of GDP deficit by 2014. It should be upfront and the people should be able to see exactly what each party is doing.

This is not just about answering questions from constituents and we must realise that the money men and women in Europe who lend us the €20 billion per year now are watching us. If they are not satisfied that, as a country, we are taking corrective action, they will either increase interest rates or not give us the money. We need that money now.

In returning to a healthy economy we must be innovative in how we consider solutions and job creation. We agree that the tough budgets to come, irrespective of who will be in Government over the next three to four years, must be fair. We all agree that we must protect vulner-

able people. I have made the case before and will make it again that we should not cut old age State pensions. That is one group which has put so much into Ireland, people who have worked all their lives, paid their taxes and built up the country.

On the jobs front, having a reasonable capital budget is absolutely vital. I am not being parochial in mentioning metro north, as it not only applies to my constituency of Dublin North but includes all constituencies north of the Liffey, including Meath and south Louth. It is the single biggest contract in Europe currently and I hope and have requested that the Government sanctions the metro north project. I am slightly disappointed in the attitude of Deputy Eamon Gilmore in a recent interview, as he said he would not be in favour of the project now. That is slightly contradictory given that Labour is rightly making the case on jobs, with an unemployment figure of 440,000. This project will create 4,000 jobs directly, and as per the Indecon report prepared for Fingal County Council, it will create another 37,000 jobs indirectly.

This is the single biggest project that would create 4,000 jobs overnight, costing in the order of €3 billion. There would be substantial VAT payments and significant direct employment. It would be of major benefit to the country not just the Dublin North region. We cannot ignore the need to have proper modern infrastructure that a country like Ireland requires. We are one of the few European cities without a rail link to an airport.

On the jobs front, the Government might take cognisance of a delegation that came in here from the Insurance Brokers Association, which made a presentation about using private pension money to put into the Irish economy; there are currently restrictions in legislation in this regard. The Minister for Finance and the Government should give serious consideration to getting every avenue they have available to them in people willing to invest in Irish infrastructure and development.

One of the big problems we have on the jobs issue is the lack of spending. There is over €80 billion saved in personal bank accounts and if only 2.5% of that could be released into the economy, it would amount to €2 billion, which would be a substantial spend in all our local communities. We must come up with innovative ways to make this happen. I do not blame people for not spending as they constantly hear doom and gloom day in and day out. I recommend that the Government consider a voucher scheme in which the Government and retailers would put forward €10 each for every €100 spent by a consumer. This would be a great fillip for consumers, who never look good value in the mouth.

The car scrappage scheme introduced this year has proved a point as motor sales have increased by over 60%. This does not simply apply to cars over ten years old, and through good marketing and innovation on the part of the motor industry, people have changed their cars. There has been a significant uptake in car sales this year as a result. I believe that the voucher scheme I propose, with €20 from the Government and retailers for €100 spent by shoppers, would be self-financing. It is something I hope will be considered.

I have always felt the €10 travel tax was a reasonable proposal by the Government and it is taking in over €120 million. At this stage I would call Michael O'Leary's bluff and give him the incentive to bring millions of passengers to the country, along with Aer Lingus and other airlines, by dropping it. We must get to grips with the significant pay packets in our semi-State bodies, the political arena and in the Judiciary, which I have mentioned before. Only 75% of judges pay the levy, which is unacceptable in this day and age. We must all play our part and show leadership.

We have heard much about the Government getting forecasts wrong. I read a report yesterday indicating that the OECD advised President Obama that there would be a 3.2% growth rate in the US this year but that has been revised down to 2.6%. Ireland is not the only country getting forecasts wrong.

Deputy John McGuinness: I welcome the debate, although it is about three years too late. We seem to be rehashing what has gone on in the economy and what we are prepared to do in the forthcoming four-year plan. The only reason we are at this point is that the IMF, the European Central Bank and many others in Europe are now dictating the trend of play in Ireland and they, along with Germany, are demanding that we do this and enforce this austerity package in the budget if we are to get things right or be credible as a country. We need to focus on what we want as a country and as political parties.

I have listened carefully to this debate and while I was impressed by what people said, I question the commitment of political parties to enter into the type of reform that is necessary in the context of correcting the fiscal position from 2011-14. That is the real challenge with this House, namely, to connect the brains of the House to some sort of political backbone to make the decision. However, political backbone has been absent, not only in this debate but in the context of the decisions which have been taken up to now. People were confronted with this problem three years ago. It did not just happen today. It did not just happen with the banks. Prior to that was a huge downturn in terms of how business was being conducted, the volume of business and particularly the small and medium enterprise sector.

It down-sized, and got on with it, and what we did here, as a Government and an Opposition, was talk about it and did very little. The same thing is happening today. Sometime in 2009, Mr. Colm McCarthy delivered his report on what should be done and set out quite clearly that the game was up and we needed to have the reforms which were necessary to make this country get back to work again, create efficiencies and cost effectiveness and give value for money to the taxpayer. Nothing has happened

The Croke Park deal was signed and very little has happened in any Department. If we want to get real value for money and get people back to work we need to have a back office or public service which is the envy of Europe, that is efficient, that is streamlined and that is delivering on a daily basis for this country. That requires real public sector reform. I am not talking of doctors, nurses, gardaí or those on the front line because when I raised this question in 2008 the Labour Party jumped on it and said I was piling pressure on the lower paid in the civil and public sectors. That is not my position. I would protect those people.

However, I ask the middle and senior managers what they are doing to implement the Croke Park deal and from where the €1 billion in savings will come, because not one cent has been saved since the deal was signed. If we are to be real in this debate while protecting lower paid workers, with which I agree, we must recognise that the greater part of the deal is simply not workable or sustainable. It was agreed at a time when the economy was not facing the type of downturn or measures which we now propose to bring our fiscal position back into line. We need to consider it.

I was delighted to read today that the Minister for Finance is looking for a greater reform package in the public sector reform part of the Croke Park deal. If we do not get it immediately, as every other business is getting from its enterprise, then we will simply want more from the taxpayer. What is happening regarding the taxpayer? We are getting the Revenue Commissioners to collect taxes and squeeze everyone in terms of what they owe it, and we are then handing that money over to the soft centre which is spending it on what, having looked at the Committee of Public Accounts, are outrageous inefficiencies in the State.

There is poor value for money and it is giving this House a bad name in how we govern this country. We have to correct that or we are not correctly serving the people that we represent and we are not bringing in the reforms necessary to save the kind of money we want. We need to examine governance and ask ourselves what senior civil servants are doing. That little group, comprising 600, managed to exempt itself from the levies last year when push came to shove.

That is not leadership. How much is it getting and is it giving value for money? What decisions is it taking? What management skills does it have? How is it pressing for reform? They are the questions we need to ask in what needs to be done in terms of the governance of the country. This is central to the recovery of Ireland. Such staff will be the drivers of the country regardless of what political party is in power. We have had umpteen reports stating 2,000 to 6,000 people are surplus to requirement in the management of the HSE. The report compiled by Colm McCarthy, who has done a service to the State, detailed the savings that can be made and nothing has happened. How much of that money could have been channelled to front line workers, patients or clients of the services to make things better for our citizens? They could have received much more than they got until now. This is about the Government implementing political policies agreed by the people, driven by the Secretaries General of every Department. If they are not up to the job then we should get somebody else. I have examined the recruitment of those people and I found that there are very few, if any, who have been taken directly into positions from the private sector. If one looks at the implementation body of the Croke Park deal one will find the taxpayer is not represented. I find that remiss, in terms of how we deal with the sector.

In terms of business, most speakers in this debate have said that the small business sector will take us out of the economic crisis we are in. It employed 800,000 people at one stage, a figure which has now dropped significantly. It has cut its costs to a minimum. The owners of small firms and businesses work 24 hours a day, seven days a week just to keep their doors open. The one cost which has not reduced is the cost of doing business here. Businesses are strangled with red tape and bureaucracy. The costs of local authority rates should be cut by 25% this year, which would certainly force efficiencies in the delivery of local government. Planning fees and charges should be examined to enable anyone who is willing to take a risk to get planning permission sorted out at real value.

The cost of doing business has not reduced in the State even though the reports from ISME and other national representative bodies of business state that the only cost which has not been touched has been the cost of local government and national Government. That, in a time of crisis, is nothing short of a disgrace. The Government could easily make the decision and make it happen. In terms of job creation we should look to nuclear energy and other forms of energy. I note the Minister, Deputy Gormley, dealt with Poolbeg. One talks about political correctness. He should have stood back from the issue. It was in his constituency. We should have examined the issue in the context of job creation and what could be done for Ireland but that did not happen.

My message is that it cannot be "business as usual". We have to take political decisions and risks in the context of those decisions. We can get advice but we need to follow it. We can look to county enterprise boards and Enterprise Ireland. I find it hard to stomach that the Government would say it is reviewing the role of county enterprise boards. I do not mind reviewing the efficiencies within the boards but it should pump money into county enterprise boards to improve local economies, give businesses that are in trouble a different focus and direction and be involved in mentoring. It need not necessarily involve a grant; it could involve financial assistance of some kind. Enterprise Ireland should be supported and put out into the markets of the world 24 hours a day, seven days a week with Government support, to ensure that people who are doing business abroad can do more to sustain the jobs which they are creating at home.

On NERA and the minimum wage, we need to examine the entire area. NERA is closing down small businesses up and down the country. It cannot cope with the red tape. I listened to Deputy Tuffy who said it would be better to work for nothing rather than be unemployed.

[Deputy John McGuinness.]

I am not attacking the minimum wage; I am simply saying that there has to be an economic basis for the value we put on it in the context of where we currently stand as a country.

Debate adjourned.

The Dáil adjourned at 8.30 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 28 October 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 97, inclusive, resubmitted.

Sugar Imports

98. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Taoiseach the quantity and value of sugar imported in 2009; the countries from which the sugar was imported; the amount and value imported from each country respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38570/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy John Curran): The information requested by Deputy Stanton is presented in the table below.

The table shows the total quantity of cane or beet sugar and chemically pure sucrose imports by country for the year January-December 2009. The total value of sugar imported in 2009 was €99.9 million and the quantity was 169,130 tonnes.

Imports

Country	Jan-Dec 2009	
	€ 000	Tonnes
Australia	6	6
Austria	1	1
Belgium	782	1,111
Brazil	1	1
Canada	0	0
China	30	26
Czech Republic	3	3
Denmark	2	1
France	8,723	16,253
Germany	9,908	14,380
Ghana	10	2
Great Britain	72,648	128,038
Hong Kong	8	8
Hungary	3	1

[Deputy John Curran.]

Country	Jan-Dec 2009	
	€ 000	Tonnes
India	3	3
Indonesia	1	1
Ireland	608	728
Italy	851	196
Japan	776	206
Kenya	0	0
Lithuania	7	10
Luxembourg	4,853	7,629
Malawi	43	33
Malaysia	0	0
Mauritius	20	14
Netherlands	119	41
New Zealand	0	0
Nigeria	0	0
Northern Ireland	63	80
Pakistan	5	1
Philippines	1	2
Poland	22	24
Spain	34	29
Switzerland	113	72
Thailand	17	11
Turkey	28	13
United Arab Emirates	84	163
United States	87	43
Grand Total	99,860	169,130

Public Service Staff

99. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Taoiseach the number of public servants who left under the incentivised early retirement scheme with details of grades; the number of public servants who left for other reasons with details of grades; the number of new staff recruited with details of grades; the number of promotions with details of grades; the net savings arising from the staff leaving over and above those recruited and promoted and to provide a breakdown of each of these figures for years 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010 [38483/10]

The Taoiseach: The information requested by the Deputy in relation to Civil Service grades in my Department is set out in the following tables. The tables are based on head count and not whole time equivalents. The actual number of staff in my Department (WTE) has reduced by 26 since January, 2008 to date. The estimated net saving in 2010 accruing from the total reduction in staff levels in my Department since 2008 is approximately €1,543,651.

2008

Grade	Incentivised Retirement 2008	Other Departures 2008	Promotions 2008	New Recruits 2008
Assistant Secretary		1	0	1
Assistant Principal		3	0	1
Higher Executive Officer		3	0	0
Administrative Officer		0	0	1
Executive Officer		2	1	0
Staff Officer		2	3	0
Clerical Officer		5	0	7
Services Officer		1	0	1
Totals	Nil	17	4	11

2009

Grade	Incentivised Retirement 2009	Other Departures 2009	Promotions 2009	New Recruits 2009
Principal officer	0	2		
Assistant Principal	1	6		
Higher Executive Officer	0	3		
Administrative Officer	0	3		
Executive Officer	0	2		
Staff Officer	0	2		
Clerical Officer	0	4		
Services Officer	0	1		
Cleaner	0	1		
Totals	1	24	Nil	Nil

2010

Grade	Incentivised Retirement 2010	Other Departures 2010	Promotions 2010	New Recruits 2010
Assistant Secretary	0	1	0	0
Principal officer	1	0	1	0
Assistant Principal	0	3	1	1
Higher Executive Officer	1	0	0	0
Administrative Officer	0	2	0	2
Executive Officer	0	3	0	0
Staff Officer	0	0	0	1
Clerical Officer	0	3	0	1
Temporary Clerical Officer	0	0	0	2
Services Officer	1	1	0	2
Totals	3	13	2	9

Cabinet Committees

100. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Taoiseach the date on which the Cabinet Committee on Strategic Directions for the Future of Local Government was set up and the number of times the committee has met since that date [38435/10]

The Taoiseach: The Cabinet Committee on Strategic Directions for the Future of Local Government was set up on 13 January 2010 and has met some 16 times since.

Departmental Agencies

101. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Taoiseach the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39240/10]

The Taoiseach: The composition of the National Economic and Social Development Office, as set out in the National Economic and Social Development Act 2006, consists of the chairpersons and deputy chairperson of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP).

Following the dissolution of the NESF and NCPP, the Board is now comprised of the chairperson and deputy chairperson of the Council only. As a result of the statutory provisions in the NESDO Act, the composition of the Board can only be changed by means of primary legislation.

In light of this and in order to ensure appropriate Governance is maintained, three members of the newly constituted NESC will be invited to attend Board meetings in an observer capacity.

102. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Taoiseach the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39255/10]

The Taoiseach: The annual estimate provision for each of the State Agencies under the aegis of my Department for the years 2006, 2007, 2008 2009 and 2010 are detailed in the following table:

Agency	2006 (in '000)	2007 (in '000)	2008 (in '000)	2009 (in '000)	2010 (in '000)
Central Statistics Office	84,761	54,900	51,130	53,640	57,832
NESDO	5,039	6,053	6,500	5,059	3,332

FÁS Training Programmes

103. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of face to face interviews carried out by FÁS in 2009 and to date in 2010; the number of applicants interviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38504/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): The information requested by the Deputy is being researched. I will reply to him substantively in the matter as soon as possible.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

104. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the amount of money spent by the Residential Institutions Redress Board on advertising in the UK between 2002 and 2005; the number and type of publications in which these advertisements were placed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38561/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the total amount expended by the Residential Institutions Redress Board on advertising in the UK between 2002 and 2005 was €519,120.

Between 2002 and 2005, in addition to the placing of advertisements in Sunday newspapers, daily newspapers and publications aimed specifically at the Irish community, 7,500 leaflets and 7,500 pamphlets were distributed to the network of Irish societies. The Board also held 12 information days throughout England.

In addition to advertising the actual Redress Scheme, the Board also placed advertisements in selected newspapers in the UK highlighting the two Ministerial Orders made in 2004 and 2005 which had the effect of extending the scheme to include additional institutions. Similar advertisements were placed in selected UK publications advising potential applicants of the closing date for receipt of applications.

A total of 68 entries were made in the following newspapers: 3 Sunday Publications which provided national coverage; 9 Local Newspapers; and 5 Irish interest publications.

105. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons residing in the UK who were estimated to be eligible for compensation under the Residential Institutions Redress Board; the number of persons living in the UK that received compensation under the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38563/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I wish to advise the Deputy that there is no mechanism by which my Department can accurately estimate the number of persons resident in the UK who may have been eligible to apply for compensation under the Redress Scheme. My Department does not have access to any information which would provide details of the current whereabouts of persons who may have been resident in a scheduled institution.

However, from statistics provided by the Redress Board, I can tell you that 4,576 UK based former residents have received compensation under the Redress Scheme up to the end of September 2010.

Higher Education Grants

106. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the fact that social welfare recipients who change from one long-term social welfare payment to another long-term social welfare payment are being prevented from obtaining a third level grant top up due to a technicality in the system, whereby a combination of time on long-term social welfare payments is unacceptable for grant purposes; if she will examine the case of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford who had to transfer from lone parent allowance to jobseeker's allowance due to the age of their dependent and has been refused the top up allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38615/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): To qualify for the Special Rate of maintenance grant, an applicant must qualify for the ordinary maintenance

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grant in respect of the 2010/11 academic year. In addition, total reckonable income must not exceed a specified amount, which is €22,703 in the 2009 tax year. Finally, on the operative date, 31st December 2009 for the 2010/11 academic year, the reckonable income must include one of the eligible long-term social welfare payments prescribed under the scheme.

Where a person goes directly from one eligible social welfare payment to another, without a break in payment, the continuous period spent on both eligible payments is taken into consideration when assessing eligibility for the Special Rate of grant.

The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant grant awarding authority i.e. the applicant's local authority or VEC.

Where a grant application is refused, the reason for the refusal is given by the grant awarding authority.

An applicant may appeal the decision to the relevant local authority or VEC.

Where the grant awarding authority decides to reject the appeal, the applicant may appeal this decision to my Department by submitting an appeal form outlining clearly the grounds for the appeal.

No appeal has been received by my Department to date from the candidate referred to by the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes

107. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if any community employment scheme participants have been refused an extension for a further year on the basis that they are in receipt of a disability benefit [38623/10]

108. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will confirm if any community employment scheme participants in receipt of either disability or one parent payments have requested and been refused an extension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38729/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 and 108 together.

The length of time a person can remain on Community Employment (CE) is dictated by a number of factors, in line with the guidelines for CE:

- What age the person is
- How long they have been in receipt of a qualifying Department of Social Protection (DSP) payment
- Previous participation on CE since 3rd April 2000
- Whether they are considered job-ready at the end of each year's CE participation
- Budgetary limitations/place availability limitations.

The maximum participation limits for CE are three years for those under 55 years of age, and six years for those of 55 to 65 years of age.

Persons in receipt of a qualifying disability-related DSP payment are eligible for one additional year on top of these two limits, i.e., four years for those under 55 and seven years for those of 55 to 65.

Persons in receipt of a qualifying DSP payment for 12 months (on entry to CE) may participate on CE for one year before having to leave CE and re-qualify, subject to the age-related maximum participation caps above. In exceptional circumstances, a percentage of participants may be retained for an additional subsequent year, subject to budget limits and personal training needs.

Persons in receipt of a qualifying DSP payment for three years or more (on entry to CE) may be eligible for up to three years on CE, subject to annual renewal, based on job-readiness assessment and personal training requirements. There is no entitlement to remain for the 3 years if the person is considered job-ready when assessed by the CE supervisor at the end of each annual contract.

FÁS has indicated that CE participants receiving Illness Benefit (previously known as Disability Benefit) and One Parent Family payment have requested and been refused an extension. However, FÁS does not gather statistics on the numbers of CE participants refused extensions, regardless of eligibility category or reason for refusal. The receipt of Illness Benefit or One Parent Family Payment has no bearing on the granting or otherwise of a further year on CE.

109. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the changes envisaged for community employment schemes, particularly the role of community employment supervisors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39104/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): There are no proposals currently under consideration in regard to making changes to the national operation of Community Employment Scheme.

Within the current very difficult budgetary constraints, the number of places on CE have been increased to 23,300 in 2010. In delivering these places, FÁS will continue to operate flexibly in the management of this allocation in order to maximise progression to the labour market, while at the same time facilitating the support of community services.

Employment Support Services

110. **Deputy Michael Noonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the procedures she has put in place to enable persons who feel entitled to moneys from the European Global Fund, for workers redundant from Dell and associated companies, to enable them to access the fund; to discuss their eligibility for certain payment; and to appeal decisions if they are adverse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39441/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): A dedicated EGF coordination unit has been established by FÁS to coordinate all services being provided to, or sought by, those redundant workers eligible for EGF support in the case in question.

Eligible supports include occupational guidance, training, upskilling, educational opportunities and enterprise supports supplied, as appropriate, by both public and private service providers.

The EGF coordination unit is charged with ensuring the effective and efficient management of EGF measures at local level. That function includes appropriately addressing and resolving problems encountered.

Each implementing body is understood to operate an EGF related appeals mechanism. For example, in the case of FÁS there is a written appeals system pertaining to all FÁS provided

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or supported EGF programmes with appeals being adjudicated on at Regional Director, or Assistant Director General levels, as appropriate.

Policy issues may be referred for advice, as appropriate, to the Department as the national EGF management authority. In addition, an EGF Steering Committee has been established, which includes representatives of the redundant workers, in order to provide advice and feedback on the implementation of EGF funded supports at local level.

School Staffing

111. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will ensure that a school (details supplied) in County Louth will be allocated a third mainstream teaching post; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39545/10]

168. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the request for the appointment of a third mainstream teacher in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Louth [39265/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 and 168 together.

The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level for this school year is the pupil enrolment at 30 September 2009. The staffing schedule for the 2010/11 school year was published by my Department in March, 2010. The additional posts in the renewed Programme for Government enabled some improvement to be made to the staffing schedule. It is open to any Board of Management to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeal Board. Details of the criteria for appeal are contained in the staffing schedule, Circular 0021/2010 which is available on my Department's website.

I understand that the school referred to by the Deputies submitted an appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeal Board which was considered by the Board at its meeting on 19 October 2010. The Board decided that a departure from the staffing schedule was not warranted in this case and the school has been notified in this regard. The Appeal Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Employment Support Services

112. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the location of centres operating the job fit scheme; the number of participants in each of these schemes; the funding made available in 2010 to operate the scheme; the way in which the scheme provides work experience; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38447/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): The Labour Market Activation Fund is designed to assist in the creation of innovative training and education provision by private, not-for-profit and public sector providers. It is targeted at specific priority groups among the unemployed, namely the low skilled, and those formerly employed in declining sectors — construction, retail and manufacturing sectors — with particular emphasis on the under 35s and the long-term unemployed. Following an open tender competition in which 370 tenders were received, offers of funding were initially made to 26 organisations across the private, not-for-profit and public sectors to support specific training and education programmes for the priority groups.

An additional allocation of €12 million has been made available to the Fund, raising it to €32 million in all. This has enabled the Department of Education and Skills to offer funding

to 33 additional projects. This will bring to almost 60 the number of projects throughout the country being supported by the Fund.

The job fit programme is being delivered in the following locations in Dublin at Blanchardstown, Smithfield and Tallaght and in Athlone, Castlebar, Cork, Dundalk, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford. There are currently 694 participants on the various courses being provided and it should be noted that this figure exceeds the anticipated intake for October 2010.

Further courses will commence throughout the remainder of 2010 and in early 2011 and it is anticipated that a total of 1,500 participants will avail of the programme. A total sum of €7.03m funding has been allocated to the running of these programmes from start to their finish in 2011.

To ensure that programmes being funded are meaningful and will offer a qualification to individuals, programmes financed under the Labour Market Activation Fund are accredited.

Work experience is provided by local employers for periods of up to 4 full weeks, delivered flexibly according to employer and participants needs. Participants who successfully complete the programmes will receive recognised certification and these programmes will provide an opportunity for unemployed individuals to enhance their career prospects in a meaningful and realistic way and will provide a stepping stone for these people to pursue a career in their chosen profession. Of the start up number 51 participants have recently attained employment and this figure is expected to rise over the coming months.

Departmental Staff

113. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of retired teachers working on a temporary contractual basis as of 30 September 2010 in a county (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38453/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available on a county basis.

The managerial authorities of primary schools as at the 30th September had submitted claims for the payment of 302 retired teachers for work undertaken in a substitute capacity since the commencement of the current school year. These claims represent approximately 8% of the teachers engaged in substitute work for whom the managerial authorities have submitted claims.

In the case of Secondary Community and Comprehensive schools the managerial authorities had submitted claims for the payment of 74 retired teachers as at the 30th September for work undertaken in a substitute capacity since the commencement of the school year. This represents about 1.75% of the teachers engaged in substitute work for whom the managerial authorities have to-date submitted claims for payment.

The appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a matter for the individual school managerial authorities.

My Department is arranging for an information note to issue to schools this week regarding the recruitment of temporary and substitute teachers.

I will arrange for a copy of the note to be forwarded to the Deputy.

Special Educational Needs

114. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if Circular 33 of 1979 has been replaced or updated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38456/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The circular referred to by the Deputy provided the basis for additional posts in respect of remedial education in Post Primary schools in the 1979/80 school year. The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to schools for the current school year are published on my Department's website. As the Deputy will be aware, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), 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.

All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Redundancy Payments

115. **Deputy Seán Power** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills when a redundancy payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38489/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I can confirm that an application for redundancy has been received by my Department from the Special Needs Assistant referred to by the Deputy. Applications for redundancy are being received on an ongoing basis and are processed in date order of receipt. The application in question will be dealt with as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects

116. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the plans her Department has to proceed with the construction of a permanent school building (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38497/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department is currently in negotiations regarding the acquisition of a suitable site for the school in question.

The progression of a project for the school from site acquisition and initial design stage through to construction phase will be considered in the context of my Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. However, in light of current competing demands on the Department's capital budget, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of a project for the school at this time.

Higher Education Grants

117. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will support the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38502/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department has facilitated the running of the course referred to by the Deputy in a PLC centre for the last number of years. It is accredited by Dundee University as the equivalent of a Level 8 award on the National Framework of Qualifications (Honours Bachelor Degree/Higher Diploma). My Department funds four maintenance grant schemes, three at third level, the Higher Education Grants (HEG) Scheme, the Vocational Education Committees' (VEC) Scholarships

Scheme, the Third Level Maintenance Grants Scheme for Trainees (TLT) and one for students attending Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLC). The HEG Scheme is administered by the Local Authorities on behalf of my Department, the other three maintenance grant schemes are administered on a similar basis by the VECs. The PLC Scheme prescribes the terms and conditions of funding in respect of students attending approved courses in approved PLC Centres.

Under the terms of the PLC scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet prescribed conditions of funding including those which relate to previous academic attainment. Students attending the course to which the Deputy refers must hold the HND in Animation or relevant and equivalent qualification. As students entering the above course already hold the equivalent of a Level 6 qualification, they are not eligible for grants under the maintenance scheme for students attending Post Leaving Certificate Courses.

I understand from the VEC concerned that prospective students are informed of the absence of grant support for the degree courses before they apply for places.

Departmental Agencies

118. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an outline of each service provided by FÁS which falls within the remit of her Department; the projected expenditure of FÁS in 2010 for each area; the number of persons employed by FÁS in the delivery of these services, the number of persons assisted in each area in 2009 and to date in 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38505/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): The information requested by the Deputy is being researched. I will reply to him substantively in the matter as soon as possible.

119. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons employed by the National Centre for Technology in Education; where personnel are based; the budget allocated to the NCTE; the way it will be used in 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38507/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): As the Deputy may be aware, the ICT in Schools Programme addresses four broad areas, namely:

- the provision of essential ICT infrastructure and networking within schools;
- the provision of access to broadband connectivity to schools;
- continuous professional development in ICT for teachers;
- integrating ICT within the curriculum and providing curriculum relevant digital content and software.

As the Department's lead Agency for implementation of the Programme, the NCTE addresses each of these four areas in its work. It provides advice and support to schools in connection with some €43m in ICT Grants distributed since November 2009, and manages the engagement of schools with national procurement Frameworks. It funds the provision of a schools broadband service desk, which deals with any issues schools may have with their broadband service. Under its Teaching Skills Initiative, it offers a range of ICT related training programmes, providing more than 10,000 places annually (latest full-year figures indicate some 12,000 places were provided in 2009). The NCTE also funds the procurement of online digital reference

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content for schools and the operation of Scoilnet, the national portal for digital content in Irish Education. Scoilnet provides a central resource to teachers, pupils and parents, offering access to a growing repository of advice and information. The NCTE is currently running a programme of nationwide ICT in-service seminars for Post-Primary principals. Seminars for primary principals were also held.

In addition, the NCTE works with other organisations in the delivery of innovative pilot programmes (including the current deployment of 100Mbps broadband connections across a sample of 78 post-primary schools). The NCTE carries out its functions above with a staffing complement of 18 whole-time-equivalents, all based in Dublin City University in Dublin 9, and a budgetary allocation of €5.4m for the current year which includes the salary costs for all NCTE staff.

Preschool Services

120. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of children that have benefited each year from the early start programme since its introduction; the amount it costs annually; the type of supports provided to children participating in this scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38508/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Barry Andrews): The Early Start Pre-School Programme was established in 1994/95 in 40 primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Galway, Drogheda and Dundalk. Each pre-school class caters for a total of 30 children — 15 in the morning and 15 in the afternoon. The 55 classes now in place can cater for a total of 1,650 children. Each pre-school class has a teacher and a child care worker.

The programme is a one-year intervention scheme to meet the needs of 3 and 4 year olds who are at risk of not reaching their potential within the school system. The project involves an educational programme to enhance overall development, help prevent school failure and offset the effects of social disadvantage. Parental involvement is one of the core elements of the programme in recognition of the parent/guardian as the prime educator of the child and to encourage the parent/guardian to become involved in their child's education.

The enrolments and costs in providing the Early Start programme are set out below. The teachers involved in Early Start units are assigned by the individual school and my Department does not collect individual data on the teachers employed in the Early Start programme. Specific salary costs can't therefore be provided. The salary costs have been estimated based on the numbers employed, with reference to the salary scales prevailing each year. The estimated cost of the programme including salary costs is was €6.1m for the 2009/2010 school year.

Early Start Pre-School Approx Cost from 1994 to 2010

School Year	Enrolment	No. of Schools	No. of Teaching Posts & CCW's	Cost of Early Start (excluding Teachers)	Cost of Early Start Teachers (Approx figures used)	Approx Total Cost
				€	€	€
1994/1995	369	8	13	191,267	409,500.00	600,767.00
1995/1996	1,593	40	56	1,013,565.88	1,812,830.32	2,826,396.20
1996/1997	1,566	40	56	1,121,913.90	1,848,000.00	2,969,913.90
1997/1998	1,558	40	56	1,169,074.51	1,904,000.00	3,073,074.51
1998/1999	1,538	40	55	1,230,493.60	1,925,000.00	3,155,493.60

School Year	Enrolment	No. of Schools	No. of Teaching Posts & CCW's	Cost of Early Start (excluding Teachers)	Cost of Early Start Teachers (Approx figures used)	Approx Total Cost
				€	€	€
1999/2000	1,613	40	56	1,279,300.60	2,044,000.00	3,323,300.60
2000/2001	1,619	40	56	1,793,370.29	2,240,000.00	4,033,370.29
2001/2002	1,492	40	56	1,801,727.61	2,296,000.00	4,097,727.61
2002/2003	1,529	40	56	1,881,083.28	2,520,000.00	4,401,083.28
2003/2004	1,565	40	56	1,978,780.28	2,744,000.00	4,722,780.28
2004/2005	1,603	40	56	1,734,783.48	2,912,000.00	4,646,783.48
2005/2006	1,603	40	56	2,226,922.90	3,080,000.00	5,306,922.90
2006/2007	1,598	40	56	2,320,296.31	3,248,000.00	5,568,296.31
2007/2008	1,583	40	56	2,462,086.05	3,600,000.00	6,062,086.05
2008/2009	1,572	40	56	2,520,043.18	3,472,000.00	5,992,043.18
2009/2010	1,535	40	56	2,473,718.57	3,584,000.00	6,057,718.57

Redundancy Payments

121. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo has not been informed by the Department of Education of the reason their redundancy payment has been reduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38514/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The person the Deputy refers to was consulted by my Department in relation to the reduction of the redundancy payment. The consultation was by telephone. I will arrange for a written explanation to issue to the person in question.

Schools Building Projects

122. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school (details supplied) in County Carlow; if this school will be included in the 2011 Capital Programme; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the conditions of the school has continued to deteriorate and that the planned extension and renovation for 2011 is essential; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38523/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department has recently received the Stage 2b (detailed design) submission for the project to which the Deputy refers. My officials are currently reviewing this documentation and will revert to the Board of Management when this review is complete.

The further progression of this project will be considered in the context of my Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme for 2011 and subsequent years. However, it is not possible to give a more indicative timeframe for the progression of the project to tender and construction at this time.

Higher Education Grants

123. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will consider an increase in the higher education grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38532/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant grant awarding authority i.e. the applicant's local authority or VEC. Where a grant application is refused, the reason for the refusal is given by the grant awarding authority.

An applicant may appeal the decision to the relevant local authority or VEC.

Where the grant awarding authority decides to reject the appeal, the applicant may appeal this decision to my Department by submitting an appeal form outlining clearly the grounds for the appeal. No appeal has been received by my Department to date from the candidate referred to by the Deputy.

124. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for grant assistance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38533/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant grant awarding authority i.e. the applicant's local authority or VEC.

Where a grant application is refused, the reason for the refusal is given by the grant awarding authority.

An applicant may appeal the decision to the relevant local authority or VEC.

Where the grant awarding authority decides to reject the appeal, the applicant may appeal this decision to my Department by submitting an appeal form outlining clearly the grounds for the appeal.

No appeal has been received by my Department to date from the candidate referred to by the Deputy.

125. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for a third level grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38537/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant assessing authority, i.e. the applicant's local authority or VEC. An applicant may appeal the decision to the relevant local authority or VEC.

Where the assessing authority decides to reject the appeal, the applicant may appeal this decision to my Department by submitting an appeal form outlining clearly the specific grounds for the appeal. No appeal has been received by my Department to date from the candidate referred to by the Deputy.

Schools Building Projects

126. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) in Dublin 7 will have a permanent location and facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38559/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Officials from my Department are in on-going discussions with Naomh Fionnbarra GAA regarding a design solution for the School referred to by the Deputy. The GAA club have confirmed that they are

agreeable, in principle, to surrendering their interest in the relevant land holding subject to technical issues being agreed. Once this acquisition is concluded, the proposed building project will be considered in the context of the capital budget available to my Department for school buildings generally.

Higher Education Grants

127. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills her plans to put in place a scheme to allow students at private third-level colleges to avail of student grants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38560/10]

141. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the reason third level maintenance grants are not available to persons attending a college (details supplied) in Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38712/10]

157. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will respond to a request from students in private third level colleges for their inclusion in access to the higher education grants scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39110/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 127, 141 and 157 together.

The statutory framework for the Higher Education Grants Scheme, as set out in the Local Authorities (Higher Education Grants) Acts, 1969 to 1992, provides for means-tested higher education grants to assist students to attend full-time third level education in approved institutions. The institutions approved under the scheme are, generally speaking, publicly-funded third level colleges offering full-time courses at undergraduate and post-graduate level. Each year, the Higher Education Grants Scheme specifies a list of institutions approved for the purposes of the scheme.

My Department provides very significant funding to publicly-funded third level institutions in the State. This funding is used to provide a very broad range of courses to meet both economic and societal needs. Private commercial colleges, in general, operate on a “for profit” basis and the State has no say in directing their operations. I have no plans to extend the scope of the student grant schemes to private colleges operated on a “for profit” basis at this time. My Department has received correspondence from the group referred to by the Deputy and a reply will issue shortly.

Schools Building Projects

128. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills when she will provide the new permanent school building for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 7 [38567/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Officials from my Department are in ongoing discussions with Naomh Fionnbarra GAA regarding a design solution for the School referred to by the Deputy. The GAA club have confirmed that they are agreeable, in principle, to surrendering their interest in the relevant land holding subject to technical issues being agreed. Once this acquisition is concluded, the proposed building project will be considered in the context of the capital budget available to my Department for school buildings generally.

School Evaluations

129. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills when a centre (details supplied) in Dublin 2 will receive the result of their whole school evaluation, which was carried out more than 10 months ago [38575/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): I am pleased to advise that the evaluation of the Centre referred to by the Deputy has been finalised. The evaluation was carried out within my Department as part of a review of projects funded under the Fund for the Development of Targeted Educational Responses to Certain Children at Risk. While the evaluation was not a Whole School Evaluation it was modelled on those applied to centres for education such as Youthreach.

This finalised report will issue shortly to the Centre.

Schools Building Projects

130. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will confirm that funding for the proposed extension of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 6 will include funding for ancillary space, stairs, toilets and a lift [38578/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the school to which he refers was approved an all-in devolved grant in April 2010 to construct four mainstream classrooms, one to replace a prefab and the other three to provide additional classroom accommodation.

A condition of devolved funding is that the school authority must manage the project within the grant level approved. Any costs associated with additional works completed outside the level of grant aid approved must be borne by the school authority. A letter clarifying this recently issued to the school authority.

131. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding funding for a new site and new school buildings (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38591/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): A suitable site has been identified which is in the ownership of Limerick County Council. My officials are in contact with the Council in relation to an agreed means of ownership/interest in the site. Once this acquisition is concluded, the proposed building project will be considered in the context of the capital budget available to my Department for school buildings generally.

Higher Education Grants

132. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will amend the eligibility criteria for student grant support to ensure that families and parents solely reliant on payments under the non-means-tested illness benefit are entitled to the full support including the top-up payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38592/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education made detailed recommendations concerning the introduction of special rates of maintenance grants for disadvantaged students.

The target group of “those most in need” was defined in terms of the dependants of people receiving long-term welfare payments, where the necessary conditions are fulfilled.

To qualify for the Special Rate of maintenance grant, an applicant must qualify for the ordinary maintenance grant in respect of the 2010/11 academic year. In addition, total reckonable income must not exceed a specified amount, which is €22,703 in the 2009 tax year. Finally, on the operative date, 31st December 2009 for the 2010/11 academic year, the reckonable income must include one of the eligible long-term social welfare payments prescribed under the scheme.

Illness Benefit is considered to be a short-term payment and, therefore, it is not included as an eligible payment for the purposes of the special rates of maintenance grant.

Schools Refurbishment

133. **Deputy Michael D’Arcy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills when emergency works will be sanctioned for and commenced on a school (details supplied) in County Wexford which has made an application under the emergency works scheme 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38608/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): An application for funding under Emergency Works was submitted by the school in question. However, following an assessment of the application and in light of the nature and scale of the works involved it is not possible to provide funding at this time. It is open to the school authority to submit an application for these works under the next round of the Summer Works Scheme.

Higher Education Grants

134. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if her attention has been drawn to the delays being experienced by third level students in the processing of their applications for higher education grants; if her further attention has been drawn to the staff shortages in councils and vocational education committees that are contributing to these delays; her plans to resolve the issue [38612/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The process of paying third level or further education grants is a matter for the relevant local authority or VEC. I am aware that the timing of payment varies between the 66 awarding bodies depending on a number of variables including the volume of applications received, staffing resources and whether or not properly completed application forms have been received.

This year’s student grant schemes include a number of significant administrative and service improvements aimed at addressing the issue of delays which include an initial roll-out of a new on-line grant application system. The new system, introduced in both Irish and English, is already now operating in 11 grant awarding authorities. Building on this initial phase for the current academic year, the ultimate aim will be to make it available to all applicants nationally.

The on-line system is part of a package of administrative and service improvements brought to the student grant schemes this year. Key among the other changes are a complete overhaul of the grant application form, streamlined administrative processes, advance payments to awarding authorities and publication of the grant schemes some two months earlier than last year.

Regarding the staffing position in Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and local authorities, the Deputy will be aware of the Government decision to implement a recruitment and

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promotion moratorium in the public sector, including in these bodies. Work prioritisation across different functions, and how available staff are deployed to execute those functions, are matters for the management of each VEC and local authority concerned.

Schools Building Projects

135. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the progress regarding a school (details supplied) in County Cork; when she expects each stage of the works to take place; if she will provide a timescale for the works and when she expects the project to be completed [38629/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The school to which the Deputy refers is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning. An application for a Disability Access Certificate (DAC) has been made to the Local Authority and a decision is pending. Once the DAC is received, and assuming no problems arise, it is envisaged that the project will then progress to tender and construction.

Special Educational Needs

136. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of special needs assistants employed in primary, special and post-primary schools in Waterford city in each of the past five years and to date in 2010; the number of special needs pupils benefiting in Waterford city in each of those years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38652/10]

137. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of special needs assistants employed in primary, special and post-primary schools in County Waterford in each of the past five years and to date in 2010; the number of special needs pupils benefitting in County Waterford in each of those years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38653/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 and 137 together.

The information requested by the Deputy on the number of special needs assistants employed in Waterford City and County is not readily available. The number of Special Needs Assistants employed nationally in each of the past five years and on 30th September 2010 is available in the attached document. The details for each of the past five years are the December figures for the year in question. The primary schools information is inclusive of the special schools details.

As the Deputy will be aware, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

The Deputy is aware that my Department is very supportive of the SNA scheme. It has been a key factor in both ensuring the successful integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream education and providing support to pupils enrolled in special schools and special classes. The SNA scheme will continue to be supported and 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.

Number of Special Needs Assistants

Year	Number of Special Needs Assistants in Primary schools	Number of Special Needs Assistants in Post Primary Schools, including VECs.
2005	6,273	1,021
2006	6,974	1,416
2007	8,038	1,786
2008	8,440	2,002
2009	8,392	1,950
30/09/2010	8,141	2,065

Schools Building Projects

138. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding grant aid to a school (details supplied) towards the provision of two resource rooms and ancillary costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38664/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The school to which the Deputy refers applied to my Department in 2005 for large scale capital funding for an extension and refurbishment. The application was assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects and assigned a band rating of 2.5. Information in respect of the current school building programme along with all assessed applications for major capital works, including the project referred to by the Deputy, is available on the Department's website at www.education.ie. The school authority has recently applied to my Department for additional accommodation for resource teaching. This application is currently under consideration and a decision will issue to the school authority in due course.

Vocational Education Committees

139. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the implications of her proposal to amalgamate a committee (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38678/10]

158. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills when she will bring forward legislation to reduce the number of vocational education committees from 33 to 16; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39114/10]

159. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she has decided the number of representatives on each vocational education committee once they have been rationalised from 33 to 16; if a net reduction on the number of committee members is envisaged under the reform; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39115/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139, 158 and 159 together.

At this point the only firm and absolute decisions taken by the Government are to reduce the overall number of VECs from 33 to 16 and the merger of particular counties. My Department has commenced work on the preparation of legislation so that it can be brought forward in 2011. Many of the detailed aspects of the restructuring, including the location of the head-

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quarters of the new VECs, the number of representatives on each VEC and the number of administrative staff which each of the new VEC entities will have, will fall to be considered and worked through by my Department in conjunction with the VECs involved in any one merger before decisions are taken.

Schools Building Projects

140. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills when permission will be granted for a design team to be appointed to the school building project for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 16; the timeline she envisages for the building project through to completion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38687/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): As the Deputy will be aware, on 16 February last, details of the major school building projects to enter into architectural planning this year were announced. The project for the school referred to by the Deputy was included in this announcement and work has begun on formulating the project brief. As part of this process, my Department's Professional and Technical Staff will be inspecting the proposed site for the new school during next week. Following the site visit and based on the findings of the site visit, my Department will then be in contact with the school authority regarding the progression of the project into architectural planning. At this early stage in the process, it is not possible to be specific about a timeline for completion of the project.

Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 127.

Pension Provisions

142. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will respond to the issues raised in correspondence (details supplied) [38718/10]

143. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare [38719/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 142 and 143 together.

There was an initial difficulty in locating records in respect of this individual who worked in the Department in a temporary capacity on a number of occasions during the 1970's due to the way her name was recorded at the time. However, after further clarification and information was provided all verified service has now transferred to her current Superannuation Scheme and correspondence has issued to the individual informing her of same. There is however an outstanding difficulty in locating any record in respect of one of the years that the person wishes to claim pensionable service and officials from my Department will be in contact with the individual in this regard with a view to resolving the situation as soon as possible.

FÁS Training Programmes

144. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the details regarding a FÁS programme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38741/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the "JobFit" programme provided by TGB Learning

Ltd and which is being funded by the Labour Market Activation Fund. The Fund is being managed by my Department and FAS has no role in its administration.

The Labour Market Activation Fund is designed to assist in the creation of innovative training and education provision by private, not-for-profit and public sector providers. It is targeted at specific priority groups among the unemployed, namely the low skilled, and those formerly employed in declining sectors — construction, retail and manufacturing sectors — with particular emphasis on the under 35s and the long-term unemployed. Following an open tender competition in which 370 tenders were received, offers of funding were initially made to 26 organisations across the private, not-for-profit and public sectors to support specific training and education programmes for the priority groups.

TBG Learning are a member of the Rehab Group. The Company has been contracted to deliver the JobFit programme in the following locations in Dublin at Blanchardstown, Smithfield and Tallaght and in Athlone, Castlebar, Cork, Dundalk, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford. Work experience is provided by local employers for periods of up to 4 full weeks, delivered flexibly according to employer and participants needs. Participants who successfully complete the programmes will receive recognised certification and these programmes will provide an opportunity for unemployed individuals to enhance their career prospects in a meaningful and realistic way and will provide a stepping stone for these people to pursue a career in their chosen profession.

TBG Learning has informed my Department that there are currently 694 participants on the various courses being provided and it should be noted that this figure exceeds the anticipated intake for October 2010. Of the start up number 51 participants have recently attained employment and this figure is expected to rise over the coming months. Further courses will commence throughout the remainder of 2010 and in early 2011 and it is anticipated that a total of 1,500 participants will avail of the programme. A total sum of €7.03m funding has been allocated to the running of these programmes from start to their finish in 2011. Funding is provided to the contracted bodies in 3 tranches.

A progress report on implementation of the project is due from TBG by end October 2010 and this will confirm progress at the various centres. In line with the contractual agreement TBG Learning are formally required to submit a Programme Evaluation Report to the Department of Education and Skills. The Report must show how completion of the programme has enhanced opportunities for its participants, and how the programme has progressed participants to full or part-time employment, or self-employment, or to further training or educational attainment connected with labour market opportunity. The Report must also show how value for money was delivered in the programmes. This final report is not due until completion of the programme. The Contracted Body were also advised to pay particular attention to the relevant ESF Regulations and Circulars and to those items qualifying as eligible expenditure and to expenditure, which is not eligible for a contribution from the ESF.

Departmental officials will be visiting one or more of the locations listed above as part of our monitoring process and further payments will not be made to the contracted body until such time as my Department is satisfied that they have adhered to the terms of the tender and subsequent contract. As part of this exercise, checks on sources of funding will be undertaken, including checks on such issues as duplication of funding.

Education Provision

145. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding provision planned in the areas of primary, post-primary and special needs

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education for patients within the proposed new national children's hospital of Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38742/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I wish to confirm for the Deputy that education provision is being planned for children within the proposed new National Children's Hospital and my Department is liaising with representatives of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board regarding this provision. Provision is presently made to ensure that a measure of interim education is provided for hospitalised children in a number of hospital based schools. Such schools are supported by lower pupil teacher ratios of 10:1 which are designed to take into account the various needs and ages of the children concerned and their individual curriculum progress. It is planned that similar hospital based schooling will be provided at the new National Children's Hospital.

Departmental Correspondence

146. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will respond to issues raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38745/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The position is that the governance and day to day activities of the Institute concerned are matters for which the management authorities and the Governing Body of the Institute are responsible. My Department does not have any function in relation to the day to day operational affairs of the Institution or in relation to decisions about the programmes of study that it provides. It is my understanding that demand from students is a key factor in relation to such decisions and in the absence of a sufficient level of demand it may not be possible to offer a particular programme in any given year. It is also my understanding that each individual year of the programme referred to provides for a distinct level of certification.

Third Level Fees

147. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she can ensure that there will be no increase in student service charges at third level in 2011; if the student assistance fund will be applied to part-time students experiencing difficulties continuing their education; if she will commit to streamlining of the grants system for third level students to ensure ease of access for all and if she will commit to no reduction in maintenance grants for third level students [38751/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Deputy will appreciate that the preparation of the Estimates is carried out on a strictly confidential basis and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on specific issues or proposals including the student service charge, the maintenance grant or the student assistant fund at this stage. However, all proposals made in relation to education expenditure will be considered in the context of the Budget.

In line with the Transforming Public Services agenda, it is intended that the student grants administration process will be streamlined to create one consolidated student grant scheme to be administered by a single grant awarding authority. The main objective of this reform of the administrative arrangements is to bring about greater simplicity and efficiency to the system. The new administrative arrangements will be fully customer focused to ensure the efficient and timely delivery of grants to those students who demonstrate an entitlement. The Student Support Bill, due to progress to Committee Stage shortly, will provide an enabling legislative

framework for the provision of all student grants, facilitating the creation of the single consolidated grants scheme and underpinning the reform and streamlining of administration procedures for the management of the grant awarding process.

Community Employment Schemes

148. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if he will clarify the conditions under which persons can qualify for participation in community employment schemes and, in particular, any exclusion of persons performing casual work at weekends; and if he will ensure that such restrictions do not exclude persons who are trying their best by taking up casual opportunities that come their way [38823/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): FÁS has advised that the criteria for participating in the FÁS Community Employment Scheme (CE) are based on age and length of time in receipt of various social welfare payments, and are as follows:

- Part-time Integration Option (PTI)
- One year version of CE for people aged 25 years and over who are receiving social welfare payments for 12 months or more.
- Part-time Job Option (PTJ)
- Three year version of CE, (based on annually renewable contracts) for people aged 35 years and over and who are receiving social welfare payments for 3 years or more.

The social welfare payments referred to above are:

- Jobseekers Benefit (JB)
- Jobseekers Allowance (JA)
- One Parent Family Payment (OPFP)
- Widows/Widowers Contributory Pension
- Widows/Widowers Non-Contributory Pension
- Deserted Wife's Benefit (DWB)
- Farm Assist (FA)

Time spent in receipt of Carer's Allowance can also count towards the 12-month eligibility period (3 years for PTJ), but caring responsibilities must have ceased and the person must currently be in receipt of either JA, JB or OPFP.

The following are also eligible for participation on CE:

- People aged 18 years or over (35 years or over for PTJ) and are currently in receipt of any of Disability Allowance, Blind Pension, Invalidity Pension and Illness Benefit for six months or more
- Travellers aged 18 years or over, who are unemployed and in receipt of Jobseekers Benefit, Jobseekers Allowance for any period (12 months for PTJ) or One Parent Family Payment for 1 year or longer. In the case of Travellers under 18 years of age, a minimum of 12 months spent in a Travellers Training Centre is enough for eligibility

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- All refugees aged 18 years or over, as authenticated by the Department of Justice and Law Reform, in receipt of payments from the Department of Social Protection
- Persons aged 18 years or over inhabiting the offshore islands
- Ex-offenders aged 18 years or over (35 years or over for PTJ) and referred by the Probation Service. Also, Ex-offenders aged 18 and over (35 years or over for PTJ) and not referred by the Probation Service and in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance or Jobseekers Benefit for a period of one year or more (3 years for PTJ). Time spent as a prisoner is regarded as reckonable when considering the duration unemployed
- Persons aged 18 years or over referred by the Drugs Task Force.

Time spent on recognised training or employment programmes (such as a FÁS training course) can also be counted towards eligibility. Eligibility to participate on CE for both PTI and PTJ is linked to those in receipt of an Irish social welfare payment. Those persons not meeting the criteria under these options, or who are signing for credits, or receiving social welfare benefits from a different country, are not eligible to participate on CE.

FÁS has advised that, in assessing eligibility for CE, recipients of JA or JB are allowed a maximum of 30 worked days in the 12 months prior to commencing. CE is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis. CE helps long-term unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to a work routine and to assist them to enhance/develop both their technical and personal skills.

CE is not designed to cater for short-term unemployed people as they are not as far removed from the open labour market as the main client group for the programme. To facilitate some short-term employment opportunities, breaks off the live register up to 30 days in total (i.e. 30 worked days) are permissible within the 12-month eligibility period, while still maintaining eligibility for CE. The reason for the 30-day live register break rule is to ensure that the programme responds to its primary target group of long-term unemployed clients. Many unemployed people engage in work of a temporary nature. If the programme were open to these individuals, there is a danger that people would leave their employment, albeit of a temporary nature, in order to participate in CE. This would be contrary to the objective of the programme and result in a Labour Market Intervention competing with the open labour market. In circumstances where breaks off the live register exceed 30 days, other interventions may be more appropriate than CE.

School Staffing

149. **Deputy Shane McEntee** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in County Meath will still be entitled to another mainstream teacher in 2011 [39018/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule for the 2011-2012 school year will be published on my Department's website in early 2011. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools who are dissatisfied with their staffing allocation and the appeals criteria are outlined in the staffing

schedule (Primary Circular 0021/2010) for the current school year. The final staffing position for all schools for the 2011-2012 school year will ultimately not be known until the Autumn of 2011. At that stage the allocation process will be fully completed for mainstream classroom teachers and any appeals to the Staffing Appeals Board will have been considered.

Schools Building Projects

150. **Deputy Shane McEntee** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if two 16-teacher schools (details supplied) in County Meath will be built now that four acres of land have been recently purchased [39019/10]

171. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding funding for a school (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39405/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 150 and 171 together.

I can confirm to the Deputies that the Patron of the school to which they refer has recently confirmed to my Department that he has acquired additional land adjacent to the school and a neighbouring school to facilitate an expansion of the accommodation provided at both schools. My Department considers that the provision of 16 mainstream classrooms plus appropriate ancillary accommodation in both schools will meet the needs of the area.

Projects for the schools have been assigned a band 1 rating and the progression of all large scale building projects, including these projects, from initial design stage through to construction phase will be considered in the context of the Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. However, in light of current competing demands on the Department's capital budget, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the projects at this time.

Computerisation Programme

151. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the reason post leaving certificate students and colleges were excluded from his announcement last week of funding for IT equipment (details supplied) [39024/10]

153. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills further to her announcement on 15 October 2010, that 698 post primary schools would receive €21 million in grants for information and communications technology equipment, the reason 34 vocational educational committee schools have been excluded from this funding; the rationale behind this decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39053/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 151 and 153 together.

As the Deputies are aware, I recently announced the distribution of €20.75m in post-primary level ICT Infrastructure grants under the ICT in Schools Programme. These capital grants are designed to assist schools in the integration of ICT into teaching and learning in a curricular context from Junior to Senior cycles. At present, there is a particular emphasis on supporting the revised Maths curricula in tandem with the national rollout of Project Maths.

The PLC programme is a self-contained whole-time learning experience designed to provide successful participants with specific vocational skills to enhance their prospects of securing lasting, full-time employment, or progression to other studies. It caters for those who: have

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completed senior cycle education, and require further vocational education and training to enhance their prospects of employment or progression to other studies; are adults returning to education, who may not have completed the senior cycle, but are deemed by the provider to have the necessary competencies and capacity to undertake the programme.

The aim of the PLC programme is to provide participants with specific vocational skills. It is intended, therefore, that this programme will provide for a more intensive development of technical skills, including new technologies, combining opportunities for work experience, vocational studies and general studies. Providers must demonstrate a labour market justification for the programmes being proposed. Therefore programme content must be relevant to labour market needs and/or progression to further studies.

Staff are allocated to deliver PLC courses on the basis of a pupil teacher ratio (PTR) of 17:1. Enhanced PLC capitation of €185.38 in addition to the standard post-primary non-pay grants is provided, based on the number of approved places or enrolments in the previous academic year, whichever is the lower. The annual grant is intended to help defray overheads on PLC courses including repairs and maintenance. Learners who satisfy the terms of the PLC Maintenance Grant Scheme are eligible to receive maintenance grants. In this context, it would not have been appropriate to include PLC enrolments in the ICT Infrastructure Grants, which focus on second-level curricular contexts from junior to senior cycle.

Higher Education Grants

152. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if the Student Support Bill intends to provide financial assistance under the higher education grants scheme to students attending approved private third level education facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39040/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Higher Education Grants Scheme operates under the Local Authorities (Higher Education Grants) Acts, 1968 to 1992. Each year, the scheme specifies a list of approved institutions for grants purposes. Private commercial colleges operating on a “for profit” basis are not generally approved for grants purposes.

Section 8 of the Student Support Bill as published makes provision for the Minister, in certain circumstances and taking certain matters into account, to prescribe an educational institution as being an approved institution for grants purposes. However, I have no plans to extend the scope of the student grant schemes to private colleges operated on a “for profit” basis at this time.

Question No. 153 answered with Question No. 151.

154. **Deputy John Cregan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the reason her Department advised Limerick County Council to include a once-off way leave compensation payment when calculating means for the purpose of determining qualification for a higher education grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick [39074/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I understand that my Department received a general query from Limerick County Council with regard to treatment of way leave compensation for the purpose of calculation of reckonable means under the student grant schemes. The position as outlined in the application form and guidance notes

is that disposal of assets and rights should be included in calculating reckonable income for grant purposes.

The Deputy will appreciate, however, that the decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant grant awarding authority i.e. the applicant's local authority or VEC. Where a grant application is refused, the reason for the refusal is given by the grant awarding authority. An applicant may appeal the decision to the relevant local authority or VEC. Where the grant awarding authority decides to reject the appeal, the applicant may appeal this decision to my Department by submitting an appeal form outlining clearly the grounds for the appeal. No appeal has been received by my Department to date from the candidate referred to by the Deputy.

155. **Deputy John Cregan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the reason a course (details supplied) is not grant aided [39076/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The course referred to by the Deputy has not been approved as it has not been demonstrated that it represents academic progression from the qualification required for entry to the course.

Schools Refurbishment

156. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she has received an application for funding in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; if this application can be expedited in the interests of safety and comfort for pupils and staff; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39101/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): An application for funding under Emergency Works was submitted by the school in question. However, following an assessment of the application and in light of the nature and scale of the works involved it is not possible to provide funding at this time. It is open to the school authority to submit an application for these works under the next round of the Summer Works Scheme.

Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 127.

Questions Nos. 158 and 159 answered with Question No. 139.

Departmental Expenditure

160. **Deputy Johnny Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the amount spent by her Department and also by any bodies under her Department's jurisdiction in each of the last three years on the provision of Internet applications (details supplied); the processes in place to ensure that such funds have been spent on good quality Internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection [39127/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department has spent the following amounts in connection with internet applications in the past 3 years:

2007 — €2,267,000;

2008 — €2,294,000;

2009 — €1,412,000 .

These internet applications include my Department's website, the Display Energy Certificate website and the esinet portal, which supports the electronic transfer of data between schools

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and my Department. Each of the applications supported by esinet and all major enhancements to these applications are subjected to extensive user acceptance testing and are often piloted in a select number of schools before going live. Furthermore, the Department has a contract in place with an independent security company which provides six monthly security health checks on all our internet applications. This company also offers advice on data protection issues for these applications.

With regard to the bodies under the aegis of my Department, the provision of internet applications is an operational matter for each individual body and the information is not collated centrally.

Education Provision

161. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the provision of an educate together school for the Kenmare area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39133/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): As I previously indicated to the House, a review of the procedures for the establishment of new primary schools is currently being carried out under the Commission on School Accommodation. In the interim it is not proposed to recognise any new primary schools, except in areas where the increases in pupil numbers cannot be catered for in existing schools and which require the provision of new schools. The Commission is due to report to me shortly at which time I will have to consider the policy matters and necessary arrangements and revised procedures that will need to be put in place.

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. The study indicated that the requirement for additional primary provision in the short to medium term is likely to be greatest in more than 40 identified locations across the country based on significant changes to the demographics of those areas. The Kenmare area was not included in these initial identified areas.

Forward Planning Section of my Department will continue to analyse demographic trends to determine the level of additional provision which will be required into the future. Overall school requirements in the area referred to will be considered in this context.

Schools Building Projects

162. **Deputy Charlie O'Connor** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the building programme issues relating to a school (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39151/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department is aware of the difficulties that have arisen between the school in question, the building contractor and the Consultant Architect that has resulted in delaying the satisfactory conclusion of this project.

The bulk of the funding due for payment under the terms of the contract between the school and the contractor for this project has issued to the school on foot of appropriate certification that certain works have been completed. This is a normal requirement before funding can be provided in relation to school projects. The dismissal of the Consultant Architect by the school authority has created difficulties in relation to final certification of the satisfactory completion

of the project and, consequently, payment of the balance of funding due. Officials from my Department have recently written to the School Management Authority requested a meeting and as soon as a reply is received a meeting to discuss the ongoing difficulties will be arranged.

School Transport

163. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if he will support special needs pupils transport requirements (details supplied) [39167/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): The school transport scheme, which is operated by Bus Éireann on my Department's behalf, facilitates the transportation of over 125,000 children to primary and post-primary schools each day including approximately 8,000 children with special educational needs. Children with special needs are eligible for School Transport if s/he is attending the nearest recognised: mainstream school, special class/ special school or a unit, that is or can be resourced, to meet the child's special educational needs under Department of Education and Science criteria.

Bus Éireann endeavours to ensure that a reasonable level of transport service is provided for each eligible child. The safety of pupils travelling on school transport services is of paramount importance to the Department and Bus Éireann. In some cases the service provided may include an individual taxi and escort where the child's care and safety needs are such that they warrant this level of support. In general, transport for children with special needs is provided from home to school and from school to home. The provision of school transport to and from respite services is not a feature of the scheme, rather it is a service which has evolved over time and transport has been availed of on an incidental basis.

There are complex, individualised transport arrangements required for the children availing of a school transport service to a respite centre. These attendance patterns do not fit into general school transport arrangements and there are potential safety risks which need to be addressed. School bus services do not have the flexibility to provide morning only, evening only, or services on certain days only for certain children and different days for others. While individual arrangements were put in place in some instances in previous years, the level of individual planning and monitoring that this type of service provision would involve is not provided for under the School Transport Scheme and difficulties have arisen with the continuing implementation of existing arrangements.

In light of this, an examination of the current position in respect of transport to and from respite centres has been initiated in conjunction with the HSE with a view to formulating clear policy guidelines on the matter. Aspects to be considered will include the location of respite services identified relative to existing school bus routes, clarity on responsibility for the child transferring between school transport and respite arrangements, the complexity and regularity of individual respite arrangements and cost.

All new applications for transport to respite, including the case referred to by the Deputy, are to be considered in the light of these guidelines.

Legislative Programme

164. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills when the Student Support Bill will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39170/10]

169. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills her plans to introduce a centralised grants agency to replace the present multiple agency system in

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light of the increased number of applications; the savings projected to result from the creation of a single agency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39394/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 169 together.

The Deputy will be aware that, in line with the Transforming Public Services agenda, it is intended that the student grants administration process will be streamlined to create one consolidated student grant scheme to be administered by a single grant awarding authority. The main objective of this reform of the administrative arrangements is to bring about greater simplicity and efficiency to the system. The new administrative arrangements will be fully customer focused to ensure the efficient and timely delivery of grants to those students who demonstrate an entitlement.

The Student Support Bill, due to progress to Committee Stage shortly, will provide an enabling legislative framework for the provision of all student grants, facilitating the creation of the single consolidated grants scheme and underpinning the reform and streamlining of administration procedures for the management of the grant awarding process. This reform programme has the potential to deliver a significant service enhancement benefit to student grant applicants through streamlined processes, greater consistency in dealing with applications, faster processing due to economies of scale and full implementation of the on-line applications system introduced in September 2010. It is anticipated that it will also deliver substantial administrative cost savings beyond the initial transitional phase. The extent of savings in each area will depend on the implementation mechanisms to be agreed following selection of the single grant awarding authority.

Departmental Agencies

165. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under her Department's control; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39233/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The details requested by the Deputy are set out in the table below.

Bodies under the aegis of the Department of Education & Skills — Board members as of October 2010

Name of Board	Total Board Members	Total appointed directly by Minister	Total appointed by Minister on nomination of other body
(CICA) Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse	7	7	0
COGG (An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta)	21	3	18
EFB (Education Finance Board)	9	4	4
FÁS (Foras Áiseanna Saothair)	10	10	0
FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council)	18	5	13
GDA (Grangegorman Development Agency)	15	7	7
HEA (Higher Education Authority)	19	19	0
HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council)	15	5	10
IRCHSS (Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences)	12	10	0
IRCSET (Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology))	15	15	0
Leargas — The Exchange Bureau	9	8	1

Name of Board	Total Board Members	Total appointed directly by Minister	Total appointed by Minister on nomination of other body
NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment)	25	2	23
NCGE (National Centre for Guidance in Education)	10	2	8
NCSE (National Council for Special Education)	13	at least 6	up to 7
NCTE (National Centre for Technology in Education)	There is no Board for the National Centre for Technology in Education		
NEWB (National Educational Welfare Board)	13	1	11
NQAI (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland)	14	3	11
(RIRB) Residential Institutions Redress Board	12	12	0
(RIRC) Residential Institutions Review Committee	5	5	0
SEC (State Examinations Commission)	5	Commissioners are appointed by the Government on the nomination of the Minister	
Skillnets Ltd	13	3	0
The Teaching Council	37	3	2

166. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the annual budget of each State agency under her Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39247/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information requested is currently being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects

167. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if a successful contractor has been chosen for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare following the evaluation of the tender report [39264/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department recently received the Tender Report for the school to which the Deputy refers. Further clarification was required on a number of items in the report. This clarification is currently awaited. When this clarification is received and assessed, assuming that no issues arise, it is envisaged that the contract will be awarded and the project will progress to construction.

Question No. 168 answered with Question No. 111.

Question No. 169 answered with Question No. 164.

Departmental Contracts

170. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the details of any contractual commitments her Department has to a company (details supplied) in respect of services rendered; to set out a schedule of any payments made to this company, including the exact date of these payments and their amount in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and to date in 2010; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that this company has been placed in examinership; if

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there are any outstanding payments due to this company; if the placing of this company into examinership has any impact on any such outstanding payments; if her further attention has been drawn to the fact that many sub-contractors have provided goods and services to the State through the company and are still awaiting final payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39396/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): A contract existed between my Department and the company to which the Deputy refers in respect of works at the Navan Education Centre. The value of the contract was €255,023 inclusive of VAT. Payments totalling this amount have issued as follows:

16/9/09 = €118,805;

12/10/09 = €84,711.18;

23/9/10 = €19,107.73;

14/10/10 = €32,399.04.

I am aware that the company has been placed in examinership. As the Deputy will appreciate contractual matters involving sub-contractors and the company/Examiner are for resolution between these parties.

Question No. 171 answered with Question No. 150.

Schools Building Projects

172. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for extension works to a school (details supplied) in County Meath; if she will give details of the amount of funding she intends to provide for the extension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39406/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I can confirm that the school to which the Deputy refers has made an application to my Department for large scale capital funding for an extension. The application has been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects and assigned a band 2 rating. Information in respect of the current school building programme along with all assessed applications for major capital works, including the project referred to by the Deputy, is available on the Department's website at www.education.ie. The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction phase will be considered in the context of the Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. However, in light of current competing demands on the Department's capital budget, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

173. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding plans to provide a new premises for a school (details supplied) in County Meath; if a site has been decided upon; the level of funding allocated for the new school; the time frame for the school to be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39407/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department acquired a site for a post-primary school under the Redress

Scheme for the school in question. The technical report in relation to this site deemed the size and location of the site generally suitable for a 700 pupil Post Primary School. The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction phase will be considered in the context of the Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. However, in light of current competing demands on the capital budget of the Department, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

174. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide details of the amount of funding that has been allocated nationally, in tabular form, for all works done on primary and secondary schools from 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; for this information to be provided on a county by county basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39408/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. I will forward the information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

175. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the plans for an extension to a secondary school (details supplied) in County Meath; the reason for the delay in the building this extension; the target date for completion of the extension; the levels of funding for the extension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39409/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I can confirm that the school to which the Deputy refers has made an application to my Department for large scale capital funding for an extension. The application has been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects and assigned a band 1.2 rating. Information in respect of the current school building programme along with all assessed applications for major capital works, including the project referred to by the Deputy, is available on the Department's website at www.education.ie. The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction phase will be considered in the context of the Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. However, in light of current competing demands on the capital budget of the Department, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

Physical Education Facilities

176. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Meath for a grant for a recreational hall; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39410/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school to which she refers renewed its application to my Department to proceed with the construction of a GP room and the conversion of the existing GP room to ancillary purposes. My officials raised some queries regarding the proposal with the school authority and are awaiting further information from the school authority in this regard. When this information is received, my Department will consider the application in the context of the available resources and competing demands for capital funding and convey a decision on the matter to the school authority.

Schools Building Projects

177. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills her plans for the provision of a new school (details supplied) as the local board of management has provided a site as the present school is overcrowded, on a restricted site, with health risks for children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39420/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The school to which the Deputy refers has applied to my Department for large scale capital funding for an extension and refurbishment. The application has been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects and assigned a band 2 rating.

Information in respect of the current school building programme along with all assessed applications for major capital works, including the project referred to by the Deputy, is available on the Department's website at www.education.ie.

My Department understands that it is the Board of Management's intention to procure a site for a new school. The progression of all large scale building projects, including a project for this school, from initial design stage through to construction phase will be considered in the context of my Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. However, in light of current competing demands on the Department's capital budget, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time. My officials have conveyed this position to the school authority.

In the meantime, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department has recently approved devolved funding to the school authority to construct two classrooms to meet the school's immediate accommodation needs. My Department understands that it is the school authority's intention to construct two permanent classrooms with this funding on the school's existing site.

FÁS Training Programmes

178. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will ensure that an issue (details supplied) is resolved as soon as possible and ensure that participants on the programme are given their full entitlements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39446/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): The Minister does not have a role in the administration of individual cases. The administration of individual cases is a day-to-day matter for FÁS as part of its responsibility under the Labour Services Act 1987.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

179. **Deputy Michael Kennedy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills in relation to survivors of institutional child abuse whose claims came before the redress board, the number of claims that were refused on a year to year basis in the period 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010, on the basis that the applicant was not a resident in an institution outlined in schedule A of the governing legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39447/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): While my Department is aware of the total number of applicants to the Residential Institutions Redress Board whose applications were unsuccessful, it does not have a breakdown indicating numbers who were unsuccessful on the basis that they had not been resident in a scheduled institution.

My Department has contacted the Board in relation to the Deputy's question and I understand that the records are not maintained in such a format as to allow this information to be readily accessed. I further understand that the retrieval and examination of such records would be a costly and labour intensive exercise for the Board. However, I would like to draw the Deputy's attention to the Newsletters which appear on the Board's website — www.rirb.ie — and which provide regular updates in relation to the application and award process. The July 2010 edition of the Newsletter states that “by and large applications have been refused as, on the face of the documentation, the application was outside the Board's terms of reference as laid down in the 2002 Act. In other words, the applications did not relate to residential institutions as defined in the Act.”

Special Educational Needs

180. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of whole time equivalent special needs assistants presently employed in the primary and post primary school system respectively; the corresponding figure for the last school year; the steps she will take to protect this service from budget cuts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39448/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

I can confirm for the Deputy that there were 8,403 whole-time equivalent (wte) SNAs employed in Primary schools in September 2009 and 8,141 in September 2010. At post primary level there were 1,911 wte SNAs employed in September 2009 and 2,065 in September 2010.

I do not intend to comment on budgetary issues but I can confirm for the Deputy that my Department is very supportive of the SNA scheme. It has been a key factor in both ensuring the successful integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream education and providing support to pupils enrolled in special schools and special classes.

Higher Education Grants

181. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the qualifying criteria for the higher education grant top up; if exceptional costs such as mortgage repayments can be taken into consideration; if she will review the conditions of the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39449/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): To qualify for the special rate of student grant, an applicant must qualify for the ordinary student grant in respect of the 2010/11 academic year. In addition, total reckonable income must not exceed a specified amount, which is €22,703 in the 2009 tax year. Finally, on the operative date, 31st December 2009 for the 2010/11 academic year, the reckonable income must include one of the eligible long-term social welfare payments prescribed under the scheme. There are no plans at present to extend the current arrangements. Any such extension could only be considered in the light of available resources and other competing demands within the education sector.

Flood Relief

182. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Finance the progress made on introducing an early warning system for adverse weather conditions in view of the devastation caused during the winter of 2009 and early 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38681/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The issue of a national flood warning system was raised with me by a number of public representatives during the severe flood event of November 2009. At that time I gave an undertaking that the OPW would examine the issue and bring forward recommendations. The issue was re-iterated in the Fourth Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Environment Heritage and Local Government — The Management of Severe Weather Events in Ireland and related matters was published in July 2010.

Prior to the publication of the report of the Joint Committee in July, OPW had, already, commissioned a feasibility study on the provision of a national flood forecasting and flood warning system. The purpose of this study is to examine the potential benefits and assess the options for delivery of such a service. The study will also examine the procedures and infrastructure required for a flood forecasting and flood warning service including the resourcing installation, maintenance and operation of any possible system or systems. It is expected that the study will be completed in early 2011. An extensive consultation with the primary stakeholders has already been carried out as a central part of the overall feasibility study.

In parallel with the national study, existing catchment-based flood forecasting systems are being piloted at Mallow and Clonmel and a further assessment is being carried out on the Lee catchment. The extensive experience and knowledge gained from the practical operation of these local systems will be an invaluable guide to the present study of national requirements. Clearly the feasibility of any system or systems which the report may propose will be predicated on the ability to resource not only the commissioning of any such system, but critically, its ongoing implementation and operation.

Croke Park Agreement

183. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance the action taken by him from the date of acceptance of the Croke Park Agreement to establish cost saving measures; if all aspects of the deal are now being complied with; the changes made in his Department relative to the agreement; if staff numbers have been affected; if staff have been transferred from his Department or recruited from other Departments; the savings achieved because of the agreement. [39005/10]

200. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the make up of the implementation body relative to the Croke Park Agreement; the list of nominating bodies and their nominees; if he has nominees on the body; if the private sector is represented on the body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39006/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 183 and 200 together.

The Implementation Body provided for under the Croke Park Agreement comprises the independent chair, Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick, whose appointment was agreed by the parties, and nominees representing both public service management and the Public Service Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. The nominees to the Implementation Body from the Public Service Management side are Ciaran Connolly and Brendan Duffy from the Public Service Management Division of the Department of Finance, and Philip Kelly of the Department of the Taoiseach. The nominees from the Public Service Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions are Mr. Seamus Cody, Ms. Sheila Nunan, Ms. Patricia King and Mr. Tom Geraghty. The Agreement is between Public Service Management as employer and the Public Service Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and does not provide for any external representation from the private sector on the Implementation Body.

The Implementation Body in its regular meetings has concentrated on establishing the sectoral implementation bodies provided for under the Agreement and on reviewing the sectoral Action Plans which have been submitted by each Government Department. These plans inform the Implementation Body on the significant changes proposed by public service management to achieve the reforms, efficiencies and savings needed in each sector. At its most recent meeting on 18 October, I understand that while noting that the proposals made may need to be revised in the light of, and to support, decisions taken by the Government in the overall budgetary process, the Implementation Body considered that the implementation plans submitted in respect of the Health Sector and the Local Government sector set out a clear and substantive list of identifiable actions for delivery. The Body requested additional information to be submitted in respect of the Education sector implementation plan. I understand the plans for the Health sector and the Local Government sector are being published on the websites of Department of Health and Children and Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government respectively.

The Government is determined that public service management will be proactive and ambitious in delivering on the full range of productivity and change measures envisaged in the Agreement, and accepted as necessary by all parties to it. Strong oversight by the Implementation Body will be an important factor in this.

The Agreement provides a sustainable framework to manage the provision and delivery of our essential public services in a period of unprecedented pressure on public resources. In this regard, the Exchequer Pay Bill is estimated to reduce by 8% in 2010 over 2009 while the number of public servants has reduced by almost 11,000 since March 09, resulting in significant savings in the public service paybill.

National Pension Reserve Fund

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the full extent of the national pension reserve fund at this time in each of the past five years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39196/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF) was established on 2 April 2001 under the National Pensions Reserve Fund Act 2000 with the objective of meeting as much as possible of the cost to the Exchequer of social welfare pensions and public service pensions to be paid from the year 2025 until at least 2055. According to the National Pensions Reserve Fund Commission, which is responsible for the management and investment of the Fund and which publishes a report on the performance of the NPRF at the end of each quarter on the Commission's website www.nprf.ie, the value of the Fund at the end of September from 2005 to 2009 was as follows:

2005 €14.5 billion;

2006 €17.6 billion;

2007 €21.3 billion;

2008 €18.7 billion;

2009 €20.9 billion.

The latest published figure for the value of NPRF in 2010 is to the end of June, when the value of the Fund was €24.1 billion. The quarterly report on the Fund for the third quarter is expected to be published shortly.

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

Under the National Pensions Reserve Fund Act 2000, the Exchequer is required to contribute a sum equivalent to 1% of GNP to the NPRF each year. In 2009, in addition to a statutory contribution of €1.6 billion, the Minister for Finance made an additional contribution of some €1.4 billion towards the cost of the NPRF's investments of €3.5 billion each in Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Banks plc, made at his direction as part of their recapitalisation. In addition, €1 billion in assets of university and non-commercial semi-state pension funds was transferred to the NPRF in 2009 and a further €1.1 billion in 2010. Legislation provides for the offsetting of these additional amounts against the statutory contribution in 2010 and following years.

Tax Code

185. **Deputy John O'Donoghue** asked the Minister for Finance the number of taxpayers earning in excess of €100,000 per annum; the average of those in excess of that amount; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38472/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the number of income earners earning in excess of €100,000, estimated by reference to 2011 incomes, is estimated at 111,500. This represents approximately 5% of all income earners. The total gross income of income earners earning in excess of €100,000 is estimated at €20 billion. Some 63% of this group earn below €150,000 per annum. These figures are estimates from the Revenue tax-forecasting model using actual data for the year 2008 adjusted as necessary for income and employment trends for the year 2011. They are therefore provisional and likely to be revised. It should be noted that a married couple who has elected or has been deemed to have elected for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit.

186. **Deputy John O'Donoghue** asked the Minister for Finance the amount the tax rate for those earning over €100,000 would have to be increased by for the Exchequer to save at least €3 billion without cutting social welfare, reducing child benefit, or introducing a property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38474/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2011 incomes, of a 1% point increase in the top rate of income tax for those with income over €100,000 would be of the order of €69 million. Consequently, the top rate of income tax would need to increase to 84% for tax units with income in excess of €100,000 to yield in the region of €3 billion in a full year. This estimate is based on confining the increased tax rate to the segment of income that is in excess of €100,000.

These figures are estimates from the Revenue tax-forecasting model using actual data for the year 2008 adjusted as necessary for income and employment trends for the year 2011. They are therefore provisional and likely to be revised.

It should be noted that a married couple who has elected or has been deemed to have elected for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit.

187. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of the concession provided by section 76 of the Finance Act of 1982 which provides for VAT relief in respect of the purchase of certain services; the reason this relief was introduced and if those reasons continue to justify the provisions of the section [38524/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that section 76 of the Finance Act 1982 inserted a new subsection (4A) in section 5 of the Value-Added Tax Act 1972. The measure dealt with the VAT treatment of the supply of

services by barristers. When a barrister supplies a service he or she is not legally entitled to receive a fee in respect of that supply, even though appropriate steps may be taken at the time to secure payment. Accordingly, for VAT purposes, no part of the fee charged to the client may be regarded as consideration, which the barrister “becomes entitled to receive” in accordance with section 10(1) of the Value-Added Tax Act 1972, and no liability to tax arises by virtue only of the supply of the service.

Thus, section 5(4A) of the Value-Added Tax Act 1972 provides that a barrister’s service is deemed to take place for VAT purposes when the consideration for the service is paid to him or her. Accordingly, a barrister will have no liability to VAT until he or she has both supplied a service and has been paid in respect of that supply. Also, the obligation to issue an invoice for the supply under section 17(1) of that Act does not arise until those two conditions have been fulfilled. In effect, the barrister operates VAT on a cash receipts basis. There is no cost, as such, to this measure, as the barrister must account for VAT when he or she has been paid in respect of a supply.

188. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare can apply for a tax free allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38551/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a tax credit certificate will issue to the person concerned shortly.

National Asset Management Agency

189. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance to provide a list of the companies whose loans have transferred to the National Asset Management Agency [38580/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by NAMA that, for two reasons, the names of any companies whose loans have transferred to NAMA may not be disclosed. The first reason is that companies and individuals whose loans have transferred to NAMA are entitled to have this information kept confidential. This is normal practice with regard to creditors and, as NAMA is stepping into the shoes of the bank from which the borrowings have transferred, it owes a duty to the borrower just as the bank did. Furthermore, Section 202 of the National Asset Management Agency Act 2009 specifically states that an officer of NAMA shall not disclose information that he or she knows or ought reasonably to have known is confidential information. Contravention of Section 202 constitutes a criminal offence. The second reason is that the Agency has a commercial remit and, if it is to maximise the return it makes for the taxpayer, it must be able to make agreements, transfers, sales, and so on without having its hands tied by a requirement to disclose commercially sensitive information publicly.

NAMA has reporting and accountability obligations which are set out in the legislation and these include the requirement to submit quarterly reports and an annual statement to the Minister for Finance, for laying before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The quarterly report contains information on the loans NAMA has acquired by sector, by geographical location, by status, etc. I currently am considering the second quarterly report, for the period to 30 June 2010, and I expect to lay it before each House shortly.

Tax Code

190. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax revenue that could be generated if those earning in excess of €100,000 were to be taxed at a rate of 48% [38583/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): It is assumed that the threshold for the proposed new tax band mentioned by the Deputy would not alter the existing standard rate band structure applying to single and widowed persons, to lone parents and married couples. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2011 incomes, of the introduction of a new 48% rate would be of the order of €410 million. Given the current band structures, major issues would need to be resolved as to how in practice such a new rate could be integrated into the current system and how this would affect the relative position of different types of income earners.

This figure is an estimate from the Revenue tax-forecasting model using actual data for the year 2008, adjusted as necessary for income and employment trends for the year 2011. It is therefore provisional and likely to be revised.

191. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of the artist's tax exemption scheme since it was capped in 2007 [38603/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the latest relevant available information relates to the income tax year 2007. In that year, an estimated 2,650 claimants availed of the artists' exemption scheme at an estimated cost to the Exchequer of €27 million. It should be noted that this figure takes account of the restriction of reliefs measure as applied to the exemption of certain earnings of writers, composers and artists which took effect for the first time in 2007. The impact of the measure in that year was to reduce the value of the income tax relief by €4 million.

The restriction was originally provided for in section 17 of Finance Act 2006 and was significantly tightened in Section 23 of Finance Act 2010. Individuals are now subject to the restriction where they have adjusted income of €125,000 and claim specified tax reliefs of €80,000 or more. Those subject to the full restriction will pay an effective income tax rate of 30% in addition to PRSI and levies.

Financial Services Regulation

192. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the country's largest licensed home collection moneylender has acquired an additional 13,000 customers in the past year; his plans to introduce a system of regulation for debt collection agencies [38637/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In my role as Minister for Finance I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing the regulation of financial institutions in Ireland. The day to day responsibility for the supervision of these financial institutions is a matter for the Central Bank which is independent in the exercise of its regulatory functions. The Central Bank issues licences to moneylenders on a yearly basis. The Central Bank has produced a *Consumer Protection Code for Licensed Moneylenders*. Under this Code, moneylenders are required to prominently indicate the high-cost nature of the loan on all loan documentation where the APR is 23% or higher. The disclosure must take the following form:

Warning: This is a high-cost loan.

Moneylenders must also provide consumers, who demonstrate difficulty in meeting their repayments, with information on debt counselling services such as the Money Advice and Budgeting Service which provides free independent advice and guidance.

Other provisions of the Code cover a range of areas including:

- Unsolicited contact and unsolicited credit facilities,

- Handling complaints,
- Arrears and guarantees, and
- Debt collection.

The *Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997* provides some protection to consumers against inappropriate methods of collecting repayments. Under section 11 of that Act, it is an offence to demand payment of a debt in a way designed to alarm, distress or humiliate. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provisions of that Act rests with my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Law Reform.

The Deputy may wish to note that, in the case of financial institutions which use debt collection firms, the Central Bank has imposed requirements, under its *Consumer Protection Code*, that offer protection to consumers. This Code obliges the regulated financial institutions that it covers to ensure that any outsourced collection activity complies with the requirements of the Code. This means that outsourced activity should uphold principles in the Code such as the requirement for institutions to:

- not exert undue pressure or undue influence on a customer,
- act honestly, fairly and professionally and with due skill and diligence in the best interests of its customers, and
- prohibit personal visits to or oral communications with consumers except in specified circumstances.

The Deputy may also wish to note that the National Consumer Agency provides extensive information on its website and through its helpline to help consumers avoid getting into debt difficulties. The Agency also provides information for those at risk of not being able to meet loan repayments.

Public Procurement Policy

193. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties that may be caused for the small and medium enterprise sector as a result of the appointment by the national procurement service of a single supplier of office products; if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that this could cause significant lay-offs in the indigenous SME sector; the strategies he has in place to ensure that with more centralised and globalised purchasing of supplies and equipment that local suppliers here are not disadvantaged; the proportion of public procurement in each of the past five years which was derived from sources outside the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38656/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The National Procurement Service (NPS) is currently engaged in a tender process for the procurement of Stationery and Office Supplies. This process is now at evaluation stage as the closing date for receipt of tenders was Tuesday 26 October 2010. No award has yet been made to any party.

The NPS is anxious to support SMEs and to this end included the following text in the Request for tender (RFT) of the Stationery and Office Supplies tender. It was felt that this strategy would enable SMEs participate in the process. “*NPS policy seeks to encourage participation by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in this Competition. SMEs that believe the scope of this Competition is beyond their technical or business capacity are encouraged to explore the possibilities of forming relationships with other SMEs or with larger enterprises. Through*

[Deputy Martin Mansergh.]

such relationships they can participate and contribute to the successful implementation of any contracts, agreements or arrangements that result from this Competition and therefore increase their social and economic benefits. Larger enterprises are also encouraged to consider the practical ways that SMEs can be included in their proposals to maximise the social and economic benefits of the contracts that result from this tendering exercise”

The division of this tender into three distinct lots has also increased the possibilities for SMEs to tender individually, or form consortia that can enter competitive bids to win this State contract.

Utilising this approach has significantly increased the opportunities for Irish SMEs to compete in this tender process.

It should be noted however, that aggregating demand for a contract of this size, for low risk low value goods can yield substantial cost and administrative savings for the Exchequer as well as minimising legal exposure to the State, particularly in light of the recently transposed Remedies Directive.

Although the NPS views aggregation of requirements across the public sector as a significant contributor to delivering better value, the aggregation of demand is not suitable for all markets and categories. Before undertaking any major procurement project or entering a new procurement category, the NPS will make use of the optimum strategy for the particular market, and, where it is deemed appropriate and practical, the NPS will use framework agreements, or divide requirements into lots, when tendering for goods and services.

The NPS is fully cognisant of the difficulties SMEs are undergoing and as part of its strategy of training has provided procurement seminars to this sector. Furthermore, the NPS works closely with Enterprise Ireland to ensure that the maximum number of opportunities are made available to SMEs in all tender processes.

The number of non-domestic suppliers winning public procurement contracts in Ireland has been the subject of recent controversy.

The EU Commission released a statistic, suggesting that 17% of the number of contracts awarded in 2008 went to suppliers outside the jurisdiction. However, this statistic is based on incomplete data relating only to above threshold procurements, where contract notices were published, and the nationality of the winning tenderer disclosed.

When one compares the value (as opposed to the number) of contracts going to non-Irish companies in 2008, the figure actually amounts to less than 5% of the overall public spend on procurement. It should also be noted that the figures quoted by the EU Commission do not distinguish between companies in the UK and those based in Northern Ireland, so of the contracts going “abroad”, many of the contracts may have stayed on the island of Ireland. The European Commission agrees that an alternative interpretation of their figures is that “about 95% of all procurement by value was from domestic suppliers”.

Due to the incomplete nature of these statistics, it would be unwise to draw any conclusions from them, but from the information available, it would appear that the figure of 5% by value going to overseas companies has been broadly consistent over the years since 2005.

Fiscal Policy

194. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the percentage loss of consumer

spending power resulting from tax and price index changes since the budget of October 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38675/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Taking into account the various indirect tax changes, the consumer price index fell by 5.9 per cent between October 2008 and September of this year, thus supporting consumer spending power. Over this period there have been some increases in direct taxes, notably with the introduction of the income levy. However, it is not possible to say what the precise impact has been as this would require an assessment of various income deciles etc. What is clear is that overall price levels have fallen and thus supporting living standards economy wide.

195. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance in respect of Anglo Irish Bank, the value of bonds, both senior and subordinated, that matured and were redeemed at full face value in the period between September 2008 and September 2010; the number and the negotiated price paid for bonds, of any variety, which were redeemed prior to maturity in the period between September 2008 and September 2010; if there is any reason this information should be withheld from the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38676/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tables following:

1. Value of bonds that matured and were redeemed at full face value in the period between September 2008 and September 2010:

Type	Value
	€
Senior Bonds	14.6 bn
Subordinated Bonds	Nil

2. Subordinated Debt Bought Back Prior to Maturity (30/09/2008-30/09/2010)

	Nominal Repurchased	% of par value
	€	
<i>Dated Subordinated Debt</i>		
€750m Floating Rate Subordinated Notes 2014	388,295,000	55%
Total	388,295,000	
<i>Undated Subordinated Debt</i>		
Stg £200m Step-up Callable Perpetual Capital Securities	205,355,421	27%
Stg £250m Tier One Non-Innovative Capital Securities	249,686,277	27%
€600m Perpetual Preferred Securities	403,247,000	27%
Stg £300m Step-Up Perpetual Subordinated Notes	295,892,665	37%
€600m Fixed / Floating Perpetual Preferred Securities	525,741,000	27%
Stg £350m Fixed/Floating Rate perpetual Preferred Securities	390,760,765	27%
	2,070,683,128	
Total	2,458,978,128	

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

3. Senior Bonds: Bought Back Prior to Maturity (30/09/2008-30/09/2010)

Notional Amount Issued	Final Maturity	Nominal Repurchased	% of par value
€		€	
1,250,000,000	25/01/2012	73,000,000	94%
3,685,000,000	09/09/2010	75,000,000	99.87%
1,000,000,000	11/02/2011	29,683,121	93.5%
		177,683,121	

Notes:

- The exchange rates used are as of the final day of the month of the “buy-back” for the corresponding bond.
- All the bonds repurchased are accounted for in the bank’s published financial reports.

Motor Industry

196. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance the number of cars that were re-registered here in 2009 and to date in 2010; the number of cars on waiting lists for re-registration; to provide this information on a test centre-by-test centre basis in tabular format; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38677/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that 45,055 used vehicles were registered in the State in 2009. In so far as 2010 is concerned, up to 30 September 2010, a total of 30,115 used vehicles had been registered in the State. The requirement to have all used vehicles presented for pre-registration examination has presented some new challenges for both Revenue and the NCTS. In consultation with other stakeholders, e.g. the Society of the Irish Motor Industry (SIMI), the Farm Tractor & Machinery Trade Association Ltd (FTMTA), Revenue and the NCTS are facing these challenges and have implemented some revised procedures to speed up the registration process. For example, the NCTS have recently put procedures in place to provide additional capacity in their centres, including extending the opening times in some centres. Moreover, the NCTS are at an advanced stage in the configuration of two additional centres for registration purposes, one in Carrick on Shannon and one in Donegal Town, in order to address current delays in the northwest of the country. It is now expected that these two centres will commence operation in the week commencing 22 November. Revenue are also examining the possibility of providing electronic facilities for the registration of used vehicles that have been subjected to a pre-registration examination.

Figures provided by the National Car Testing Service (NCTS) to the Commissioners show that 4 centres have people waiting to receive a pre-registration examination appointment. These, together with the number of applicants, are shown in tabular format below.

Centre	Number
Letterkenny	225
Dundalk	5
Monaghan	2
Sligo	26

Additionally, at lunchtime on Friday 23 October, the waiting time for appointments for the pre-registration examination of vehicles in each of the National Car Test centres were as follows:

Centre	Next Available Appointment (Days)
Arklow	6
Carlow	5
Northpoint 2	11
Dundalk	17
Ennis	6
Enniscorthy	4
Galway	4
Kilkenny	4
Letterkenny	17
Limerick	6
Monaghan	13
Kells	10
Nenagh	5
Naas	12
Skibbereen	4
Sligo	17
Tralee	6
Tullamore	9
Waterford	9
Westport	12
Blarney	12
Greenhills	9

Budget Submissions

197. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if he has received a pre-budget submission from the Irish Farmers Association; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38713/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I have received a pre-Budget submission from the Irish Farmers Association. Its contents will be considered in the context of the forthcoming Budget and Finance Bill. As Deputies are aware it would not be appropriate for me to comment in advance of the Budget on possible Budget decisions.

198. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if he will examine the proposals contained in a document (details supplied) regarding the upcoming budget [38720/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I have received a pre-Budget submission from the practice mentioned in the details supplied. Its contents will be considered in the context of the forthcoming Budget and Finance Bill. As Deputies are aware it would not be appropriate for me to comment in advance of the Budget on possible Budget decisions.

Local Authority Rates

199. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Finance if funding will be made available to the Valuation Office to enable them to carry out a full revision of rateable valuations of properties in County Clare similar to that carried out in South Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38740/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Valuation Act, 2001 which came into effect on 2nd May, 2002, provides for the revaluation of all commercial and industrial property in the State. The Commissioner of Valuation has sole responsibility for all valuation matters under the Act, which includes the implementation of the revaluation programme. This is a major project in nature and scale, all the more so given that such a nationwide exercise has not been undertaken since the mid-1800's. The programme began in November 2005 in the South Dublin County Council area and has since been rolled out to the areas covered by Fingal and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councils. It is intended to roll out the programme to further local authority areas, including County Clare, as soon as possible. The necessary process of consultation, as provided for under the Act, is under way in Dublin City and in the local authorities of Waterford, i.e. Waterford City and County Council and Dungarvan Town Council. Preliminary work is also underway on the revaluation of Limerick City.

The purpose of revaluation is to bring more equity, fairness and transparency into the local authority rating system and following completion of the initial national revaluation programme, I am satisfied that there will be a much closer and uniform relationship between rental values of property and their commercial rates liability and that this relationship will thereafter be maintained by means of the recurring revaluations provided for in the Act.

The funding for the revaluation project in general is being provided in the normal way through the Valuation Office Vote allocation. At this stage, it is not envisaged that additional resources will be required to undertake the project which is an integral part of the Valuation Office work programme.

Question No. 200 answered with Question No. 183.

Budget Submissions

201. **Deputy Joe Behan** asked the Minister for Finance if he or officials of his Department have met with representatives of the tobacco industry to discuss Budget 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39020/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): It is normal practice for officials of my Department to meet with various interest groups, especially in the run-up to the annual Budget. In that context, officials of my Department met with representatives of the tobacco industry in September 2010.

Departmental Properties

202. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the progress on drafting a lease for the transfer of a property in Dublin (details supplied) to the Department of Education and Skills and the timescale for the completion of same [39045/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Commissioners of Public Works are currently negotiating the transfer of the property in question with the Department of Education and Skills.

On completion of these negotiations, the legal formalities will be finalised.

Insurance Industry

203. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to cases whereby insurance companies are refusing to provide cover to property owners who made claims on their policies in the aftermath of last year's flooding; the measures he will take

to ensure that these property owners receive insurance cover from insurance providers operating here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39046/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The decision about whether to renew cover in any insurance situation is a commercial matter for insurance companies, which is considered on a case by case basis, as this allows the insurance company to properly assess the risk they are accepting. Neither I nor the Central Bank has any influence over this matter. While I am aware of instances where insurance companies have refused to cover some property owners who made claims on their policies in the aftermath of last year's flooding, the Irish Insurance Federation has informed my Department that the insurance industry is very reluctant to discontinue flood cover for existing policyholders, and would generally only do so where there have been repeated flooding claims.

The Deputy should note that a central element of the Government's response to this issue is flood prevention measures. In this regard the Government allocated 50m euro for flood risk management activities for 2010, which is administered by the Office of Public Works. This increased allocation allows for delivery of a range of Capital Works schemes throughout the country. A concerted effort to roll out schemes, taking account of the seriousness of the underlying flooding problem in the different localities, is currently under way.

Ministerial Salaries

204. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance the salary costs in respect of each Government Minister and Minister of State since 2004 broken down by Department, by year and by person, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39049/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Details of the periods of appointment and annual salary rates payable to Ministers and Ministers of State appointed to the Department of Finance since 2004 are set out below for information of the Deputy.

Annual Salary Rates

	Minister			Minister of State		
	Office Holder	TD Salary	Total	Office Holder	TD Salary	Total
	€	€	€	€	€	€
01/01/2004	95,890	80,457	176,347	41,844	80,457	122,301
01/07/2004	97,808	82,066	179,874	42,681	82,066	124,747
01/12/2004	99,764	83,707	183,471	43,535	83,707	127,242
01/06/2005	101,260	87,247	188,507	44,188	87,247	131,435
01/07/2005	105,057	87,247	192,304	45,845	87,247	133,092
01/12/2005	106,633	88,556	195,189	46,533	88,556	135,089
01/01/2006	110,488	88,556	199,044	48,215	88,556	136,771
01/06/2006	113,250	90,770	204,020	49,420	90,770	140,190
01/12/2006	116,648	93,493	210,141	50,903	93,493	144,396
01/06/2007	118,981	95,363	214,344	51,921	95,363	147,284
01/03/2008	121,956	97,747	219,703	53,219	97,747	150,966
01/09/2008	125,005	100,191	225,196	54,549	100,191	154,740
01/01/2010	98,745	92,672	191,417	46,594	92,672	139,266

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Appointees

Minister		Minister of State	
Period	Appointee	Period	Appointee
26 June 1997 to 29 Sept 2004	Mr Charlie McCreevy TD	19 June 2002 to 12 June 2007	Mr Tom Parlon TD
29 Sept 2004 to 06 May 2008	Mr Brian Cowen TD	13 June 2007 to 13 May 2008	Mr Noel Ahern TD
07 May 2008 to date	Mr Brian Lenihan TD	14 May 2008 to date 23 March 2010 to date	Dr Martin Mansergh TD Mr Dara Calleary TD

Similar salary rates are payable to Ministers and Ministers of State across all Departments of State. Details of those appointed and their periods of appointment is a matter for the relevant Department in each case.

Pension Provisions

205. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm the salary on the basis of which pension rights and gratuity will be calculated for persons who retire during the course of 2011 [39072/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): On 18 June last, I signed the Public Service Pension Rights Order 2010 (S.I. 302/2010) which extends by a year the period within which the superannuation benefits of retiring public servants will be unaffected by the pay adjustments set out in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No.2) Act 2009. The period now runs to 31 December 2011.

Departmental Expenditure

206. **Deputy Johnny Brady** asked the Minister for Finance the amount spent by his Department and also by any bodies under his Department's jurisdiction in each of the last three years on the provision of Internet applications (details supplied); the processes in place to ensure that such funds have been spent on good quality internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection [39126/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the following tables:

Department of Finance

Year	Amount spent on Internet applications	Supply details of the processes in place to ensure that such funds have been spent on good quality internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection.
2008	€2,528.90 (spent on updating some graphic design elements of www.gov.ie)	N/A

Office of the Revenue Commissioners

The Revenue Commissioners continues to be at the leading edge of eGovernment initiatives both across the breadth of the public service in Ireland and worldwide from a tax administration perspective. This has been recognised externally by the fact that the Revenue On-Line Service (ROS) has won numerous awards, including a Central eGovernment Award and an Inspired IT Award. Improvements in PAYE service delivery won a Taoiseach's Public Excellence Award and an Innovating Government Award for Services to Business.

Since 2005 Revenue has treated the development of internet applications as an integral element of all business projects. Since that time many initiatives have been implemented that have internet application components.

Year	Amount spent on Internet applications	Supply details of the processes in place to ensure that such funds have been spent on good quality internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection.
2008 2009 2010	€3.081 Million €3.121 Million €1.088 Million	<p>Revenue employs strong governance, including the operation of a Programme Management Office, which enables effective and accountable management of projects throughout their lifecycle. All Revenue projects use the Revenue Delivery Method, based on international standards, as a comprehensive guideline for delivery of high-value ICT solutions.</p> <p>Revenue is committed to providing websites that are accessible to the widest possible audience, regardless of technology or ability. Its existing generation of websites strive to achieve "Triple-A" accessibility as per the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0. The ROS website has recently undergone a full audit by recognised accessibility experts and Revenue are fully committed to implementing the resulting recommendations as part of its development programme.</p> <p>Revenue's next generation developments are in line with WCAG 2.0 standards where appropriate. To validate conformance against the WCAG 2.0 Level AA checkpoints, some services have recently undergone audits by recognised accessibility experts. In addition, the National Council for the Blind of Ireland has carried out detailed user trials. The recommendations of these audits and user trials have been implemented resulting in further accessibility improvements.</p> <p>Revenue's public facing applications are formally certified to ISO 27001 security standards. In 2009 Revenue was the subject of an audit by the Data Protection Commissioner. The audit found that Revenue was in compliance with all data protection obligations.</p>

Costs given cover Revenue's public facing website (www.revenue.ie) and its associated transactional services such as ROS and PAYE Anytime. It does not include those back-office services that are also part of the overall business solution. Costs of internal intranet services were of the order of €480,000 in total over the three years.

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NDP Information Office

Year	Amount spent on Internet applications	Supply details of the processes in place to ensure that such funds have been spent on good quality internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection.
2008 2009 2010	€8,136.50 €2,600 €375.10	Amount supplied to Fusio Ltd for the hosting & maintenance of the NDP website. The contract was awarded on the basis of the website being accessible, fully secure and data protected, and on the understanding that Fusio would be available to provide back-up technical support.

Office of the Ombudsman

Year	Amount spent on Internet applications	Supply details of the processes in place to ensure that such funds have been spent on good quality internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection.
2007 2008 2009	€9,500 €39,000 €36,000	The Office's websites are audited every two years for accessibility and usability and an IT Security audit was recently conducted. The contract for website technical assistance is currently under review.

Public Service Appointments

Year	Amount spent on Internet applications	Supply details of the processes in place to ensure that such funds have been spent on good quality internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection.
2007 2008 2009	€136,460 €28,340 €36,450	The Public Appointments Service (PAS) has developed the www.publicjobs.ie website to provide information on public service career opportunities, to provide information to potential candidates on the public service recruitment process and to handle online applications. The platform is widely used by the Civil Service, Local Authorities, Health Service and Education Sectors. We retained the services of the National Disability Association throughout these developments to provide quality assurance on accessibility of the site for people with disabilities. The security and integrity of the online services are regularly verified by external security experts. PAS complies with the Data Protection Code of Practice.

Valuation Office

Year	Amount spent on Internet applications	Supply details of the processes in place to ensure that such funds have been spent on good quality internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection.
2007 2008 2009	€22,760 €48,339 €25,846	All Website developments are in line with e-Government Requirements. Our Web developers were initially recruited by Tender process. There are annual performance reviews in place to ensure value for money and required results. Our website is hosted by Eircom on their secure data centre in City West. Our website complies with WCAG accessibility guidelines.

National Treasury Management Agency

Year	Amount spent on Internet applications	Supply details of the processes in place to ensure that such funds have been spent on good quality internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection.
2008 2009 2010	€24,097 €6,405 €5,303	All of the Agency's web sites are designed and built to meet the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Open Standards for accessibility. In addition, in line with recognised industry approaches, the web sites are designed to assist sensory impaired users through the use of the following: An assistive accessibility technology (BrowseAloud) to aid users with literacy and visual impairments in the use of the web sites and a disability simulator tool (aDesigner) which assists web designers to ensure that their web pages are accessible and usable by the visually impaired.

Special EU Programmes Body

Year	Amount spent on Internet applications	Supply details of the processes in place to ensure that such funds have been spent on good quality internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection.
2007 2008 2009	Nil €162,837 €48,974	In respect of the 2007 Systems Database the contract for the provision of the Systems 2007 database was awarded following a comprehensive procurement exercise which was conducted by Department of Finance and Personnel Northern Ireland. Stipulations contained within the Terms of Reference ensured that the database would comply with all relevant and future standards, policies and directives in the areas of Quality; Information Governance (which includes data protection); and Systems Security. Ongoing monitoring of database is completed by DFP. In line with Public Expenditure Requirements, the SEUPB adhered to a robust procurement process for the award of this contract. The process comprised an open tender competition to ensure quality and value for money was achieved. Tender submissions were scored against a range of criteria including: Application Security and Effectiveness of the Proposed Solution. A number of mandatory stipulations within the Terms of Reference required that providers demonstrate adequate security levels and audit trails to protect the integrity of website and associated server. A range of additional security measures were also identified. It also required that providers comply with international standards and best practice in terms of accessibility. Standards adhered to include: WAI-AA and National Disability Authority of Ireland Guidelines. The SEUPB adheres to an Accessibility Statement which demonstrates the body's commitment to ensuring the accessibility of information sources. Accessibility and Security is monitored on an ongoing basis by the SEUPB IT and Communications teams.

In relation to Special EU Programmes Body the Expenditure on the Internet applications is attributable to both the Department of Finance and The Department of Finance and Personnel Northern Ireland.

I have been informed by the Office of Public Works that are currently collating the data requested by the Deputy and as soon as this process is completed they will forward the data directly to the Deputy.

207. **Deputy Johnny Brady** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department or any bodies under its jurisdiction provide or oversee the provision of financial support to businesses, chari-

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ties or other public service organisations that are directly or indirectly used to assist those organisations with their marketing promotion or service delivery on the Internet; if so the processes in place to ensure that such funds are used to provide good quality Internet applications in terms of accessibility, security and data protection [39129/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Department does not directly provide or oversee the provision of financial support to businesses, charities or other public service organisations that are directly or indirectly used to assist those organisations with their marketing promotion or service delivery on the internet. I have been informed by the Special Eu Programmes Body that there are opportunities for businesses, charities or other public service organisations to avail of funding for the purpose of assisting with marketing promotion or service delivery on the internet under the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes.

Whilst funding is not ‘ring fenced’ or allocated specifically for this purpose, there are opportunities for projects to receive grant funding for internet related activities should they satisfy the defined selection criteria of the relevant Programme. Calls will be made for funding applications throughout the Programming period (2007-2013) as required and in line with normal public expenditure requirements, all applications are subject to a robust and defined assessment process.

It is the responsibility of the lead project partner to implement the project and therefore ensure that any accessibility, security and data protection requirements are met. That said, the SEUPB can and does issue guidance to project partners relating to procurement and tendering to ensure that quality and value for money is achieved. The SEUPB can also, where particular concerns arise, include specific conditions within the Project’s Letter of Offer. The SEUPB or relevant implementing body will then monitor the implementation of the project against the conditions and outputs outlined within the Letter of Offer on a quarterly basis.

In addition to funding provided directly for the purposes of internet related activity, all project receiving PEACE III and INTERREG IVA funding must satisfy a number of communication and publicity requirements in line with European Regulation.

Relating to internet activity, projects are obliged to create a dedicated webpage for the project. It is the responsibility of the lead project partner to ensure that provisions for security and data protection are taken into account. However, the SEUPB, in its role as Managing Authority for the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes, does organise a number of communications and publicity workshops throughout the year which focus on issues such as internet development, dissemination of information, security, and management. As outlined above, projects will also be obliged to comply with a Procurement and Tendering Guidance Note in the purchasing of internet or related services.

Company Takeovers

208. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will give permission for the takeover of a company (details supplied) by another to guarantee its sustainability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39134/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The operation of the Biofuel MOTR scheme is in the first instance, a matter for the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. However, my Department has consulted with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in relation to the details supplied and on the issues raised

therein. Following those consultations, a letter issued from the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources on 20 September, setting out the position.

Tax Code

209. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to capture tax from on-line and other forms of betting where tax is not now payable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39138/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I have stated previously that it is my intention to widen, if possible, the tax base on which betting duty would be applied. Bets placed either online or over the phone are generally with out-of-State companies so applying betting duty is therefore problematic. My officials, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, are looking at the scope to overcome legal and operational difficulties in this area. Any extension of betting duty will be applied on a fair basis and should not be perceived as an attempt to threaten jobs. Also, tax changes will be in tandem with ongoing work by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on issues surrounding licensing and regulation.

National Monuments

210. **Deputy Mary Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to provide additional facilities at the Interpretive Centre at the Hill of Tara, County Meath; if play facilities for children will be included; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39144/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): Basic interpretative facilities are provided on the Hill of Tara. Given the funding situation, there are no further plans, at present, for additional facilities at this site.

211. **Deputy Mary Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to provide additional facilities at the Battle of the Boyne site at Oldbridge, County Meath; if play facilities for children will be included; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39145/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): Improvements are being made on an on-going basis as resources permit. Further progress has been made this year on the restoration of the Walled Gardens and associated structures.

A children's playground would be a desirable additional amenity and plans have been advanced. It is hoped to apply to the Local Authority for the necessary planning permission in the near future.

212. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 118 of 6 July 2010 the progress on the provision of signage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39157/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): Tender documents are being prepared for the design and fabrication of interpretation panels for the National Monuments at Rathcroghan. The signs will be erected next year.

Credit Availability

213. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the progress made to date by banks

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(details supplied) in lending the €3 billion each per annum by industry sector and by geographical region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39161/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Deputy will be aware that my Department and Mr. Trethowan of the Credit Review Office receive monthly progress reports from the two banks which allow us to monitor their lending to viable businesses in all sectors of the economy and in every area of the country. This information is commercially sensitive. The banks have 12 months to reach their targets and the overall results of their activities will be published in due course. In addition to the monitoring, the Credit Review Office reviews decisions of banks to refuse credit on application from the customer to ensure that the banks are not refusing to lend to viable businesses.

Mr. Trethowan's first quarterly report was of course published and I intend publishing his next report when it is received.

214. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of loan or credit refusals investigated by the Credit Review Office to date, the result of these reviews; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39162/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In his appearance before the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Innovation on 21 September, Mr Trethowan informed the Committee that "Approximately 20 applications have been sent to the office for review, of which we have dealt with about ten, of which five have been upheld." These figures have not significantly changed since then. The quarterly report of the CRO will be published in due course.

215. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if he will formally instruct the banks to inform their customers when initially applying for a loan or credit facility that the Credit Review Office exists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39163/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The banks covered by the Credit Review Office (CRO) inform customers who have a loan application turned down, rather than everyone who applies, about the availability of the CRO to review their application. As such, I do not at present see a need to inform all customers on a formal basis about the presence of the CRO. Anyone to whom it applies to is already being informed and there is also considerable literature placed in the public areas in these institutions which outlines the role of the CRO and steps required to avail of the services of the office. The banks covered by the Credit Review Office (CRO) inform customers who have a loan application turned down, rather than everyone who applies, about the availability of the CRO to review their application. As such, I do not at present see a need to inform all customers on a formal basis about the presence of the CRO. Anyone to whom it applies to is already being informed and there is also considerable literature placed in the public areas in these institutions which outlines the role of the CRO and steps required to avail of the services of the office.

Tax Code

216. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the amount raised to date in 2010 through the carbon levy with a breakdown by each fuel type [39168/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that for the period January to September 2010 the amount received from the carbon levy is

€161.6 million. The breakdown by each fuel type between Carbon and the estimated VAT is as follows:

2010	Carbon	Estimated VAT	Total (Jan to Sep)
	€m	€m	€m
Auto Diesel	72.1	1.5	73.6
Petrol	48.4	10.2	58.6
MGO	14.8	2.0	16.8
Kerosene	3.6	0.5	4.1
Fuel Oil	0.4	—	0.4
LPG	1.3	0.2	1.4
Natural Gas	6.0	0.8	6.8
Total	146.5	15.1	161.6

217. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the accumulative number of employers availing of revenue job assist in the past 5 years; the number who joined the scheme in each of the years; the accumulative number of employees covered in each of the years and the number who joined the scheme in each of the years; the cost to the Exchequer, with a breakdown by employer costs and employee costs in each of the years and if an employer availing of the employer's PRSI tax incentive scheme can also avail of the benefits under this scheme in respect of the same employee. [39228/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Unfortunately, it was not possible to collate the information required for this answer in the time allowed. I will provide the Deputy with the answer in writing as soon as the information has been collated.

Departmental Agencies

218. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39236/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The number of sitting board members on bodies under the aegis of my Department are set out in the following table.

Bodies under the aegis of the Department of Finance

Body Name	Number sitting on the Board
Adjudicator for Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme, Teachers Conciliation & Arbitration Scheme, Gardaí Conciliation & Arbitration Scheme and Defence Forces Conciliation & Arbitration Scheme.	6
Anglo Irish Bank	6 ¹
An Post National Lottery Company	7
Central Bank Commission	9-12
Civil Service Disciplinary Appeals Board	3
Credit Union Advisory Committee	7
Decentralisation Implementation Group	6
Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal	5 ²
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	1

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Body Name	Number sitting on the Board
European Investment Bank	3
Financial Services Ombudsman Council	7
Independent Mediation Officer for the Civil Service Grievance Procedure	1
Irish Nationwide Building Society	See note 3
International Monetary Fund	1
Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal	7
National Development Finance Agency (NDFA)	8
National Pensions Reserve Fund Commission	7
National Treasury Management Agency Advisory Committee	7
National Asset Management Agency	9
Outside Appointments Board	5
Public Appointments Service Board	9
Sealúchais Árachais Teoranta	2
State Claims Agency Policy Committee	7
Valuation Tribunal	20

1. There is no set number of board members for Anglo Irish Bank
2. There is no set number of members for the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal.
3. There is no set number of board members appointed to the Board of Irish Nationwide Building Society.

219. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Finance the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39250/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The annual budgets for the civil service agencies which come under the aegis of my Department are published in the book of estimates each year. The annual budgets for the other State Agencies which come under the aegis of my Department are set out below.

National Treasury Management Agency

The following figures include the budgeted costs in respect of the National Asset Management Agency for which the National Treasury Management Agency will be reimbursed by the National Asset Management Agency

Year	Budget for year
	€m
2006	30
2007	34
2008	38
2009	43
2010	60

Special EU Programmes Body

The following information has been supplied by the Special EU Programmes Body in relation to budgets for 2006-2010. The information supplied is based on budget allocations as outlined within the respective Annual Special EU Programmes Body Business Plans as agreed by the North South Ministerial Council.

Table 1 below outlines the financial resources in respect of administration and operating costs which are provided via an agreed budget with Sponsor Departments. It should be noted that these budgets are apportioned in various combinations between the Department of Finance and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Table 1: Special EU Programmes Body Annual Budgets 2006-2010

Year	Administration / Operating Costs Budget for Year €'000	Apportionment of Costs	Exchange Rates
2006	3,218	56% North: 44% South	(€1: £0.69)
2007	3,345	56% North: 44% South	(€1: £0.69)
2008	4,064	53% North: 47% South	(€1: €0.67)
2009	3,762	55% North: 45% South	(€1: €0.78)
2010	2,533	53% North: 47% South	(€1: £0.89)

The Special EU Programmes Body is also responsible for the management of a significant amount of Programme funds under the current (2007-2013) and previous (2000-2006) funding periods. The budgets as outlined within the respective Business Plans are outlined in Table 2 below. Annual budgets associated with these Programme funds are based on the value of the Euro funds required for the Central Payments Unit to make payment requests to projects to cover European N+2 expenditure targets as set down within the Operational Programmes. These figures also take into account any advance payments required by projects.

Please note that the figures outlined within Table 2 reflect European Regional Development Fund and match contributions for Ireland and Northern Ireland. Funding for Tripartite projects under the INTERREG IVA Programme would also contain an element of Scottish Match funding.

Table 2: Total Annual Programme Expenditure of the Special EU Programmes Body

Year	Programmes Budgets €'000	Exchange Rates
2006	294,689 ¹	(€1: £0.69)
2007	111,597 ²	(€1: £0.69)
2008	21,474 ³	(€1: €0.67)
2009	52,159 ⁴	(€1: €0.78)
2010	67,659 ⁵	(€1: £0.89)

Note: Business Plans 2006 and 2007 did not outline agreed Programme Costs in the same format as Business Plans 2008, 2009 and 2010. Figures for 2006 and 2007 are therefore based on Annual N+2 Expenditure Targets outlined for these years within the Business Plans for these years.

¹ Figures presented are based on Annual N+2 Expenditure Targets for 2006 for the PEACE II and INTERREG IIIA Programme, as outlined within Business Plan 2006.

² Figures presented are based on Annual N+2 Expenditure Targets for 2007 for the PEACE II and INTERREG IIIA Programme, as outlined within Business Plan 2007.

³ Figures outlined are based on Programme Costs outlined within Business Plan 2008 for INTERREG IVA and PEACE III Programmes.

⁴ Figures outlined are based on Programme Costs outlined within Business Plan 2009 for INTERREG IVA and PEACE III Programmes.

⁵ Figures outlined are based on Programme Costs outlined within Business Plan 2010 for INTERREG IVA and PEACE III.

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Civil Service Arbitration Body

Details in respect of the Civil Service Arbitration Board (including the Adjudicator)

Civil Service Disciplinary Code Appeal Board and Independent Mediator for the Civil Service are as follows:

Year	Budget for year
	€
2006	70,000
2007	70,000
2008	70,000
2009	70,000
2010	70,000

The Central Bank of Ireland and Financial Regulator

The Central Bank of Ireland has supplied the following information in relation to the Financial Regulator and the Central Bank of Ireland for the period 2006 to 2010.

Financial Regulator

Year	Budget for year**
	€m
2006	48.6
2007	51.5
2008	55.7
2009	63.5
2010	78.07

CBFSAI

Year	Budget for year
	€m
2006	108.1
2007	115.7
2008	135.8
2009	125.4
2010	

**Funded on a 50/50 basis with 50% industry levy funding and 50% Central Bank subvention.

Year	Body	Total Net Income	Expenses	Profit for year
	€m	€m	€m	
2006	CBFSAI	209.7	108.1	101.1
2007	CBFSAI	334.5	115.7	228.0
2008	CBFSAI	484.0	35.8	364.2
2009	CBFSAI	1,053,528.0	125.4	933.8
2010	Central Bank	n/a		

Financial Services Appeals Tribunal

Year	Budget for year
	€
2006	n/a
2007	452,630
2008	488,230
2009	419,166
2010	529,602

Financial Services Ombudsmans Council

Year	Budget for year
	€
2006	n/a
2007	452,630
2008	488,230
2009	419,166
2010	529,602

The Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal

The Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal is hosted by the National Rehabilitation Hospital (NRH), Rochestown Avenue, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin on behalf of the Department of Finance and the cost of the Board has been recouped to the NRH since 2005 from the Department of Finance Vote.

Year	Budget
	€
2006	279,653
2007	285,539
2008	320,323
2009	371,467
2010 (est)	350,000

EU Funding

220. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions if any that have taken place at the Council of Finance Ministers regarding the establishment of an EU equivalent of the International Monetary Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39307/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the proposal for the establishment of a permanent crisis resolution framework in the EU. The report on the Van Rompuy Task Force, which is being submitted to the European Council of the 28th-29th October, concluded that this proposal requires further work. The Task Force also notes that as it may imply a need for Treaty changes, depending on its specific features, it is an issue for the European Council in the first instance. The recent Franco-German declaration

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of 18th October 2010, which proposes an amendment to the Treaties for this purpose, will feed into deliberations on this matter.

Illicit Trade in Tobacco

221. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount of revenue lost in 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010 due to tobacco smuggling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39310/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners, who are responsible for the collection of tobacco products tax, and for tackling the illicit trade in cigarettes and tobacco products, that there is no internationally recognised method for precisely determining the amount of tax lost as a result of the illicit trade in cigarettes. On the basis of a 2009 survey carried out independently on behalf of Revenue and the Office of Tobacco Control, Revenue estimates that approximately 20% of cigarettes consumed in the State had not been taxed in this jurisdiction. It is important to emphasise that this estimate includes both illicit cigarettes and legal cross-border purchases brought into the State for personal consumption. Revenue would further tentatively estimate that this figure of 20% comprises 14% illicit product and 6% legal cross-border purchases. Based on an estimate of 14%, the loss of excise duty to the exchequer from illicit cigarette consumption during 2009 would be in the region of €200m.

Figures for 2007 and 2008 are unlikely to have been significantly different. Figures for 2010 to date are not available at this time but a new survey is scheduled for later this year and the results are expected to be available in 2011.

The strategy of the Revenue Commissioners for tackling this illicit trade is multi-faceted. It includes ongoing analysis of the nature and extent of the problem, developing and sharing intelligence on a national, EU and international basis, ongoing review of operational policies, development of analytics and deployment of detection technologies, optimum deployment of resources at point of importation and internally to intercept the contraband product and to prosecute those involved.

Interception at the point of importation is achieved through a combination of risk analysis, profiling, intelligence, and the screening of cargo, vehicles, baggage and postal packages. Revenue enforcement officers also target this illicit trade at the post-importation level by carrying out intelligence-based operations and random checks at retail outlets, markets and private and commercial premises. Revenue and An Garda Síochána also carry out regular multi-agency operations, particularly in relation to large maritime importations and in checks at inland markets.

In terms of detection equipment resources, a second mobile X-ray container scanner, to augment the one first deployed in 2006, was commissioned by Revenue in January 2010 and is now fully operational. Container scanning is one of a number of detection technology applications used to detect contraband. However, its deployment must take into account the principle of free movement of goods within the Community as well as the objective of minimal disruption to legitimate trade.

Revenue also uses a tobacco detection dog in addition to the smaller baggage/parcel scanners, which are deployed at all major ports, airports and postal depots. Two new X-ray scanners were also purchased within the last 12 months for use in postal depots.

Revenue's approach in relation to the detection of tobacco-related offences is under continuous review. For example, in July of this year Revenue launched a nationwide tobacco operation, which concentrated additional Revenue resources at ports, airports and at various retail points for the purpose of identifying illicit tobacco products. This resulted in 561 seizures totalling 13.7m cigarettes and 195 kgs tobacco in the course of the two-week period of the operation. Further such intensive operations are planned, to supplement the normal ongoing level of detection and enforcement activities.

The Revenue Commissioners have also established a high level internal group, chaired at Commissioner level, to examine the risks related to tobacco excise, and to monitor and optimise performance in relation to detection of counterfeit and contraband tobacco products. This group has promoted a number of initiatives aimed at counteracting the illicit trade in tobacco. These include improved profiling of passengers and freight to identify tobacco smugglers, the recent establishment of a tobacco hotline, co-ordinating national blitz-style operations, evaluation and acquisition of scanning and other detection technologies and learning from best practice internationally.

The multi-faceted approach that Revenue has adopted has resulted in the seizure of 161m cigarettes and more than 2,700 kgs of tobacco to date in 2010.

Banking Sector Regulation

222. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Finance if information was available to the Department of Finance during the summer of 2008 regarding the share support scheme which had been put in place by Anglo Irish management during that period [39318/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Deputy will be aware that the matters referred to in his question are currently being investigated by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement and other authorities. It would not therefore be appropriate for me in my role as Minister for Finance to make any comment on this matter at this stage in order to avoid any risk of prejudicing ongoing investigations.

Tax Reliefs

223. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of tax breaks for provision of private pensions in 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; the cost to the Exchequer of these tax breaks for individuals in 2009 who invested between €1,000 and €5,000 in their pension; between €5,001 and €10,000 in their pension; between €10,001 and €20,000 in their pension; and between €20,001 and €50,000 in their pension; between €50,001 and €500,000 in their pension and between €500,001 and greater in their pension in 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39393/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The following table provides a breakdown of the estimated cost of tax and PRSI reliefs relating to private pension contributions for 2007, the latest year for which the most up-to-date data is available. Figures have been rounded where appropriate. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that while corresponding updates of the cost figures are not yet available for the tax year 2008 the necessary work to enable this to be done is ongoing.

There is not sufficient data yet available to the Revenue Commissioners in relation to pension contributions in 2009 which would allow for full cost figures to be provided. No data is available for 2010.

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

Estimate of the cost of tax and PRSI reliefs on private pension contributions 2007.

	Estimated costs	Numbers*
	€ million	
Employees' Contributions to approved Superannuation Schemes	590	708,100
Employers' Contributions to approved Superannuation Schemes	150	385,100**
Estimated cost of exemption of employers' contributions from employee BIK	540	385,100
Retirement Annuity Contracts (RACs)	410 (revised)	123,900
Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs)	60 (revised)	56,400
Estimated cost of PRSI and Health Levy relief on employee and employer contributions	240	Not available

*Numbers as included in P35 returns from employers to Revenue for 2007. Figures are as verified to date but may be understated and subject to revision.

**Numbers of employees for whom employers are contributing to occupational pension funds as included in P35 returns to Revenue for 2007. Figures are as verified to date but may be understated and subject to revision.

I am also informed by the Revenue Commissioners that it is not possible to provide disaggregated figures in regard to the take-up of the tax relief for all pension contributions across different contribution ranges because the relevant data in regard to contributions is not captured in such a way as to make this possible.

The latest relevant information available in this area is in respect of income tax relief allowed for contributions to Retirement Annuity Contracts (RACs) and Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs) for the income tax year 2007, as returned for that year by individuals in personal income tax returns. This information is set out in the following tables which provide the number of cases as well as amount of deduction and reduction in tax for tax relief for RACs and PRSAs for the various contribution ranges.

A married couple who has elected or has deemed to have elected for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit.

The lower aggregate figures for cost and numbers in respect of RACs and PRSAs in the tables below (compared to the slightly higher figures in the preceding table for 2007) are taken directly from filed income tax returns which represent about 90% of all income tax returns expected for 2007. The higher figures in the initial table have, in accordance with normal practice, been grossed-up.

It is not possible to provide corresponding figures in regard to the take-up of the tax relief for pension contributions by employers and employees to occupational pension schemes because the returns are aggregated at employer level and do not provide a precise basis for measuring the distribution of pension tax relief across different income or contribution cohorts.

INCOME TAX 2007

Retirement Annuity — by range of Retirement Annuity.

Range of Retirement Annuity		Totals		
From	To	Number of cases	Amount of deduction €	Reduction in tax €
€	€			
—	1,000	12,755	8,554,012	2,195,262
1,000	5,000	53,094	131,626,207	36,812,190
5,000	10,000	15,032	107,944,901	35,881,712
10,000	20,000	10,293	146,830,170	55,912,616
20,000	50,000	7,445	232,066,475	94,172,399
50,000	200,000	4,275	309,226,910	126,673,365
Over	200,000	2	413,825	169,668
Totals		102,896	936,662,501	351,817,214

INCOME TAX 2007

Personal Retirement Savings Accounts- by range of Personal Retirement Savings.

Range of Retirement Annuity		Totals		
From	To	Number of cases	Amount of deduction €	Reduction in tax €
€	€			
—	1,000	2,459	1,510,278	393,857
1,000	5,000	9,532	23,442,529	6,929,653
5,000	10,000	2,494	17,775,441	6,060,539
10,000	20,000	1,360	19,144,322	7,200,268
20,000	50,000	656	19,765,530	7,917,019
50,000	200,000	147	10,442,738	4,255,776
Over	200,000	2	456,358	187,106
Totals		16,650	92,537,198	32,944,216

Banking Sector

224. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of senior and subordinated bonds outstanding in Anglo Irish Bank as at 29 September 2008; the amount of senior and subordinated bonds outstanding in Anglo Irish Bank as at 30 September 2008 which were covered by the Government guarantee; the amount of senior and subordinated bonds in Anglo Irish Bank which matured between 30 September 2008 and 29 September 2010 and since 29 September 2010; the amount of senior and subordinated bonds in Anglo Irish Bank bought back by the bank, and the capital gain registered as a result between 30 September 2008 and 29 September 2010 and since 29 September 2010; the amount of senior and subordinated bonds currently outstanding in Anglo Irish Bank covered by the eligible liabilities guarantee and outside the scope of the eligible liabilities guarantee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39395/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The information required by the Deputy is set out in the tables following:

1. The amount of Senior and Subordinated Bonds outstanding as at 29 September 2008:

Debt	Amount
	€
Senior Bonds:	10,770,669,707
UK Covered Bonds:	1,512,660,000
Subordinated Debt:	4,791,653,500

2. The amount of Senior and Subordinated Bonds outstanding as at 30 September 2008 which were covered by the government guarantee:

Debt	Amount
	€
Senior Bonds:	10,763,531,707
UK Covered Bonds:	1,512,660,000
Subordinated Debt:	2,108,760,000

3. The amount of Senior and Subordinated Bonds which matured between 30 September 2008 and 29 September 2010:

Debt	Amount
	€bn
Senior Unsecured Debt:	14.6
Subordinated Debt:	0.0

4. The amount of Senior and Subordinated Bonds that have matured since 29 September 2010:

Debt	Amount
	€m
Senior Unsecured Debt:	91
Subordinated Debt:	0

5. The amount of Senior and Subordinated Bonds bought-back by the Bank and the associated capital gain(s) for the period of 30 September 2008-29 September 2010:

Debt	Amount	Gain
Senior Unsecured Debt	177.6 m	6 m
Subordinated Debt	2.45 bn	1,752 m

6. The amount of Senior and Subordinated Bonds that have been bought-back by the Bank and the associated capital gain(s) for the period commencing 29 September 2010:

There has been no buy back of either senior or subordinated bonds in this period.

7. The amount of Senior and Subordinated Bonds currently outstanding in the Bank that are covered by the ELG scheme:

Debt	Amount
	€bn
Senior Unsecured Debt:	2.68
Subordinated Debt:	0.00

8. The amount of Senior and Subordinated Bonds currently outstanding in the Bank that are not covered by the ELG scheme:

Debt	Amount
	€bn
Senior Unsecured Debt:	4.00
Subordinated Debt:	2.36

Notes:

- Subordinated Debt can not be guaranteed under the ELG Scheme.
- The bank has recently launched a liability management exercise in relation to its subordinated debt.
- Unless stated otherwise, exchange rates as of 21 October 2011 have been used in order to provide a corresponding euro equivalent.

Site Aquisitions

225. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the reason, in October 2006, consent was conveyed to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for borrowing by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority up to the statutory limit of €127 million under section 30 of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority Act 1997, to purchase one site (details supplied) in the absence of financial scrutiny of the request. [39398/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Under Section 30 of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority Act 1997, the Dublin Docklands Development Authority is entitled to borrow up to a limit of 127 million euro, with the approval of the Minister for the Environment Heritage and Local Government and the consent of the Minister for Finance. In October 2006 the Dublin Docklands Development Authority applied to and was given approval by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, to borrow up to that limit for the purpose of acquiring the Irish Glass Bottle Site in the Dublin docklands area. The consent of the Minister for Finance was given on the basis that the Authority had the then projected capacity to service the debt incurred without recourse to the Exchequer.

Flood Relief

226. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Finance the reasons for the delay in carrying out works at Ballinasloe, County Galway to alleviate the danger of flooding for residents, especially in the Derrymullen and Ashfield areas, which were prioritised in February 2010 and has not yet started; the funds already spent in Ballinasloe flood alleviation to date by the local Council; and if he will state when works will be completed [39418/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): In June of this year, the Office of Public Works agreed to fund works under the Minor Flood Works scheme for mitigation works in Ballinasloe. The allocations include €360,200 for works in the Derrymullen and Ashfield areas. The scheduling and progressing of these projects is a matter for Galway County Council.

The OPW would not necessarily be aware of the total spent by Galway County Council on flood alleviation in Ballinasloe. The Council has recently applied to draw down €95,850 of the allocations under the Minor Works scheme for works in the Town, in addition to €9,000 for a flood study.

Within the past week, the Council has applied for additional funding for the works in the Derrymullen/Ashfield areas in light of changes to the specification to provide the necessary level of protection to the town. The Office of Public Works has agreed to increase the funding to €900,000.

227. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Finance when will the final report on the south Galway drainage be launched; if he will outline the main proposals of this report as there is great concern that floods may return without any alleviation works being carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39419/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): In July of this year the Office of Public Works commissioned consultants to undertake a review of the recommendations of the 1998 South Galway Flood Study report with the aim of developing proposals for specific flood alleviation measures that can be implemented subject to obtaining statutory consents and stakeholder agreement.

It is expected that the consultant's review of the Study's recommendations will be completed by the end of the year. In the interim, where viable mitigation measures are identified by the consultants, OPW will look to take them forward, in conjunction with Galway County Council, under the framework of the Minor Flood Works scheme.

228. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to his Department of works carried out in the village of Abbey, Loghrea, County Galway to alleviate the danger of flooding in the village; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39424/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The works referred to by the Deputy involved installation of a by-pass culvert under the public road and the backyard of a property in Abbey to alleviate flooding in the village. The works are almost complete and the cost to date is €86,700.

229. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Finance the reasons, at a time when flood alleviation is of primary concern throughout the country, the OPW have deposited several hundred tons of rock into the bed of river (details supplied) at the request of Inland Fisheries Ireland, at a section of the river where flooding has reportedly occurred on the main road at this point; if he will accept that as he has the lead role in flood alleviation that he has agreed to this obstacle to be put in the river course by OPW machinery; if he will provide the costings incurred in these works to his Department and to Inland Fisheries Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39425/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): In carrying out its role as lead agency for flood risk management, the Office of Public Works co-operates with other state bodies, particularly environmental stakeholders such as Inland Fisheries. The works

referred to by the Deputy were carried out as part of a programme being undertaken by the OPW in conjunction with Inland Fisheries that aims to incorporate environmental river enhancement measures in OPW's drainage maintenance activities where this is feasible and does not conflict with effective flood risk management. OPW is satisfied that the enhancement works referred to, which were carried out by the Office's staff at a total cost of €8,757, do not contribute to flood risk in the area.

Taxi Sector

230. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to address the issues which are delaying the introduction of the nine year rule for wheelchair accessible taxis; and when will he make a decision regarding the submission on the nine year rule and the possibility that without such a subsidy that the percentage of wheelchair accessible taxis in the fleet could in fact substantially reduce from the 6% presently in operation [39431/10]

231. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance to discuss with the Minister for Transport the introduction in the forthcoming budget of a zero cost or gain to exchequer proposal whereby vehicles bought for use in the taxi industry are exempted from VRT, with a claw back facility which would prevent vehicles being sold within nine years without paying a reducing percentage of the due VRT, thus helping the many taxi drivers who will over the next few years need to buy replacement vehicles due to the nine year rule, but who will buy a second-hand car due to the financial hardship of most taxi drivers, thus not delivering the upgrading of the fleet which that nine year rule had intended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39437/10]

232. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance if he has received a submission in relation to VRT and taxis from the Commission for Taxi Regulation or the Minister for Transport; when and the reasons it was rejected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39438/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Question Nos. 230 to 232, inclusive, together.

I have not received any recent submission in relation to VRT and taxis from the Commission for Taxi Regulation or the Minister for Transport. However, my Department did receive correspondence in relation to wheelchair accessible taxis in November, 2009, and it is this correspondence to which I assume the Deputy refers. I have no plans to reduce or eliminate VRT on taxis, including wheelchair accessible taxis.

In relation to wheelchair accessible taxis the Taxi Regulator, through its parent Department, has been advised that if it considers that some form of State assistance is required to facilitate taxi drivers purchasing wheel chair accessible taxis, it may wish to put forward for consideration an expenditure based scheme, financed from within its existing financial allocation and operated by that Department or possibly the Taxi Regulator.

Departmental Funding

233. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Health and Children when funding will be released for an association (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38512/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Services

234. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average processing time for domiciliary care allowance in each of the years 2006, 2007 and 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39216/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

235. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average processing time for back to school clothing and footwear allowance in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39220/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

236. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of persons waiting for outpatients treatment in the ear, nose and throat department in the South Infirmary Victoria Hospital, County Cork; the longest waiting time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38449/10]

250. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of persons waiting for outpatient appointments at the cardiac unit at the Mercy University Hospital Cork; the longest time a person has been waiting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38566/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 236 and 250 together. The management of hospital services generally, including out-patient waiting lists, is a matter for the Health Service Executive and the individual hospitals concerned. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular issues raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the issues investigated and to reply directly to the Deputy.

Health Services

237. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of appeals that are being processed for each Health Service Executive region by county; the length of time each appeal is taking to be processed in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38450/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Cards

238. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a medical card renewal application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork [38457/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

239. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 746 of 29 September 2010 the reason persons (details supplied) have not received any information regarding their medical card application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38464/10]

240. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a medical card application in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38465/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 239 and 240 together.

My Department has again requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Health Service Executive to arrange for a reply to issue to the Deputy on this matter.

Health Services

241. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children her plans to reinstate services (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38475/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

242. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health and Children the supports available to an Irish citizen currently living abroad (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38476/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Health Act 1970 (as amended) governs eligibility for health services in Ireland. Eligibility for health services is primarily based on residency and means. A person is regarded as “ordinarily resident” in Ireland if he/she satisfies the HSE that it is his/her intention to remain in Ireland for a minimum period of one year.

In general, Irish nationals and non-nationals who have been resident outside Ireland, are not eligible for public health services under the Health Acts. However, under EU Regulations, a person who is attached to the social security system of another EU Member State may be entitled to public health services. In addition, where an Irish national is working abroad on a short-term contract, but does not intend to take up residence outside Ireland, or has been resident abroad for a period of up to three years but the HSE is satisfied that he/she has not established an entitlement to health services in any other country, such persons may be regarded as ordinarily resident in Ireland on return.

Hospital Services

243. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she is satisfied with the availability of therapy services in Dún Laoghaire for persons who have suffered major trauma and need rehabilitation; if some beds have been closed in this sector despite the long waiting lists; if the Health Service Executive has any initiatives in mind to try to protect this important front-line service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38484/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services

244. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she has sought a report on the availability of home-care packages particularly in hospitals on Dublin's northside where there is a scarcity of step down facilities; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that many persons need 24 hour nursing care after they are discharged are being left without any financial support towards this cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38485/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): The Minister for Health and Children receives Performance Reports each month which outline, amongst other things, progress on activity levels against targets set out in the National Service Plan. This includes Home Care Packages. The Minister has not sought an additional report on home care packages outside of this agreed mechanism.

Government policy is to support older people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. This is delivered through a range of community services such as Home Help, Home Care Packages (HCPs), Meals-on-Wheels, and Day / Respite care. Such supports have the added objective of reducing inappropriate admissions by older people to Acute Hospital or Long-Term Residential Care.

The importance attached to these services is highlighted by the fact that over €200 million additional funding has been provided in recent years for these services. The HSE has responsibility for the delivery of Home Care services, in line with its National Service Plan 2010. The Plan commits the Executive to providing 11.98 million Home Help hours nationally this year, to over 54,000 people. Home Care Packages will be delivered to around 9,600 people at any one time, or to some 13,000 clients over the course of the year. In the region of 21,300 Day / Respite care places will also be utilised this year by the Executive as part of its overall Home Support programme. In addition, arising out of an independent Evaluation of Home Care Packages published by the Department in December 2009, the HSE are this year progressing a number of initiatives to effect improvements generally in the area of Home Care Services.

In relation to Dublin's Northside, the HSE has advised that the procedures for applications for Home Care Packages have not changed. The service can be accessed through the local area office. The service provides assistance with care needs including essential personal care and other home support tasks.

Applications for packages in respect of in-patients in Acute Hospitals should be initiated prior to a patient's discharge from hospital. This can be facilitated by designated staff based in the hospital system. The provision of 24 hour care is not normally provided within the Home Care Package scheme. Where long-term 24 hour care is required, an application for the Nursing Home Support Scheme is advised. Home Care Packages continue to be approved in this area, in line with available funding. A prioritisation process is in place to determine how available funding is best allocated.

245. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she proposes to meet persons (details supplied). [38522/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I spoke briefly with one of the individuals referred to by the Deputy at an event I attended

recently. I asked the individual to write to my Office giving details of the matter concerning them. The individual subsequently wrote to me and my Office has responded.

Primary Care Services

246. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the primary care unit projects that are under way; the location of same and the status of each project; the projected budget for these projects and the staff in each case that have been recruited; the future primary care projects that are being considered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38538/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services

247. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason persons (details supplied) in County Meath were refused community living services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38554/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

248. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be facilitated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38558/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

249. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of patients on the public waiting list as of 30 September 2010; and the length of time they have been on the waiting list for a service (details supplied) [38562/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As the matter raised by the Deputy relates to the delivery of health services, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply directly to the Deputy.

Question No. 250 answered with Question No. 236.

Preschool Services

251. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if schools participating in the early childhood care and education scheme will be exempt from the payment of local authority rates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38568/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): As the Deputy will be aware, I have responsibility for the implementation of the new free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme, which was introduced in January 2010.

[Deputy Barry Andrews.]

Whether a child care service is liable for commercial rates under the Valuation Act 2001, is a matter for the Valuation Office under the remit of the Minister for Finance. In July of last year the Valuation Office clarified that certain services participating in the ECCE scheme will be considered exempt from commercial rates. The exemption applies to services which are solely and exclusively used for the provision of educational services which are available to the general public, and where the expenses incurred in providing these services are defrayed wholly or mainly by the State. With the exception of community not for profit child care services which may, on a case by case basis be exempted from commercial rates, child care services which do not meet the conditions of the exemption continue to be liable to commercial rates.

252. **Deputy Seán Fleming** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the official working group to look at the services and supports for the allocation of resources for preschool children with special needs will report; if this report will be published; if resources will be provided to implement any recommendations in the report that will have a financial implication; when children with special needs at preschool level can expect a proper service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38572/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As the Deputy is aware, a cross sectoral working group was established by the Office for Disability and Mental Health earlier this year to develop and agree a framework for the inclusion of young children with disabilities in mainstream pre-school settings. I am advised that the Group's Report will be completed in November. It will then be circulated to the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Health Service Executive and the Department of Education and Skills for further consideration in the light of available resources and competing priorities for 2011 and subsequent years.

Legislative Programme

253. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children when she will publish the criminal justice (female genital mutilation) Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38579/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The text of the new Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Bill is being finalised and Government approval will be sought shortly for the text of the Bill and its publication.

Services for People with Disabilities

254. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason children diagnosed with a mild needs assessment have had their service withdrawn (details supplied). [38582/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Services

255. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on a matter (details supplied). [38586/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Cards

256. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on a matter (details supplied). [38587/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department has again requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Health Service Executive to arrange for a reply to issue to the Deputy on this matter.

Nursing Education

257. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will clarify a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38588/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I am informed by An Bord Altranais that it is not the case that an applicant for registration who is required to successfully complete a period of adaptation and assessment as a prerequisite to registration cannot apply for adaptation until he/she has secured a permanent job contract. Each applicant who is required to undertake adaptation is provided by An Bord Altranais with a list of approved sites for adaptation placements. The number of placements is limited, especially at the current time and all applicants are informed of this. Some hospitals only offer placements to those who have offers of employment, while others offer placements to individuals who have no contract or offer of employment.

Health Services

258. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she has any plans to introduce a national screening programme for diabetic foot disease; and if she is aware of the 40% to 70% cost savings potential of such a programme costing €1.56 million annually [38593/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Services

259. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Meath should expect to receive an appointment to see a consultant psychiatrist. [38594/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As this is a service matter the question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Staff

260. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 150 of 22 September 2009 in respect of the number of agency staff employed by the Health Service Executive, if she will provide a breakdown of the figure for Ennis General Hospital of €736,117; the number of agency staff employed and the role they fulfil that is nursing, junior doctor or consultancy grade. [38607/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Prescription Charges

261. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will outline the details of the new 50 cent prescription charge scheme; if pharmacies can charge more than the €10 monthly limit for an individual or family; the way in which this money can be claimed back; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that this process is particularly onerous for older persons. [38609/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Since 1st October 2010, medical card holders are required to pay a 50c charge for medicines and other prescription items supplied to them by community pharmacists. The charges are subject to a cap of €10 per month for each person or family.

Should a person or family pay more than €10, the HSE will issue refunds automatically on a quarterly basis based on the information received from the dispensing pharmacy. However, if a person considers that they have not received the refund due to them there is a refund claim form available through the HSE and an on-line version of the form is available on www.medicalcard.ie or www.hse.ie.

Hospital Waiting Lists

262. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will be called for a procedure; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38616/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Foster Care

263. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of foster carers and relative carers; and the number that have not received a home visit by social workers in the past six months. [38620/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Social Welfare Benefits

264. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide a breakdown per region of the amount paid out to date in rent allowance by the Health Service Executive for the years 2009 and to date in 2010. [38645/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Alcohol Abuse

265. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on the low price of alcoholic drinks available, often with big supermarket chains using these products as loss leaders; if she considers such pricing policies are damaging in terms of preventing the abuse of alcohol; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38649/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): The low price of alcoholic drinks in the supermarket and off-trade sector is an ongoing matter of concern. The available research evidence shows that lower prices for alcoholic drinks results in more alcohol being sold and consumed with a resultant increase in alcohol-related harm in society.

The issue of the pricing of alcoholic drinks was considered by Government Alcohol Advisory Group in 2008. The resultant Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008 provided a legislative basis that would allow irresponsible price-based promotions of alcohol to be tackled.

In March, 2009 the Government agreed to include alcohol in a National Substance Misuse Strategy (NSMS) that would be coordinated jointly by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and my Department. A Steering Group has been established to develop proposals on the alcohol element of the NSMS. The NSMS Steering Group is examining a wide range of issues in relation to alcohol policy such as pricing, availability, treatment, prevention and marketing. The NSMS Steering Group is due to report on its findings by the end of the year. I look forward to receiving the Report from the Steering Group and in particular considering the recommendations around the price at which alcoholic drinks are sold.

Health Service Staff

266. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38657/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As the recruitment of social worker posts is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services

267. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the application for a home help or the home care package in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38669/10]

268. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application for home help in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38670/10]

269. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the home care package is still accepting applications; the procedures a person (details supplied) should adhere to in seeking such a payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38671/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I propose to take Questions Nos. 267 to 269, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

270. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children if his attention has been drawn to the need for facilities to deal with problems affecting senior citizens in the Kildare and west Wicklow areas; his plans or the Health Service Executive's plans to address the issue (details supplied). [38672/10]

271. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of Alzheimer's and dementia patients in long-term care registered under the control of the Health

[Deputy Jack Wall.]

Service Executive and resident in HSE facilities; the geographical areas of such facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38673/10]

272. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of beds in the Kildare and West Wicklow area designated for dementia and Alzheimer's patients; if this number is adequate to meet the need for such or if there is a waiting list for same; his plans or those of the Health Service Executive to address the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38674/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I propose to take Questions Nos. 270 to 272, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Mental Health Services

273. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children the supports being made available to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; if a plan for their care in the community is in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38716/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As this is a service matter the question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Cross-Border Health Services

274. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide details on the feasibility study on North-South co-operation on health matters; when this study was initiated; when it will be completed; the persons involved in the study; if it will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38732/10]

275. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide details on the areas covered by the co-operation and working together study on cross-Border co-operation in relation to health care; when this study will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38733/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 274 and 275 together.

In 2007, both Health Departments agreed to undertake a Feasibility Study on the potential for future cooperation. A Project Board representative of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (NI), the Department of Health and Children, the Health Service Executive, and Cooperation And Working Together (CAWT) was established to oversee the Study. The Study examined the potential for joint co-operation in health across an extensive range of health and social care services and makes a number of recommendations for future cooperation. The Study was conducted jointly and it was agreed would constitute a report to the two Ministers. Any action arising, including a decision to formally publish the Report, requires the agreement of both parties.

The Study was completed in 2009 and was presented to Ministers in April that year. While I have indicated my approval for the Study's recommendations, in a discussion with the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland in June this year, he informed me that he was not satisfied to endorse the Study.

However, it would be wrong to assume that the non publication of this Study implies that there is no cooperation on health matters. Cross Border working on health has existed for many years and both Departments continue to collaborate on a wide range of health and social care issues. Currently, some of these issues include Radiotherapy Services, Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services, Emergency Planning, Child Protection, Health Promotion, Cancer Research and Suicide Prevention.

Both Health Ministers meet regularly under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council and continually review the existing arrangements for cooperation and explore other areas for collaboration where mutual benefit for both populations is demonstrated.

Health Services

276. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide figures for the number of persons in each county categorised by ages 0 to 30, 31 to 65, 65 years and over who were diagnosed in a medical setting with retinopathy here since 2004; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38734/10]

277. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide figures for the number of persons in each county categorised by ages 0 to 30, 31 to 65, 65 years and over who were diagnosed in a medical setting with diabetic retinopathy here since 2004; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38735/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 276 and 277 together.

As these are service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Services for People with Disabilities

278. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide figures for the numbers of persons in each county and categorised by ages nought to 30, 31 to 65, 65 years and over that were registered as blind here since 2004; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38736/10]

279. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide figures for the numbers of persons in each county and categorised by ages nought to 30, 31 to 65, 65 years and over that have been diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy and were registered as blind here since 2004; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38737/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 278 and 279 together.

There is no State system for the registration of people with a visual impairment. However, the National Council for the Blind of Ireland operates a system of registration for people with a visual impairment. If you are registered with the National Council for the Blind of Ireland, this registration is usually accepted as satisfying the blindness criteria for State schemes such as Blind Pension, Domiciliary Care Allowance and Blind Welfare Allowance. The National Council for the Blind of Ireland provides a range of services to over 15,500 people with a wide range of visual impairments, including those who are blind as a result of diabetic retinopathy.

The Deputy will be aware that diabetic retinopathy is a complication of diabetes. Good diabetes control reduces the risk of diabetic retinopathy. Retinopathy screening is a priority for the Health Service Executive's National Diabetes Programme.

[Deputy John Moloney.]

My Department has asked the National Council for the Blind of Ireland for the information sought. My Department will forward the information to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Preschool Services

280. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the original basis for the age limits of the early childhood care and education scheme; her plans to rectify the situation facing parents where their child's date of birth does not correspond with the current age-range eligibility; if her attention has been drawn to the level of inconvenience the situation is creating for parents attempting to enroll their children in September 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38738/10]

281. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of applications received by her Department from County Mayo since the early childhood care and education scheme was introduced; of these applications, the numbers that were approved and rejected by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38739/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I propose to take Questions Nos. 280 and 281 together.

I have responsibility for implementing the free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The objective of the ECCE scheme is to make early learning in a formal setting available to children in the year before they commence primary school. Services participating in the pre-school year are expected to provide appropriate age related activities and programmes to children within the age cohort of 3 years and 2 months and 4 years and 7 months in September of the relevant year.

The age limits, which span almost 17 months, take account of a number of factors, including the variation in school admission policies and the fact that the majority of children commence primary school between the ages of 4 years 6 months and 5 years 6 months. While exceptions to the upper age limit are made where children are developmentally delayed and would benefit from participating in the pre-school year at a later age, the scheme does not provide for exceptions to the lower age limit and I am not considering any change to this position.

More than 53,000 children availed of the free pre-school provision in the period January to August 2010 and approximately 63,000 children are currently enrolled from September 2010. The latest figure represents 94% of all children eligible for the scheme this year and is an extraordinarily high level of participation after such a short period of time.

Parents can apply to avail of the scheme for their children by enrolling them in a participating service, generally at the start of the pre-school year in which the children qualify, including children who have been approved for late entry to the scheme. The service will ask the parents of children who have been enrolled, to provide the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) of the children and to sign and return a declaration form which is then returned to my Office for verification of the details provided.

In September 2010, the parents of almost 1,800 children in Mayo applied to enter the ECCE scheme and, in the vast majority of cases, the details provided have been verified as being valid. In a small number of cases the details provided were not validated. This may be because an incorrect PPSN was furnished to the service in which case the parent or service provider should contact my Office with the correct details. Such cases are being processed as they are received.

Family Support Services

282. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will consider correspondence (details supplied); if she will direct the Health Service Executive to provide essential supports to this family; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38989/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): Officials in my Department have been in contact with the Department of Social Protection who have indicated that the payment of child benefit has been amended to reflect the current position. I understand that contact has been made with the relevant officials in the HSE regarding the issuing of a medical card. Furthermore, this issue has been referred to the HSE for their attention and direct reply to Deputy Ó Fearghail.

Medicinal Products

283. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the legal status of electronic cigarettes on sale in shops and pharmacies here; the way this compares with other European Union member states; if she has asked the Irish Medicines Board to investigate these products; if they are regarded as being a medicinal product or a device by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39010/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The EU Commission, in its Orientation Note on Electronic Cigarettes (May 2008), stated that where such products are presented for use in or assist in smoking cessation, they are regarded as medicinal products. In this regard they are similar to other nicotine replacement therapies (NRT) and therefore require marketing authorisation before being placed on the market in Ireland. In common with other such NRT products they may be supplied only through pharmacies.

The EU Commission has recently commenced a public consultation with respect to the possible revision of the Tobacco Products Directive 2001/37/EC. One of the issues being considered is to extend the scope of the directive to cover electronic nicotine delivery systems where such products are presented as alternatives to cigarettes.

My Department will be engaging with the Irish Medicines Board, Health Service Executive, Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland and other relevant bodies, and will contribute to ongoing EU deliberations on the matter.

Departmental Investigations

284. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will publish those parts of an independent review report with respect to a person (details supplied) that will not obstruct criminal proceedings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39011/10]

285. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the review into a case (details supplied), which was supposed to be completed between ten and 12 weeks, took almost one year to complete; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39012/10]

286. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the review into a case (details supplied); when she envisages this review will be published in full; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39013/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284 to 286, inclusive, together.

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

I appointed the former High Court Judge, Mr. TC Smyth SC, to examine whether a further investigation into the case of Michael Shine, former Consultant at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda would be of benefit.

I would like to clarify that Judge Smyth began his work on the review in January last and that it was always expected that it would take a number of months, to around the middle of the year, to complete. The review is now complete and I recently received the Judge's report.

In line with the advice of both Judge Smyth and the Attorney General I regret that, in order to avoid any danger of prejudicing legal cases, it is not possible to publish the Judge's report or a redacted version of his report at this time. It is also not possible to comment on any publication date.

However, I have undertaken to examine whether it may be possible to publish a summary of the report as soon as possible.

Tobacco Products

287. **Deputy Joe Behan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she or officials of her Department have met with representatives of the tobacco industry to discuss budget 2011 or legislation affecting supply and sale of tobacco products; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39021/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): My Officials last met with representatives of the tobacco industry in July 2008 to discuss the introduction of bilingual health warnings on tobacco products placed on the market from 1 October 2008. No further meetings have taken place.

Hospital Services

288. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment [39025/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Mental Health Services

289. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average waiting times for child psychology appointments in the Health Service Executive south region; if she will provide a breakdown of the figures in each administrative area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39035/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As this is a service matter the question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Services

290. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the reconfiguration of health services in the mid-west; if adequate provision has been made in respect of resources and staffing at a hospital (details supplied) to cope with the increased workload resulting from this reconfiguration; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39055/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Mental Health Services

291. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of community-based mental health teams envisaged under A Vision for Change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39056/10]

292. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of community-based mental health teams established to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39057/10]

293. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number and types of vacancies in community-based mental health teams; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39058/10]

297. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of multi-disciplinary community-based mental health teams that will provide mental health services to children and adolescents under the age of 18, recommended under A Vision for Change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39062/10]

298. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of multi-disciplinary community-based mental health teams that provide mental health services to children and adolescents under the age of 18 established to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39063/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 291 to 293, inclusive, 297 and 298 together. The Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy, '*A Vision for Change*', estimates that three hundred and thirty-two community mental health teams are required to deliver the proposed community-based mental health service. Seventy-eight of these teams relate to child and adolescent community mental health services and twenty-seven are for child and adolescent specialist services. There are currently fifty-five child and adolescent mental health teams in place and a further eight teams are in development. At the end of 2009 there were one hundred and twenty-four adult community mental health teams.

The specific question relating to vacancies in community based mental health teams is a service matter and accordingly, has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

294. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number and location of high-support group homes for persons with enduring mental illnesses at the end of 2009; the number of beds for same in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39059/10]

295. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number and location of medium-support group homes; the number of beds in same in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39060/10]

296. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number and location of low-support group homes; the number of beds in same in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39061/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 294 to 296, inclusive, together. As this is a service matter the question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Questions Nos. 297 and 298 answered with Question No. 291.

299. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children admitted to adult psychiatric units for each of the years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39064/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The following table provides data on the number of children admitted to adult acute psychiatric units and hospitals.

Year	Total number of children admitted to Adult Psychiatric Units
*2005	39 – under 16 year olds
*2006	253 – under 18 year olds
**2007	217 – under 18 year olds
**2008	247 – under 18 year olds
**2009	200 – under 18 year olds

Source:

*2005 and 2006 figures from HRB Activities of the Irish Psychiatric Units and Hospitals.

**2007 to 2009 figures from Mental Health Commission Annual Reports.

Suicide Prevention

300. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the funding available to the National Office for Suicide Prevention for each for the years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39065/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The Budget for the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) is set by the Health Service Executive. The following table provides details of the annual budget for the NOSP since 2005:

Year	Funding
	€m
2005	1.5
2006	2.7
2007	4.5
2008	4.5
2009	4.3
2010	3.7

The total annual funding available to support suicide prevention initiatives is in the region of €8 million.

Mental Health Services

301. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the funding available to mental health for each of the years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2008, 2009 and to date 2010 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39066/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The following table provides details of expenditure on mental health services since 2005.

Year	Mental Health Expenditure
	€m
2005	775
2006	984
2007	1,000
2008	1,000
2009	1,000
2010	977 (estimated)

Source: Revised Estimates for Public Services.

Medical Cards

302. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average cost of a medical card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39067/10]

303. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide a general breakdown of the costs of a medical card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39068/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to answer Questions Nos. 302 and 303 together.

There are two main cost factors associated with medical cards and GP visit cards, firstly the capitation and other fees paid to General Practitioners (GPs) and, secondly, the cost of drugs supplied to patients.

GPs who hold contracts under the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme with the Health Service Executive (HSE) are remunerated through a range of fees and payments. There are more than 50 different capitation fees, which vary depending on the age and gender of the patient and the distance he or she lives from the GP's surgery. For example, fees currently range from €76.98 for a male patient under 5 years living 3 miles or less from the GP's surgery to €218.37 for a female aged 65-70 years living more than 10 miles from the surgery. In addition, there are special capitation rates of €280.31 for persons aged 70 and over residing at home and €896.07 for persons aged 70 and over residing in private nursing homes. There is also a range of additional payments; for example, in respect of out-of-hours consultations, temporary residents, special items of services (e.g. suturing), panel size, practice support allowances and locum expenses.

Drugs costs vary significantly depending on the patient's medical condition. GP visit card holders avail of the Drugs Payment Scheme, which now involves a co-payment of the first €120 spent per family in any calendar month, whereas medical card holders only have to pay a prescription charge of 50 cent per item subject to a maximum of €10 per month for each person or family.

My Department has been in contact with the HSE in relation to the average cost of a medical card per annum and the Executive has indicated that, given there were 1,588,494 medical card holders and 112,139 GP visit card holders on the 1st October, 2010, the variety of payment arrangements and the variation in drug costs under the GMS Scheme, a single average annual cost figure in respect of the medical card and GP visit card is not a sufficiently refined measure for policy options and decisions.

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

The estimated total expenditure in 2009 on the GMS Scheme was approximately €1.85 billion. The HSE Service Plan for 2010 shows the projected cost of the GMS Scheme this year as €2.032 billion. The Service Plan also shows a projected increase in medical card and GP visit card numbers of 144,000 and 16,111 respectively for 2010.

Hospital Services

304. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of stroke units here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39069/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Service Staff

305. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if stroke care will be removed from the moratorium on recruitment in view of the publication of the cardiovascular strategy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39070/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Government has made clear that a critical part of its strategy to restore the public finances is to achieve sustainability in the cost of delivering public services relative to State revenues. To help achieve this goal, it will be necessary to restructure and reorganise the public service and to reduce public service numbers over the coming years. This requires that the moratorium on recruitment and promotion in the health service will continue to apply until the numbers have fallen to the level set out in the Employment Control Framework for the health sector. The Framework for 2010-2012 gives effect to the Government decision on employment policy in the public sector and provides that there will be a net reduction in employment to 2012. This includes a target reduction in numbers in 2010 to achieve the overall reduction of 6,000 from March 2009 to the end 2012 and consequential pay roll savings. Based on numbers reductions already achieved in 2009, the net target reduction to end 2012 is 4,560 WTE (or 1,520 per annum). While there is provision in the HSE's Employment Control Framework for some exemptions and exceptions these are limited because of the need to achieve the required payroll savings.

Cardiovascular Services

306. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the person leading the implementation of the cardiovascular strategy; if funding has been ringfenced for its implementation; if implementation plans have been drawn up and published; the main targets which have been prioritised for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39071/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Director of Clinical Care in the Health Service Executive (HSE) has lead responsibility in the HSE for implementation of the Cardiovascular Policy. The HSE has established 3 programmes to implement the different elements of the Cardiovascular Policy, covering acute coronary syndrome, heart failure and stroke. Lead clinicians have been appointed with specific responsibility for each of these programmes and they are developing policy implementation plans to be submitted to the Director of Clinical Care. The lead clinicians are Professor Peter Kelly and Dr Joe Harbinson (Stroke and Stroke Rehabilitation), Professor Ken McDonald (Heart Failure) and Dr Kieran Daly (Acute Coronary Syndrome).

The implementation of these plans and the organisation of the necessary resources are service delivery matters and have, therefore, been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Budget Submissions

307. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will consider priorities for budget 2011 from an association (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39078/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): The priorities for Budget 2011 are being considered as part of the estimates and budgetary process for 2011. As the Deputy will appreciate, detailed deliberation on all aspects of expenditure in the health service is underway as part of the consideration of the very challenging financial circumstances which face the Government this year. As such, it would not be appropriate to comment further on particular elements of the Budget at this time.

Medical Cards

308. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39093/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Service Properties

309. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the total bill for rented properties in the Health Service Executive; the breakdown of this figure according to sectors and regions; the rental commitments entered into in relation to primary care centres to developers and general practitioners or GP groups; the efforts being made to reduce the cost of rented properties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39105/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Management of the Health Service Executive property portfolio is a service matter. Therefore your question has been referred to the Executive for direct reply.

Hospitals Building Programme

310. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the construction firm will start work on the new cystic fibrosis unit at St. Vincent's Hospital following the signing of the contract. [39113/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The St Vincent's University Hospital and the HSE are working to ensure the earliest possible delivery of the new ward block. The contract for construction of the new facility was signed on the 14 October 2010. The site has been handed over to the contractor. An architect has been appointed, the contractor and design team are on site and construction work has commenced. The site had previously been cleared in readiness for construction to begin. It is expected that construction of the building will take 18 months. Completion is expected as early as possible in 2012.

Hospital Services

311. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of Alzheimer and Dementia patients in long-term care registered under the control of the Health Service Executive and resident in HSE facilities throughout the State; the location of such facilities and the numbers on the waiting list at present for each such facility. [39121/10]

312. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of public long-term care beds within the Kildare and west Wicklow area especially designated for dementia and Alzheimer patients; if this number is adequate to meet the need for such beds or is there a waiting list for same; the numbers on the waiting list; her plans to address the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39122/10]

313. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the urgent need for facilities to deal with problems effecting senior citizens in the Kildare and west Wicklow areas; her plans to address the issue (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39123/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to answer Questions Nos. 311 to 313, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

314. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children the plans in place to provide an early arthritis clinic at Naas General Hospital [39124/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

315. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare receive an appointment date for Tullamore Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39135/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Accommodation

316. **Deputy Charlie O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will investigate claims made in the past week of serious overcrowding at Tallaght Hospital, Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39149/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

General Practitioner Services

317. **Deputy Charlie O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health and Children the progress made in respect of the need to develop an out of hours general practitioner service attached to Tallaght Hospital, Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39150/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

318. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the Health Service Executive's plans for the future of St. Mary's Orthopaedic Hospital, Cork city [39152/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Departmental Programmes

319. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children if there was a scheme administered by the Department of Health up to 2008 which allowed survivors of institutional abuse to travel to Ireland for a holiday; the success of this scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39158/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): During 2004 and 2005, the Department of Health and Children (DOHC) provided funding for a support network and accommodation service (Avoca House) administered by SOCA UK (Survivors of Child Abuse UK), a voluntary organisation and registered charity in Ireland. This service offered a safe and comfortable environment for survivors of institutional abuse visiting Ireland to attend to matters related to the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, the Residential Institutions Redress Board or for those visiting the Barnardos family tracing service. Avoca House also offered accommodation for survivors who wished to revisit the Industrial School in which they had been detained within the blin Region. The premises was not for holiday use.

Responsibility for this service transferred to the Health Service Executive following its establishment.

Health Services

320. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an appeal against the decision to refuse an application on medical grounds in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39165/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Cards

321. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick [39175/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services

322. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the entitlements available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39176/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As the Deputy's question is referring to entitlements in an individual case, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Departmental Agencies

323. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under her Department's control [39237/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The maximum number of members on Boards to which I make appointments are set out below. In the case of some Boards other Ministers and Bodies have responsibility for making nominations and appointments.

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

Board/Agency	Number of Members
Advisory Committee for Human Medicines (IMB)	12
Advisory Committee for Veterinary Medicines (IMB)	12
An Bord Altranais	29
An Bord Uchtala	9
Beaumont Hospital Board	15
Board of the Adelaide and Meath Hospitals	23
Bord na Radharc Mhastoiri	11
Childrens Act Advisory Board	12
Comhairle na Nimheanna	18
Consultative Council on Hepatitis C	16
Crisis Pregnancy Agency	9
Dental Council	19
Drug Treatment Center Board	10
Dublin Dental Hospital Board	14
Food Safety Authority of Ireland	10
Food Safety Consultative Council	24
Health and Social Care Professionals Council	25
Health Information and Quality Authority	12
Health Insurance Authority	5
Health Research Board	16
Health Service Executive	12
Hepatitis C and HIV Compensation Tribunal	15
Irish Blood Transfusion Service	12
Irish Medicines Board	9
Leopardstown Park Hospital Board	9
Medical Council	25
Mental Health Commission	13
National Cancer Registry Board	10
National Haemophilia Council	11
National Paediatric Hospital Development Board	13
National Social Work Qualifications Board	17
National Treatment Purchase Fund Board	9
National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing/Midwifery	20
Office of Tobacco Control	12
Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland Council	21
Poisons Council	18
Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council	17
Scientific Committee of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland	15
Social Workers Registration Board	13
St James's Hospital Board	15
Voluntary Health Insurance Board	12

324. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the annual budget of each State agency under her Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39252/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Agencies funded by my Department in each of the years 2006-2010 are set out in the following table. The Deputy will also be aware that the Health Service Executive is accountable to me as Minister for Health & Children. The net amount voted by the Oireachtas in respect of Vote 40 — Health Service Executive is as follows:

2006 — €10,031,090

2007 — €11,453,895

2008 — €12,667,159

2009 — €11,890,719

In 2010 the Net Estimate of the HSE is €10,528,581.

Agencies directly funded by Department of Health and Children

Agency	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
		€	€	€	€
National Council on Ageing***	0	430,000	904,000	1,510,000	1,440,000
National Social Work Qualification Board	538,000	569,000	578,000	573,000	557,000
Irish Medicines Board	3,650,000	4,601,922	4,993,000	4,924,000	4,025,000
Post Graduate Medical and Dental Board*	0	0	10,362,000	9,795,000	8,744,000
Board for the Employment of the Blind (Blindcraft)****	0	17,000	10,000	4,717,000	1,100,000
Crisis Pregnancy Agency*****	0	8,178,000	8,706,000	8,574,000	8,140,000
Food Safety Authority Ireland	17,427,000	18,032,000	18,505,000	18,712,000	17,430,000
Institute of Public Health	1,542,000	1,517,000	1,576,000	1,562,000	1,505,000
Health Information & Quality Authority	14,757,000	11,100,000	14,800,000	6,389,000	1,386,000
Irish Health Safety Accreditation Board**	0	0	0	843,000	2,464,000
Mental Health Commission	18,190,000	17,950,000	16,600,000	17,380,000	6,250,000
National Cancer Screening Service*	11,000	57,300,000	42,452,000	30,419,000	13,693,000
National Council Professional Development of Nursing & Midwifery	4,162,000	4,285,000	4,473,000	4,200,000	4,350,000
Office of Tobacco Control	1,726,000	1,620,000	1,819,000	2,495,554	2,315,000
Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council	3,161,000	3,281,000	3,438,000	3,414,850	2,812,000
Childrens' Acts Advisory Board*****	1,000,000	2,199,000	2,314,000	2,232,000	1,715,000
Women's Health Council**	0	500,000	658,000	654,000	631,000
National Treatment Purchase Fund	90,092,000	90,350,000	104,641,000	91,744,000	78,644,000
Food Safety Promotion Board	6,665,000	5,623,000	7,000,000	6,475,000	6,580,000
Health Research Board	34,157,000	35,241,000	36,885,000	36,085,000	30,353,000
Ombudsman for Children	2,223,000	2,310,000	2,409,000	2,080,992	1,266,268
Office of the Disability Appeals Officer	501,000	557,000	0	0	1,720,000
National Cancer Registry Board	2,975,000	2,477,000	3,037,000	2,165,000	0
Health & Social Care Professionals Council	962,000	595,000	315,000	0	

2006-2009 are Outturn figures.

2010 figures as per Revised Estimates Volume.

*Transferred to HSE from 1/4/10.

**Subsumed into HIQA in 2007.

***Subsumed into DoHC in 2009.

****Wound Up in 2007.

*****Transferred to HSE from 01/1/10.

*****Due to be abolished in 2010.

Health Services

325. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be called for treatment [39316/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply

326. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide details of the budget for the refurbishment of the new care centre for persons with disabilities at Duleek County Meath; the process for the tendering of the management of the facility; if the facility has the contingency for outdoor activity facilities; the provisions for natural lighting in the building; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39401/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Services

327. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Health and Children to indicate when the three vacant consultants positions at a hospital (details supplied) will be filled; if the funding for these positions will be provided; if she will confirm the filing of these positions at the hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39412/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Service Staff

328. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of home help hours and positions provided by the Health Service Executive in Galway city and county for each of the years 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; the number of home care packages processed and delivered to applicants by HSE West in Galway city and county for the same years; the number of patients receiving long stay care in HSE nursing homes for the same period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39413/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Accommodation

329. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of beds assigned for cancer care at University College Hospital Galway prior to its designation as a centre of excellence for cancer care and the number for each year since that designation to the present; if she will state the original proposal of the transfer of beds and services from the other centres in counties Mayo, Sligo and other areas to Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39414/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The matters raised by the Deputy relate to the provision of healthcare services and accordingly, I have asked the Health Service Executive (HSE) to respond directly to the Deputy.

Hospitals Building Programme

330. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the new hospital

facilities at St. Brendan's Hospital, Loughrea, County Galway will be opened; the proposed staff numbers for each grade to be employed in the new facility compared to the number currently employed in the existing facility; the number of long stay beds in the new facility as against the bed numbers for each of the years 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; the outline of the new facilities to be provided as extra in the new facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39415/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Cards

331. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of persons in Galway city and county possessing medical cards for each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; if she will provide the breakdown of these between full medical card, GP visit cards and the over 70s medical cards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39416/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has the operational and funding responsibility for the medical card benefit. It collates medical card data by county, age and gender. Therefore, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to address this matter and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

332. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No 205 of 20 January 2010 if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the waiting list to see a consultant rheumatologist in a hospital (details supplied) is growing because additional weekly referrals exceed the existing capacity; the reason the staffing levels of one rheumatologist and four support staff to cover the population of Kildare is so low compared with staffing levels at other hospitals with similar population [39442/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Service Staff

333. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason staff in the Roscommon mental health services do not receive payment for short time acting up positions of responsibility in line with other services in the Health Service Executive west; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39450/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): As this is a service matter the question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Public Transport

334. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Dublin Bus have been forced to reduce their services as a result of a lack of adequate funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38479/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): While the allocation of Exchequer subvention to the CIÉ operating companies is a matter for the National Transport Authority I understand that Dublin Bus have been allocated €75.790 million in 2010 towards the cost of public

[Deputy Noel Dempsey.]

service obligation services. The decision by Dublin Bus as part of its cost recovery plan, to re-organise its network to reflect changes in demand, based on 120 fewer buses is consistent with the conclusions in the Deloitte Report. The Deloitte report concluded that the Dublin Bus fleet is adequate to meet current demand, and that fleet expansion was not an immediate issue. Instead the Deloitte report concluded that the focus should be on optimising the existing network and extracting full value from the existing sized fleet.

The objective of the redesign of the Dublin Bus network is to provide current and future bus customers with a service that will be modern, accessible, integrated, easy to understand, punctual and frequent. The redesigned network will be supported by complementary measures such as Integrated Ticketing and Real Time Passenger Information. These measures reflect the commitment of the company to deliver better services at better value to the customer and taxpayer.

Taxi Regulations

335. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport the number of times he and his Department are briefed by the Commission on Taxi Regulation; the way he invigilates the actions and performance of the office of the Taxi Regulator in terms of carrying out the Governments overall policy for the taxi sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38553/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Under section 29 of the Taxi Regulation Act 2003, the Commission is required to submit its Annual Report and Accounts. The Commission also publishes a Strategy Statement under Section 28 of the Act and is obliged to adhere to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. Earlier in the year the Commission produced its Strategy Statement 2010-2014 and its Action Plan for 2010-201. In September the Commission produced its mid-year report in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State bodies.

Taking account of its statutory independence under the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 and its reporting requirements as mentioned, my officials have regular contact with the Commission for Taxi Regulation on corporate governance issues and general policy relating to the taxi sector.

Departmental Agencies

336. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Transport the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39242/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table. The Commission for Taxi Regulation and the Railway Safety Commission do not have Boards.

Board Members

State Body	Members
National Roads Authority	11
Medical Bureau of Road Safety	5
Road Safety Authority	9
Córas Iompair Éireann	11
Bus Átha Cliath	8
Bus Éireann	6

State Body	Members
Iarnród Éireann	8
National Transport Authority	10
Railway Procurement Agency	5
Railway Safety Advisory Council	12
Advisory Council to the Commission for Taxi Regulation	18
Dublin Airport Authority	13
Shannon Airport Authority	9
Cork Airport Authority	9
Irish Aviation Authority	7
Marine Casualty Investigation Board	5
Port of Cork Company	10
Drogheda Port Company	8
Dublin Port Company	8
Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company	11
Shannon Foynes Port Company	12
Port of Waterford Company	8
Galway Harbour Company	8
New Ross Port Company	8
Dundalk Port Company	9
Wicklow Port Company	9
Arklow Harbour Commissioners	10
Baltimore & Skibbereen Harbour	9
Bantry Bay Harbour	11
Kinsale Harbour Commissioners	9
Tralee & Fenit Commissioners	11

337. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Transport the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39257/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The Exchequer funding has been allocated under Vote 32 to the following agencies under the remit of my Department since 2006:

State Body	Vote 32 Funding 2010 €000	Vote 32 Funding 2009 €000	Vote 32 Funding 2008 €000	Vote 32 Funding 2007 €000	Vote 32 Funding 2006 €000
CIE Group	496,129	726,808	911,036	776,269	574,124
Railway Safety Commission	400	2,014	2,078	2,090	2,272
Railway Procurement Agency	29,748	10,598	10,958	11,000	39,953
National Roads Authority	1,636,324	1,470,009	1,679,461	1,782,874	1,650,644
Dublin Transportation Office/NTA	353,512	38,472	59,017	41,593	28,730
Road Safety Authority	28,746	32,835	39,704	31,124	*
Medical Bureau of Road Safety	4,557	4,363	4,448	5,911	9,333
Marine Casualty Investigation Board	250	200	250	300	300

*Road Safety Authority established on 13 September 2006.

Rural Transport Services

338. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport if he is committed to a better rural transport system here; if he has implemented the suggestions put forward in the 2006 public consultation document entitled *Progressing Rural Transport in Ireland — A Discussion Paper*; his priorities for advancing rural transport under Transport 21; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39263/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The mainstreamed Rural Transport Programme (RTP) was launched in February 2007 in line with the principle recommendation of the Fitzpatrick Associates report ‘Progressing Rural Public Transport in Ireland’ which was circulated by my Department as a discussion document in August 2006. There are commitments to the RTP in the National Development Plan, Towards 2016 and the Department’s Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act 2005. The development of rural transport is also a key objective in the Government’s sustainable travel and transport plan *Smarter Travel — A Sustainable Transport Future*. The renewed Government Programme contains a commitment to explore the provision of a full-scale transport system in rural areas using the network expertise of Bus Éireann and the resources of the school and health transport systems and pilot projects have been undertaken in the North East and in the North West in that regard. The pilots are currently being assessed and together with a recently completed exercise to map all transport services in County Louth and a cross-border pilot rural community transport project under the auspices of the British/Irish Council, will feed into the process for developing rural transport policy into the future.

Disabled Drivers

339. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport the eligibility criteria for a disabled person’s parking card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39317/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The current position regarding eligibility for the Disabled Persons Parking Permit is set out in the Regulation 43 (1) of the Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations 1997 (S.I. No. 182 of 1997). This provides that a Disabled Person Parking Permit may be granted to “a person suffering from a disability that prevents that person from walking or causes undue hardship to the person in walking”. Any person, driver or passenger, meeting the eligibility criteria may be granted a permit. Last July I published a Review of the Disabled Parking Scheme which was conducted by my Department and prepared in co-operation with the issuing authorities, the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland. I have accepted the recommendations of this Review, one of which is that criteria for eligibility for the Scheme should be refocused from type of disability to actual level of mobility impairment. I believe that this will lead to a fairer distribution of Disabled Persons Parking Permits to those whom the Scheme was originally designed to benefit. Work is under way in my Department to give effect to the recommendations of the Review.

Rail Network

340. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Transport the position regarding progress following his decision to proceed with the extension of the restoration of the rail line from Athenry to Tuam; the proposed expenditure involved in these works in 2010 and 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39417/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The first phase of the Western Rail Corridor was opened on 29th March 2010. My Department has received an application for funding from Iarnród Éireann for the detailed design and tender preparation stage for Phase 2, Athenry to Tuam which is currently being reviewed. This stage will involve a detailed estimate of costs for the construction of Phase 2. The exact timeframe for when the project will move to construction will be influenced by the outcome of the design and tender stage and available resources.

Taxi Regulations

341. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport when he received the Commission for Taxi Regulator's submission seeking permission to subsidise the taxi industry to encourage greater accessibility in the taxi fleet and if he has received any updates on that position paper from the Commission or the Regulator [39430/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): As part of its statutory remit the National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for improved access to the transport system and in particular for public passenger transport access for persons with disabilities. In addition, the functions of the CTR will be absorbed into the NTA by the end of the year. I referred the CTR's proposals to the NTA in March 2010 for its consideration and decision. It will be a matter for the NTA to decide on the future approach to incentives for wheelchair accessible taxis in the light of available funding and other priorities as regards supporting enhanced accessibility on bus, rail and taxi services.

342. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport if he has considered changing legislation to allow the Taxi Regulator the power to use some of its surplus cash to buy back taxi plates from drivers leaving the industry due to financial hardship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39432/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): As the Deputy is aware the Commission for Taxi Regulation (CTR) is responsible, under the Taxi Regulation Act, 2003, for the regulation of the small public service vehicles (SPSV) sector. The Act does not provide the CTR with the power to purchase back taxi licences. I do not propose amending legislation to enable the CTR to have such powers in the future. I understand that all new taxi licences issued by the Commission from 8th June 2010 are non-transferable licences.

343. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport if he has had any communications from the Commission for Taxi Regulation, the Taxi Regulator or Data Protection Commissioner in relation to the personal data, including home address and so on, which members of the public can access on request from the Taxi Regulator; the content of such communication; if he has considered changing the regime to make it similar to the Private Security Services Authority where personal details are only available to the Revenue Commissioners, An Garda Síochána and the authority to protect against threats, attacks or otherwise an invasion of the private life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39434/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I have received correspondence from the Data Protection Commissioner and the Commissioner for Taxi Regulation (CTR) in relation to information contained in certificates released on request under Section 38(6) of the Taxi Regulation Act, 2003. Upon payment of a fee, Section 38(6) requires the CTR to issue a certificate relating to information relating to a licence granted, including the name and address of the person who holds the licence.

[Deputy Noel Dempsey.]

Both the Data Protection Commissioner and the Taxi Regulator have referred to concerns raised by taxi licence holders and their representatives regarding the provision of personal information, particularly their personal addresses.

With a view to addressing the issues raised in the correspondence, a review of the legislation and administrative arrangements is under way to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place.

Auctioneers and House Agents

344. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the way in which members of the public can ascertain if a person operating as an auctioneer has an auctioneer's licence; if such information is readily available to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38446/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I wish to inform the Deputy that the licensing of Auctioneers and House Agents is currently a matter for the Revenue Commissioners under the Auctioneers and House Agents Acts 1947 to 1973.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Property Services (Regulation) Bill 2009, which will establish the Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA), is currently awaiting Second Stage debate in this House. Once the new legislation is enacted responsibility for the licensing of Property Services Providers (i.e. Auctioneers/Estate Agents, Letting Agents and Management Agents) will become the responsibility of the PSRA. This legislation also provides for the establishment by the PSRA of a register of persons who are licensed under the Bill to provide property services. The register will be available for inspection free of charge by members of the public at the Authority's office and on its internet website.

Citizenship Applications

345. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 361 of 12 October 2010, the reason an application for naturalisation has not been processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38454/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question 361 on 12 October, 2010. The position remains as stated.

Legislative Programme

346. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform when he will initiate the commencement order on the Fines Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38455/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Fines Act 2010 will be commenced on a phased basis and I expect that the capacity to pay provisions in section 14 will be among the first features of the legislation to be commenced from early January, 2011. Section 14 places an obligation on the court to take account of the defendant's financial circumstances before a fine is imposed.

While I would like to be in a position to commence all parts of this important legislation from an early date, it is not possible to fully commence the Act until the necessary arrangements have been put in place by the Courts Service to fully facilitate its operation. I have requested the Courts Service to prioritise the work necessary in order to progress the request for tender and contract negotiations for the appointment of a receiver. The tender procedure is subject to EU tender rules, including timelines. Appointment of a receiver will facilitate commencement of

section 19 of the Act, which makes imprisonment a last resort on default of payment of a fine. It is only when the receiver has failed to recover the fine (or its value in seized goods) and a community service order has not been complied with, or is not suitable in the circumstances of a particular case, that imprisonment will arise. Significant enhancements to the Courts Service ICT system are necessary to facilitate payment of fines by instalment, which is provided for in section 15. These provisions and the remaining sections of the Act will be commenced as soon as possible.

Asylum Support Services

347. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the procedures in place to assist asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their status and do not have a current valid refugee card and so experience difficulties obtaining benefits [38486/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Deputy may be aware that Ireland operates a system of Direct Provision of services and supports for asylum seekers. At the time of their applications, asylum seekers are offered accommodation in a reception centre in Dublin for a period of approximately ten to fourteen days. During this period they are given access to health (including health screening), legal and welfare services. Asylum seekers are then relocated to an accommodation centre outside the Dublin area.

Accommodation in reception and accommodation centres is provided on a full board basis which includes the provision of a room / family room (as appropriate) and three meals per day. All accommodation for asylum seekers is required to comply and operate in accordance with the statutory requirements of local authorities and State agencies in relation to bedroom capacity, food hygiene, water supply and so on.

Asylum seekers are paid a weekly supplementary welfare payment. The current rates are €19.10 per week for an adult and €9.60 per week for a child. In addition, asylum seekers can access exceptional needs payments, clothing and footwear allowances and similar supports. Asylum seekers can remain in the accommodation provided to them while their application for asylum is being considered. They are precluded by law from receiving rent supplements towards the cost of accommodation in the private rented sector. Additionally, they are not allowed to access the labour market while their applications for asylum are being determined.

I would draw the Deputy's attention to Section 3 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended), where it is made clear that it is only when an individual has been declared to be a refugee do they become entitled to the same social welfare benefits as those to which Irish citizens are entitled.

Garda Telecommunications

348. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the total cost of upgrading the phone system used by An Garda Síochána from analogue to digital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38498/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the total cost of upgrading the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) and Rural PABX networks over the past five years amounted to €9.238m. The Garda authorities have further advised that the additional functionality provided by the upgraded systems will help to achieve savings through the elimination of costs associated with internal calls, a reduction in the cost of handling mobile telephone calls and a reduction in the number of direct lines required within stations.

Liquor Licensing Laws

349. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the procedure for a person operating a post office and shop to obtain a licence to sell wine for consumption off the premises; where and the way one should apply; if the legislation in this matter has recently changed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38510/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Revised provisions governing the grant of a new wine retailer's off-licence are set out in sections 6 to 8 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008.

Citizenship Applications

350. **Deputy Michael Noonan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform when an application for a certificate for naturalisation will be completed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38600/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): A valid application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's Question was received in the Citizenship Division of my Department in February 2010.

All valid applications are dealt with in chronological order as this is deemed to be the fairest to all applicants. The average processing time from application to decision is now at 26 months. More complicated cases can at times take more than the current average, while an element of straightforward cases can be dealt with in less than that timescale.

The length of time taken to process each application should not be classified as a delay, as the length of time taken for any application to be decided is purely a function of the time taken to carry out necessary checks. There is a limit to the reduction in the processing time that can be achieved as applications for naturalisation must be processed in a way which preserves the necessary checks and balances to ensure that it is not undervalued and is only given to persons who genuinely satisfy the necessary qualifying criteria.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made direct to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Garda Vetting Services

351. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the position regarding a Garda clearance form in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38619/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Garda Authorities that a vetting application in respect of the person referred to has been received by the Garda Central Vetting Unit. The application is being processed at present and a response will issue in due course.

Citizenship Applications

352. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the reason for the delay in processing an application in respect of a person (details supplied) [38654/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): A valid application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's Question was received in the Citizenship Division of my Department in April 2008.

All valid applications are dealt with in chronological order as this is deemed to be the fairest to all applicants. The average processing time from application to decision is now at 26 months. More complicated cases can at times take more than the current average, while an element of straightforward cases can be dealt with in less than that timescale. Officials in the Citizenship Division inform me that processing of the application is ongoing and the file will be submitted to me for a decision in due course.

The length of time taken to process each application should not be classified as a delay, as the length of time taken for any application to be decided is purely a function of the time taken to carry out necessary checks. There is a limit to the reduction in the processing time that can be achieved as applications for naturalisation must be processed in a way which preserves the necessary checks and balances to ensure that it is not undervalued and is only given to persons who genuinely satisfy the necessary qualifying criteria.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made direct to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Garda Recruitment

353. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the position regarding the recruitment drive for An Garda Síochána; when this recruitment drive was to commence; the status of this recruitment drive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38683/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The general moratorium on recruitment and appointments in the Public Service continues to apply to An Garda Síochána. The purpose of initiating a Garda recruitment campaign at this time is to begin a process of establishing a panel of approved candidates who will be available to meet future Garda recruitment needs in line with Government policy. This forward planning is necessary given the lead time involved both in establishing such a panel and in training recruits to the point of attestation. The Garda recruitment process is managed by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Commissioner and I have no function in that matter.

Garda Investigations

354. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if it is legal or illegal for An Garda Síochána to confirm to media and journalist queries that a person has been arrested and is being held for questioning; the legislation and procedures that exist to protect a person's presumption of innocence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38685/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): An Garda Síochána, through the Garda Press and Public Relations Office provides information to media in relation to matters under investigation and other issues relating to the work of the organisation. Appeals for assistance/information from the public are also communicated through the media.

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In serious cases, when arrests are made, the Garda Press and Public Relations Office informs the media of the fact that an arrest has been made, the age and gender of the arrested person, where he/she was arrested, for what offence and the relevant power of detention.

I am advised that the Garda Press and Public Relations Office does not identify any person who has been arrested, and that confirmation is not provided in response to any media queries as to whether any named individual has been arrested.

Fraud Offences

355. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform his plans to address the activities of individuals and groups who organise and promote the door to door collection of used clothing; his views regarding alleged criminal activity associated with the used clothing collection operations; his further views regarding the fact that the used clothing collected is not being used for charity purposes as is usually stated in the promotional material; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38708/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Section 6 of the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud) Offences Act 2001 provides for the offence of making gain or causing loss by deception.

Any complaints received by An Garda Síochána regarding activities such as those referred to by the Deputy are the subject of investigation and possible criminal proceedings, where the evidence disclosed so warrants.

The role of An Garda Síochána is to investigate alleged offences, to gather whatever evidence may be available and to submit a report to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The question of whether or not a particular person should be prosecuted and for what criminal offence is the responsibility of the DPP. The Director, who is independent in the performance of his functions, makes his decision on the basis of the Garda findings viewed against the background of common and/or statute law.

Any person who may have information in relation to the matters referred to by the Deputy should contact An Garda Síochána.

Citizenship Applications

356. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the rights and entitlements of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38749/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister for Justice and Law Reform may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. In the case of a non-national applicant who is the spouse of an Irish citizen those conditions are that the applicant must:

- be of full age;
- be of good character;
- be married to the Irish citizen for at least 3 years;
- be in a marriage recognised under the laws of the State as subsisting;

- be living together as husband and wife with the Irish spouse;
- have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the island of Ireland immediately before the date of the application and, during the four years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the island of Ireland amounting to two years;
- have made, either before a Judge of the District Court in open court or in such a manner as the Minister, for special reasons allows, a declaration in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State.

The granting of Irish Citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour and not an entitlement. Applications must be processed in a way which preserves the necessary checks and balances to ensure that it is not undervalued and is only given to persons who genuinely satisfy the necessary qualifying criteria.

It is open to the person in question to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when she is in a position to meet the statutory requirements. Application forms and information on the statutory requirements in relation to an application for a certificate of naturalisation are available on the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Services website at www.inis.gov.ie.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made direct to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

357. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if he will consider correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38990/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. The conditions are that the applicant must:

- be of full age;
- be of good character;
- have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the State amounting to four years;
- have made, either before a Judge of the District Court in open court or in such a manner as the Minister for special reasons allows, a declaration in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State

In the context of naturalisation, certain periods of residence in the State are excluded. These include:

- periods of residence in respect of which an applicant does not have permission to remain in the State;
- periods granted for the purposes of study;

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- periods granted for the purposes of seeking recognition as a refugee within the meaning of the Refugee Act, 1996.

The Minister may, in his absolute discretion, waive the statutory conditions where the application is of Irish descent or Irish associations. Irish associations is defined as meaning related by blood, affinity or adoption to a person who is an Irish citizen. However, this provision is not applicable in this case.

It is open to the person concerned to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation with the Citizenship Division of my Department if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made direct to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Proposed Legislation

358. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform when the Spent Convictions Bill is expected to be brought to completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39031/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Spent Convictions Bill 2007 completed Second Stage in this House on 18 December 2008. Work is under way on the preparation of Committee Stage amendments. My colleague, Mr. Barry Andrews, TD, Minister for Children, expects to be in a position to publish the amendments early in the next term and he hopes that Committee Stage can take place shortly thereafter.

Residency Permits

359. **Deputy Joe Behan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if arrangements for renewal of Garda National Immigration Bureau Registration cards could be re-examined (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39034/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have been informed by the Garda National Immigration Bureau that non-nationals who present at the registration office located at the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) premises at Burgh Quay, Dublin, 2 for the purpose of complying with their requirement to be placed on a register of non-nationals, provided for at section 9 of the Immigration Act 2004, are each issued with a numbered ticket which indicates their position within the queue of people presenting on that day. The numbered ticket is issued to each non-national by a senior member of staff who ensures that the persons concerned are in possession of all necessary documentation and establishes any other issue which might impact on the registration of the non-nationals.

In the event that any person presenting for the purpose of being entered on the register of non-nationals, maintained pursuant to the provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, indicates that he/she has any particular difficulty with regard to complying with the registration process, it will be considered at the time of being issued with a numbered ticket.

When each non-national is issued with such ticket, he or she is advised of the approximate time at which his or her application will be processed, thus eliminating the need for the non-

national to remain at the GNIB premises for protracted periods of time. In the event that a non-national would indicate that he or she has a medical condition or, as in the circumstances subject of this Question is at an advanced stage of pregnancy, his or her application to be entered on the register of non-nationals will be prioritised.

Garda Vetting Services

360. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if there is a rule whereby persons from other EU countries (details supplied) have to wait for two years before they get Garda clearance for jobs that require such vetting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39108/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Garda Central Vetting Unit issues vetting certificates to a registered organisation in respect of any individual whom it proposes to employ or engage in a position having substantial, unsupervised access to children and/or vulnerable adults. There are no special waiting periods for persons from other EU countries for vetting purposes. A Garda vetting certificate is issued to a registered organisation in response to a written request made with the permission of the person who is the subject of that request .

Gaming Regulation

361. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the progress that has been made in relation to legislation on gambling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39139/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 21 and 50 for answer on 7 October, 2010 in which I set out the necessary process involved in this matter before any legislative change can be addressed. The position has not changed since that date.

In essence, the position is that I initiated a major review of gambling in May of last year. The objective of the wide-ranging review is to provide Government with options for a new and comprehensive legal and organisational framework governing the gambling architecture in the State. It is a matter of record that successive Governments have shied away from attempting any significant reform of our gambling laws since our existing gaming and lotteries legislation was enacted over 50 years ago. Notwithstanding the foregoing, however, I am resolved to make our gambling laws relevant to the 21st century. In light of this commitment, I make no apology for taking the time to make sure this is done effectively. We must first achieve a policy in relation to a new gambling architecture that is capable of winning broad spectrum agreement. It is when this goal is achieved that we will be in a position to address the matter of legislative change, with some degree of confidence.

Any such new policy aimed at modernising our gambling code must take account of the issues raised by new technologies, particularly the Internet. In addition, policy must also be premised on the three important considerations which are the hallmark of most well-regulated gambling codes. These are:

- that young people and the vulnerable are protected
- that gambling should, in all respects, be fairly and openly conducted and
- that gambling is kept free of crime.

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Following the settling of that policy, arrangements will be made in the normal course to address the necessary legislative change.

As the first comprehensive review of our gambling law, effectively since the enactment of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 draws to a close, it is reasonable to expect that any new legislation that may arise, will be both complex and comprehensive.

Garda Strength

362. **Deputy Charlie O'Connor** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if sufficient resources will be made available to An Garda Síochána in Tallaght, Dublin 24 to allow for an effective response to crime in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39148/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of Tallaght Garda Station, on the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 204. Tallaght Garda Station forms part of the DMR South Division and on that date the personnel strength of the DMR South Division was 639. There are 10 Juvenile Liaison Officers and 55 Community Gardaí attached to the DMR South Garda Division.

Responsibility for the allocation of resources, including personnel, within the Force rests with the Garda Commissioner, in consultation with his senior management team. Resource levels are constantly monitored, in conjunction with crime trends and other demands made on An Garda Síochána, and the situation is kept under continuing review to ensure optimum use is made of these resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the public. Garda management will continue to monitor the situation in the DMR South Division with a view to ensuring that an effective Garda service is maintained.

Prison Building Programme

363. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 321 of 15 June 2010, the additional planting and maintenance costs to date in 2010; the plans for further expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39153/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): During the period January to September 2010, expenditure of €10,900 was incurred in relation to the planting and maintenance of the boundary planting scheme at Thornton Hall, Kilsallaghan, County Dublin.

As indicated previously, when granting development consent for the Thornton Hall prison project, the Oireachtas decided to increase the planted zone at certain points along the perimeter of the site in order to mitigate the visual and aural impact of the development. This additional planting will be undertaken at the appropriate time.

Proposed Legislation

364. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform further to parliamentary Question No. 380 of 7 July 2009, the progress made to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39156/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Legal Costs Bill and the Family Law Bill, referred to in the Government Legislation Programme for the Autumn

Session, remain as Bills in respect of which the details continue to be developed in my Department.

Residency Permits

365. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if he will confirm that a work permit for eight years entitles a person (details supplied) in County Kildare leave to remain in the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39177/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The position in relation to the status of Long Term Residency is that, at the date of application, a person applying for such status must have been legally resident in the State for over five years (60 months) on the basis of work permit, work authorisation or working visa conditions. Such applications are made to the Long Term Residency Section of my Department and where such an application is approved, permission to remain for a further five-year period is granted. Persons granted this status are exempt from employment permit requirements.

In addition to the requirement to have completed five years (60 months) of legal residency in the State, on work permit conditions, an applicant for Long Term Residency must have the corresponding Stamp 1 or Stamp 4 endorsements on their Passport during such periods.

In calculating the period of legal residency, my Department only takes into consideration time spent in the State legally on work permit conditions. Periods of time where a person has not had the requisite stamps on their Passport are not counted.

In addition to the basic requirements referred to above, some other conditions must be met. One of these conditions is that an applicant must be of good character. Against this background, each application is forwarded to the Garda National Immigration Bureau for a character check before a decision is made. Applicants who do not satisfy these conditions will not be considered for a grant of Long Term Residency.

In relation to the case of the person concerned, I am advised that an application for Long Term Residency was received from him on 7 March 2008. Following the consideration of this application, a decision was made to refuse the application and this refusal decision was conveyed in writing to the relevant party by letter dated 9 September 2009. The reasons for refusal were set out in that letter.

Arising from the refusal of that application, and given that the person concerned had no other valid basis to remain in the State, the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 18 May 2010, of the proposal to make a Deportation Order in respect of him, in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). He was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against him.

Representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned and these representations will be fully considered under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. When this overall consideration has been completed, the case is submitted to me for decision. Once a decision has been made, this decision and the consequences of the decision will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such

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cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

366. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the position regarding residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39178/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my detailed Reply to his recent Parliamentary Question, No. 1052 of Wednesday, 29th September, 2010, in this matter. The position in the State of the person concerned is as set out in that Reply.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

367. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the position regarding an application for residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39179/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my Reply to his recent Parliamentary Question, No. 1054 of Wednesday, 29th September, 2010, in this matter. The position in the State of the person concerned is as set out in that Reply.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Asylum Applications

368. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if leave to remain here on compassionate and health grounds will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39180/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy has no application pending for residency. The person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order, signed on 23 September 2009, following a comprehensive and thorough examination of her asylum claim and her application for subsidiary protection, and a detailed examination of the representations she submitted for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

The effect of the Deportation Order is that the person concerned must leave the State and remain thereafter out of the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made direct to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

369. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the position regarding an application for leave to remain in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39181/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Arising from the refusal of her asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 17th July, 2007, that the Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of her. She was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against her. In addition, she was notified of her entitlement to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006.

The person concerned initiated Judicial Review Proceedings in the High Court, challenging the decision of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal in her case. On the 3rd April, 2009, the High Court refused the Judicial Review Leave Application with the consequence that the earlier decisions of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal and the Minister stood.

Subsequently, an application was made on behalf of the person concerned, seeking to have her re-admitted to the asylum process in accordance with the provisions of Section 17(7) of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended). Following consideration of this application, a decision was taken to refuse the application and this decision was notified by letter dated 26th June, 2009.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before the file is passed to me for decision. Once a decision has been made, this decision and the consequences of the decision will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

370. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the position regarding an asylum application in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39182/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The person concerned applied for asylum in this State on 19th August, 2008. His asylum claim was investigated by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and, on appeal, by the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, both of whom concluded that the person concerned did not meet the criteria for recognition as a refugee.

Arising from the refusal of his asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 25 May 2010, that the Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of him. He was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against

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him. In addition, he was notified of his entitlement to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006.

The person concerned submitted an application for Subsidiary Protection. When consideration of this application has been completed, the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome.

In the event that the application for Subsidiary Protection is refused, the position in the State of the person concerned will then be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before the file is passed to me for decision. Once a decision has been made, this decision and the consequences of the decision will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Residency Permits

371. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the position regarding an application for residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39183/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy, made a Family Reunification application in August 2009. The application was forwarded to the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner as required under Section 18 of the Refugee Act 1996. The investigation was completed in February 2010 and a report was forwarded to INIS. The application is currently under consideration by INIS. INIS are currently waiting for an inter-departmental report, upon receipt of same INIS will contact the applicant.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made direct to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

372. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the position regarding an application for residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39184/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my detailed Reply to his earlier Parliamentary Question, No. 148 of Thursday, 27 May, 2010, in this matter.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before the file is passed to me for decision. Once a decision has been made, this decision and the consequences of the decision will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Crime Levels

373. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to the fact that, further to Parliamentary Question No. 141 of 7 October 2010, the relevant section of the Garda Síochána has publicly commented on the fact that numerous burglaries were due to unprotected or inadequate intruder systems and that victims only became aware of this after a burglary; that Parliamentary Question No. 141 requested information which is already in the hands of the Gardaí; that the use of such systems is seen as a bonus for burglary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39185/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Garda authorities that alarm systems of an adequate standard are an effective deterrent against burglars. However, alarms are not a replacement for good physical security, but work best when used in tandem with physical security measures, such as door and window locks of an appropriate standard.

All members of An Garda Síochána promote crime prevention and reduction. There are also dedicated Crime Prevention Officers (CPOs) within each Garda Division, who encourage, promote and advise both private citizens and the business community on crime prevention. A list of CPOs and crime prevention advice are available on the Garda website *www.garda.ie*.

Criminal Assets Bureau

374. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number of houses and apartments that have been repossessed in Galway city and county and around the country by the Criminal Assets Bureau in the past few years; the number that were sold, and the price and the location of these houses or apartments. [39209/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I wish to advise the Deputy that the Criminal Assets Bureau, while authorised by statute to own property, does not in fact own any property. Properties which are the subject of orders under the Proceeds of Crime Act 1996 are generally held by a Court appointed receiver. Once a final order is made, the property becomes vested in the Minister for Finance.

While the Bureau regularly targets certain properties under both the proceeds of crime and taxation legislation, there are statutory limitations on the disclosure of such information in the course of Court proceedings. It is therefore the policy of the Bureau not to disclose information on specific properties until investigations have been completed and the Courts have made a final determination. It is therefore difficult for the Bureau to be specific in relation to the numbers that were sold and the price and location of these houses or apartments.

There are a significant number of properties around the country which are the subject of Section 7 receivership orders, some with a power of sale, and some without. However the majority of these are still subject to a final order from the Court. One particular property in County Galway has been the subject of an order pursuant to Sections 3 and 7 of the Proceeds of Crime Act within the past few years. The receiver is in the process of inviting bids in the hope of effecting a sale of the property, final approval of which is subject to High Court

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approval. As the matter has the potential to be subject to further Court proceedings, it is not appropriate for the Bureau to provide further details on this case at present.

An Garda Síochána and the Criminal Assets Bureau are prohibited by legislation in disclosing details of ongoing investigations or legal proceedings prior to conclusion. The Criminal Assets Bureau is required, by statute, to prepare an Annual Report which is submitted to the Minister for Justice and Law Reform. The report for 2009, which was published this week, details in general terms the number of receivership orders granted and the funds collected by the Bureau.

Prison Committals

375. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number of prisoners who served sentences of less than 12 months in each of the years 2005 to 2009 and to date in 2010; the average monthly cost to the State of keeping a person in prison in each of those years; the number of persons who have served less than 12 months and were found to have committed a crime after their release in each of the years from 2005 to 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39211/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I can advise the Deputy that figures for the number of persons committed to custody serving less than 12 month sentences during each of the past 5 years and the average monthly cost of keeping an offender in custody in those years, are set out in the table below. Figures in relation to 2010 are unavailable at this stage.

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of Persons committed serving less than 12 months	3,944	4,607	4,952	6,424	9,216
Monthly Average cost of keeping an offender	€7,575	€7,641	€8,141	€7,726	€6,435

It is not possible to provide figures to the Deputy in relation to those who were found to have committed a crime after their release as this would require the manual examination of records going back over the time period in question. Such an examination would require a disproportionate and inordinate amount of staff time and effort and could not be justified in current circumstances where there are other significant demands on resources.

However, the Deputy may wish to note that the Irish Prison Service facilitated a major study of prisoner re-offending by the UCD Institute of Criminology, published in 2008. That study found that 27.4% of released prisoners were serving a new prison sentence within one year. This rose to 39.2% after two years, 45.1% after three years, and 49.2% after four years. The fact that over 50% of prisoners do not re-offend within four years of release compares well internationally.

376. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the percentage of persons engaged in work, training and educational activities in prisons here by prison in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39224/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The most recent full year statistics available are for 2009. Over the course of 2009, an average of 39% of the prison population are reported as having attended education classes. This figure is based on weekly returns from the education units in each prison and excludes normal school holidays, when a

reduced service is available. Additionally, in the same period, an average of 20% of the prison population are recorded as having attended workshop sessions each day. This understates workshop participation somewhat since the prisoners attending morning and afternoon sessions may vary.

Participation rates in different institutions also vary with factors such as facilities, availability of alternative activities, population turnover and segregation having an impact on the numbers involved. The pattern of attendance for each prison is presented in the following table. Prisoners may participate in both education and work and training so there is a degree of overlap in the figures given.

Institution	Average % of prison population per work and training session	Average % of prison population attending education
Arbour Hill	53	57
Castlerea	19	38
Cloverhill	5	19
Cork	21	43
Dóchas	33	55
Limerick	12	46
Loughan House	11	65
Midlands	17	46
Mountjoy	17	19
Portlaoise	7	54
Shelton Abbey	50	63
St Patrick's Institution	21	44
Training Unit	55	38
Wheatfield	27	38

Prisoner Releases

377. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number of persons on full temporary release from prisons here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39225/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Criminal Justice Act 1960, as amended by the Criminal Justice (Temporary Release of Prisoners) Act 2003 provides that the Minister may approve the temporary release of a sentenced prisoner. This discretionary instrument assists in gradually preparing suitable offenders for release and in administering short sentences, and is an incentive to well-behaved prisoners.

Temporary release arrangements operate similarly to a system of parole, which is a feature of prison systems worldwide. They are an important vehicle for re-integrating an offender into the community in a planned way. The generally accepted view is that the risk to the community is reduced by planned re-integration of offenders compared with their return to the community on the completion of their full sentence. The Irish Prison Service has also judiciously used temporary release as a means of reducing numbers in times of serious overcrowding. Each case is examined on its own merits and the safety of the public is paramount when decisions are made. In addition, all releases are subject to conditions, which in the vast majority of cases include a requirement to report on a regular basis to the offender's Garda Station. Of course, any offender who breaches his or her conditions may be arrested and returned to prison immediately by the Gardaí.

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I can advise the Deputy that on 26 October, 2010 there were 563 persons on reviewable temporary release from prison. Of this, 107 persons were on full temporary release. A condition for prisoners on reviewable temporary release is that they return to the prison on a set day. Their case is then reconsidered with regard to them being granted a further period of temporary release. Prisoners on full temporary release are not required to return to the prison but, obviously, must abide by the conditions of their temporary release until the expiration of their sentence.

Departmental Agencies

378. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department’s control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39238/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I wish to inform the Deputy that the number of board members sitting on the board of each statutory State Agency under my Department’s control is set out below:

Name of Board of State Agency	Number of members
Courts Service Board	17
Legal Aid Board	13
Private Security Authority	11
Property Registration Authority	11

379. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the annual budget of each State agency under his Department’s control in each of the years from 2006 to 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39253/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I wish to inform the Deputy that the information requested for the years 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 is available in the Revised Estimates Volume for each of the years concerned. Copies of these documents are available on the Department of Finance’s website (www.finance.gov.ie) and in the Oireachtas Library. I also wish to refer the Deputy to the Revised Estimates Volume for 2010 which contains full year Estimates information for the bodies concerned. Copies of this document are available on the Department of Finance’s website (www.finance.gov.ie) and in the Oireachtas Library.

Crime Levels

380. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform his plans for curtailing the activities of drug addicts who consistently rob supermarkets and other such premises; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that jailing such people in the majority of cases does not seem to work; his views on whether such people can be rehabilitated on community projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39259/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): As the Deputy is aware, the Government’s National Drug Strategy 2009-2016 tackles the complex problem of drug misuse in an integrated way under the five pillar headings of Drugs Supply Reduction, Education and Prevention, Treatment, Rehabilitation and Research. Underpinning this strategy is the collaborative approach in place between statutory services and the community and voluntary

sectors. A key feature of this strategy is to provide drug treatment for people in the criminal justice system who require such care.

The Probation Service of the Department of Justice and Law Reform is the lead agency in the assessment and management of offenders in our communities. This Service provides funding to approximately 50 voluntary bodies to add value to the core work of the Service and to assist with the management of offenders in the community. Community based organisations in receipt of funding provide a range of services to offenders including training and education, offender management programmes, residential accommodation, and drug and alcohol abuse treatment programmes.

In keeping with the principles in the National Drug Strategy, the Probation Service is committed to playing its part in the development and implementation of a comprehensive and integrated drug treatment implementation programme. The principal provider of services and funder of medical and non-medical addiction services for both illicit drug and alcohol use is the Health Service Executive through its Social Inclusion Services.

The Deputy will also be aware that in May, 2010 I published a Review of the Drug Treatment Court. This Review provided evidence that the option of the Drug Treatment Court can have encouraging outcomes. The findings suggested that participants who engage with the Programme have reduced rates of recidivism and improved health, education and social skills. Based on this Review and the implementation of a series of recommendations aimed at making the Programme more effective, I approved the continued operation of the Drug Treatment Court for a further two years.

More generally, the Deputy might wish to be aware that I intend to bring forward proposals to Government in the next few weeks to draft legislation to encourage greater use of community service orders in lieu of custodial sentences for minor offences. I should also add that the second Discussion Document of the White Paper on Crime series, 'Criminal Sanctions', which was published in February 2010 included an examination of the use of non-custodial sanctions generally, such as Community Service. Submissions on this Document were invited from the Public and, in August 2010, my Department published reports of both the submissions received and a consultation seminar held in Dublin Castle in May 2010. The opinions received will be reflected in the development of future policy.

An Garda Síochána continue to monitor the situation with a view to putting in place crime prevention and reduction schemes as appropriate. My Department and its agencies will continue to invest significant efforts and resources into addressing the problems associated with drug misuse and will continue to do so under our National Drugs Strategy.

Departmental Correspondence

381. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if he will respond to correspondence (details supplied). [39321/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have absolutely no knowledge of the matter referred to by the Deputy.

Anti-Social Behaviour

382. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to complaints of anti-social behaviour in an area (details supplied) in County Meath; the steps he will take to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39403/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matter referred to by the Deputy. I will contact the Deputy again when the report is to hand.

Overseas Development Aid

383. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his plans to continue his support by adhering to the stated promise to spend 0.7% of national income on overseas aid by 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39428/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Peter Power): Ireland is committed to the UN target to provide 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) to Official Development Assistance (ODA) by 2015. The Minister for Foreign Affairs confirmed the commitment at the recent United Nations Summit in September. The EU has committed to collectively attain the UN target by 2015, and has set an interim target of 0.51% for Ireland and other Member States in 2010. This year the Government is providing a total of €671 million for ODA. On current projections, this will amount to at least 0.52% of GNP, thereby exceeding the EU interim target. Last year, Ireland was the seventh most generous aid donor in the world in per capita terms. We are ahead of most other EU Member States in our progress towards the achievement of the international ODA target by 2015.

The economic crisis of the past two years has required very difficult decisions across all areas of public expenditure, including the allocations for ODA. The sole motivation and objective of these decisions has been the need to restore stability to the public finances, in order to create the conditions for a resumption of economic growth. Stable public finances and sustained growth in our own economy are the indispensable bases for the resumption of sustainable growth in the aid programme.

The Deputy will be fully aware of the extent of the challenge facing the Government in framing the Budget for 2011. The decision in relation to ODA, as with all budget expenditure decisions, will be taken in the light of our commitment to restoring growth to the Irish economy.

The Government's aid programme is the Irish people's aid programme. We can be justifiably proud that it continues to receive strong international recognition for its quality and effectiveness and for its particular sharp focus on the poorest countries and communities in sub-Saharan Africa. I am committed to maintaining the high quality of our aid programme, and its focus on the fight against global poverty and hunger.

Passport Applications

384. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the position regarding a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38477/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Passports Act 2008 requires that before issuing a passport to a person, the Minister for Foreign Affairs shall be satisfied that the person is an Irish citizen and that in the case of children full parental or guardian consent is provided. Documentary proof in respect of identity and entitlement to citizenship are required for all passport applications. These requirements are outlined in the passport application form notes that accompany each application form. Details are also available on the Department's website. Birth certificates are among the standard documents that are required for applications that involve children and persons, aged 18 and over the age, who are first-time applicants. These certificates are critical to the passport process in the following ways:

- (i) Each certificate confirms and verifies the applicant's personal details such as his/her date and place of birth which appear on that person's passport.
- (ii) They help to demonstrate the person's entitlement to Irish citizenship which is a pre-requisite for passport issue; and
- (iii) Details of parents are stated on these certificates. This is important to the Passport Service in ensuring that the full parental consent to the issue of a passport to a minor is provided.

For the reasons above, birth certificates are and remain a basis requirement for passport applications.

In terms of this case, I can confirm that no passport application has been registered with the Passport Service for the child. It therefore remains open to the child's mother to formally apply for a passport on her behalf. However, it should be noted that a long form birth certificate will be required. Any difficulties that may be encountered by the child's mother in registering her child's birth in Ireland is a matter that she will have to pursue directly with the General Registrar's Office. Their address and contact details as follows:

Office of the Registrar General
Civil Registration Service
Government Offices
Convent Road
Roscommon

LoCall: 1.890.200311 Website: www.groireland.ie

From the details supplied, it should be noted that the child's entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 2004 ("the 2004 Act"). Section 6A of the 2004 Act provides that persons born in the State on or after 1 January, 2005, where neither parent is an Irish or a British citizen or otherwise entitled to reside in the State or Northern Ireland without restriction, may claim citizenship by birth in the State (and thereby establish eligibility for a passport) only where the parent has been lawfully resident in the State for 3 of the 4 years preceding their birth.

At the time of the birth of the person concerned, her mother was a Polish national. Section 6B(2) of the 2004 Act makes particular provision for parents from EU Member States whereby such nationals may make a declaration in a prescribed form concerning their residence in the island of Ireland within the 4 years preceding the child's birth. This declaration is supported by the submission of the parent's EU passport and by documentary evidence of that parent's residence in Ireland. That non-Irish citizen parent will then be regarded as having resided in the island of Ireland for the declared periods for the purposes of s6A, unless the contrary is proved. This declaration and the supporting documentation in relation to the mother's residence will be required in any future passport application that is made for this child on this basis.

Foreign Conflicts

385. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the effects, if any, of the partial lifting of the blockade by Israel on human rights in Gaza. [38611/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The blockade of Gaza remains in force, in the sense that Israel continues to require that it be able to control and security screen

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

goods entering the strip, and for this reason it continues to prevent any direct shipments by sea to Gaza. However, a number of measures have been taken to relax the conditions for goods entering Gaza by the land crossings from Israel. The previous highly restricted and opaque list of goods which were allowed into Gaza has been replaced by a more transparent ‘negative list’ of goods which are not allowed in, principally materials recognised internationally as dual use goods. For the wide range of food and consumer goods, the previous restrictions have therefore been removed.

The overall volume of goods allowed into Gaza has been progressively increased, and now stands at about 50% higher than before the summer. This is a very welcome increase, but still only amounts to about one third of the volume of goods which were entering Gaza in the period before the blockade.

There has been a modest improvement in the availability of food and consumer goods. However, much of the recent increase has been goods which have simply displaced the more expensive goods previously brought in through the tunnel economy, which is now greatly reduced. Continued expansion of the volume of imports will be needed if there is to be significant improvement in the living conditions for ordinary Gazans.

Because goods entering Gaza remain subject to rigorous security checks, there are infrastructural bottlenecks which limit how quickly this volume can be increased. Israel has indicated steps it is taking to increase the capacity of the crossing points. This is clearly work in progress, which I shall be following closely. Additional capacity should be made available as soon as possible, to arrive quickly at a point where all of Gaza’s needs can be routinely met.

There remain two serious areas of concern. First, while steel, cement and other construction materials are allowed into Gaza in greater quantities than before — but in a very closely controlled procedure, on the grounds that such materials could also be used for military purposes by Hamas or others — considerably greater flows are needed to repair the damage to infrastructure, housing and businesses. Greater effort should be made to facilitate UNRWA in its effort to build sufficient schools in which it teaches tolerance and respect for human rights. In the absence of such schools, parents have no option but to send their children to Hamas schools, built with smuggled materials, which teach a very different curriculum.

Secondly, there has been no provision yet for a resumption of exports from Gaza, or for the ordinary movement of persons. Without these, economic life cannot resume, and Gazans will remain in a state of permanent dependency and unemployment, the conditions in which militancy flourishes.

While I recognise the improvements that have taken place in Gaza, I want to see more done — and more quickly. All restrictions save those directly necessitated by security should be removed.

It is important to recognise that there are many human rights concerns in relation to Gaza apart from the blockade. Under the control of Hamas in the last three years, there has been growing concern about the increasing number and secrecy of executions, including of political opponents, of restrictions on freedom of expression, the media, and NGOs, and actions to restrict the freedom of women. None of these areas have shown any recent improvement; indeed, they seem to be worsening.

It is also appropriate to recall that militant groups in Gaza continue to aim missiles and mortars deliberately at civilian areas in Israel, although thankfully the volume is now significantly reduced. I reiterate my condemnation of such indiscriminate attacks and of those who perpetrate them. In addition, the Israeli soldier, Sgt Shalit, who was abducted while on duty in

Israel, remains in captivity in Gaza, without being allowed visits even by the Red Cross. I again urge those holding Sgt. Shalit to release him.

Passport Applications

386. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if a passport will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38659/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Passports Act 2008 requires that before issuing a passport to a person, the Minister for Foreign Affairs shall be satisfied that the person is an Irish citizen. Proofs of identity and entitlement to citizenship are required in respect of all passport applications. As the person in question was born in 2010, her entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 2004 (the 2004 Act). Those persons, who were born in the State after 1 January 2005, where neither parent is an Irish or British citizen or otherwise entitled to reside without restriction in the State or in Northern Ireland, may claim citizenship by birth in the State (and thereby establish eligibility for a passport) only where a parent has a period of reckonable residency in the State for 3 years of the 4 years preceding their birth.

In the case of applications for passports arising from the terms of the 2004 Act, it is the practice of the Passport Office to seek evidence of lawful residence in the State by one or both parents. The general types of evidence considered are immigration stamps in passports and Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) cards and registration books. In cases where a parent is a refugee, the evidence required is the travel document for declared refugees, which is issued by the Department of Justice and Law Reform, a GNIB card and the letter from the Department of Justice and Law Reform which declares the parent to be a refugee.

A passport application was submitted for this child on 07 September, 2010. The evidence submitted showed that the child's father did not have the required amount of reckonable residence in the four years prior to his children's birth in accordance with guidelines provided to the Passport Service by the Department of Justice and Law Reform, which is responsible for citizenship and immigration matters. Accordingly, the passport application could not be approved. The guidelines direct that periods of residency in the State, prior to obtaining a declaration as a refugee in accordance with the Refugee Act, 1996, are not reckonable for the purposes of the 2004 Act. The evidence provided by the applicant's father to the Passport Service shows that while he was resident in State from May 2007, he was not declared a refugee until 26 October 2007. Accordingly he does not have the necessary period of reckonable residency prior to the birth of the applicant.

The guideline with regard to residence, that arises prior to the date on which a person is declared a refugee, is currently being reviewed by the Department of Justice and Law Reform in consultation with the Passport Service. If, on foot of this review, the guideline changes, the Passport Service will of course re-examine the passport application and contact the applicant's parents accordingly.

EU Enlargement

387. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the position on Serbia's application to the EU; and his position on bringing those responsible for the 8,000 civilian massacred at Srebrenica to justice [38660/10]

391. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the steps he is taking on behalf of the Irish nation to ensure that persons (details supplied) are brought to the Hague

[Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan.]

tribunal and that this takes place before Serbia is allowed to proceed further on the path to European Union accession. [38752/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 387 and 391 together.

Serbia submitted its application for EU membership in December 2009. At the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 25 October, Ministers unanimously decided to refer the application to the European Commission for its opinion. This is essentially a technical step and usually happens quickly following the submission of an application. The period for the formulation of that opinion has no specific timeframe, although the Commission’s research on Serbia’s application is likely to take several months and a report is not expected until the second half of 2011.

The Council reaffirmed that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union and reiterated that each country’s progress towards the Union depends on its individual efforts to comply with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilisation and Association Process. The Council also reiterated that a constructive approach towards regional cooperation is essential and called for progress in the process of EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

The Council recalled that, in line with the political criteria of Copenhagen, full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is an essential condition for membership of the EU and that Serbia’s full cooperation with the ICTY is already required by the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Agreement (Articles 2 and 4). The Council furthermore called upon Serbia to implement recommendations presented by the ICTY Office of the Prosecutor to the United Nations Security Council in June 2010 concerning Serbia’s support in ongoing trials and appeals and Serbia’s assistance in the key matter of the arrest of the two remaining fugitives, Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic. In addition, the Council underlined that, at each stage of Serbia’s path towards EU accession, further steps will be taken only when the Council unanimously decides that full co-operation with the ICTY exists or continues to exist. Negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) began in 2005. The negotiation and signing process for the EU-Serbia SAA was delayed on a number of occasions until the EU was satisfied with Belgrade’s level of cooperation with the Tribunal. Ministers decided at the June Foreign Affairs Council to submit the EU-Serbia SAA to national parliaments for ratification following positive assessments by the ICTY Chief Prosecutor regarding Serbia’s ongoing cooperation with the Tribunal.

I share the widespread revulsion at the appalling massacres at Srebrenica and elsewhere during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and I too want to see the perpetrators brought to justice as soon as possible. Regrettably, as we know from experience elsewhere, including in this country, justice can sometimes take time to deliver.

Serbia must do all in its power to ensure that Mladic and Hadzic are immediately handed over to the ICTY. However, I believe that we, for our part, should acknowledge the substantial progress Serbia has made in the ten years since public outrage led to the end of the Milošević regime. Serbia today is a different place from the Serbia of Milošević because of the courageous decisions of governments in Belgrade since then. Over the past year, in particular, we have seen a number of positive developments which demonstrate that Serbia’s Government has moved away from the destructive politics of past decades.

These positive developments include: the declaration by the Belgrade Parliament last March condemning the Srebrenica massacre; the appointment by Bosnia and Herzegovina in March

of an Ambassador in Belgrade for the first time in three years; the handing over of the wartime notebooks of Ratko Mladic to the ICTY in May; the joint visit by the Serbian and Croatian Presidents to Bosnia for the Srebrenica commemoration this July; the indictment in September of nine former paramilitaries by the country's war crimes prosecutor over the killing of ethnic Albanians during the Kosovo conflict; and the joint EU-Serbia UN General Assembly resolution on Kosovo this September.

I met with Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic in New York last month. He emphasised the importance Serbia attaches to EU integration and underlined Belgrade's commitment to working with the ICTY. In response to my questioning, he assured me that his government is determined to secure the arrest of the two remaining indictees.

I believe that the most likely means of achieving the arrest of Mladic and Hadzic lies in a combination of encouragement and pressure designed to empower the progressive elements in Serbia and that it is important that we send a signal to the people of Serbia that we recognise the positive direction their country has taken in the past decade. I welcome, therefore, the unanimous decision by Ministers to request an opinion on Serbia's membership application from the Commission. We should continue to assist and encourage Serbia in its reform programme, as it rebuilds its relations with its neighbours and moves towards the EU. At the same time, as with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement process, the EU will insist at each stage in the process that Serbia cooperates fully with the ICTY.

Overseas Development Aid

388. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views regarding a submission (details supplied); the actions he will take to address the concerns raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38667/10]

390. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views regarding the increased involvement of China in providing aid to Africa; if this policy is in conflict with aid as supplied by Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38715/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 388 and 390 together.

The submission referred to by Deputy Wall concerns two newspaper articles regarding, respectively, the role of China in Africa and the UN report on what happened in the DRC between 1993 and 2003, in particular the role of other countries, including Rwanda.

I am aware of the contrast often made between what has been perceived as the commercial focus of China's policy in Africa and the primary focus of Ireland and the EU on issues such as poverty reduction, human rights and good governance. However, I believe that this contrast can be overstated. There are signs that China is increasingly aware of the importance of peace and stability in Africa and, as such, these are areas of shared interest with Ireland and the EU. China also has a large contribution to make in Africa by the sharing of experience on the reduction of poverty, including in some key areas for Africa such as raising agricultural productivity.

At the EU-China Summit held in Nanjing last November both sides welcomed trilateral dialogue between the EU, China and Africa, and agreed to explore appropriate areas for cooperation. They reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the full and timely achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and to supporting Africa's sustainable development and early economic recovery from the global financial crisis. At the most recent summit, held in

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Brussels earlier this month, both sides reaffirmed their active commitment to peace and sustainable development of the world.

I am also of the view that the commitment of African countries to human rights, gender equality, good governance and the fight against corruption is not only the product of pressure related to assistance from donors. African countries are participants in a wide range of international instruments which guarantee such freedoms and are, as is Ireland, accountable under the terms of these international agreements.

On 1 October the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report which documented the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed within the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between March 1993 and June 2003. I fully support the statement by High Representative Ashton in which she welcomed the report as an additional contribution in the global fight against impunity for human rights violations, and expressed the EU's determination to support the prevention of crimes violating human rights and humanitarian law, and the need to hold accountable the perpetrators of such crimes.

As regards the provision of Overseas Development Aid to Africa, Ireland's assistance has a strong focus on poverty reduction and hunger. We work closely with our partner governments in Africa, and other donors, to ensure that international aid has the most effective impact in reducing poverty, alleviating hunger and in the providing basic services such as health and education. We welcome the provision of development aid to Africa by new donors, such as China, who share our commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Ireland will continue to work with our partners in Africa, and other international donors to ensure that Overseas Development Assistance is directed to those areas most in need and is used in the most effective way in the fight against hunger and poverty. For our part, we are determined to deliver on our commitment that Ireland's Aid Programme will benefit the poorest and most vulnerable in Africa.

389. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the implications an UN report (details supplied) will have on the allocation of Irish aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38714/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Peter Power): The OHCHR (the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) Report of the *Mapping Exercise documenting the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the period of 1993 to 2003* is an important contribution to the global efforts to address impunity for human rights violations. The Report identifies countries "that could be held responsible for serious violations of human rights committed by their national armies during the period in question", including Rwanda.

In HR Ashton's statement on behalf of the EU after the publication of the Report, which Ireland fully supports, she reiterated the determination of the EU to support the prevention of crimes violating human rights and humanitarian law, and strongly supports the need to hold accountable the perpetrators of such crimes.

Rwanda has made considerable progress in seeking to overcome the human and economic legacy of the terrible genocide visited upon the country in 1994. While Irish Aid does not provide budget support to the Government of Rwanda, assistance is provided directly to the Rwandan people through a number of NGO, civil society and missionary partners which carry out enormously important work in helping to rebuild Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide

there. In 2010, Irish Aid expects to provide approximately €2 million to the Rwandan people through our partners.

Our main NGO partners include Concern, Trocaire and Christian Aid as well as Mísean Cara, which supports missionaries working on the ground in Rwanda. This funding is used to support Basic Education, Primary Health Care, Water Sanitation and Community Rural Development in Rwanda.

Question No. 390 answered with Question No. 388.

Question No. 391 answered with Question No. 387.

State Visits

392. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will provide names of persons involved in the committee arranging the visit of Queen Elizabeth to Ireland in 2011 [39038/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Deputy will be aware that the Taoiseach has indicated already that it is right and timely that the transformation of relations between Britain and Ireland should be reflected in a State visit to Ireland by Queen Elizabeth. Reconciliation between Ireland and Great Britain has been hugely advanced over recent decades, most importantly through the working together of successive Irish and British governments on the peace process, and the Government is of the view that relations between our own two countries should be marked by the normal courtesies between neighbouring states. I am sure that the vast majority of Irish people would welcome a State visit by Queen Elizabeth in the present day spirit of mutual respect between our nations and friendship between the peoples of these islands. All relevant Government Departments and agencies would co-operate as required to put in place the necessary arrangements for any such visit.

Official Engagements

393. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will provide details of all meetings facilitated by the embassy in London between Ministers and other parties during the course of July and August 2010; if he will further provide the cost of each such meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39116/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Embassy in London facilitated meetings for three Ministers during the period in question. The Minister for Health and Children, Mary Harney, T.D., visited London from 1 to 2 July 2010. She was invited to make a speech at the Embassy to some 120 representatives of the Irish International Business Network in support of the Embassy's work in promoting the Irish economy. Following the speech, the Ambassador hosted a networking reception, the total cost of which was £1,450.

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Ms Mary Hanafin, T.D., visited London from 2 to 4 July 2010 with the objective of boosting Irish tourism in the UK, our most important overseas market. The Minister's programme included briefings with Tourism Ireland and Embassy officials and a series of interviews with correspondents from the Irish and British media. The Ambassador hosted a working lunch at the Embassy for senior representatives of the Business Tourism industry in Britain in preparation for opening of The Convention Centre Dublin. The total cost of the lunch, which was attended by some 40 people, was £2,030.34. The Ambassador also hosted a reception at the Embassy for 140 guests to launch the digitisation of the 1901 and 1911 Census. The total cost of the reception was £1,837.95.

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The Minister for Transport, Noel Dempsey, T.D., visited London from 19 to 20 July 2010 on Government business. The Embassy hosted a business breakfast, the cost of which was £135. The costs referred to in the second and fourth paragraphs were met by the Embassy from funds allocated to it for such purposes and the costs in respect of the third paragraph will be recouped from Tourism Ireland.

Departmental Agencies

394. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39251/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): There are no state agencies operating under the remit of my Department.

International Agreements

395. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of the 12 October 2010, if he will list all treaties into which the State has entered, which have not been laid before the Dáil; the date on which each treaty was signed and ratified by the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39260/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): As I indicated in my reply to Parliamentary Question 378 of 12 October 2010 I am confident that the vast majority of international agreements which entered into force since 1937 have now been laid before the Dáil but it is possible that a small number of further agreements will be identified and any such agreements will be laid before the Dáil in due course. All historical agreements identified by my Department to date have been laid before the Dáil. I also indicated that the Department now seeks to lay all international agreements before the end of the calendar year following the year in which they enter into force for the State. Thus, in 2011 my Department will arrange for the laying before the Dáil of the international agreements which enter into force for the State in 2010. A provisional list of agreements to be laid before the Dáil in 2011 is set out below, although it cannot be precluded that further agreements will be added to the list by the end of the year. A multilateral agreement may, under its own terms, enter into force internationally when the number of states required by it for that purpose has ratified it. Where Ireland ratifies the agreement subsequently there is then a later date of entry into force.

Title of Agreement	Date of Signature	Date of Ratification/ Accession/ Notification	Date of Entry into Force for Ireland	Date of Entry into Force Internationally
Partnership and Cooperation Agreement establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Tajikistan, of the other part	11/10/2004	11/06/2007	01/01/2010	01/01/2010
Trade Amendment to the Energy Charter Treaty	n/a	13/07/2001	21/01/2010	21/01/2010
Instrument as contemplated by Article 3(2) of the Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance between the United States of America and the European Union signed on 25 June 2003, as to the application of the Treaty between the Government of Ireland and the Government of the United States of America on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters	14/07/2005	28/10/2009	01/02/2010	01/02/2010

Title of Agreement	Date of Signature	Date of Ratification/ Accession/ Notification	Date of Entry into Force for Ireland	Date of Entry into Force Internationally
Instrument as contemplated by Article 3(2) of the Agreement on Extradition between the United States of America and the European Union signed 25 June 2003 as to the Application of the Treaty on Extradition between Ireland and the United States of America	14/07/2005	28/10/2009	01/02/2010	01/02/2010
Amendment to the Convention on the Control and Marking of Articles of Precious Metals	n/a	25/07/2005	27/02/2010	27/02/2010
World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) Copyright Treaty	19/12/1997	14/12/2009	14/03/2010	06/03/2002
World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) Performances and Phonograms Treaty	19/12/1997	14/12/2009	14/03/2010	20/05/2002
Agreement between Ireland, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Kingdom of Spain, the Italian Republic, the Portuguese Republic, the French Republic and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland establishing a Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre — Narcotics	30/09/2007	21/07/2008	02/04/2010	02/04/2010
Protocol No. 14 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, amending the Control System of the Convention	13/05/2004	10/11/2004	01/06/2010	01/06/2010
Agreement between the Government of Ireland and the Government of the United States of America on the privileges of US employees assigned to Preclearance duties in Ireland pursuant to the Agreement between the Government of Ireland and the Government of the United States of America on Air Transport Preclearance	17/11/2008	06/07/2010	06/07/2010	06/07/2010
Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime	13/12/2000	17/06/2010	17/07/2010	25/12/2003
Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime	13/12/2000	17/06/2010	17/07/2010	28/01/2004
Convention on Cluster Munitions	03/12/2008	03/12/2008	01/08/2010	01/08/2010
Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings	13/04/2007	13/07/2010	01/11/2010	01/02/2008
Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption	19/06/1996	28/07/2010	01/11/2010	01/05/1995
Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants	22/05/2001	05/08/2010	03/11/2010	17/05/2004

EU Strategy

396. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will outline the implementation strategy of the specific proposals contained in the EU 2020 policy document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39308/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I welcome the new Europe 2020 Strategy which was adopted by the European Council on 17 June and the Government fully supports the core elements. I believe that the Strategy will provide an essential framework for action by the EU and Member States to achieve higher levels of sustainable jobs and growth as economic recovery is secured. As the Deputy will be aware, the European Council has agreed five headline targets in the areas of: employment; research and development, including innovation; climate change and energy; education; and social inclusion, in particular poverty. Following the identification of these EU level targets attention now shifts to the substantial body of work which must be undertaken, both at national and EU level, to ensure that this Strategy is implemented.

The June European Council also endorsed the first of the Commission's Flagship Initiatives, a "Digital Agenda for Europe". It focuses on the 21st century technologies and on-line services that will enable Europe to boost job creation, promote economic prosperity and improve the daily lives of EU citizens and businesses in a variety of ways. The overall aim of is to deliver sustainable economic and social benefits from a digital single market based on fast and ultra fast internet and interoperable applications. Successful delivery of the Digital Agenda will spur innovation, economic growth and improvements in daily life for both citizens and businesses.

In September, the Commission launched "Youth on the Move", a Flagship Initiative aimed at helping young people to gain knowledge, skills and experience. It is aimed at making education and training more relevant to young people's needs and encouraging more of them to take advantage of EU grants to study or train in another country. This will increase young people's employability and access to the labour market.

Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, earlier this month, launched the "Innovation Union" Flagship Initiative. The Innovation Union initiative is intended to remove obstacles to innovation by mobilising greater venture capital and unifying Europe's fragmented research system. It also aims to refocus R&D and innovation policy on the pressing challenges facing society, such as climate change, energy and resource efficiency and demographic change.

The presentation of the remaining four Flagship Initiatives will take place before the end of this year. These Flagship programmes are intended to support implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy through activities at Union level.

In support of the EU-wide targets, Member States are now to set national targets using appropriate indicators which take into account national circumstances and priorities. This approach allows each Member State to reflect national policy priorities and/or to build on national targets, if these are already in place. Each Member State will consider how their national targets will contribute to the achievement of the EU level targets in dialogue with the Commission.

Work on the identification of Ireland's national targets under each of the five EU headline targets is well underway. Officials from the European Commission visited Ireland on 27-28 September to discuss national targets and potential bottlenecks. A follow-up meeting in Brussels between Irish and Commission officials took place on 5 October. Following these most constructive bilateral exchanges, work is progressing well on the finalisation of relevant national targets.

These national targets will serve as an important element in the preparation of an initial draft of Ireland's National Reform Programme, which is to be prepared by mid-November 2010. It is currently anticipated that final agreement on our National Reform Programme will be reached in April 2011. It is expected that the European Council will take stock of progress under this Strategy at its meeting in December.

EU Enlargement

397. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the progress being made by Turkey in meeting the Copenhagen requirements for EU membership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39309/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The process involved in Turkey's negotiations on EU Membership is based on rigorous conditionality, including with regard to the Copenhagen Criteria which cover political and economic dimensions as well as the ability to take on the Union's *acquis*. Progress has been made in some areas; in others it has been slow. Turkey still has substantial work ahead in meeting all the established criteria and conditions for membership.

Successive European Councils have recognised Turkey's efforts towards reform, and commitment to the EU negotiation process. Last December's General Affairs Council, in a statement later endorsed by the European Council, acknowledged Turkey's positive steps in the areas of the judiciary, civil-military relations and cultural rights. While much has been achieved in Turkey in these areas, the challenge is now for Turkey to maintain and accelerate the progress on reforms. Last December's Council stated further that it was encouraged by Turkey's democratic progress, including with regard to the Kurdish issue. At the same time, Council said that further efforts to ensure that Turkey fully meets the Copenhagen criteria are required in a number of areas, including human rights and civic freedoms.

Turkey's continued non-compliance with its obligations under the Ankara Protocol by continuing to refuse to open its ports and airports to vessels and aircraft from the Republic of Cyprus continues to be an issue. The Council decided in 2006 that eight chapters of the accession framework could not be opened and no further chapters would be provisionally closed until Turkey fulfils its commitments in this regard. These measures remain in place. The matter is kept under review by EU Ministers in the Council, most recently at their meeting last December, and it is expected to be part of the discussions on enlargement at this December's Council. At the bilateral level I have met twice with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, in March and more recently in September. Minister Davutoglu 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.

In the course of both meetings with Minister Davutoglu this year, I reiterated to the Minister 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 I highlighted the need for Turkey to make progress towards normalisation of its relations with the Republic of Cyprus.

Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator, Mr. Egemen Bagis, plans to visit Dublin in November and we look forward to discussing further the progress Turkey has made in reforms following passage of the recent referendum on constitutional reform, and the challenges which still lie ahead.

Social Welfare Benefits

398. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he outline the reasons for the refusal to award rent allowance in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Meath [38595/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that no application for rent supplement was made in this case.

The person concerned should contact the Community Welfare Officer dealing with their supplementary welfare allowance claim if they wish to apply for rent supplement.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

399. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide a regional breakdown of the numbers awaiting a consultation with the Money Advice and Budgeting Service; the average waiting period for those wishing to meet with an adviser; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38638/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) assists people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems.

The Citizens Information Board (CIB), who has responsibility for MABS, compiles information on the waiting times and numbers in each MABS region on a quarterly basis and posts it to the www.mabs.ie website. A table of the most recently published information, as at 30 September 2010, is set out below for your information.

Based on the latest information available, the average waiting time from first point of contact to first appointment with a money adviser is 4.9 weeks. This is the average nationally and there are fluctuations between offices.

During the waiting period, clients are assessed and those in need of immediate assistance are given a priority appointment, others are provided with assisted self-help to ensure that they have taken steps to assess their situation and if appropriate they are supported to take holding action with their creditors.

I am satisfied that MABS provides a high quality personal service to assist people in overcoming their indebtedness and managing their finances.

Client Waiting Times & Numbers at 30th September 2010

Region	Contact Phone Number	Average Waiting time Weeks	No. awaiting first appointment
Arklow & District	0402 91200	5.00	45
Athlone	090 6476616	3.00	14
Ballymun	01 8620059	2.50	24
Blanchardstown	01 8206324	8.50	100
Bray	01 2760411	2.00	28
Carlow	059 9140977	2.10	40
Cavan	049 4362900	3.80	25
Charleville	063 81603	3.50	10
Clare /Shannon Office	065 6841991 /061 360422	5.00	38
Clondalkin	01 4575782	8.00	80
Cork	021 4552080	5.80	85
Cork North	022 43879	4.00	41
Cork West	023 8855155	3.50	21
Donegal North / Inishowen	074 9129909 / 074 9321856	5.00	24
Donegal South	074 9724462	3.00	7
Drogheda	041 9842810	3.50	50

Region	Contact Phone Number	Average Waiting time Weeks	No. awaiting first appointment
Dublin 10 + 20 (Comac) Ballyfermot/Cherry Orchard	01 6235443/01 6233900	3.50	25
Dublin 12 Area	01 4560731	8.00	29
Dublin North City	01 8794006	3.70	26
Dublin North East	01 8674892	6.00	46
Dublin South East	01 6706555	5.50	39
Dun Laoghaire	01 2302002	3.00	25
Dun na nGall Iarthar	074 9560747	5.05	10
Dundalk/Oriel	042 9327823	4.90	47
Dundrum/Rathfarnham	01 2990360	7.00	45
Fingal	01 8901102	5.30	48
Finglas	01 8642148	8.00	68
Galway North	093 24421	15.00	52

Company	Contact Phone Number	Average Waiting time Weeks	No. awaiting first appointment
Galway South (Galway City/Loughrea)	091 569349/ 091 841869	2.50	38
Kerry	066 7129750	3.00	44
Kildare (Kilcock/Kildare)	01 628 4466 / 045 435558	18.40	125
Kilkenny	056 7761777	2.10	17
Laois	057 8661727	8.50	72
Leitrim	071 9644994	4.50	35
Liffey South West	01 4731878	4.50	73
Limerick	061 310620	0.80	112
Longford	043 3347705	0.85	16
Mayo North	096 72902	7.60	19
Mayo South	094 9028888	13.50	58
Meath	046 9072836	0.60	0
Monaghan	042 9749189	2.00	17
Mullingar	044 9340871	2.60	19
Offaly	057 9323211	6.00	40
Roscommon	0906 627811	2.50	9
Sligo	071 91 41022	8.60	58
Tallaght	01-4203274	7.00	95
Tipperary North (Nenagh/Thurles)	067 41033/0504 23510	6.20	39
Tipperary South (Clonmel/Tipperary Town)	052 6129313/062 33410	3.50	81
Waterford	051 857929	1.00	0
Waterford West	058 44922	0.20	8
Wexford	053 9121504	1.00	82

Clár Seirbhísí Pobail

400. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Dinny McGinley** den Aire Coimirce Sóisialaí an bhfuil iarratas faighte ag a Roinn ó eagrais (sonraí tugtha) ar dheontas faoi scéim CSP agus an bhfuil cinneadh déanta an deontas a cheadú [38761/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Formheasadh an eagraíocht dá dtagraíonn an Teachta le haghaidh maoiniúón gClár Seirbhísí Pobail i mí na Bealtaine 2010. Éagfaidh an conradh ag deireadh mhí na Nollag 2010 ar aon dul le gach conradh eile faoin gClár sin. Tá tograíá mbreithniú agam i láthair na huaire chun síneadh a chur le conarthaí na neagraíochtaí sin a sholáthraíonn seirbhísí faoin gClár Seirbhísí Pobail. Tá an eagraíocht i gceist san áireamh sa phróiseas sin. Tairgfear conradh trí bliana don eagraíocht sin ó Eanáir 2011, faoi réir maoiniú leordhóthanach a bheith curtha ar fáil. Tá súil agam go mbeidh ar mo chumas toradh an phróisis seo a chur in iúl don eagraíocht sna seachtainí romhainn.

Social Welfare Benefits

401. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide a breakdown nationally per Health Service Executive administrative area of the number of non-Irish national people claiming rent allowance; their county of origin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39033/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The purpose of rent supplement is to provide short-term income support to assist with reasonable accommodation costs of eligible people living in private rented accommodation who are unable to provide for their accommodation costs from their own resources and who do not have accommodation available to them from another source.

The Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) scheme, which includes rent supplement, is administered on behalf of the Department of Social Protection by the Community Welfare Services division of the Health Service Executive.

With effect from May 2004 supplementary welfare allowance is subject to a statutory Habitual Residence Condition (HRC). All applicants regardless of nationality are required to be habitually resident in the state in order to qualify for rent supplement.

An EEA national who is engaged in genuine and effective employment in Ireland is regarded as a worker under EC law and is treated as habitually resident for the purpose of a rent supplement claim. In addition, the European Court of Justice has ruled that SWA, which includes rent supplement, is a social benefit under Article 7 of EC Regulation 1612/68. Nationals of other EEA countries who come and work in Ireland may be treated in the same way as Irish workers in determining entitlement to rent supplement and this EU law takes precedence over HRC. EEA nationals who are in Ireland but have not been employed here are subject to HRC review.

A number of different factors are taken into consideration in deciding whether a person satisfies the HRC, including, in particular, the following:

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

The onus is always on applicants to provide sufficient evidence to support their HRC status.

Asylum seekers who arrived in Ireland after May 2004 are not eligible for rent supplement. Asylum seekers who were receiving rent supplement prior to 1st May 2004 continue to receive these payments.

The information the Deputy has requested is set out in the following tabular statement.

Country	HSE East	HSE South	HSE South East	HSE West	HSE North East	HSE Mid West	HSE North West	HSE Midland	Total
Ireland	24,158	7,814	7,037	5,657	4,030	4,584	2,804	2,894	58,978
Poland	3,277	1,499	1,077	881	557	645	337	670	8,943
United Kingdom	1,163	1,001	743	871	353	379	562	219	5,291
Lithuania	1,330	233	205	180	437	109	77	206	2,777
Nigeria	1,675	209	56	109	229	96	34	92	2,500
Latvia	728	131	206	134	213	136	39	109	1,696
Romania	1,336	90	48	28	100	14	21	21	1,658
Slovakia	325	79	93	50	44	63	17	115	786
Congo	416	55	14	21	33	31	3	25	598
Somalia	421	46	39	3	10	44	6	7	576
Czech Republic	150	114	52	42	45	57	8	46	514
Iraq	314	40	14	15	3	23	5	4	418
Hungary	176	75	30	28	17	28	6	10	370
Germany	97	81	30	57	22	35	26	11	359
Ukraine	217	27	24	9	20	19	7	13	336
Sudan	135	50	46	10	1	58	14	3	317
Algeria	258	14	6	14	6	8		8	314
Russia	204	28	17	23	8	17	2	8	307
South Africa	138	42	23	25	30	23	5	21	307
Estonia	138	37	61	16	15	18	5	12	302
Moldova	214	14	10	6	17	5	1	3	270
Northern Ireland	38	8	8	24	31	4	137	6	256
France	122	42	8	30	12	12	9	13	248
Pakistan	121	19	8	32	19	16	7	23	245
Iran	162	15	3	4	3	5	21	4	217
Italy	117	27	14	27	10	7	2	8	212
Portugal	52	38	53	20	12	5	2	27	209
USA	60	47	18	34	14	14	14	4	205
Spain	118	23	6	30	3	15	5	3	203
Angola	144	14	11	5	11	10	1	6	202
Scotland	42	17	8	34	6	10	66	7	190
Cameroon	118	29	9	8	7	13	1	2	187
Ghana	75	22	4	13	10	21	24	3	172
Zimbabwe	81	24	10	15	8	10	4	8	160
Netherlands	56	29	12	10	12	10	15	6	150
Georgia	98	35	3	10	1	1		1	149
Albania	108	16	7	2	2	5	1		141
Afghanistan	73	21	4	1	2	22	1	2	126
Kosovo	90	20	6	1	2	4			123
Brazil	42	7	13	39	5	3	5	7	121
China	82	14	3	4	2	9	1	2	117

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Country	HSE East	HSE South	HSE South East	HSE West	HSE North East	HSE Mid West	HSE North West	HSE Midland	Total
Bulgaria	85	8	2	4	5	2	2	7	115
Libya	77	9	7	3	3	4	1		104
Bangladesh	34	32	11	12		9		4	102
Croatia	24	27	11	11	6	6	2	6	93
Bosnia	83	1	2		1				87
Philippines	63	8	3	4	1	2	3	1	85
Togo	31	21		10	6	14	1	1	84
Kenya	47	11	7	5	4	3		3	80
Sierra Leone	49	12	3	1	7	4	1	1	78
Egypt	42	2	9	3	3	2		16	77
Belarus	33	6	6	6	5	11		1	68
Ethiopia	46	9	4	1	2	5	1		68
Ivory Coast	37	11	2	4	7	4		3	68
India	33	8	5	4	3	5	4	4	66
Eritrea	39	10		2	1	9	2	1	64
Morocco	27	4	7	1	1	19	3		62
Rwanda	36	6	5	2	2	3	1	1	56
Turkey	27	6	5	4	4	4		1	51
Belgium	32	9		6	1	1		1	50
Guinea	33	6	1	2	1	5			48
Uganda	22	7	2	5	4	4		3	47
Palestine	27	6	3	3	1	5			45
Zambia	19	5	6	3	1	8	2	1	45
Wales	7	15	10	1	2	4	3		42
Canada	14	4	4	5	6	1	3	4	41
Kuwait	34	4		1		1			40
Zaire	36				2			2	40
Kazakhstan	23	3	2	4		2		4	38
Vietnam	36				1				37
Sweden	20	5	5	2		2	1		35
Uzbekistan	20	6	4	2		1		2	35
Malaysia	20	6	2			2	1	1	32
Malta	11	5	2	3	6	3		1	31
Syria	23		2	2		3		1	31
Australia	13	2	1	6	2	2	4		30
Liberia	13	4	1	5	1	5		1	30
Austria	14	5		1	2	5	1		28
Armenia	17	5	1		2	1	1		27
Yugoslavia	21	4				1		1	27
Tunisia	20	2	1	1	1				25
Burundi	12	4	1	1	1	3	1		23
Israel	14	3	2	1	1	1	1		23
Lebanon	15	2	3	2				1	23
Thailand	14	4	3	1			1		23
Chechnya	18			3	1				22
Finland	12	3	1	3	1	1		1	22

Country	HSE East	HSE South	HSE South East	HSE West	HSE North East	HSE Mid West	HSE North West	HSE Midland	Total
Greece	14	4					3	1	22
Cuba	18		1			2			21
Sri Lanka	5	4	1	4		3	1	2	20
Mongolia	18								18
Burma	8	1		5	1	1			16
Jordan	11	2		1		1			15
Mauritius	10	2			1			2	15
Niger	7	4	2	1		1			15
Denmark	7		4		2	1			14
El Salvador	7	2		1		1		2	13
Serbia	3	5	1		3			1	13
Azerbaijan	10					2			12
Kyrgyzstan	9			2					11
Malawi	6	2			2	1			11
Maldives	9			1			1		11
New Zealand	3	2	2	1	1	1			10

Flood Relief

402. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Social Protection the expenditure of the humanitarian aid funds in each of the areas, south Galway and Ballinasloe and the other areas in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39426/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): In recognition of the devastation suffered by people in many areas of the country as a result of the flooding from November 2009 onwards, the Government set up a humanitarian assistance scheme to provide income tested financial support to people who have suffered damages to their homes not covered by insurance. An initial sum of €10million was set aside by the Government for this purpose.

916 payments have been made to 338 individuals to the value of €467,800 in County Galway up to 17 September 2010. A breakdown of statistics is not available in the Department on particular locations within Co Galway — south Galway or on particular towns, for example Ballinasloe.

Social Welfare Appeals

403. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action he is taking to deal with the backlog in social welfare appeals [39268/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): A number of initiatives have been put in place to enhance the capacity of the Social Welfare Appeals Office to deal with the current caseload and inflows. In that regard:

- 2 additional Appeals Officers were assigned to the Office in 2009,
- A number of additional staff were assigned to the administration area of the Office,
- The organisation of the Appeals Officer's work has been changed so as to increase productivity,

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- A project to improve the business processes in the office was undertaken which has resulted in a number of improvements being implemented, and
- Significant enhancements have been made to the office's IT and phone systems.

In addition, it was decided to use experienced retired staff strictly on a short term basis to supplement the current resources and the services of eight retired officers have now been secured on a part-time basis and have been operating since July.

I am assured by the Chief Appeals Officer that she is keeping current processes under continuous review with a view to achieving a more effective throughput of appeals, while ensuring that any progress does not conflict with due process in terms of the rights of appellants and adherence to the requirements of natural justice.

Employment Action Plan

404. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to extend the rural social scheme and the community services programme at no additional cost; the number of new places that will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38982/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Activation and support for those who are unemployed is a key priority for Government. Earlier this year, the Taoiseach announced a number of changes to improve the delivery of employment, training and community services to the public by bringing together related responsibilities in these areas. These changes included the restructuring of Departmental responsibilities with the objective of providing a stream-lined response to the income support and job search needs of people who are unemployed.

In this context, my Department is devising proposals for the development of new initiatives based on the Rural Social Scheme and the Community Services Programme which will offer social employment opportunities. Considerable work is required on these proposals before they come on stream and take their place within the suite of activation measures aimed at supporting unemployed people. I have not set targets as to how many employment opportunities might be created as much depends on the level of resources that will be available to the Department and the capacity of not-for-profit community based organisations to avail of these emerging opportunities. Details of the rollout of this initiative will be made available as soon as possible.

Social Welfare Appeals

405. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied); when a decision will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38452/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 10 May 2010. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received back in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 02 September 2010 and the appeal will be referred, in due course, to an Appeals Officer who will decide whether the case can be decided on a summary basis or whether to list it for oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Social Welfare Benefits

406. **Deputy Joe Behan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will support the case of a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38488/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The person concerned claimed job-seeker's allowance from 31 August 2010 and the claim was closed because she did not return documents as requested. She re-applied for jobseeker's allowance on 29 September 2010 and a decision will be made on her claim as soon as her circumstances have been fully investigated. The person concerned applied for supplementary welfare allowance from 21 July 2010. Her application was disallowed by the community welfare officer on the grounds that she is not habitually resident in the State. I understand that she has lodged an appeal against this decision which is currently being considered by the HSE Appeals Office. In relation to emergency assistance, under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, an exceptional needs payment may be made to a person to help meet an essential, once-off cost which cannot be met from the person's own resources. The amount paid under this provision, if any, is assessed by the community welfare officer on a case by case basis.

Social Welfare Appeals

407. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of appeals that are currently at hand for all social protection entitlements for County Mayo and the breakdown for each category and the length of time it is taking to process in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38494/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that statistics are not maintained on a county by county basis and it is not in a position to supply the information sought by the Deputy in relation to Co. Mayo.

408. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an appeal for carer's allowance will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [38499/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 27 August 2010. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Social Welfare Services on the grounds of appeal be sought. When received, the appeal in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer for consideration. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Social Welfare Benefits

409. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the delay in awarding persons (details supplied) a back to school clothing and footwear allowance. [38528/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme (BSCFA) is administered on behalf of the Department by the community welfare division of the Health Service Executive (HSE). Applications for the allowance may be made between the beginning of June and the end of September each year. A person may qualify for payment of the allowance if/ he is in receipt of a social welfare or health service executive payment, is participating in an approved employment scheme or attending a recognised education or training course and has household income at or below certain specified levels. The Executive has advised that it has no record of an application for BSCFA from the persons concerned

410. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) has received correspondence in relation to over-payment of jobseeker's benefit, when they did not claim same in the period stated and were in fact in full-time education and in receipt of a back to education allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38529/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The person concerned was notified that an overpayment was assessed against him arising from concurrent working and claiming. Following a review, this decision has been revised. No overpayment occurred during the period 15 January 2010 to 7 May 2010 as he was in receipt of Back to Education Allowance. He concurrently worked and claimed Jobseekers Benefit and Supplementary Welfare Allowance from 8 May 2010 until 1 September 2010. He will be notified of this revised decision and the overpayment assessed.

411. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review an application for supplementary allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38530/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, 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. Those who qualify are normally in receipt of a social welfare or Health Service Executive (HSE) payment. Departmental records show that there have been no applications for an ENP from the person concerned. She should contact the community welfare officer at her local health centre in order that she can have her claim for entitlements examined.

Departmental Staff

412. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for a staff transfer in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38534/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): In accordance with formal procedures agreed between the Civil, Public and Services Union (CPSU) and the Department of Finance, the names of Clerical Officers and Staff Officers applying for transfer are entered on the Department's transfer lists in the order in which they are received. Vacancies which fall to be filled by way of transfer are filled by reference to these lists in strict order of application date and the Department has no discretion in this regard. The person in question is currently placed 7th on the transfer list for Mullingar, having applied in December 2003. The officers placed ahead of this person would have to be considered before her in the event of any vacan-

cies arising, which are fillable by transfer. There are currently no Clerical Officer vacancies in the Department's office in Mullingar.

Social Welfare Benefits

413. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Longford was told that they would receive €29.80 in children's allowance and are now only receiving €14.90; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38536/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The person concerned is currently in receipt of half rate child dependent allowance of €14.90 on her disability allowance claim. Her husband is in receipt of half rate child dependent allowance of €14.90 for the same child on his jobseekers allowance claim. The total weekly amount of child dependent allowance payable in respect of any one child is €29.80. If the person's circumstances have changed she should request a review of her claim and her file will be sent to a Social Welfare Inspector for investigation.

Citizen Information Services

414. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full role and responsibilities of the Citizens Information Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38541/10]

415. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons employed at the Citizens Information Board for the following years: 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38542/10]

416. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the budget available to the Citizens Information Board for the following years: 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38543/10]

417. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the premises out of which the Citizens Information Board operates; the total number of locations; the cost of these premises' rent or other on an annual basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38544/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 414 to 417, inclusive, together.

The Citizens Information Board is the national agency responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice and advocacy on social services to the public and for the provision of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service, the national free, independent and confidential service for people in debt, in danger of getting into debt or who have money management problems. Under the Citizens Information Act 2007 the Citizens Information Board also has a mandate to provide advocacy targeted at people with disabilities. Furthermore, under the Comhairle Act 2000 the Board has a remit to support, promote and develop the provision of information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services and to highlight issues which are of concern to users of those services.

Services are made available to the public through websites such as www.citizensinformation.ie, the Citizens Information Phone Service and the network of Citizens Information Services and MABS companies. The CIB was established in 2007, in line with the Citizens

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information Act 2007, having previously been known as Comhairle. The average number of whole time equivalents employed per year for the period 2005-2010 was:

	Year/Number
Comhairle	2005: 92
	2006: 92
Citizens Information Board	2007: 92
	2008: 88
	2009: 88
	2010: 90

Expenditure for the period 2005-2010 is as follows:

	Year/Expenditure
Comhairle	2005: €20.917m
	2006: €24.362m
Citizens Information Board	2007: €29.90m
	2008: €29.468m
	2009: €28.005m
	2010 (Allocation): €45.872m (includes funding for MABS)

Responsibility for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) transferred to the CIB in July 2009 and expenditure for MABS amounted to €17.041m in 2009. The allocation to CIB in 2010 includes funding for the delivery of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service.

The head office of the Citizens Information Board is located at George's Quay House, 43 Townsend St, Dublin 2. As well as their head office, CIB leases 13 additional offices at locations in Sligo, Galway, Castlebar, Mullingar, Dundalk, Limerick, Cavan, Waterford, Tallaght and Kilkenny. The CIB also owns 5 properties at locations in Dublin, Cork, Letterkenny, Tralee and Sligo. In 2010 the estimated expenditure on rent, rates and service charges in respect of these properties is in the order of €1.285 million. I am satisfied that the Citizens Information Board is managing its resources effectively and discharging its duties in relation to the provision of information, advice and advocacy services, and social policy work as remitted on behalf of the Department.

Social Welfare Appeals

418. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in County Wickow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38564/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all the evidence, partially allowed the appeal of the person concerned by way of summary decision on 22 October 2010. The person concerned has been notified of the decision. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Social Welfare Code

419. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views regarding a submission (details supplied); the actions he proposes to take to address the points raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38573/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): In considering any changes to social welfare schemes, full consideration is given to the impact of any proposals on the recipients involved. The Government is acutely aware and appreciative of the contribution made by carers. It was for that reason, that when resources were available, we invested heavily in improving social welfare rates and services for carers. Following this year's Budget, the carer's allowance rate for carers over 66 years of age has not changed and remains at €239. The rate of carer's allowance for someone under 66 is €212.

Since the introduction of the carer's allowance in 1990 payments to carers have been increased and expanded. Carer's allowance was increased in 2007, 2008 and 2009 by 12.1%, 6.5% and 3.3%, respectively. As a result, even with the reduction announced in the last Budget for carers under 66, the weekly rate of payment for the carers allowance is still almost 20% higher this year than in 2006 and more than 147% higher than in 1997.

The means test for carer's allowance has been significantly eased over the years, and is now one of the most generous means tests in the social welfare system, most notably with regard to spouse's earnings. Since April 2008, the income disregard has been €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple. This means that a couple with two children can earn in the region of €37,200 and qualify for the maximum rate of carer's allowance as well as the associated free travel and household benefits. A couple with an income in the region of €60,400 can still qualify for a minimum payment, as well as the associated free travel and household benefits package. These levels surpass the 'Towards 2016' commitment to ensure those on average industrial earnings continue to qualify for a full carer's allowance.

From June 2005, the annual respite care grant was extended to all carers who are providing full time care to a person who needs such care, regardless of their income. The rate of the respite care grant has also been increased to €1,700 per year in respect of each care recipient since June 2008. The Government will continue to support carers and the people they care for within the resources available.

Social Welfare Appeals

420. **Deputy Michael Noonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on an appeal to the Health Service Executive for rent supplement in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38598/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that the person concerned was refused rent supplement as his means are sufficient to meet his accommodation costs. The HSE further advised that the person concerned appealed the decision to refuse rent supplement to the HSE Appeals Office but the decision was upheld by the HSE Appeals Office. The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised that they have received an appeal from the person concerned but that no decision has been made on his appeal. The Social Welfare Appeals Office will contact the person concerned when a decision has been made.

Social Welfare Benefits

421. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details

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supplied) in County Kildare has had their rent supplement cut; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38621/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that they are currently reviewing the rent supplement entitlement of the person concerned. The HSE will contact the person concerned when the review has been completed.

422. **Deputy Mary O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the case of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath regarding the previous refusal of a mortgage interest relief claim [38625/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that the person concerned was refused mortgage interest supplement as his income of €601.50 per week from his widower's contributory pension and income from his share in a bar are sufficient to meet the interest cost of his mortgage. The HSE has further advised that the person concerned was advised of his right to appeal the decision to refuse payment of mortgage interest supplement but that no appeal has been received to date. It remains open for the person concerned to appeal the decision to the HSE Appeals Office.

423. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare is entitled to a rent supplement [38647/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that there is no record of an application for rent supplement from the person concerned. If the person concerned wishes to make an application for rent supplement she should contact the HSE.

Civil Registration Service

424. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to amend the Civil Registration Act 2004; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38516/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): A general review of the provisions of the Civil Registration Act 2004 is being carried out by An tArd-Chlárathóir (Registrar General) who has statutory responsibility in relation to the administration of the Civil Registration Service. However, this cannot be concluded until a report from the Law Reform Commission which is expected to contain recommendations relevant to this, is available. It is understood that the report from the Commission will be available by the end of the year. As the Deputy is aware, there are a number of steps to be taken before any amending legislation might come before the Oireachtas and it is not possible to be definite as to timescales at this juncture.

Social Welfare Code

425. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to review the habitual residency test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38517/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The requirement to be habitually resident in Ireland was introduced as a qualifying condition for certain social assistance schemes and child benefit with effect from 1st May 2004.

The purpose of the habitual residence condition is to safeguard the social welfare system from abuse by restricting access for people who are not economically active and who have little or no established connection with Ireland.

A person who does not satisfy the habitual residence condition is not eligible for specified social welfare payments, regardless of citizenship, nationality, immigration status or any other factor. The social welfare schemes concerned are jobseeker's allowance, one parent family payment, disability allowance, carer's allowance, widow/er's (non contributory) pension, guardian's payment (non contributory), State pension (non-contributory), blind pension, supplementary welfare allowance (except urgent or exceptional needs payments), domiciliary care allowance and child benefit.

The Department's guidelines are currently being reviewed with the intention of making these clearer and more user-friendly for deciding officers and customers alike. However, I do not propose to amend the legislative provisions regarding the habitual residence condition.

Departmental Records

426. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he has received correspondence from a person (details supplied) in County Wexford seeking a recording of his telephone conversation with a staff member of the disability allowance section of the Department; if he will reply to the correspondence; if he will accede to the request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38743/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The request seeking a recording of a telephone conversation between the person concerned and a member of staff of the Department of Social Protection was received by my office on 19 October 2010.

The Department does not record telephone conversations between customers and staff of the Department and consequently a transcript of this conversation is not available.

The person concerned applied for disability allowance on 2 September 2010. He was asked to furnish additional bank statements which have been received. A Deciding Officer will examine his claim and he will be notified of the decision in due course.

Social Welfare Benefits

427. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of family income supplement; the reason for the suspension of payments while applications are under review; the average processing time for reviews; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38746/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): There are currently some 27338 people in receipt of a weekly family income supplement (FIS) payment.

The relevant legislation provides that once FIS is awarded, it continues to be payable at the rate awarded for a period of 52 weeks provided that the person remains in employment. However, the rate of payment may be increased if an additional child is born in the course of the 52 weeks.

In advance of the end of the 52 week period, each FIS recipient is sent a form to apply for renewal of their payment. If they wish to reapply, they must complete and return the form to the department. Payment of FIS stops automatically after a year and only those customers who reapply will have their entitlement re-assessed. Customers who wish to reapply must submit fresh income details in order that their continued entitlement and the appropriate rate for their family circumstances for the coming year can be assessed. Where a customer is entitled to

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renewal of FIS for a further 52 weeks, they are notified of the rate payable and any arrears due are issued.

Applications received by the department for renewal of FIS are prioritised in accordance with the date that their payment is due to cease. The average processing time for renewal applications is currently 9 weeks.

Social Welfare Appeals

428. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application for disability benefit has been received in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; if the application has been assessed and the position regarding same [38747/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned has been referred to an Appeals Officer who proposes to hold an oral hearing in the case. The person concerned will be informed when arrangements have been made. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

429. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on an appeal for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39008/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Payment of illness benefit, to the person concerned, was disallowed by a Deciding Officer following an examination by a Medical Assessor of the Department who expressed the opinion that she was capable of work. An appeal was opened and in the context of that appeal her case was reviewed by a second Medical Assessor who also expressed the opinion that she was capable of work.

I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that, following receipt of the grounds of appeal from the person concerned, the relevant Departmental papers and comments of the Department have been sought. On receipt of its response the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer for consideration.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

430. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on an appeal for rent allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry [39026/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): In the time frame available, I regret that my Department is not in a position to reply to this question. My Department will be in contact with the Deputy over the coming days and will reply in full to the question raised.

431. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Limerick will be called for an oral hearing on their disability allowance claim as soon as possible [39050/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer

who proposes to hold an oral hearing in this case on 2 November 2010. The person concerned has been notified of the arrangements for the hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

432. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on an application for jobseeker’s assistance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick [39079/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned against the disallowance of Jobseekers Allowance was registered in that office on 21 August 2010 together with the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal. The appeal will be referred in due course to an Appeals Officer who will decide whether the case can be decided on a summary basis or whether to list it for oral hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

433. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39100/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that following a review of the case, payment of rent supplement was suspended as the claimant’s means were not fully disclosed when making the initial claim.

The HSE has further advised that it has not received an appeal against this decision from the person concerned.

Social Welfare Benefits

434. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare had their rent supplement suspended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39102/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that payment of rent supplement in this case was suspended pending verification of the address of the person concerned.

Payment of rent supplement has now been restored.

435. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the sum of money allocated to RTE in 2010 out of his Department’s budget in respect of the free television licence scheme; his views that such payment is justified in the context of the current Exchequer deficit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39111/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The cost of the Free TV Licence scheme, administered under the Household Benefit package, was €55.7 million in 2009 and the projected cost for 2010 is €59.2 million.

The current number of eligible customers for the Free TV licence scheme is 389,800.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

The Household Benefits package, which comprises the Electricity/Gas Allowance, Telephone Allowance and free Lifetime Television Licence, is available to people living permanently in the State who satisfy specific qualifying criteria.

The package is payable to all customers in receipt of Carer's Allowance and persons aged over 70 years. It is available to customers under the age of 70 in receipt of qualifying payments from this Department or an equivalent payment from a country covered by EU regulation or Bilateral Social Security agreement and who live with certain categories of persons. Customers aged between 66 and 69 years who do not satisfy the criteria may qualify under a means test.

For most people television is an essential support in preventing social isolation; it is the principle medium for information and entertainment. The advantage of the TV licence scheme is that it takes care of a large annual non-discretionary bill for a group who may find it difficult to budget.

Payment for the scheme is made by this Department to the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. Payments are made on a monthly basis using an agreed formula based on a percentage of the Department's customer base.

Any changes to the current arrangements could only be considered in a budgetary context and in the light of available resources. At this stage no decisions have been taken with regard to the forthcoming budget.

Departmental Expenditure

436. **Deputy Johnny Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount spent by his Department and also by any bodies under his Department's jurisdiction in each of the past three years on the provision of Internet applications (details supplied); the processes in place to ensure such funds have been spent on good quality Internet applications, in terms of accessibility, security and data protection [39128/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Department currently maintains four websites; three external and one internal as follows:

- www.welfare.ie
- www.groireland.ie
- www.nationalpensionsframework.ie
- SOLAS

The development and ongoing maintenance of these websites is subject to the Department's project governance provisions ensuring value for money and high quality, including adherence to security, data protection and accessibility standards. The Department also has a customer consultation framework in place whereby we seek participation from customers to assist in developing and validating policies and service delivery mechanisms. This is achieved through surveys, customer panels, as well as meetings with customer representative groups and those engaged in welfare information services.

The Department's main website, www.welfare.ie, contains information on the range of schemes and services provided, as well as policy publications and on-line services. This site was re-designed and re-developed in 2008 and is highly accessible, winning the *Accessible e-Government Award* at the 2009 Irish e-Government Awards. The content on www.welfare.ie is maintained and updated by Department staff. The website provides a platform for the deliv-

ery of a range of on-line service which are integrated with the Department's systems and processes.

Responsibility for the General Register Office, and for its website www.groireland.ie, was transferred from the Department of Health and Children to this Department from January 1st, 2008. The Department also maintains the www.nationalpensionsframework.ie website. This site was originally launched as www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie in 2007 to coincide with the launch of the Pensions Green Paper and has been recently expanded and renamed to include information on the Government's plans for the future of pensions in Ireland, the National Pensions Framework and its implementation.

A key component of the Department's Document, Record and Information Management (DRIM) programme was the design, development and implementation of an internal corporate portal and document management system called SOLAS, which was launched in 2008. SOLAS provides a single point of access to information, tools, systems and services required by staff to carry out their jobs.

Agencies under the remit of the Department maintain another seven websites. These agencies are subject to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The Boards of these bodies are responsible for ensuring compliance with security, data protection and accessibility standards in addition to fulfilling all regulatory and statutory obligations.

The Citizens Information Board maintains the following five websites:

- www.citizensinformation.ie
- www.assistireland.ie
- www.losingyourjob.ie (launched March 2009)
- www.citizensinformationboard.ie
- www.keepingyourhome.ie (launched January 2010)

The Pensions Board's maintains the website www.pensionsboard.ie. The Office of the Pensions Ombudsman website www.pensionsombudsman.ie is supported and maintained by the Department's staff.

The costs of all these websites over the last three years are provided in the table below.

Organisation	Website	2008	2009	2010
		€	€	€
Department of Social Protection	www.welfare.ie	320,639	61,914	53,870
Department of Social Protection	www.groireland.ie	230	1,892	2,000
Department of Social Protection	www.nationalpensionsframework.ie	4,840	242	816
Department of Social Protection	SOLAS (internal website)	1,147,000	—	—
Citizens Information Board	www.citizensinformation.ie	351,457	258,575	219,722
Citizens Information Board	www.assistireland.ie	100,636	85,030	45,000
Citizens Information Board	www.losingyourjob.ie	—	7,454	2,179
Citizens Information Board	www.citizensinformationboard.ie	18,644	10,882	683
Citizens Information Board	www.keepingyourhome.ie	—	—	612
Pensions Board	www.pensionsboard.ie	22,700	40,019	10,090
Pensions Ombudsman	www.pensionsombudsman.ie	Nil	Nil	Nil

Social Welfare Code

437. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to cut or reform child benefit in the forthcoming budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39136/10]

447. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will ensure that the budget for family income supplement for 2011 is adequate to meet requirements in the emerging economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39197/10]

451. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will ensure that the budget for 2011 in respect of child benefit is adequate to meet the likely requirements having particular regard to the trend emerging from previous years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39201/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 437, 447 and 451 together.

Child income support payments to all families with children have risen in the period since 1997. Spending on Child Benefit increased from €506 million in 1997 to almost €2.5 billion in 2009 while spending on the Family Income Supplement increased from €33 million to €167 million over the same time period. The Government is proud to have been able to direct such substantial increases in financial support to all Irish families in recent years.

However, in the current economic environment, it is necessary to address all aspects of the public finances so as to ensure that they are sustainable and to ensure that fairness exists in the allocation of resources. Clearly social welfare spending and specifically Child Benefit, is a very significant part of overall government spending. Social welfare expenditure for 2011, including expenditure on Family Income Supplement and Child Benefit, is currently being considered in the context of the preparation of the departmental estimates for that year. Data on the amounts to be provided for the two schemes in question will be published on Budget Day. Any plans to change the conditions for the Child Benefit payment is a matter to be decided in a budgetary context.

Question No. 438 withdrawn.

439. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on the necessity to ease the qualification regulations for back to education allowance in view of the urgent necessity to encourage persons who find themselves unemployed back to education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39188/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The back to education allowance (BTEA) scheme is a second chance education opportunities scheme designed to remove the barriers to participation in second and third level education by enabling eligible people on social welfare to continue to receive a payment while pursuing an approved full-time education course that leads to a higher qualification than that already held.

Changes have been introduced to BTEA to increase flexibility in terms of qualifying for the scheme, with some practical changes to its qualifying conditions coming into effect from 19th July 2010.

Previously, a person who wished to take up a third level course of education could do so after getting a jobseeker or other relevant social welfare payment for 12 months, or 9 months, only if approved by a facilitator of the Department. Since 19th July this period has been set at

9 months for all applicants who are attending third level education (a 2 year qualifying period continues to apply to participants coming from Illness Benefit). People who are awarded statutory redundancy may access the scheme immediately, provided an entitlement to a relevant social welfare payment is established prior to commencing an approved course of study.

Prior to July, a person could only apply for BTEA in respect of a third level course if s/he was commencing year one of the course. Since 19th July, a person can avail of BTEA where s/he previously did not complete his/her course and is returning to the second or subsequent year of the third level course. This also applies to people who are granted an exemption from a period of their third level course.

A person who completed earlier year(s) of his/her third level course on a part-time basis but is now getting a jobseeker's payment, may apply for BTEA to continue the course on a full-time basis.

The back to education allowance has an important role to play in enhancing the employability skills of jobseekers. The conditionality of the scheme will continue to be monitored in the context of the objectives of the scheme and changes in the economic climate.

Employment Support Measures

440. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which he and or his Department have examined the beneficial economic impact of encouraging more unemployed persons back to education as a means of preparing for economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39189/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Department of Social Protection operates a range of employment support measures designed to encourage and support social welfare recipients of working age to reduce their dependency on welfare payments. This is done through the operation of a number of schemes such as the Back to Education scheme, Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme, the Short-Term Enterprise allowance scheme, the Technical Assistance and Training Grants and the Employer Job (PRSI) Incentive scheme. In addition the Activation and Family Support Programme offers supports to social welfare customers and other disadvantaged persons to assist them to improve their employability and personal and family situations.

The Back to Education Allowance scheme (BTEA) is a scheme which encourages and facilitates people on certain social welfare payments, mainly unemployment, lone parents and illness and disability payments, to improve their skills and qualifications and, therefore, their prospects of returning to the active work force.

The focus of the Back to Education Allowance is to assist those who are most marginalised and distant from the labour market to acquire the necessary education to improve their chances of becoming independent of the social welfare system.

The number of participants in the scheme in the 2009/2010 academic year was 20,808 which represented a 79% increase on the previous year. The 2008/2009 academic year also showed an increase of 31% on the previous academic year.

The back to education scheme is only one of the support services through which Government is responding to the challenge of preventing drift into long-term unemployment. In the area of education 157,000 training and work experience places will be provided in 2010, compared to 66,00 places in 2008; higher education institutions have increased the number of places on offer; 48,000 learners will participate in full-time education including VTOS, Youthreach and PLC programmes; an estimated 125,000 will participate in part-time education programmes under

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the adult literacy, community education and Back to Education schemes; and the Labour Market Activation Fund is supporting almost 60 innovative projects and 12,000 participants in 2010.

This range of programmes and schemes will support unemployed people in acquiring skills which will assist them in returning to employment as the economy recovers and minimise the risk of their drifting into long-term unemployment.

441. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons currently on back to work or similar incentive based schemes; the extent if any to which he intends to expand these schemes having particular regard to the current economic climate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39190/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The back to work allowance schemes are designed to assist the long-term unemployed, lone parents, people with disabilities and other social welfare recipients to return to work. One of the goals of the social welfare system is to be responsive to the needs of people of working age and to facilitate them taking up relevant employment opportunities. In order to respond effectively to the growing numbers on the live register and the continuing contraction in employment, it was decided in the Supplementary Budget of the 7th April 2009 to refocus resources on the back to work schemes to support people into self employment.

A revised Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) and a new Short Term Enterprise Allowance (STEA) scheme were introduced from May 1st 2009. The back to work allowance (employee strand) scheme was closed to new applicants on May 1st 2009.

In addition the qualifying period required for Jobseekers on the live register to access to the BTWEA has reduced from 2 years to 12 months provided the person has an entitlement to Jobseeker's allowance. Those who do not have an underlying entitlement to Jobseeker's allowance can access the scheme, as before, subject to the two year qualifying period. The period for which the allowance is payable is 2 years, the first year at 100% of existing social welfare entitlement and 75% in the second year.

Furthermore, people who previously participated in the back to work enterprise allowance scheme may apply a second time after a period of at least 5 years has elapsed.

The STEA provides immediate access to people who have lost their jobs and qualify for jobseekers' benefit who wish to set up a business. Payment under the scheme is at the same rate and for the same duration as their entitlement to jobseeker's benefit.

These changes significantly strengthen the supports for jobseekers wishing to move to self employment. The qualifying conditions will continue to be monitored in the context of the objectives of the scheme and changing economic circumstances.

There were 9,551 participants in the back to work schemes at end September 2010. A total of 6,904 people were availing of the back to work enterprise scheme, 1,550 on the short-term enterprise scheme and 1,097 partaking in the back to work employee strand.

Social Insurance

442. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to make the necessary budgetary provision to meet in full the extra funding required arising from the current and or likely economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39191/10]

443. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans for social protection in the now emerging economic climate; if he has in mind any particular initiative to alleviate the most negative impact on families likely to be affected by the continued economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39192/10]

452. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full extent of his Departments budgetary projections in respect of pensions over the next 10 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39202/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 442, 443 and 452 together.

Social welfare expenditure for 2011, including expenditure on State pensions, will be considered in the context of the forthcoming Budget, having regard both to needs and to the resources available to meet those needs. In an uncertain economic environment, my priority will be to ensure that the Government strategy to stabilise the financial position is advanced and to protect those most in need in a manner which is sustainable in the years ahead.

Social Welfare Benefits

444. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of applications for back to school clothing and footwear allowance received to date in 2010; the number approved and refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39193/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme (BSCFA) operates from the beginning of June to the end of September each year and is administered on behalf of my Department by the community welfare division of the Health Service Executive. Applications for the allowance may be made between the beginning of June and the end of September each year.

While the closing date for applications for BSCFA was 30th September 2010, processing and payment of late applications is ongoing. At 15 October 2010 approximately 190,000 claims had been received by the HSE and in excess of 160,400 claims had been paid at a value of €77.46m. Current indications are that approximately 5,000 more families will benefit from the scheme this year.

Final figures in relation to the numbers of applications received and awarded for 2010 are not yet available from the HSE but based on previous years the average number of claims granted was 88% of claims received.

445. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons previously self-employed who have applied for jobseeker's allowance to date in 2010; the number granted and refused; if he will consider easing the qualification criteria having particular regard to the current economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39194/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): At 15th October 2010, there were 8,406 jobseeker's allowance customers who made their claim after 1st January 2010 and who are categorised as having been self-employed prior to making their claim. Of those, 4,729 are awarded, 520 are currently disallowed and 3,157 are pending a decision.

Any changes to the qualifying criteria for jobseeker's allowance will be considered within a budgetary context.

446. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of applications for carer's allowance received in each of the past three years and to date in 2010; the number granted, refused or on appeal ; if he intends to review or ease the qualification guidelines in view of the important service currently being provided by carers and the savings to the Exchequer in lieu of institutional care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39195/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The data requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Carer's Allowance claims received, awarded, refused, appealed 2007-2010

	2007	2008	2009	2010 (30 Sept)
No. of claims received	18,097	18,928	16,574	13,894
No. of claims awarded	9,109	15,457	10,730	6,354
No. of claims refused	3,537	5,015	5,776	5,187
No. of appeals received	668	1,017	1,864	2,389

I have no plans to review or to change the qualifying conditions for carer's allowance. The Government will continue to support carers within the resources available.

Question No. 447 answered with Question No. 437.

Social Welfare Appeals

448. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of applications for jobseeker's allowance currently on appeal; his proposals, if any, to address the ongoing situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39198/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I am informed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that there are 6,842 Jobseeker's Allowance and Jobseeker's Benefit appeals on hand. A number of initiatives have been put in place to enhance the capacity of the office to deal with the current caseload and inflows. In that regard:

- 2 additional Appeals Officers were assigned to the Office in 2009,
- A number of additional staff were assigned to the administration area of the Office,
- The organisation of the Appeals Officer's work has been changed so as to increase productivity,
- A project to improve the business processes in the office was undertaken which has resulted in a number of improvements being implemented, and
- Significant enhancements have been made to the office's IT and phone systems.

In addition, it was decided to use experienced retired staff strictly on a short term basis to supplement the current resources and the services of eight retired officers have now been secured on a part-time basis and have been operating since July.

I am assured by the Chief Appeals Officer that she is keeping current processes under continuous review with a view to achieving a more effective throughput of appeals, while ensuring that any progress does not conflict with due process in terms of the rights of appellants and adherence to the requirements of natural justice.

Departmental Staff

449. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he has arranged for or sought the necessary staff redeployments from other Departments to his Department in line with the increased number of applications for various payments arising from the economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39199/10]

454. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to ensure the availability of the necessary staff to speed up the process of all social welfare payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39204/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 449 and 454 together.

Since May 2008, 766 staff have been assigned to my Department, mainly through the transfer and redeployment of staff from other Government Departments. The urgent need for resources was due to a number of factors including the significant increase in the Live Register, an increase in claims for other schemes operated by the Department, together with vacancies arising due to the Incentivised Career Break Scheme, the Incentivised Early Retirement Scheme and other normal retirements and vacancies.

The staff assigned have filled additional posts and critical vacancies in Local Offices, Central Support Units, Scheme areas and the Department's Inspectorate. Some of these posts were sourced through a staff levy imposed on other Government Departments in April 2009. Staffing needs are kept under constant review to ensure that best use is made of all available resources.

It is also recognised that the provision of additional staff in itself is not the only appropriate way to deal with the rising claim load. Since early 2008 all aspects of the work associated with the processing of claims has been examined and streamlined wherever possible without, of course, compromising our scheme controls. In this context, the Department has introduced a range of process improvement initiatives regarding claims for Jobseeker's Allowance and Jobseeker's Benefit. One of the most significant initiatives, aimed at reducing queuing times and waiting times, involves the customer attending the office by appointment at which time the claim is taken and decided.

In addition, a range of other process improvements have been introduced which include:

- A more streamlined procedure for claimants moving to jobseeker's allowance when their jobseekers benefit expires;
- A streamlined process for people who had a claim in the previous two years;
- Application forms for the jobseeker schemes are now available on the Department's website. This means that anyone who wants to make a claim can print the form at home and bring it to the local office completed. This helps reduce queuing times;
- More straightforward procedures for providing evidence of identity and address have been introduced;
- The Department has also simplified processing methods for some customers who work casually, part-time or on systematic short-time work.

Question No. 450 withdrawn.

Question No. 451 answered with Question No. 437.

Question No. 452 answered with Question No. 442.

Social Insurance

453. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current value of the social welfare reserve fund; the extent to which this has fluctuated in each of the past five years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39203/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I understand from the Deputy that his question refers to reserves of the Social Insurance Fund. The Social Insurance Fund finances expenditure on insurance based welfare benefits. It held cash equivalent reserves of €890 million at the beginning of 2010. The amount by which income exceeded expenditure has fallen consistently since 2006 and the Fund has run an annual deficit since 2008, using accumulated reserves to supplement the funding required for benefit payments. These cash reserves were exhausted earlier this year. The shortfall between Fund income and expenditure is being met by way of subvention from the Department's Vote 38.

It is important to note that traditionally, social insurance spending has been funded on a tripartite basis — with contributions coming from the exchequer, employers and employees. The exchequer is the residual financier of the Fund and exchequer contributions were the norm for over forty years — for example, in 1967, the state contribution was 38% of Fund expenditure and almost 29% in 1985. However, no exchequer contribution was required between 1996 and 2009 as the Fund was in surplus on foot of contributions from employers and workers.

An actuarial review of the Social Insurance Fund, undertaken in 2005, which covered the period from 2006 to 2061, highlighted that progressive action is required if future costs, including pensions, are to be met. This will involve finding an appropriate balance between the three strands of the tripartite funding system.

The following table sets out the balance in the Social Insurance Fund over the past five years:

Year End	Social Insurance Fund Reserves
	€
2009*	891,272,000
2008	3,376,969,000
2007	3,632,298,000
2006	3,049,141,000
2005	2,400,284,000

*2009 accounts are subject to audit by the Comptroller & Audit General Office.

Question No. 454 answered with Question No. 449.

Social Welfare Benefits

455. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the entitlements available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39205/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): According to the records of the Department the person concerned has paid PRSI contributions since he entered insurable employment in this State in 2001. He should call to his local social welfare office for advice on the entitlements that are available to him.

456. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 181 of 14 October 2010, if he will arrange for a new application to be considered rather than await an appeal in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39206/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The position remains as advised to the Deputy in question number 181 of 14 October 2010. The Health Service Executive (HSE) refused rent supplement in this case on the grounds that the rent payable to the landlord was in excess of the prescribed maximum limits with regard to the personal circumstances of the person concerned. If the person concerned wishes to make a new application for rent supplement he should contact the community welfare officer at his local health centre.

457. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when rent support will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39207/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): In the time frame available, I regret that my Department is not in a position to reply to this question. My Department will be in contact with the Deputy over the coming days and will reply in full to the question raised.

458. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average processing time for illness benefit in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39212/10]

460. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average processing time for injury benefit in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39214/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 458 and 460 together.

The average processing times for illness benefit (IB) and occupational injury benefit (OIB) claims are as follows:

	IB	OIB
2006	5 days	5 days
2007	6 days	5 days
2008	8 days	6 days
2009	7 days	6 days
2010*	8 days	6 days

*Up to week ending 15 October.

Claims from customers who have no other income (i.e. people who are not paid by their employer while out sick) are prioritised and, in general, processed within 3 days.

459. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average processing time for disability allowance in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39213/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

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	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of weeks	14	16	15	15	13

The Department is committed to delivering the best possible service to its customers. Operational processes and procedures and the organisation of work are continually reviewed in all areas of the Department, including disability allowance section, to ensure that claims are processed and decided in the most efficient and expeditious way possible, having regard to the eligibility conditions that apply to each scheme.

Question No. 460 answered with Question No. 458.

461. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average processing time for domiciliary care allowance in 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39216/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Since the 1st April 2009 this Department has responsibility for the administration of the domiciliary care allowance (DCA) scheme. Prior to this date the scheme was the responsibility of the HSE. Statistics relating to the period prior to April 2009 are not held by this Department.

In 2009 the average time taken to process a DCA application in the Department was 7 weeks, the average processing to date in 2010 is under 8 weeks.

462. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average processing time for family income supplement in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39218/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The average processing time for family income supplement in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and currently in 2010 are as follows:

Year	Average weeks to award
2010*	9 weeks
2009	8 weeks
2008	13 weeks
2007	12 weeks
2006	8 weeks

*Current figure for 2010.

Departmental Agencies

463. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39239/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The three statutory bodies operating under the aegis of the Department are the Pensions Board, the Citizens Information Board and the Social Welfare Tribunal. In addition the Pensions Ombudsman comes under the remit of the Department.

The information requested in respect of these bodies is set out in the following table.

Name of Agency	No. of Board Members
The Pensions Board	17
Citizens Information Board	15
Social Welfare Tribunal	5

The Pensions Ombudsman does not have a board.

464. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39254/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The three statutory bodies operating under the aegis of the Department are the Pensions Board, the Citizens Information Board and the Social Welfare Tribunal. In addition the Pensions Ombudsman comes under the remit of the Department.

On 1 July 2009, the Combat Poverty Agency integrated with the Office for Social Inclusion within this Department to form the Social Inclusion Division. From 1 May 2010, responsibility for the Social Inclusion Division transferred to the Department of Community, Equality & Gaeltacht Affairs. Responsibility for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) transferred to the Citizens Information Board on 13 July 2009.

Responsibility for the Family Support Agency also transferred to the Department of Community, Equality & Gaeltacht Affairs on 1 May 2010 and the position regarding that agency's funding will be included in that Department's reply.

The following table contains the information sought in the Parliamentary Question.

Name of Statutory Body	Expenditure for each year
	€
Social Welfare Tribunal	2006: Nil 2007: Nil 2008: 155.00 2009: 330.00 2010: 5,772.00 (1/1/10 to 30/09/10)
Office of the Pensions Ombudsman	2006: 0.79m 2007: 0.91m 2008: 0.96m 2009: 0.93m 2010: 0.65m (1/1/10 to 30/09/10)
The Pensions Board ¹	2006: 6.60m 2007: 6.63m ² 2008: 6.76m 2009: 6.10m 2010: 3.50m (1/1/10 to 30/09/10)
Combat Poverty Agency	2006: 4.31m

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

Name of Statutory Body	Expenditure for each year
Combat Poverty Agency was dissolved as a separate entity with effect from 01 July 2009	<p style="text-align: center;">€</p> 2007: 4.0m 2008: 4.1m 2009: 1.2m
Comhairle Citizens Information Board (The Comhairle name was changed to Citizens Information Board in February 2007 under the Citizens Information Act 2007)	2006: 25.00m 2007: 29.9m 2008: 29.4m 2009: 28.0m ³ 2010 34.03m (1/1/10 to 30/09/10)

¹ The operations of the Pensions Board are financed by annual fees payable to it by occupational pension schemes and by providers of Personal Retirement Savings Accounts.

² Expenditure figures for the Pensions Board for each year include an allocation from the Department of Social Protection to it in respect of the National Pensions Awareness Campaign. The allocation was €1 million in respect of 2007 and 2008 and €500,000 for 2009 and 2010.

³ Responsibility for MABS transferred to the Citizens Information Board (CIB). Prior to its transfer expenditure for MABS amounted to €17.041m in 2009.

Social Welfare Benefits

465. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the guidelines he has issued in respect of the administration of the rent supplement scheme, including dealing with anti-social behaviour by tenants; his plans to reform the rent supplement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39311/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is to provide short-term support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation, whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from another source.

Social welfare legislation provides the Health Service Executive with the authority to refuse, suspend or terminate payment of a rent supplement in the case of a person who has been required to deliver up possession of a dwelling provided by a housing authority or an approved body for reasons that include anti-social behaviour or the interests of good estate management.

In the case of private rented accommodation, tenancy arrangements involve a contract between the landlord and tenant and tenant behaviour is a matter for the landlord in the first instance. There are a number of avenues open to landlords in such cases, including the mediation service for landlords and tenants operated by the Private Residential Tenancies Board and/or recourse to the Garda Síochána and/or the Courts in relation to the enforcement of the law in dealing with anti-social behaviour. If necessary, the landlord may seek termination of the tenancy which, if affected, would result in the termination of rent supplement.

Social Welfare Appeals

466. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a domiciliary care allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and when an appeal will be heard [39400/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who proposes to hold an oral hearing in this case. The person concerned will be informed when arrangements have been made.

There was a 46% increase in the number of appeals received by the Social Welfare Appeals Office in 2009 when compared to 2008, which in itself was 27% greater than the numbers received in 2007. There was an increase of a further 44% in the number of appeals received in the first eight months of 2010. These increases have caused delays in the processing of appeals. In order to be fair to all appellants, oral hearings are arranged in strict chronological order.

A number of initiatives have been put in place to enhance the capacity of the office to deal with the current caseload and inflows. In that regard:

- 2 additional Appeals Officers were assigned to the Office in 2009,
- A number of additional staff were assigned to the administration area of the Office,
- The organisation of the Appeals Officer's work has been changed so as to increase productivity,
- A project to improve the business processes in the office was undertaken which has resulted in a number of improvements being implemented, and
- Significant enhancements have been made to the office's IT and phone systems.

In addition, it was decided to use experienced retired staff strictly on a short term basis to supplement the current resources and the services of eight retired officers have now been secured on a part-time basis and have been operating since July.

I am assured by the Chief Appeals Officer that she is keeping current processes under continuous review with a view to achieving a more effective throughput of appeals, while ensuring that any progress does not conflict with due process in terms of the rights of appellants and adherence to the requirements of natural justice.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Social Welfare Benefits

467. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will ensure that an issue (details supplied) is resolved as soon as possible and ensure that participants on the programme are given their full entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39445/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I understand that the difficulties which have arisen in this case have arisen as a consequence of a change in practice introduced by FÁS in respect of persons in receipt of Disability Allowance who participate in part-time training courses funded by FÁS.

These difficulties have recently come to light in my Department and I have arranged that the position in respect of those concerned will be addressed without delay. In practice, and in line with the legislative provisions governing the Disability Allowance scheme, the training allowance (excluding any allowance paid specifically towards travel and other expenses associated with the training course) will be assessed as means and the Disability Allowance payment adjusted accordingly. This will ensure that the people concerned do not lose out in any way and will continue also to retain entitlement to the relevant secondary benefits.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

More generally, the wider issues arising from the change in practice introduced by FÁS are the subject of ongoing discussions between my Department and the Department of Education and Skills.

Sports Capital Programme

468. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport if she will deal with a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38470/10]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Mary Hanafin): A community association in Dublin 13 was allocated €12,000 under the Sports Capital Programme in 2006 for a new water tank and to upgrade showers for use by local clubs including the club in question. None of this allocation has been drawn down.

Departmental Agencies

469. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under her Department's control; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39241/10]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information requested by the Deputy is set out hereunder:

State Board	Number sitting on Board
National Library of Ireland	12
Crawford Gallery	16
Irish Manuscripts Commission	20
National Archives Advisory Council	6
Tourism Ireland Ltd*	12
National Tourism Development Authority (Fáilte Ireland)	12
Irish Sports Council	11
National Sports Campus Development Authority	13
Irish Film Board	7
National Museum of Ireland	8
Irish Museum of Modern Art	9
National Concert Hall	15
National Gallery of Ireland	16
Arts Council	13
Culture Ireland	12

*Tourism Ireland is a North/South body operating under the aegis of the North South Ministerial Council.

470. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport the annual budget of each State agency under her Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39256/10]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The requested information (Revised Estimates provision) is as set out in tabular form below.

Agency	2006 €000	2007 €000	2008 €000	2009 €000	2010 €000
Arts Council	72,310	80,000	82,102	73,350	68,649
Chester Beatty Library	2,483	3,208	3,467	3,083	2,714
Crawford Art Gallery	1,190	2,080	1,991	1,753	1,579
Fáilte Ireland **	77,857	79,496	82,819	78,687	68,299
Irish Film Board	17,126	19,659	23,197	20,340	19,272
Irish Museum of Modern Art	6,480	7,442	8,260	7,332	6,671
Irish Sports Council	40,914	54,025	57,631	51,689	49,572
National Concert Hall	2,852	4,270	3,903	3,478	3,105
National Gallery of Ireland	9,439	11,765	12,610	10,934	10,163
National Library of Ireland	11,417	13,201	12,002	10,742	9,348
National Museum of Ireland	19,842	19,512	19,058	15,415	15,125
National Sports Campus Development Authority*	—	22,198	6,710	4,398	7,754
Tourism Ireland**	18,737	19,600	20,010	19,400	18,740

*The National Sports Campus Development Authority was established on 1 January 2007.

**Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland also received allocations under the Tourism Marketing Fund subhead of the Department's Vote for the years in question as set out in the Revised Estimates volumes.

Water Charges

471. **Deputy John O'Donoghue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the charge that would have to be applied in respect of water charges for the Exchequer to save at least €3 billion without cutting social welfare, reducing child benefit, or introducing a property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38474/10]

474. **Deputy John O'Donoghue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the length of time it will take and the cost of installing water meters at each customers location here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38473/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 471 and 474 together.

The renewed Programme for Government contains a commitment to introduce charges for water in a way that is fair, significantly reduces waste and is easily applied. Proposals are being developed by my Department on the approach to be taken to the installation of water meters in approximately 1.2 million households connected to public water supplies.

The metering programme is likely to take a number of years to be completed but every effort will be made to roll it out in as short a time period as possible. My aim is to ensure that, once meter installation commences next year, we will have a significant proportion of the programme completed in the first two to three years.

The overall cost will be dependent on the types of water meters and associated equipment chosen for use and the method of installation to be employed. I will be analysing the various options to ensure the delivery of the metering programme in the most cost effective manner. I will provide further details on these matters following their consideration and approval by Government.

Households charges for metered water supply will be based on volumetric usage so the bills incurred by a household will be directly related to their consumption levels. No decision has

[Deputy John Gormley.]

been taken yet on the charging structure or on the rate that householders will be charged so I am not in a position to provide an estimate of the potential revenue that might be generated.

Local Authority Staff

472. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if her attention has been drawn to a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38515/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each County and City Manager is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

Planning Issues

473. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the procedure for applying to a local authority to extend the duration of a planning permission; the time frame for a decision to be given for such an application; if such a timeframe does not exist, why not; the appeals procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38451/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Ciarán Cuffe): The procedure for applying for an extension of duration of planning permission is set out in Article 42 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended by Article 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2010. An application must be made in writing, be accompanied by the appropriate fee as prescribed by Article 170 of the Regulations and contain the information set out in Article 42.

The previous provision in relation to a time-frame for deciding applications for extensions of permission (Section 42(2) of the 2000 Act) provided for a default decision to extend the duration of permission in a case where an application was not decided by the planning authority within 8 weeks. As this provision could have resulted in a situation where an applicant who did not comply with all the requirements of the section could get an extension due to the failure of the planning authority to decide the application in time, it was considered appropriate to amend it. The new provision, introduced in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 requires the planning authority to make its decision on an application for the extension of duration of planning permission as expeditiously as possible, and provides that it must be the objective of the planning authority to notify the applicant of its decision within the period of 8 weeks beginning on the date of application or submission of required further information, where relevant.

There is no appeal procedure for an application that has been granted or refused an extension of duration for permission. It is not considered that an appeal is required as the Act provides for an automatic extension in cases where the requirements of the legislation are complied with.

Question No. 474 answered with Question No. 471.

Environmental Policy

475. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the Magyar Aluminium Zrt. (MAL) red sludge

spill in Hungary on 4 October 2010; if he has conducted a systematic review of the landfill and tailings ponds at a plant (details supplied) in County Limerick where the on-site landfill annually handles 1.5 million tonnes of similar red sludge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38480/10]

476. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if a company (details supplied) has set a fully costed environmental liabilities risk assessment with the Environmental Protection Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38481/10]

477. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if a company (details supplied) has made a financial provision with the Environmental Protection Agency to cover any liabilities arising out of its handling of red mud waste at its BRDA landfill on-site or any liabilities from possible mud spills from the landfill into the river Shannon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38482/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 475, 476 and 477 together.

I am aware of the recent tragic events at the Magyar Alumimum Zrt. owned alumina plant in Ajka, Hungary. In Ireland, decisions on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) licences are the responsibility of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The monitoring and enforcement of conditions attaching to IPPC licences, including accident prevention and emergency response measures, environmental liability risk assessments and financial provisions, are also a matter for the EPA.

Under the Environmental Protection Agency Acts 1992 to 2007, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by the EPA of its licensing functions in specific cases.

Water Services

478. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Louth County Council had a water services capital balance of €18.3 million on 1 January 2010; that this council is prohibited from allowing the balance to disimprove, that this council has had to raise a bank loan to pay local contributions to water projects in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38495/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department set out details of the financial requirements for local authorities relating to the overall management of their capital and current accounts in 2009 and 2010. These arise from the requirements for Government finances as a whole to be managed in accordance with the Stability and Growth Pact established under the Maastricht Treaty, and the associated limitation on budget deficits.

I appreciate that these requirements, while not new, impose a particular degree of financial discipline on local authorities. Current economic and budgetary considerations require all sectors, including local authorities, to ensure effective control and management of public finances.

In relation to the water services capital programme, Louth County Council received approval on 21 October 2010 to drawdown borrowing of €1.521m in respect of a number of schemes.

[Deputy John Gormley.]

My Department will continue to work closely with local authorities to ensure that, within the overall financial limits set, the necessary prioritisation is given to environmental, economic and social infrastructure as part of the overall contribution to economic recovery.

Proposed Legislation

479. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the status of the Climate Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38501/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 445, 448, 459, 460, 461 and 463 of 12 October 2010 which sets out the current position on this matter.

Building Regulations

480. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to amend the 2007 Building Control Act; if the requirements for inclusion on the Register of Architects will be changed; if any relevant secondary legislation or statutory instrument is envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38525/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I have no plans to amend the Building Control Act at this time.

The statutory process for the registration of the title of “architect”, which was introduced by the Building Control Act, 2007, is a key element in ensuring appropriate standards of competence in the architectural profession and is also an important consumer protection safeguard.

Traveller Accommodation

481. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to any plans to redevelop an area (details supplied) in Dublin 10 ; if he has received any correspondence in relation to the site from Dublin City Council in the past five years; the subject of that correspondence and the action taken on foot of same [38546/10]

482. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the overcrowding situation in an area (details supplied) in Dublin 10, exacerbated by a spate of house burnings by some former resident of the estate; his views on the tenants who agreed several years ago that the estate should be redeveloped by Dublin City Council and if he is concerned at the delay in progressing that redevelopment. [38547/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 481 and 482 together.

In accordance with the provisions of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998, responsibility for the planning and implementation of proposals for the extension or refurbishment of Traveller accommodation is a matter for the relevant housing authority.

Initial proposals for the provision of 22 extra units of Traveller accommodation at Labre Park were submitted by Dublin City Council to my Department in 2004. Following protracted

consultation between the Council and my Department, approval in principle to proceed with the scheme was issued in 2008, subject to receipt of clarification on a number of issues.

This proposal was included in Dublin City Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme for 2009-2013. The project was discussed at a meeting with my Department in November 2009 and updated proposals in relation to this scheme are awaited from the Council.

The Council also submitted outline proposals in relation to demolition works and repairs to the CCTV system at Labre Park. My Department indicated that these proposals would be favourably considered on receipt of full details of the work involved. This information is awaited at present.

483. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the location of the Traveller accommodation housing schemes in each local authority area; if each local authority is complying with its responsibility under the law on the provision of Traveller accommodation; if not, the cause of the delay in each case and the action the Department has taken to ensure local authorities comply with the law [38548/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The detailed information requested in relation to the location of Traveller accommodation housing schemes in each local authority area is not available in my Department. However, details of all Traveller-specific units of accommodation completed from 2002–2008 are included in the annual reports of the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC), copies of which are available in the Oireachtas Library and on my Department's website at www.enviro.ni.ie.

In accordance with the provisions of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998, responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes, to meet identified housing need, rests with individual housing authorities.

Traveller Accommodation Programmes covering the period 2009-2013 have been formally adopted by all relevant housing authorities. My responsibility in relation to Traveller accommodation is to ensure that there is an adequate legislative and financial framework in place to assist the authorities in implementing the accommodation strategies set out in their Traveller Accommodation Programme.

Social and Affordable Housing

484. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if consideration has been given to altering the clawback clause in terms of persons who wish to sell properties which they purchased under the affordable housing schemes, but who can no longer afford the mortgage due to a change in their financial circumstances, but who cannot afford to sell the property due to the negative equity and cannot go on the local authority housing list as they would have made themselves homeless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38549/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Where a person is selling an affordable home and the clawback amount payable would reduce the proceeds of resale below the initial price actually paid, current legislation provides for the amount of the clawback payable to be reduced to the extent

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necessary to avoid that result. The clawback provisions do not therefore need to be amended to take account of any negative equity that may arise.

The Government has put in place a range of supports for home owners facing difficulty in meeting their mortgage repayments including a Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears which applies to all mortgage lenders; support from the Mortgage Interest Scheme under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance system; and the provision of advice on debt management through the Money Advice Budgeting Service (MABS).

In addition, the Expert Group on Mortgage Arrears and Personal Debt — which published its interim report in July — is expected to complete and submit its final report in the coming weeks setting out recommendations on further measures to assist such homeowners.

To ensure that the interface between chronic arrears and the necessary social housing supports can operate more effectively, my Department is developing new regulations and guidance in the context of the social housing reform programme. This will provide that housing authorities can disregard the household's current accommodation for the purposes of determining eligibility for social housing support.

Departmental Funding

485. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the funding he will provide for the redevelopment of an area (details supplied) where a planning application will soon be lodged to An Bord Pleanála; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38552/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): My Department is committed to a multi-annual regeneration programme in Dublin City to help improve the lives and conditions of the communities involved. The programme is reviewed on a regular basis with Dublin City Council, including through the biannual Housing Action Plan meetings, with new projects added and additional elements of existing projects advanced, as resources permit. It is a matter for Dublin City Council, in the first instance, to prioritise and manage the advancement of projects within the programme, having regard to its available funding resources.

The multidisciplinary Special Housing Taskforce established by Dublin City Council, with the objective of developing and implementing alternative regeneration options for former Public Private Partnership projects, has prioritised three projects including the project in question. It is up to the City Council to decide on the type of regeneration proposal that is most appropriate for the area and the means by which the project should be delivered. The Taskforce has made good progress to date and it is understood that there are plans to submit a planning application for the project in question to An Bord Pleanála before the end of this year. My Department expects to receive detailed proposals from the City Council in the coming year in regard to the future development of the project.

Planning Issues

486. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding an application from Kilkenny County Council for a serviced land initiative at Castlecomer, County Kilkenny; if he is in receipt of all of the documentation from Kilkenny County Council; the timeframe for a decision; if he will expedite the matter [38574/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2012, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas Library, provides for the development of a comprehensive range of new water services infrastructure in County Kilkenny. The Castlecomer Sewerage Scheme (SLI) is included in the Programme amongst the list of contracts in the county to start in the period 2010-2012.

Kilkenny County Council has recently submitted a proposal to my Department regarding the funding of this scheme. The submission is under examination and a reply will issue to the Council shortly.

EU Directives

487. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will provide details as to the precise compensation measure in place for landowners where their lands are affected under habitats directive or the birds directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38589/10]

488. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will provide details as to all amounts paid in compensation to landowners or affected persons under the habitats directive or the birds directive since designation commenced [38590/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 487 and 488 together.

Payments to landowners arising from the designation of land under the Habitats and Birds Directives have generally been made by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under the provisions of successive Rural Development Programmes and in particular through the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme and the Agri-Environmental Options Scheme.

As an alternative to these schemes, for farmers in designated conservation areas, my Department operates the National Parks and Wildlife Service Farm Plan Scheme, which is designed to support particular farm practices in designated sites. To date, almost €8m has been paid to farmers under this scheme or to support individuals farming in areas requiring specific agri-environmental measures such as the Burren and uplands damaged by over-grazing in Mayo and Galway.

Where the Minister refuses consent to carry out an activity which is a Notifiable Activity under the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997, compensation may be payable under regulation 20. To date, €1.5m has been paid and this has been exclusively to compensate commercial turf-cutters who were compelled to discontinue their activities on sites designated under the Birds or Habitats Directives.

€17.5m has been paid to date under my Department's voluntary bog purchase scheme for the acquisition of freehold and turbary rights within designated raised bogs. This sum principally relates to acquisition costs but a small proportion relates to compensation for vendors agreeing to cease turf extraction earlier than permitted under the ten year derogation period.

My Department has also made payments of over €105,000 in 2010 to turbary right owners who have been compelled to discontinue turf-cutting to provide for their domestic fuel needs on certain raised bog Special Areas of Conservation. These payments were made under an interim compensation scheme that I announced earlier this year.

Planning Issues

489. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the planning permission requirements for constructing a porch to the front of a house and if there are any exemptions for such development [38635/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Ciarán Cuffe): Under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (Schedule 2, Part 1, Class 7), the construction of a porch is an exempt development, subject to the following conditions and limitations: Any such structure shall be situated not less than 2 metres from any road; the floor area of any such structure shall not exceed 2 square metres, and; the height of any such structure shall not exceed, in the case of a structure with a tiled or slated pitched roof, 4 metres or, in any other case, 3 metres.

Housing Grants

490. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views regarding the possibility of introducing a national grant scheme for rainwater harvesting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38679/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Rainwater harvesting has environmental benefits through reducing the demand for and the consumption of treated water, thereby reducing pressures on our water resources. The introduction of a grants scheme for any purpose must be managed within current budgetary parameters and, insofar as the funds administered by my Department are concerned, there are no plans to introduce a grant scheme for the installation of rainwater harvesting systems.

Departmental Correspondence

491. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will respond to issues raised in correspondence (details supplied) [38744/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The correspondence referred to in the Question was not received in my Department.

The Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010 was signed by the President on 21 July, 2010 following its passage through the Oireachtas. It is intended that the Act will commence in early 2011.

Section 16 of the Act provides that it will be unlawful for the operator of a dog breeding establishment to keep a dog that is over 12 weeks old which is not implanted with a microchip. The time limit for micro chipping will reduce to 8 weeks after the first year of operation of the Act. It is expected that this provision will assist Local Authorities in identifying dogs as part of their control functions. My Department has no function with regard to the control of cats.

Heritage Sites

492. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will consider the plans known as HQ16, supported by the families of the executed, as a fitting and appropriate memorial to the historic significance of the Rising and his views on the suggestion that many buildings associated with the Rising have been lost. [38753/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): In January 2007, my predecessor as Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government placed a Preservation Order on nos. 14 to 17 Moore Street under the National Monuments Acts. The Preservation Order was made on the grounds that the buildings are a monument, the preservation of which is of national importance by reason of its historical importance as the final headquarters of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising.

My role as Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is to protect the monument, under that Order, from any danger of being destroyed, injured or removed. In that regard any works affecting the monument require my prior consent under the National Monuments Acts.

I am aware that An Bord Pleanála has granted planning permission for development on the site that includes the Moore St monument. This permission does not supersede the Preservation Order already in place and my consent will still be required for any development works that may affect the buildings covered by the Preservation Order. I fully appreciate the historical significance of these buildings as the site of the last military actions of the 1916 Rising leaders and the appropriateness of any proposed works will be carefully examined against that historical background if a development related consent application is submitted.

I have not seen the plans referred to in the question and I have no function in relation to the promotion of specific developments for sites in private ownership.

Environmental Protection

493. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the necessary environmental clean-up at the former steel plant site on Haulbowline Island, County Cork [39014/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): From 2004 to 2009 my Department had an interim role in the management of this legacy site in a manner which is consistent with good practice and minimisation of risk to human health and the environment. Accordingly, my Department arranged for the decontamination and demolition of the buildings on site and, post-demolition, arranged for the procurement of a contractor for site surface clearance, back filling of voids and the disposal of the remaining surface wastes to be undertaken.

In June 2009, the Government decided that the Office of Public Works would chair a working group to develop a structured and coherent approach to the further management of the former Irish Ispat site, and to advise on the site's most beneficial future use. The future use of the site will in itself influence the levels and extent of further works and/or remediation required.

Animal Welfare

494. **Deputy Joe Behan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the plans he has to introduce a national register and licensing system for exotic pets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39017/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My responsibilities under the Wildlife Acts relate to the conservation of populations of certain protected species. Animal welfare and the protection of animals from cruelty, including pets, are the responsibility of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Social and Affordable Housing

495. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding a facility for purchasers under existing affordable housing or shared ownership arrangements who wish to re-mortgage or top-up their mortgage without triggering the clawback clause; and if so, if he could provide a timeframe for same [39028/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): While provision has been made in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 to allow purchasers under the new Affordable Dwelling Purchase Arrangements to re-mortgage or top-up their mortgage without triggering the clawback, the Act does not provide this facility for purchasers under existing affordable housing or shared ownership arrangements. I have requested my Department to arrange to have the provisions necessary to address this matter included in the first appropriate legislative vehicle that becomes available.

496. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount spent by Government on social, affordable and voluntary housing schemes in each of the years 2007, 2008, and 2009; the number of social and affordable houses completed in each of those years; if he expects to reach the national development plan target of 100,000 new social and affordable houses by 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39054/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Since 2000, very significant levels of investment have been made available under the Social Housing Investment Programme with over €11.5 billion provided for the construction or acquisition of units by local authorities and approved housing bodies. Details on the amount spent under the various social housing programmes and the outputs achieved are set out in tables 1 and 2.

Meeting housing need remains a high priority for the Government. While ensuring that we can deliver across the full range of needs, the scale and composition of the public housing programme in the years ahead will be dependent on a number of factors, including the level of available funding and the evolution of the housing market generally, for example, to take account of the fall-off in demand for affordable housing. I am determined to ensure that the overall delivery programme is framed in a manner which continues to optimise the way in which needs are met. To achieve this, it is essential that we tailor the available Exchequer supports to prevailing market conditions, and explore alternative solutions to address needs, having full regard to the sustainable communities philosophy outlined in the Government's housing policy statement, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*.

To this end, the range of delivery mechanisms continues to be adapted and expanded. For example, last year, I introduced a new Social Housing Leasing Initiative, under which in excess of 2,000 units have now been sourced and through which I expect a substantial number of units to be provided in the years ahead to meet housing needs, estimated at just over 56,000 households in the 2008 Housing Needs Assessment. This, together with the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), complements the traditional capital funded programmes operated through local authorities and the voluntary and co-operative housing sector. The combined budget provision for leasing and RAS for 2010 is €150 million and I anticipate that, taken together, the two schemes will deliver half of the projected social housing output this year.

I will be keeping the leasing initiative and all the other housing programmes under ongoing review to ensure that they are appropriately geared towards meeting the maximum level of housing need.

Table 1

	2007	2008	2009
	€	€	€
<i>B.1 Capital</i>			
B.1.1 LA Housing	941,273,000	979,728,785	690,536,343
B.1.2 CAS	113,766,000	156,290,000	158,512,741
B.1.3 Traveller Accom.	35,000,000	35,000,000	19,601,979
<i>B.2 Capital</i>			
B.2.1 Regeneration	315,398,000	217,384,195	200,877,032
B.2.2 Retrofitting	0	0	0
<i>B.3 Capital</i>			
B.3.2 Site Subsidies	35,217,000	38,492,685	6,938,473
<i>B.1 Current</i>			
B.1.1 LA Housing/Leasing	0	0	642,178
B.1.3 Traveller Accom.	7,173,000	7,173,000	7,173,000
B.1.6 Homeless	52,987,000	53,234,999	56,056,856
B.1.7 CLSS	37,783,000	61,993,143	69,896,277
B.1.11 RAS	27,385,000	53,025,430	83,394,513
<i>B.3 Current</i>			
B.3.4 Affordable Housing/Shared Ownership	5,291,000	4,199,047	3,823,623

Table 2 — Number of units provided

Year	Local Authority	Voluntary	Affordable	Total
2007	6,988	1,685	3,539	12,212
2008	5,692	1,896	4,567	12,155
2009 (to end quarter 3)	2,963	1,330	1,360	5,653
Total	15,643	4,911	9,466	30,020

Urban Renewal Schemes

497. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he will appoint the new board for Limerick Regeneration amalgamating the two bodies; if secondary legislation is necessary; if there will be community representatives on the board; if so, the way they will be appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39098/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I have indicated to Government my intention to amalgamate the Limerick Northside and Limerick Southside Regeneration Agencies into a single Agency with a smaller reconstituted board of directors. This will be placed on a legislative basis under the Local Government (Corporate Bodies) (Amendment) Bill 2010.

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I am particularly concerned to ensure that this new Board will include local political representation and that the board will comprise an appropriate mix of skills and expertise to be in a position to provide oversight, strategic direction and accountability for the Agency's work programme.

Rental Accommodation Scheme

498. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the guidelines and-or limits given to local authorities on the upper limits paid to landlords under the rental accommodation scheme; if these limits are monitored and reviewed regularly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39107/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The amount of rent paid to private landlords through the Rental Accommodation Scheme is a matter for individual local authorities, having regard to the need to obtain value for money. Guidance from my Department in relation to this matter emphasises the need for authorities to obtain competitive prices for property, having regard to the level of risk transferred to the authority (i.e. risk of vacancies, tenant arrears etc). In most circumstances authorities obtain discounts on the prevailing market rates. As a general guide, the Department have advised that the agreed rent should be circa one to one and a half months less than the market rent over a given twelve-month period dependent on the contract type entered into. This equates to an annualised saving of between 8 and 12% on the market rent.

The Department monitor and audit value for money at recoupment stage and authorities are required to advise the Department on the level of discount that has been obtained for each unit. In addition to this, my Department is currently carrying out a Value for Money and Policy Review of the Rental Accommodation Scheme which is due for completion in 2011. A specific aim of the review is to evaluate the operation of RAS in the light of the objectives set for it, including the financial arrangements under which the scheme operates.

Natural Heritage Areas

499. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will respond to a query (details supplied) [39132/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The lakes referred to in the Question are within the candidate Special Area of Conservation known as Killarney National Park, Macgillicuddy's Reeks & Caragh River Catchment. This site was proposed for designation as an SAC in March, 1997, pursuant to provisions of the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997, which transpose the Habitats Directive into Irish law.

Affected landowners were notified directly and the proposal was advertised in the local media at that time. The site was included on a list transmitted to the European Commission on 28 July, 2000 and adopted by Commission decision of 7 December 2004, pursuant to the Habitats Directive.

Details of the site, including a map and site synopsis are available on my Department's web site at www.npws.ie. The text of the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997, is available on www.irishstatutebook.ie

Animal Welfare

500. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local

Government his plans to review the Control of Dogs Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39142/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010 was signed by the President on 21 July, 2010 following its passage through the Oireachtas. It is intended that the Act will commence in early 2011.

The Act gives statutory effect to the recommendations of the Working Group that reviewed the management of dog breeding establishments. The Act defines a dog breeding establishment as a premises with not less than 6 bitches of 6 months old capable of breeding and provides, inter alia, that all dog breeding establishments be required to register with the relevant local authority, pay a registration fee and meet a minimum set of veterinary, welfare and other requirements. There are no plans to review the Control of Dogs Act at this time.

Motor Taxation

501. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to reform the motor tax system to allow any motor tax office to issue a disk on behalf of an adjoining local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39154/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): At present a local authority may only issue a licence for a vehicle which is in its own county area. The possibility of permitting a licensing authority to issue a licence without such restriction is one of the issues being examined in the context of the development of proposals for a revision and consolidation of motor tax law underway in my Department at present. In this regard, I hope to bring Heads of a Bill to Government in the near future.

Local Authority Housing

502. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of local authority tenants who have fallen into rent arrears by local authority in tabular form in the years 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39223/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The management of differential rent schemes and individual rent accounts is the responsibility of local authorities as an integral part of their housing management functions, subject to broad principles laid down by my Department in Circular letter HRT 3/2002.

My Department does not collect information on the number of local authority tenants that fall into rent arrears each year.

Departmental Agencies

503. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39235/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested in respect of the number of board members currently sitting on the boards of the State agencies and bodies under my Department's aegis is set out in a table:

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Name of Board	No of Board Members*
Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board**	5
An Bord Pleanála	8
Dublin Docklands Development Authority	7
Comhar	26
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)***	5
An Chomhairle Leabharlanna	13
Irish Water Safety	13
Fire Services Council	0
Heritage Council	17
Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland	10
PRTB	10
Rent Tribunal	7
Housing Finance Agency	11
Limerick Northside Regeneration Agency	17
Limerick Southside Regeneration Agency	17
National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee	12
Building Regulations Advisory Body (BRAB)	24
National Building Agency Ltd. (NBA)	12
Affordable Homes Partnership	11
Local Government Management Services Board (LGMSB)	10
Local Government Computer Services Board (LGCSB)	10

*These figures include the Chairperson.

**There are two Co-Chairpersons available to the Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board.

***The Chairperson of the EPA Committee is the Director General of the EPA.

The functions of the Fire Services Council are being undertaken by my Department since the term of office of its members expired on 30 June 2009. It is not intended to reappoint a Council.

The administrative functions of the Rent Tribunal were transferred to the PRTB with effect from 1 October 2009.

The Limerick Northside and Southside Regeneration Agencies are already serviced by a single executive. It is proposed formally to merge both agencies, thereby achieving greater efficiencies.

It is intended that the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency, a single streamlined housing agency, will take on a range of housing functions currently performed by the Affordable Homes Partnership (AHP), the Centre for Housing Research (CHR) and the National Building Agency (NBA), as well as new functions reflecting current housing policy (for example, in the area of social leasing). As a result, the AHP, the CHR and the NBA will be wound up. This agency has already been established on an administrative basis, and it is expected that it will be placed on a statutory footing next year.

504. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39249/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Provisions made in my Department's Vote, as set out in the annual Revised Estimates for Public Services volumes for the years concerned, in respect of bodies in receipt of funds through the Vote are set out in the following table.

Body	2006 Outturn €,000	2007 Outturn €,000	2008 Outturn €,000	2009 Outturn €,000	2010 Allocation €,000
Rent Tribunal	145	20	42	28	—
Private Residential Tenancies Board	2,974	5,740	3,812	1,000	—
Environmental Protection Agency	18,275	27,661	35,443	34,308	27,015
Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland	4,662	3,971	4,676	4,245	3,685
An Bord Pleanála	13,609	15,990	15,098	15,331	13,029
Irish Water Safety Association	582	639	652	556	539
Heritage Council	9,388	13,536	13,403	10,142	8,482
Affordable Homes Partnership	2,164	2,436	3,465	3,210	2,127
Limerick Northside Regeneration Agency	—	565	2,480	2,803	2,803
Limerick Southside Regeneration Agency	—	565	2,480	2,803	2,802
Centre for Housing Research	30	457	606	435	—
Building Regulations Advisory Body	21	8	74	11	20
Fire Services Council	379	634	653	170	1
Irish Heritage Trust	—	5,500	520	484	436
National Traveller Consultative Committee	7	14	28	27	28
Local Drugs Task Force	461	481	496	461	461
Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board	90	157	175	43	200
National Rural Water Services Consultative Committee	134	212	171	99	2

Further financial and other information in respect of State agencies referred to above (including in relation to own resources income), and relating to agencies which are not in receipt of funds through my Department's Vote, is available in the Annual Reports and Accounts of the agencies concerned.

Departmental Bodies

505. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the reason, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, approval was conveyed on 24 October 2006 for borrowing by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority up to the statutory limit of €127 million under section 30 of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority Act 1997 in response to a request from the chief executive officer of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority for permission to put a borrowing facility in place, without specifying the amount of borrowings proposed. [39397/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Under Section 30 of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority Act 1997, as amended, the Authority may, with the sanction of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the consent of the Minister for Finance, borrow up to £100m (€127m) for the purpose of providing for current or capital purposes.

In October 2006, the Authority sought sanction for borrowings of up to €127 million for the purposes of property acquisition, and particularly in connection with the impending acquisition

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of the Irish Glass Bottle site for mixed residential and commercial development in furtherance of the objectives for the area set out in the Master Plan for the docklands.

Consent to this sanction request was sought by my Department from the Department of Finance and was subsequently received on the explicit basis that repayments would be wholly from the Authority's own resources and without recourse to the Exchequer. The Department wrote to the Authority on 24 October 2006, confirming this sanction.

Consent was also granted, in accordance with Section 6 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, to the Authority taking a shareholding in a special purpose company to facilitate the joint venture development of the IGB site.

As a commercial State body, it is in the first instance the responsibility of the Authority to manage its financial affairs within the relevant statutory parameters. Given its mandate to make independent commercial decisions, the purchase of individual properties and the extent to which the Authority would borrow for such purposes were matters for the Authority itself, subject to its overall borrowing limit not being exceeded.

Local Authority Lands

506. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will report on the current status of three tranches of land in north Dublin (details supplied); if these lands are to be used for social and affordable housing; the cost of each of the three tranches of land and the way the land purchases were and are being financed; to confirm if a plan is currently being considered for Dublin City Council to dispose of these three sites for a nominal amount of €1 and to then apply to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for funding to pay off the full capital and loan costs associated with each land purchase; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[39404/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I refer to the reply to Question No. 458 of 12 October 2010.

According to information provided by Dublin City Council as part of the land audit carried out in April 2010, these lands were purchased by way of loans advanced by the Housing Finance Agency for social and affordable housing purposes. The management of these lands is a matter for the local authority concerned. My Department has not received an application from Dublin City Council, seeking inclusion of these lands in the Land Aggregation Scheme.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

507. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to outline his plans for upgrading of the water supply to Gort town and the regional groups; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[39421/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2012, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas Library, provides for the development of a comprehensive range of new water and sewerage services infrastructure in County Galway. The programme included provision for the upgrade of the treatment plant in Gort and water conservations works which will also benefit the area.

Work is ongoing on these contracts which will to improve the water supply to Gort. Galway County Council has confirmed that work on the Gort Water Supply Scheme to upgrade the existing water treatment plant to tackle water quality issues with the existing supply is nearing completion.

In addition, advance works on the Regional Scheme for mains replacement in the town under the Council's water conservation programme are also in progress. Further information on progress with those contracts may be had from the Council.

While provision is made to commence contracts to the value of some €130 million in county Galway during the period of the Programme, apart from the foregoing contracts, it was not possible to include the wider proposals for the Gort Regional Water Supply Scheme amongst the priority contracts and schemes selected for inclusion. The new Programme prioritises projects that target environmental compliance issues and support economic and employment growth as envisaged in the Government's policy document Building Ireland's Smart Economy — A Framework for Sustainable Economic Revival. A key input to the development of the Programme was the assessment of needs prepared by local authorities, including Galway County Council, in response to my Department's request to the authorities in 2009 to review and prioritise their proposals for new capital works in their areas. These were subsequently appraised in the Department in the context of the funds available and key criteria that complemented those used by the authorities. Inevitably, through this process, certain projects that had been proposed had to give way to others that are more strategically important at this time.

508. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the reason that the provision of a water supply to an area (details supplied) was separated last year from upgrade head works at Loughrea water works as it was planned; the reason it was included in original costings for the complete project; if he will indicate when this scheme will be allowed to start work to bring water supplies to the group water members as intended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39422/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2012, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas Library, provides for the development of a comprehensive range of new water services infrastructure in County Galway. The new Programme prioritises projects that target environmental compliance issues and support economic and employment growth as envisaged in the Government's policy document Building Ireland's Smart Economy — A Framework for Sustainable Economic Revival. The Council's proposal for upgrading the Loughrea water treatment plant is considered to reflect Programme priorities as the supply is on the EPA's Remedial Action List and was included in the programme. However, the proposed extension to the network, envisaged as part of the Loughrea Regional Water Supply Scheme, was not included in the Programme as it relates solely to expansion of the existing supply. This envisaged expansion would include the provision of the trunk main to serve Kilreekil.

Galway County Council submitted a revised Preliminary Report for the overall Loughrea Regional Water Supply Scheme to the Department in February 2010. As part of my Department's ongoing assessment of this Report, my Department is also examining Galway County Council's most recent cost estimates submitted in August 2010 for its proposals to provide a water supply from Loughrea to Kilreekil.

A decision on the Report, including the cost estimates, will be conveyed to the Council shortly. However, it should be noted that, although upgrading the treatment plant is a prerequi-

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site to providing a water supply to Kilreekil village, the Council's proposals to connect Kilreekil to the Loughrea Regional Water Supply Scheme are not part of this project at this time. I have included a review process as one of a number of new measures in the Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2012, under which the Programme will be reviewed and updated annually to allow for any re-prioritisation required. The format and timing of the review process has still to be decided by my Department. Although Galway County Council has requested my Department to consider the inclusion of the trunk main to Kilreekil element of the Loughrea Regional Water Supply Scheme in the Programme, the Council will need to re-assess its Kilreekil proposals in light of my Department's assessment of its revised Preliminary Report for the entire Scheme, due to issue shortly.

Insofar as the Kilreekil Group Water Scheme is concerned, responsibility for the administration of the Rural Water Programme, which includes funding for group water schemes, has been devolved to local authorities since 1997. The advancement of individual group schemes under the programme, within the overall priorities set by my Department and subject to the block grant funding provided, is, therefore, a matter for the relevant local authority i.e. Galway County Council in this case.

509. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding raw sewage that is entering Kinavara Bay and lowering the quality of water, violating the European waters directive, damaging the bay and tourism in the area and the public health of those using the bay for recreation; when works on alleviation scheme will begin [39423/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2012, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas Library, provides for the development of a comprehensive range of new water services infrastructure in County Galway. The Kinvara Sewerage Scheme is included in the Programme amongst the list of contracts in the county to start in the period 2010-2012.

My Department is currently examining Galway County Council's design review report for the scheme and a decision on the report will be conveyed to the Council as soon as possible. Once approved, the Council can then proceed with the preparation of contract documents for the scheme.

Departmental Funding

510. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the funding and assistance his Department provided to a development (details supplied); the details of all meetings and correspondence by his Department on this development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38496/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I am advised by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) that grant aid of €400,000 was paid to Carlinn Hall in 2008 through the House of Tomorrow Scheme, in addition to €16,000 for a Feasibility Study earlier that year. No officials from my Department met or engaged with representatives of the development in question.

The House of Tomorrow Programme closed to new applications in June 2007. The objective of the Programme was to realise higher energy efficiency standards in new housing, and under-

pin the move to a 40% mandatory standard, thus reducing energy usage and lowering CO2 emissions.

Over the period 2001-2007, participation in the programme required a performance improvement of 20% and subsequently 40% relative to the Building Regulations 2005 baseline. The making of the Building Regulations 2008 by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, made mandatory the 40% improvement standards supported by the Programme for its duration.

Telecommunications Services

511. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has made any applications to the European Regional Development Fund for broadband projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38500/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department is the Intermediate Body for the Interventions in Communications Infrastructure under the Southern and Eastern (S&E) and the Border Midland and Western (BMW) Regional Assembly Operational Programmes 2007-2013.

Under the Regional Operational Programmes 2007-2013, the priorities and investment areas in Communications Infrastructure being supported by European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) includes a provision for Broadband Infrastructure and Demand Stimulation. The main thrust of this measure with support from public funds is to overcome identified gaps in broadband infrastructure and services. This is being achieved through):

- The National Broadband Scheme (NBS), which aims to provide broadband services in unserved areas. NBS services are now available in all of the Electoral Districts within the NBS coverage area.
- Completion of the Metropolitan Area Networks(MANS) Programme — The Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) are State owned, underground telecommunications networks that are located in regional cities and towns. The MANs are available to service providers to enable them to offer high-speed broadband to their retail customers without having to build their own networks. Most of the MANs were built under the 2000-2006 Operational Programmes.
- A pilot scheme to provide 100Mbps broadband access and associated services to 78 post-primary schools.
- The total ERDF funding for the *Communications Allocation* under the Operational Programmes for each Body is €46million.

My Department is also a joint partner with the Northern Ireland Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) in Project Kelvin, a telecoms project under the INTERREG IVA Programme for Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland, 2007-2013, which is also ERDF funded. The Kelvin Project will provide direct international telecoms connectivity from the North West and Border Region to North America and Europe. The total budget for the Kelvin Project is €30 million, of which 75% is refundable from ERDF funds.

512. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the budget allocated for delivering broadband to schools in 2010; the amount it will cost to upgrade the 78 schools with 100 Mb; the amount it will cost to deliver this level of connection to 300 schools in 2011 and 300 in 2012; the specific investment made in primary school broadband connectivity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38506/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The budget allocation for the 100mbps Pilot Project for 2010 was €4.9m (including capital carryover). The total cost of this project to date is €6.008m (VAT inclusive). This figure includes the installation of the broadband connectivity, the development of HEAnet's core and aggregate networks to receive the connections and investment in ICT hardware in each school to enable them to make best use of the new enhanced bandwidth.

All 78 schools now have their enhanced bandwidth and have successfully migrated onto the HEAnet's network.

The total cost of delivering the bandwidth to 300 schools both in 2011 and 2012 is dependent on the outcome of the procurement process that will have to take place prior to a national roll-out.

The responsibility for delivering broadband to primary schools rests with the Department of Education and Skills under the Broadband for Schools programme.

Broadcasting Services

513. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding community television systems when digital television becomes operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38610/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) is the statutory body responsible for the licensing of UHF Television Programme Retransmission services, as set out in the Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1926.

These community or 'deflector' television systems retransmit the analogue signals of the UK and, in some cases, Irish 'free-to-air' services and their future position in light of plans to switch-off analogue television broadcast transmissions by end-2012 is a matter for ComReg.

ComReg is an independent statutory body and as such I have no role in its day-to-day operations.

Inland Fisheries

514. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason a representative of the commercial salmon fishing industry has not been appointed to the board of Inland Fisheries Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39047/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Conor Lenihan): The Deputy will be aware that I appointed six members to the board of Inland Fisheries Ireland on its establishment. On 21 October I received the nominations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, in accordance with the Inland Fisheries Act 2010 (No 10 of 2010), for a further three places on the board. I have yet to make a decision concerning these nominations. I am confident the

members appointed to the board will have the necessary expertise and competencies to lead Inland Fisheries Ireland to fully deliver on its potential.

Telecommunications Services

515. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question No. 801 of 9 July 2009, the position regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39155/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The position remains that any future Exchequer funded broadband investment decisions, including investment in further phases of the Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) Programme, will be guided by: (i) the policy paper on Next Generation Broadband which was published in June 2009; (ii) the Value for Money and Policy Review of Phase I of the MANs Programme, which was published in 2008; (iii) any other analysis as appropriate; and (iv) the availability of resources.

Departmental Agencies

516. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39230/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I can inform the Deputy that the number of agencies under the aegis of my Department is 18. The number of current sitting board members for each agency is set out on a table:

Agency	Number of Sitting Board Members on 27th October 2010
RTÉ	12
TG4	12
Broadcasting Authority of Ireland	9
An Post	14
Bord Gáis Éireann	8
Bord na Móna	12
EirGrid	10
ESB	11
Ordnance Survey Ireland	10
Commission for Communications Regulation	No. Board — 3 Commissioners
Commission for Energy Regulation	No. Board — 3 Commissioners
Inland Fisheries Ireland	6
Digital Hub Development Agency	6
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland	11
National Oil Reserves Agency	6
Irish National Petroleum Corporation	5
Mining Board	2
Loughs Agency	12

517. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of

[Deputy Lucinda Creighton.]

the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39244/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I can inform the Deputy that the numbers of State Boards, agencies, regulators or other bodies under the remit of my Department is 18.

The following seven are commercial bodies and information in relation to the annual budget is a matter for the board of these bodies:

- RTÉ
- TG4
- An Post
- Bord Gáis Éireann
- Bord na Mona
- EirGrid
- Electricity Supply Board

However, information in respect of the annual budgets for 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 is available in the Annual Reports of each body. These reports are available in the library of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

There are eleven non-commercial bodies under the aegis of my Department, including three regulatory bodies, as follows:

- Broadcasting Authority of Ireland
- Commission for Communications Regulation
- Digital Hub Development Agency
- Commission for Energy Regulation
- Irish National Petroleum Corporation
- National Oil Reserves Agency
- Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Loughs Agency
- Ordnance Survey Ireland
- The Mining Board.

Information in respect of the Commission for Communications Regulation, Digital Hub Development Agency, Commission for Energy Regulation, National Oil Reserves Agency, Irish National Petroleum Corporation, Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, Loughs

Agency and Ordnance Survey Ireland is available in the Annual Reports of each body. These reports are available in the library of the Houses of the Oireachtas. With regard to the annual budget for 2010 for these bodies, I will request that the agencies reply directly to the Deputy with the information sought.

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland was established under the Broadcasting Act 2009 and replaced the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland will be fully funded by an industry levy as set out in the Broadcasting Act. The budget for the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland is published on the agency's website, www.bai.ie.

The new inland fisheries authority, Inland Fisheries Ireland, was established under the Inland Fisheries Act 2010. The merger of the seven regional and Central Fisheries Boards took place with effect from 1 July 2010. Details of the Budget in respect of Inland Fisheries Ireland are published in the Agency Statement for Vote 30 in the Revised Estimates Volume.

The Mining Board is an appeals body to adjudicate on decisions of the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources concerning the grant/denial, of a mining licence. The Body does not have an annual budget.

Alternative Energy Projects

518. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will indicate the current status of the REFIT policy; the expected timeline for implementation; if he will provide details on what the proposed REFIT tariff of 9.5 cent per kilowatt hour to cover; if he will give an update of the current status of this policy at National and European level [39411/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In May of this year, I announced a Renewable Energy Feed In Tariff (REFIT) Scheme for electricity generated from biomass, ranging from 8.5 cent per kilowatt hour to 15 cent per kilowatt hour depending on the technology deployed.

A tariff of 9.5 cent per kw/h has been set for electricity generated from energy crops including willow and miscanthus. A tariff of 8.5 cent will apply to electricity from other types of biomass including support for electricity generated from biomass co-fired with peat in the peat-fired power stations. Higher tariffs will apply to Combined Heat and Power plants which generate heat as well as electricity from biomass. National objectives for supporting the biomass contribution to renewable electricity and heat targets are set out in Ireland's National Renewable Action Plan (NREAP), which was submitted to Brussels last July.

State Aid Clearance from the European Commission is required before the new feed in tariffs can be implemented. My Department is currently finalising the State Aid submission with Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and this will be forwarded to the Commission very shortly.

Grant Payments

519. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the single farm payment for 2009 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38531/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The person named was fully paid in respect of both his applications under the 2009 Single Payment Scheme (70%

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

advance payment issued on 19 October 2009 and the 30% balancing payment issued on 1 December 2009) and the 2009 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (100% payments issued on 21 September 2009). However, subsequent to these payments, the person named was advised, by letters dated 27 April 2010 and 20 May 2010, of the outcome of a ground inspection of his holding under the 2009 Schemes and indicating the financial penalty involved. The sum in question has since been fully recouped, having been offset against the payments due under the 2010 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and Single Payment Scheme. The balancing payment under the 2010 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued in full on 20 October, while the full balancing due under the Single Payment Scheme is scheduled to issue when the balancing payments begin issuing, as and from 1 December.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme

520. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will expedite a disadvantaged area payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38555/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme/Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 13 May 2010. My Department identified an over-claim error on a number of land parcels declared by the applicant. A response has now been received from the herd owner in relation to these over-claims. Further re-digitisation is now required to ensure compliance with the relevant EU Regulations; immediately this process is complete, provided no further errors are identified, payment due will issue to the person named.

Farm Waste Management

521. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) has not yet received payment for a farm shed [38571/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The person concerned is an applicant under the Farm Waste Management Scheme. The first two instalments of grant-aid have been paid by my Department to the applicant and the final instalment will be paid in January 2011.

Grant Payments

522. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) is experiencing a delay in the processing of their application for single payment [38601/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 16 April 2010. Payments under the Single Payment Scheme commenced on 18 October, with an advance payment of 50% issuing in respect of those parcels cleared for payment at that stage. A number of parcels listed on the application required digitisation, immediately this process is complete and provided no further errors are identified, the payment due in respect of the Single Payment Scheme will issue to the person named.

523. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) is experiencing a delay in the processing of their application for single payment [38602/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 7 May 2010. The application has been fully processed and payment will issue shortly.

524. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the financial assistance schemes available to farmers in 2007, 2008 and 2009; the amount allocated to these schemes by the Exchequer and from the EU; the amount paid out under these schemes by the Exchequer and through the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38613/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Due to the volume of the information requested by the Deputy, it was not possible to provide it in the required time. I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme

525. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is considering re-opening the agricultural environment options scheme for all farmers leaving REP scheme three; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38614/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Further participation in the new Agri-environment Options Scheme will be determined by the level of funding available to my Department. All EU funding for the scheme up to the end of 2013 is now fully committed. Any further support in that period will have to be funded entirely by the Exchequer and this is a matter that will be considered in the context of the annual Estimates process.

Departmental Contracts

526. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will confirm the names and details of the contractors engaged by the single farm payment section of his Department for the purposes of providing mailing services; the number of years that these contractors have been engaged by his Department; the amount of money paid by his Department to these contractors in each case; the facilities in terms of accommodation and equipment provided to these contractors; if these contractors have been engaged by his Department in each year on foot of the standard competitive tendering process; if he is satisfied that there is no conflict of interest between these contractors and any member of staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38661/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The names and details of contractors engaged by the Single Payment Unit of my Department for the purposes of providing printing and as consequence mailing services/ associated costs inclusive of VAT are as follows:

Printing and mailing of 2010 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Schemes application forms (containing all of the pre-printed information on each applicant, including full details of all land parcels declared in 2009) and associated documents completed by TICo, Unit 8, Maple Avenue, Stillorgan Industrial Park, Blackrock, Co Dublin at a cost of €87,166.32.

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

Printing of letters and packaging of colour maps of land parcels for mailing by TICo Unit 8, Maple Avenue, Stillorgan Industrial Park, Blackrock, Co Dublin at a cost of €30,821.25.

Printing and mailing of letters and maps by Hi-Tech Print Services Ltd t/a AZAP Print, Castle Street, Carlow at a cost of €1,317.69.

Printing and mailing of letters and maps by Hi-Tech Print Services Ltd t/a AZAP Print, Castle Street, Carlow at a cost of €44,773.63

All of these contactors have been engaged by my Department in 2010 for the first time. My Department has not provided any accommodation or equipment to these contractors.

I am satisfied that my Department followed the proper procedures and guidelines under both National and EU law in relation to the procurement of the printing and mailing services provided by the named contractors and I am also satisfied that there is no conflict of interest between the named contractors named and any member of staff within my Department .

Grant Payments

527. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when single farm payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny [38711/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 2 May 2010; four of the land parcels declared required to be re-digitised. The person named also submitted a Consolidation of Entitlements application.

The applications have been processed and an advance payment will issue shortly, based on the clear area, i.e. less the four parcels in question. A further advance payment in respect of these parcels will issue shortly thereafter, following completion of re-digitising, providing no issues are identified.

The balancing payments under the Scheme are scheduled to commence issuing as and from 1 December 2010.

Animal Welfare

528. **Deputy Trevor Sargent** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding progress in having the estimated 1 million feral cats neutered here in a similar way as in Belgium which also has a licence law for cats; his plans in regard to this growing problem [38991/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My Department's legislative responsibility in the area of animal welfare extends to farmed animals only, including animals normally bred or kept for the production of food. Accordingly, matters relating to feral cats do not come within the scope of my Department. Nevertheless, my Department provides in excess of €1million annually to animal welfare organisations involved in the provision of animal care. In awarding the funding, we remind organisations involved in the rehoming of cats of the absolute necessity to ensure that all such animals are neutered before rehoming as this will assist in controlling numbers. With regard to animal welfare generally, work on drafting the new Animal Health and Welfare Bill which deals comprehensively with animal welfare is

continuing in my Department and I propose to submit the Heads of the Bill to the Government shortly.

Grant Payments

529. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will quantify the extent of the problem faced by his Department regarding digitising of area aid forms in respect of single payment applications; if he will provide a breakdown of the number of disadvantaged area and single payments being delayed by virtue of this process on a county by county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39036/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My Department has received over 123,000 applications for the Single Payment Scheme and 102,000 for the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. It is expected that when processing is completed over 70,000 of these will require digitising to be carried out on some or all of the land parcels the applicant has submitted, compared to an average of 22,000 in previous years. As a result, my Department has facilitated payment to cases on all digitised land, provided that there are no other errors. To date, over 110,000 applicants have received a Single Farm Payment, as well as 88,000 applicants under the Disadvantaged Area Payments Scheme.

A total of 92,652 applicants have received their full 50% advance under the Single Payment Scheme, while a further 17,337 have received a partial payment. Of the remaining unpaid applicants, 773 have received no payment as yet due to un-digitised land, and these are prioritised by my Department.

Similarly, in the Disadvantaged Area Scheme 58,751 farmers have received full payment, with a further 29,302 farmers receiving a part-payment. Some 2,610 applications remain where all of the land declared requires re-digitising. Payment will be made to these applicants when re-digitising is completed and all errors are cleared provided they meet the minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units per hectare. In the past many of these cases were not eligible for payment, as they did not meet the stocking density requirement.

I have arranged for my Department to forward to you directly a county-by-county breakdown of these figures.

530. **Deputy Beverley Flynn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo has had their single payment and disadvantaged area scheme payments based on an area of 3.40 hectares when the total declared area on the application forms for both schemes is 13.8 hectares [39041/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 12 May 2010. Payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced on 22 September, with an advance payment of 75% issuing in respect of those parcels cleared for payment at that stage. A number of parcels listed on the application of the person named required digitisation; immediately this process is complete, provided no errors are identified, the payment due will issue to the person named.

531. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason for the delay in payment of grants due to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; the position regarding the digitising of their land maps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39042/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 30 April 2010. The person named received advance payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme on 21 September and under the Single Payment Scheme on 18 October, in both cases on the basis of the land cleared at that stage. A number of the land parcels declared by the person named require re-digitisation in order to remove ineligible features (farmyard and buildings) and, immediately this is completed, the application will be processed with a view to further payments issuing shortly thereafter, provided no further issues have been highlighted.

532. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason for the delay in grant payments due to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; the position regarding the digitising of maps on their application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39043/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 6 May 2010. The person named received advance payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme on 21 September and under the Single Payment Scheme on 18 October, in both cases on the basis of the land cleared at that stage. A number of the land parcels declared by the person named require re-digitisation in order to remove ineligible features (in one instance, a farmyard) and, immediately this is completed, the application will be processed with a view to further payments issuing shortly thereafter, provided no further issues have been highlighted.

Wildlife Protection

533. **Deputy John Cregan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if an applicant may revert to claim forestry premium on eight acres of land which was due to be planted but was not subsequently planted due to restrictions placed on this land due to the presence of the hen harrier [39077/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Applications for afforestation grant aid in Hen Harrier areas are not currently being processed pending completion of discussions between my Department and the National Parks and Wildlife Service in relation to the effects of afforestation and windfarms on the habitat of the Hen Harrier.

Scéim Torthaí

534. D'fhiafraigh **An Teachta Trevor Sargent** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Iascaigh agus Bia cad é an dul chun cinn atá déanta in Éirinn maidir leis an scéim €90 milliún ón Aontas Eorpach lena spreagar leanaí scoile chun bia úr, go mór mór glasraí agus torthaí, a ithe de bharr go bhfuil timpeall 22 mhilliún leanbh san AE ró-throm de réir tuairiscí. [39083/10]

An tAire Talmhaíochta, Iascaigh agus Bia (Deputy Brendan Smith): Cuireadh tús le Scéim Torthaí sna Scoileanna an AE i Meán Fómhair 2009. Reáchtáiltear an scéim i gcomhar leis an Scéim 'Food Dude' in Éirinn. Tá an-rath ar an scéim sin atá á feidhmiú ag Bord Bia thar ceann mo Roinne ar mhaithe le tuairimí a athrú agus páistí bunscoile a spreagadh chun níos mó torthaí agus glasraí a ithe.

Sa scoilbhliain 2009/2010, ghlac 386 bunscoil agus 54,567 dalta páirt sa Scéim Torthaí sna Scoileanna/Food Dude agus fuarthas maoiniú €475,422.65 ón AE agus €2 milliún ó mo Roinn.

Léiríodh i suirbhé neamhspleách inar ghlac tuismitheoirí agus múinteoirí páirt go raibh an-mheas ag tuismitheoirí, ag múinteoirí agus ag daltaí ar an scéim.

Saináithníodh Food Dude i dTuarascáil an Tascfhórsa um Otracht mar chur chuige ar bhonn fianaise chun dul i ngleic leis an otracht.

Grant Payments

535. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding single farm payment and area aid in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath and if he will expedite the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39085/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 12 May 2010. My Department identified an over-claim error on a number of land parcels declared by the applicant. A response has now been received from the herd owner in relation to these over-claims. Further re-digitisation is now required to ensure compliance with the relevant EU Regulations; immediately this process is complete, provided no further errors are identified, payment due will issue to the person named.

536. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding area aid and single farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath and if he will expedite the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39086/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 12 May 2010. The person named received advance payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme on 21 September and under the Single Payment Scheme on 18 October, in both cases on the basis of the land cleared at that stage. A number of the land parcels declared by the person named require re-digitisation in order to remove ineligible features (in one instance, a building) and, immediately this is completed, the application will be processed with a view to further payments issuing shortly thereafter, provided no further issues have been highlighted.

537. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the steps he will take to ensure that a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath will be paid the remainder of their single farm payment which is being held up under the guise of digitisation; if the remaining payment will issue as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39087/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 13 May 2010. The person named received advance payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme on 21 September and under the Single Payment Scheme on 18 October, in both cases on the basis of the land cleared at that stage. A number of the land parcels declared by the person named require re-digitisation in order to remove ineligible features (including a number of buildings) and, immediately this is completed, the application will be processed with a view to further payments issuing shortly thereafter, provided no further issues have been highlighted.

538. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the steps he will take to ensure that a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath will be paid the remainder of their farm payment as same is being held up under the guise of digitisation; if the remaining payment will issue as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39088/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 15 April 2010. The person named received advance payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme on 21 September and under the Single Payment Scheme on 18 October, in both cases on the basis of the land cleared at that stage. A number of the land parcels declared by the person named require re-digitisation in order to remove ineligible features (buildings, farmyard, roadway) and, immediately this is completed, the application will be processed with a view to further payments issuing shortly thereafter, provided no further issues have been highlighted.

539. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the steps he will take to ensure that the single farm payment which is due in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath will issue as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39089/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 13 April 2010. A number of parcels listed by the person named on the application required re-digitisation; this process is now complete and the payment due will issue to the person named shortly.

540. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason for the delay in the digitisation of maps; the stage the process is now at; the number of farm payments being withheld at present due to these delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39103/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My Department has received over 123,000 applications for the Single Payment Scheme and 102,000 for the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. It is expected that when processing is completed over 70,000 of these will require digitising to be carried out on some or all of the land parcels the applicant has submitted, compared to an average of 22,000 in previous years. As a result, my Department has facilitated payment to cases on all digitised land, provided that there are no other errors. To date, over 110,000 applicants have received a Single Farm Payment, as well as 88,000 applicants under the Disadvantaged Area Payments Scheme.

A total of 92,652 applicants have received their full 50% advance under the Single Payment Scheme, while a further 17,337 have received a partial payment. Of the remaining unpaid applicants, 773 have received no payment as yet due to un-digitised land, and these are prioritised by my Department.

Similarly, in the Disadvantaged Area Scheme 58,751 farmers have received full payment, with a further 29,302 farmers receiving a part-payment. Some 2,610 applications remain where all of the land declared requires re-digitising. Payment will be made to these applicants when re-digitising is completed and all errors are cleared provided they meet the minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units per hectare. In the past many of these cases were not eligible for payment, as they did not meet the stocking density requirement.

541. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a REP scheme 4 payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39140/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The EU Regulations governing REPS 4 and other area-based schemes provide that payments issue in two instalments. The first instalment of 75% may be paid once all administrative checks on all applications, as well as cross-checks against areas declared on Single Payment Scheme applications, have been completed. This process is under way and while my objective is to make all payments as soon as possible, the checks are likely to take several more weeks to complete. The balancing payment of 25% can issue once all on-the-spot inspections for the year have taken place. The programme of inspections is well advanced at this stage.

Pigmeat Sector

542. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the amount of compensation paid to a claimant (details supplied) arising from dioxin support compensation fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39159/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The information requested by the Deputy is commercially sensitive and I regret that I cannot issue it to him. However, I can say that to date a total of €100m has been paid out under the Pigmeat Recall Scheme: €35m in 2008, €55m in 2009 and €10m in 2010.

Grant Payments

543. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a suckler cow payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in respect of the years 2008, 2009 and 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39169/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The person named registered 18 animals into the Suckler Welfare Scheme for 2008 and 2009.

One of the conditions of the Suckler Welfare Scheme is that an applicant is required to submit a valid Single Payment application for each year. The person named has not submitted a Single Payment application since 2007 and is, therefore, not eligible for payment under the Suckler Welfare Scheme.

However, an official of my Department has made contact with the person named and further consideration will be given to this case on the receipt of the documentation requested from the person named.

Departmental Agencies

544. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39229/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The number of appointments that can be made to the board of each State agency under the aegis of my Department are listed in the table below:

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

Body	Number of Board members
Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board (ALAB)	9
Bord Bia	15
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	6
Bord na gCon	7
Coillte Teoranta	9
Horse Racing Ireland	14
Irish National Stud	7
Marine Institute	9
National Milk Agency	5
Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA)	3 Members of the Authority
Teagasc	11

545. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39243/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): There are 10 State Agencies under the aegis of my Department, namely:

Agencies

Bord Bia
 Bord Iascaigh Mhara
 Bord na gCon
 Coillte Teoranta
 Horse Racing Ireland
 Irish National Stud
 Marine Institute
 National Milk Agency
 Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA)
 Teagasc

The annual budget is available in the Annual Report of each State Body which is held in the library of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Grant Payments

546. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason for the delay in payment of grants due to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; the progress regarding the digitising of their land maps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39315/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 15 April 2010. The person named received advance payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme on 21 September and under the Single Payment Scheme on 18 October, in both cases on the basis of the land cleared at that stage. A number of the land parcels

declared by the person named require re-digitisation in order to remove ineligible features (buildings, farmyard, roadway) and, immediately this is completed, the application will be processed with a view to further payments issuing shortly thereafter, provided no further issues have been highlighted.

Departmental Offices

547. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review the cost of the lease and rent of his Department's office in an area (details supplied); if he is concerned at the continuation of this situation in the context of value for money when Departments are looking at ways to reduce costs; if he will reconsider, as was originally announced by the Minister, that the office would move to available suitable premises at Mellows College, Athenry which will be conveniently located for the customers and at a much lower cost; if he will outline the annual costs to his Department for each of the years since they moved from Hynes Buildings; if he will name the owners of the facility now occupied by his Department; if he will clearly indicate the reduced requirement of space as against the original space contracted for; if he will provide information on the matter; if he will indicate if any outstanding obligations exist on the Hynes Building and for how long more are the contract obligations on the Dockgate facilities to run; if he considers other Departments commitment to this contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39427/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): All issues in relation to leases for Government Departments/Offices, including my Department is a matter for the Office of Public Works. However, earlier this year, my Department vacated a significant amount of the space previously occupied at Dockgate in Galway in order to accommodate additional staff of the Department of Social Protection, which resulted in a significant saving in the rental cost paid on behalf of my Department.

My Department's local office reorganisation plan provides for a reduction from 58 to 16 the number of offices from which the Department will provide district veterinary, forestry and agricultural environment and support services in the future. Significant progress has been made in the implementation of that plan with ten new regional offices already established and 22 associated offices closed to the public.

A further six additional regional offices will be established to complete the plan, of which one will be in Counties Cavan, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kildare and Offaly and I expect shortly to confirm which offices will be part of the next phase of the implementation plan.

Retail Sector Pricing Strategies

548. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if his attention has been drawn to the problem of large supermarkets using alcoholic drinks as a loss leader to attract custom to their store and the complaint that this represents unfair competition to specialist off licence outlets; if he is satisfied that the existing laws provide adequate protection for fair competition in this respect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38650/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): The use of aggressive pricing strategies is a legitimate marketing tool and is the normal outcome of the competitive process. Low cost and below cost selling by a retailer, including an off-licence, is not of itself an offence unless it involves abuse of a dominant position. A determination on whether a

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

retailer is abusing a dominant position in the marketplace would necessitate a comprehensive investigation by the Competition Authority.

The Authority is the independent statutory body responsible for enforcing competition law in the State and complaints of any alleged anti-competitive practice should be referred to it.

Redundancy Payments

549. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if he will confirm that there is an eight month delay from date of receipt of redundancy payments in his Department until payment is made to the person; his views on this delay and the measures he proposes to reduce this waiting time. [39022/10]

550. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if his attention has been drawn to the fact that in many companies which go into liquidation, there can be long delays in submitting claims for redundancy payments on behalf of employees who have lost their jobs (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39023/10]

553. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the number of individuals who were given redundancy payments by his Department in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010. [39118/10]

554. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the cost to his Department of redundancy payments for each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010. [39119/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Dara Calleary): I propose to take Questions Nos. 549, 550, 553 and 554 together.

My Department administers the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) in relation to redundancy matters on behalf of the Department of Social Protection. 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.

The Redundancy Payments Section of my Department is currently processing rebate claims from employers in general dating from April 2010 so that the waiting time is currently between 6 and 7 months. In respect of lump sum payments paid directly to employees in instances where employers are unable to pay the statutory redundancy entitlements, the current processing time for these claims has improved and claims dating from April 2010 are currently being processed. Of course in some instances, where the necessary supporting documentation for lump sum claims is not provided to my Department, or where queries arise, processing of claims can be further delayed until the required documentation is provided and/or outstanding queries are resolved.

It can indeed be the case, as pointed out by the Deputy, that in the instance of companies going into liquidation there can be a delay in the submission of employees’ claims by the Liquidators to my Department. This is unfortunately something that is completely outside of my Department’s direct control. It is my Department’s policy to process redundancy claims in order of date of receipt.

My Department continues to make every effort to reduce processing times. Measures already taken in the Department to alleviate the pressures on the Payments area include:

- Almost doubling the number of staff working solely on redundancy payment claims through reassignment to a current level of 52 full time equivalents;
- Prioritisation of the Department's overtime budget towards staff in the Section to tackle the backlog outside normal hours;
- Establishment of a special call handling facility in NERA to deal with the huge volume of telephone calls from people and businesses concerned about their payments;
- Better quality information relating to current processing times on the Department's website;
- Engagement with the Revenue Commissioners to facilitate the offset of redundancy rebate payments by employers against existing outstanding tax liabilities which those employers owe to the Revenue Commissioners.

Table 1 sets out the number of statutory redundancies for which claims were received by my Department for the years 2006 to 2009 and provisional figures for the period January to September, 2010. These figures reflect the number of employees who actually qualified for statutory redundancy lump sum payments. They do not reflect those who lost their jobs with less than two years service in employment. Unfortunately, I am unable to give a breakdown as between claims that were made payable directly to individuals as opposed to rebate payments to employers as my Department does not collate the figures on this basis.

Table 2 sets out the monies paid out of the Social Insurance Fund in respect of redundancy claims for the years 2006-2009 and up to 30 September 2010. It should be noted that all figures provided for 2009 and to date in 2010 are provisional figures.

During the period January to September 2010, 47,587 claims were received and 58,202 (with an attendant value of €363m) were processed, an increase of 81% on the corresponding 9 month period in 2009 (32,127). In 2009, claims processed amounted to 50,664 so that at this point the level of claims processed has exceeded the levels achieved in 2009.

The backlog and waiting times remain at unacceptable levels. However, improvements are evident. In 2009, my Department processed 50,664 claims, up 70% on the previous year. Furthermore, the level of new claims processed in the first nine months of 2010 was 58,202 — up over 81% on the corresponding 9-month period in 2009 (32,127) and surpassing the total amount of claims processed for the full year 2009 which came to 50,644. The backlog of claims is decreasing — reducing from its highest level in November 2009 of 43,608 to a current level of 29,776.

Responsibility for the payment functions arising under the Redundancy and Insolvency payment schemes is due to be transferred to the Department of Social Protection with effect from 1 January 2011. In transferring the functions between Departments, it is the intention that this will operate seamlessly and without any adverse impact on the service levels being experienced by individuals or the business community awaiting payment of redundancy claims.

[Deputy Dara Calleary.]

Table 1: Actual Statutory Redundancies for years 2002 to 2009 and up to end September, 2010 edundancies for years 2002 to 2009 and up to end September, 2010

Year	Number of Redundancy Claims
2006	23,684
2007	25,459
2008	40,607
2009	77,001
2010	47,587*

* Provisional figures.

Table 2: Expenditure on Statutory Redundancies for years 2002 to 2009 and up to end September, 2010

(€000)

Year	Expenditure on Statutory Redundancy
2006	166,483
2007	183,328
2008	193,711
2009	335,861*
2010	363,284*

*All figures for 2009 and 2010 are provisional subject to audit

Departmental Agencies

551. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the number of commercial units leased by tenants of the Industrial Development Agency where such units are in the ownership or leased by the IDA in County Kildare; if the IDA has any units in its own ownership or leased from any other body or person in County Kildare that are not in use at this time; the areas where all units are situated; the cost to the IDA of the units per year; the rent obtained for the leased premises that are occupied; the rent for those that are not occupied per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39032/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I am informed by IDA Ireland that IDA has no units in its ownership in Co Kildare. IDA has leases on 6 private sector units in Newbridge, Co Kildare. None of the units are currently occupied so IDA is not in receipt of any rent at present, as outlined in the tabular statement below:

Building Name	SQ M.	Occupancy Status	Head Lease Rent	Rent € per m.sq.
			€	
CL.BLDG.1 — UNIT 1	300.73	AVAILABLE	24,549.13	81.63
CL.BLDG.1 — UNIT 2	300.73	AVAILABLE	24,278.67	80.73
CL.BLDG.1 — UNIT 3	300.73	AVAILABLE	24,278.67	80.73
CL.BLDG.1 — UNIT 4	300.73	AVAILABLE	24,278.67	80.73
CL.BLDG.1 — UNIT 5	300.73	AVAILABLE	24,278.67	80.73
CL.BLDG.1 — UNIT 5	300.73	AVAILABLE	24,278.67	80.73

Market Rights

552. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if he will give an indication of when legislation, requested by Dublin City Council, will be passed to extinguish the market right of the Smithfield Horse Fair, without providing an alternative location; and if he will expedite this legislation. [39099/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Casual Trading Act 1995 sets out the law regarding selling goods in public places. Casual trading is defined as “selling goods at a place (including a public road) to which the public have access as of right”. The Act essentially requires those who engage in casual trading to hold a licence granted for that purpose by the relevant local authority where the casual trading takes place. It is the case, therefore, that whilst I have policy responsibility for the 1995 Act, operational and regulatory responsibility in regard to selling in public places lies with the 88 local authorities who each regulate casual trading in their own particular jurisdictions.

Insofar as the issue of “Market Rights” is concerned, the 1995 Act defines a “market right” as “a right conferred by franchise or statute to hold a fair or market, that is to say, a concourse of buyers and sellers to dispose of commodities”. These market rights refer to markets and fairs created by statute or royal decree in the period from the Norman invasion to 1922. Section 7 of the 1995 Act provides that local authorities may, either by agreement or compulsorily, acquire any market right in their functional areas. Section 8 sets out the powers of local authorities in relation to market rights owned by them, including in relation to the power to extinguish a market right. Essentially the Act only allows a local authority to extinguish a market right where it provides or has already provided, alternative facilities in the same vicinity as the market or fair to which the right relates.

Insofar as the management of the Smithfield Fair is concerned, this is a matter for the Dublin City Council and I have no jurisdiction in this matter. I understand that my Department has not received any specific request from Dublin City Council to extend the powers of local authorities in relation to the extinguishment of market rights. The Deputy may wish to be aware, however, that the issue of the status of market rights is currently the subject of a case before the Supreme Court, involving an appeal by a trader against a decision by a local authority in relation to the extinguishment of a market right. It is understood that this case will be heard in the spring of 2011. Any considerations in relation to a review of the legislation in this area may be more appropriate at that time.

Questions Nos. 553 and 554 answered with Question No. 549.

Work Permits

555. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation when a work permit will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39208/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Dara Calleary): My Department processes applications in respect of the different types of employment permits — Green Cards Permits, Work Permits, Spousal/Dependant Permits and Intra-company Transfer Permits. All applications are processed in line with the Employment Permits Act 2006.

I wish to advise the Deputy that this application was received in the Employment Permits Section of my Department on the 20th October 2010.

[Deputy Dara Calleary.]

All applications are dealt with in date of receipt order by permit type and the Employment Permits Section is currently processing all permit types within their customer service target of 15 working days.

A decision will be due on this application in another 2 weeks.

Departmental Agencies

556. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39234/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): Following is a list of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control:

Enterprise Ireland

The Board of Enterprise Ireland is comprised of 12 members.

Forfás

The Board of Forfás is comprised of 13 members.

The Health and Safety Authority

The Board of the Health and Safety Authority is comprised of 12 members.

IDA Ireland

The Board of IDA Ireland is made up of 12 members.

Intertrade Ireland

The Board of Intertrade Ireland is made up of 12 members, 6 from The Republic of Ireland and 6 from Northern Ireland.

Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA)

The Board of IAASA is comprised of 15 members. Currently, there are 2 vacancies on the Board.

The Labour Relations Commission

The Board of the Labour Relations Commission is comprised of 7 members.

The National Consumer Agency

The Board of the National Consumer Agency is comprised of 13 members. Currently, there is 1 vacancy on the Board.

The National Standards Authority of Ireland

The Board of the National Standards Authority of Ireland is comprised of 13 members.

The Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB)

The Board of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board is comprised of 11 members. Currently, there is 1 vacancy on the Board.

Science Foundation Ireland

The Board of Science Foundation Ireland is comprised of 12 members.

Shannon Free Airport Development Company Ltd. (SFADCo)

The Board of SFADCo is comprised of 12 members.

County Enterprise Boards

There are 35 County Enterprise Boards with a total number of Board members of 516. Currently there are 40 vacancies within the CEB Board network.

557. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39248/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): The Table below sets out the funding allocated to each of the Agencies under the Aegis of my Department between 2006 and 2010. The allocations shown include exchequer funding and National Training Fund (NTF) monies, where appropriate.

While the table shows Exchequer funding and NTF, some of the Agencies receive funding from other sources such as fees, property rental, grant refunds, and from other Departments or bodies. Funding from these sources is not included in the table.

On 1st May 2010, responsibility for FÁS and for the NTF was transferred to the Minister for Education and Skills. However, the full 2010 allocation for FÁS and for bodies under my remit that are funded from the NTF are provided for the Deputy's information.

The Employment Subsidy Scheme was introduced in 2009 and is managed by Enterprise Ireland. The 2010 REV allocation for the agency includes an allocation of €114.5 million for the scheme.

InterTrade Ireland is co-funded by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Innovation and the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland. Only the contribution from the Department of Enterprise Trade and Innovation is shown below.

In addition to the monies shown on the table, Irish Accounting and Auditing Supervisory Authority (IAASA) receives further contributions from industry associations.

The functions of the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs (ODCA) were transferred to the National Consumer Agency when the Agency was established on a statutory basis in 2007.

Agency	2006 Total	2007 Total	2008 Total	2009 Total	2010 Total
	000'	000'	000'	000'	000'
CEBs	30,421	31,856	31,985	27,812	28,310
Competition Authority	5,831	6,104	6,776	5,568	4,734
Enterprise Ireland	259,698	278,066	297,444	333,660	416,678
FÁS	942,015	1,046,312	1,096,192	1,063,936	1,017,753

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

Agency	2006 Total	2007 Total	2008 Total	2009 Total	2010 Total
	000’	000’	000’	000’	000’
Forfás	32,267	35,035	38,475	37,164	43,015
HSA	20,598	22,513	24,440	22,638	21,959
IDA Ireland	141,718	143,243	146,250	117,971	130,240
InterTrade Ireland	9,325	11,892	10,682	8,499	7,848
IAASA	919	1,528	1,547	1,532	1,345
NCA	7,289	8,397	10,000	8,588	7,232
NSAI	6,526	7,719	8,787	8,241	7,472
SFADCo	3,784	3,350	3,357	957	7,932
PIAB	0	0	0	0	60
Science Foundation Ireland	149,436	165,722	183,643	170,524	159,833

Industrial Development

558. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the number of visits by Industrial Development Authority personnel with potential investors to a town (details supplied) in County Galway from the beginning of 2008 to September 2010; if he is satisfied that sufficient efforts are being undertaken by this agency to entice potential investors to the town; the progress being made by the Government in the areas of job creation at this location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39429/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I have been informed by the IDA that to date in 2010, there have been 25 first-time site visits to County Galway, of which 1 was to Ballinasloe. In 2009, there were 22 first-time site visits and 1 of these was to Ballinasloe. There were 14 first-time site visits to County Galway in 2008, none of which visited Ballinsloe.

As part of its strategy to attract inward investment, IDA Ireland introduces a prospective client company to 3 or 4 selected locations, which meet the company’s requirements in terms of skills, labour, site, buildings and infrastructure. In undertaking this process, IDA seeks to include locations which have been affected by closures/job losses. Priority is also accorded to the Border, Midlands and West regions. While IDA aims to influence the selection of location, the final decision on location is always taken by the promoting company.

IDA is investing significantly in the provision of world class property solutions in the West region. IDA has developed Business and Technology Parks in Ballinsaloe, Tuam and Parkmore and a BioPharma Strategic Site at Oranmore. The IDA has developed a c. 13.15 hectare (c. 33 acre) Business and Technology Park in Ballinalsoe, of which c. 9.70 hectares (c.24 acres) is available for new investment. Valois, a manufacturer of cosmetic dispensing systems, and Creagh Medical, (formerly USCI), an Enterprise Ireland client and medical technology company occupy 25,000 sq ft and a 29,000 sq. ft. advanced technology facilities respectively.

IDA recognises the need to provide high value employment opportunities in County Galway, including the Gateway City of Galway and the key towns of Ballinsaloe and Tuam, which will provide sustainable long -term jobs. IDA’s strategies have proved successful to date, despite the difficult global economic conditions.

The following are some recent significant investments announced in the West region:

Covidien, a leading global supplier of healthcare products is investing €900,000 in medical technologies research and development projects with NUI Galway, during the next two years. This is the first phase of a multi-part investment of €1.8 million with Irish academic institutions which Covidien announced in July.

Recently, I announced that a global leader in operational endpoint security, Lumension, is expanding its Galway-based global R & D Centre. The company, which established the operation in October 2009 with the intention of employing 30 people in the facility, now expects to employ over 50 people by the end of 2010.

In addition, Merit Medical is to invest €6.7 million in expanding its operation in Galway with the creation of 100 new jobs

Other investment announcements in 2010 were:

- Electronic Arts is to open a European customer service and operations centre for its BioWare studio in Galway creating 200 new jobs and will be operational in 2011.
- Valeo, which is located in Tuam, Co. Galway, is to invest further in its Irish operations by embarking on a major Research and Development (R &D) Programme and expansion to target the growing market for vision systems in the automotive industry. The company will significantly expand its operations in Tuam in order to target a growing share of the camera vision market with the development of the next generation of new camera/vision systems.
- StreamServ Inc, a leading provider of business communications solutions is to establish an Inside Sales and Customer Care Operation in Galway, creating 20 jobs.

The level of foreign direct investment in Ireland relative to the size of the economy is one of the highest in Europe. I am confident, therefore, that the policies being pursued in County Galway, together with the ongoing commitment to regional development will bear fruit in terms of international investment and job creation in the County, including Ballinasloe.

UN Conventions

559. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will provide details on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the main provisions of this convention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38539/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Community; Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Moloney): The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is a human rights instrument with an explicit social development dimension. It adopts a broad categorisation of persons with disabilities and reaffirms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms of existing UN human rights conventions, (principally the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

The provisions of the convention deal with the following areas:

- right to life, liberty and security of and protecting the integrity of the person;
- access to justice, non-discrimination and equality before the law;
- freedom from torture, inhuman treatment, exploitation, violence and abuse;

[Deputy John Moloney.]

- respect for home and family;
- accessibility to buildings, goods and services;
- independent living, personal mobility;
- education, health, work and employment; and
- adequate standards of living and social protection.

Ireland was in the first group of countries to sign, subject to ratification, the UNCRPD when it opened for signature on 30 March 2007. It is the Government's intention to ratify the Convention as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to ensure that all necessary legislative and administrative requirements under the Convention are being met.

Irish Language

560. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on whether a problem arises because Section 7 of the Official Languages Act 2003 which requires that after the enactment of any Act of the Oireachtas the text thereof shall be printed and published in each of the official languages simultaneously and if he considers that an amendment to the Act would be appropriate at this stage in order that whichever version of an Act of the Oireachtas is available, is immediately accessible to the general public. [38646/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I am aware of the issue referred to by the Deputy. While publication of Acts is a matter for the Oireachtas Commission, the issue is under consideration, in consultation with the Attorney General, to see how best it can be resolved.

Departmental Agencies

561. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will provide details of the number of staff and the salary grades of those employed in each LEADER partnership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38492/10]

562. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount spent in 2009 by each LEADER partnership on administration as a proportion of overall budget; the amount expected to be spent in the same context in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38493/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 561 and 562 together.

As the Deputy is aware, my Department is responsible for the delivery of Axes 3 & 4 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP), for which overall funding of the order of €425m is available. The main objectives of the programme are to improve the quality of life in rural areas and facilitate the diversification of the rural economy. The individual measures under the programme, including indicative allocations, are as follows:

- Diversification into non-agricultural activities for farm families — €16.66m;
- Support for business creation and development — €48.26m;

- Encouragement of tourism activities — €45.4m;
- Basic services for the economy and rural population — €49.61m;
- Village renewal and development — €54.2m;
- Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage — €51.7m;
- Training and information on adapted and new skills — €29.45m; and
- Implementing co-operation projects—€10.7m.

I am pleased with progress to date under the RDP, which continues to facilitate access to significant financial resources for rural communities since it started in 2009. This has resulted in the proliferation of innovative and sustainable development projects all over the country, which are providing invaluable support to rural communities in these difficult times.

The integrated local development companies contracted to deliver Axes 3 & 4 (LEADER) of the RDP are independent private limited companies. My Department does not have a role in the human resource elements of the management of such companies. All employment and remuneration considerations are a matter for the individual companies in question.

Under the relevant measure of Axis 4 of the RDP, there is provision for funding to cover the running costs of the companies, which are given a specific allocation in this regard over the lifetime of the programme. Under EU regulations, the allocation under this measure cannot exceed 20% of the overall programme allocation. The table below details the percentage of the overall allocation in respect of administration for each group in 2009 and allocated for 2010.

Local Action Group	RDP Prog Total Budget	Admin Spend 2009	As a % of Prog budget	Allocation for 2010	As a % of Prog budget
	€	€		€	
Avondhu/Blackwater Partnership	9,057,810	316,098.71	3.49	271,734.44	3.00
Ballyhoura Development Ltd.	11,673,519	404,688.65	3.47	473,000.00	4.05
Carlow Co Development Partnership Ltd.	8,878,177	320,307.67	3.61	296,345.44	3.34
Cavan Partnership Ltd & County Monaghan Area Partnership Ltd.	12,035,118	247,592.19	2.06	387,069.30	3.22
Comhar na nOileán Teo.	4,642,415	197,077.02	4.25	454,911.08	9.80
Clare Local Development Co. Ltd.	14,028,529	355,838.59	2.54	173,395.41	1.24
Donegal Local Development Co. Ltd.	12,831,901	379,129.26	2.95	414,957.22	3.23
FORUM Connemara	9,668,965	186,826.39	1.93	253,003.52	2.62
Fingal LEADER Partnership	7,766,780	216,876.19	2.79	290,069.10	3.73
Galway Rural Development Co. Ltd.	15,257,985	360,926.38	2.37	457,739.78	3.00
Inishowen Development Partnership	8,286,143	240,140.54	2.90	255,584.41	3.08
IRD Duhallow	10,315,943	306,023.45	2.97	331,978.44	3.22
Kildare (Cill Dara ar Aghaidh Teo)	12,282,448	244,340.16	1.99	368,473.62	3.00
Co Kilkenny LEADER Partnership Ltd	11,523,729	377,104.49	3.27	395,712.04	3.43
Laois Community and Enterprise Development Co. Ltd.	10,993,608	275,768.55	2.51	329,808.40	3.00
Leitrim Integrated Development Co.	10,845,497	314,622.08	2.90	349,065.07	3.22
Longford Community Resource Ltd.	8,714,110	200,921.78	2.31	261,423.43	3.00
Louth LEADER Partnership	8,839,815	253,575.69	2.87	293,823.92	3.32
Mayo North East LEADER Partnership Co.	10,751,894	298,999.33	2.78	322,556.98	3.00
Meath Partnership	12,748,771	466,133.63	3.66	437,463.32	3.43
Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta Teo.	17,278,809	549,753.17	3.18	518,364.53	3.00
North & East Kerry LEADER Partnership Teo.	10,558,882	283,970.99	2.69	316,766.62	3.00

[Deputy Pat Carey.]

Local Action Group	RDP Prog Total Budget	Admin Spend 2009	As a % of Prog budget	Allocation for 2010	As a % of Prog budget
	€	€		€	
North Tipperary LEADER Partnership Co.	9,708,008	213,273.99	2.20	291,240.39	3.00
Offaly Integrated Local Development Co.	11,520,489	261,479.25	2.27	345,614.84	3.00
Roscommon Integrated Development Co.	12,838,021	402,930.75	3.14	385,140.82	3.00
Co. Sligo LEADER Partnership Co.	10,888,673	333,651.09	3.06	352,599.84	3.24
South East Cork Area Development Ltd.	10,641,494	268,505.33	2.52	369,244.98	3.47
South Tipperary Local Development Co.Ltd.	11,106,187	308,371.88	2.78	371,120.20	3.34
South Kerry Development Partnership Ltd.	12,370,667	372,765.37	3.01	333,185.78	2.69
South West Mayo Development Co. Ltd .	12,150,007	370,710.46	3.05	364,500.39	3.00
Waterford LEADER Partnership Ltd	10,558,519	244,439.69	2.32	316,755.73	3.00
West Cork Development Partnership	14,601,149	425,453.89	2.91	473,449.27	3.24
West Limerick Resources	9,997,751	278,891.93	2.79	331,358.68	3.31
Westmeath Community Development	10,987,060	355,819.91	3.24	342,697.64	3.12
Wexford Local Development	12,515,565	418,575.91	3.34	375,467.14	3.00
Co. Wicklow Partnership	11,135,560	320,000.54	2.87	334,066.97	3.00
	399,999,998	11,371,584.90	Ave 2.86	12,639,688.75	Ave 3.29

Community Development

563. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs if a decision has been made regarding the future of a community development programme in Cork (details supplied) [38630/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The group referred to by the Deputy has recently written to my Department with a proposal regarding their future role within the Local and Community Development Programme.

The details are being examined by my officials and I expect to have their recommendations shortly.

Departmental Agencies

564. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of board members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39231/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of board members sitting on the boards of bodies funded from my Department's Vote Group is set out in the table below.

The Deputy may wish to note that there are currently two vacancies on the board of the Equality Authority and four vacancies on the board of the Family Support Agency. There is also one vacancy on the board of Foras na Gaeilge and one vacancy on the Dormant Accounts Board.

For completeness, the Deputy should be aware that certain bodies funded from my Department's Vote Group — Waterways Ireland, the Equality Tribunal and the Office of An Coimisiún Teanga — do not have boards.

Body	Current number of board members
Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests	11
Dormant Accounts Board	10
Western Development Commission	12
Údarás na Gaeltachta	20
<i>An Foras Teanga, comprising</i>	
Ulster-Scots Agency	8
Foras na Gaeilge	15
Family Support Agency	8
Equality Authority	14
National Disability Authority	13
Irish Human Rights Commission	15

565. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39245/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): Funding provided to the agencies from my Department's Vote Group is shown annually in the Revised Estimates and in the Appropriation Accounts, each of which are available in the Dáil Library and on the internet at www.finance.gov.ie and www.audgen.gov.ie respectively.

The table below shows the funding provided by my Department to the relevant agencies in each of the years 2006 to 2010. Figures from 2006 to 2009 are taken from the outturns shown in the Appropriation Accounts. In the case of 2010, the figures used are the allocations shown in the Further Revised Estimates (FRE).

The Deputy will be aware that, in the context of the transfer of functions announced earlier this year, several agencies transferred to my Department with effect from 1 May 2010 and 1 June 2010. The table below shows the position with regard to funding provided by my Department to the agencies from the FRE.

Agency	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
Western Development Commission	7,693	6,495	6,511	4,458	2,230
Údarás na Gaeltachta	42,810	39,369	44,054	37,635	29,915
An Coimisinéir Teanga	647	694	831	831	796
An Foras Teanga	15,135	16,167	18,670	16,216	16,634
Waterways Ireland	34,133	36,218	38,140	34,504	33,585
Equality Authority					2,007*
Equality Tribunal					1,217*
National Disability Authority					4,056*
Human Rights Commission					849*
Family Support Agency					23,600**

*Transferred to Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs with effect from 1st June 2010 from Department of Justice and Law Reform.

**Transferred to Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs with effect from 1st May 2010 from Department of Social Protection.

Departmental Bodies

566. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs in the context of the appointment of an Ordinary Member of the Council of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority, his role in the approval given on 24 October 2006 by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, for borrowing by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority up to the statutory limit of €127 million under Section 30 of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority Act 1997, and for the taking by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority of a shareholding in a joint venture company, in accordance with Section 6 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, to purchase one site, (details supplied); the advice he received from his appointee on the Council of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority in relation to this transaction; the role and functions of his appointee to the Council of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority; the frequency with which he is consulted by his appointee in relation to the ongoing deliberations of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority; the nature of such consultations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39399/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I am advised that the Council of the Authority has no role in the matter referred to by the Deputy.

An officer of my Department is appointed to the Council by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in accordance with the provisions of section 16 of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority Act 1997, and acts in that capacity in accordance with the provisions of section 20 of the Act and other relevant provisions. The officer presently appointed to the Council has, inter alia, oversight responsibility in my Department for Waterways Ireland, a North/South Implementation Body with significant interests in the docklands area (e.g. the Grand Canal and Spencer Docks).

Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

567. **D'fhiafraigh** Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Comhionannais agus Gaeltachta cén ról a bheidh ag a Roinn maidir le Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge an Rialtais; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh [32350/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): Mar is eol do na Teachtaí, tá an dréacht-Straitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge foilsithe ag an Rialtas ó dheireadh 2009 agus cuireadh os comhair an Chomhchoiste Oireachtais do Ghnóthaí Turasóireachta Cultúir, Spóirt, Pobail, Comhionannais agus Gaeltachta í le breithniú. Tuigtear dom go raibh cruinnithe éagsúla ag an gComhchoiste le páirtithe leasmhara níos luaithe i mbliana agus d'aontaigh an Comhchoiste ar aighneacht le 39 moladh inti. Fuarthas moltaí an Chomhchoiste ar 28 Iúil 2010 agus táthar á mbreithniú ag mo Roinnse i gcomhair le Ranna ábhartha eile. Táthar ag siúl leis an obair seo a thabhairt chun críche go luath.

Ach é sin a bheith déanta, tá súil agam go mbeifear in ann cruinniú den Choiste Rialtais don Ghaeilge agus don Ghaeltacht a thionól ar 17 Samhain 2010 ar mhaithe leis an dréacht dheiridh den Straitéis a scrúdú agus, ina dhiaidh sin, í a thabhairt os comhair an Rialtais le ceadú.

Mar is eol don Teachta, tá moltaí éagsúla maidir leis an Ghaeilge agus an Ghaeltacht — a mbeadh impleachtaí acu do ról mo Roinne-se agus Údarás na Gaeltachta amach anseo — curtha san áireamh sa dréacht-Straitéis. Feictear dom go mbeidh ról ceannasaíochta ag mo Roinnse i bhfeidhmiú na Straitéise amach anseo ach, go dtí go mbeidh an leagan deireannach den Straitéis aontaithe agus foilsithe, ní léir dom go mbeadh sé cuí bheith níos sonraí faoin gceist ag an bpointe seo.

Community Development

568. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force on Active Citizenship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32339/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): Responsibility for progressing the Active Citizenship agenda was transferred from the Department of the Taoiseach to my Department in May 2010, as support for voluntary activity and community involvement are part of my Department's core functions. I welcome the integration of this work into my Department, which will complement our ongoing efforts to encourage voluntary activity and community development. My Department will be supported in its role by the Steering Group on Active Citizenship, chaired by Ms Mary Davis, whose members have a wealth of experience of working to develop community engagement and encourage greater levels of civic engagement by citizens who are committed to making a positive difference within their communities. I believe that the Government's efforts to date have helped to increase levels of community involvement and generate a new willingness in Irish society to become involved and to help others. Government continues to work with communities and organisations to highlight and promote the importance of increasing civic engagement by citizens, including voluntary and philanthropic activities that strengthen the fabric of community life across Ireland. I believe that a strong, vibrant community infrastructure is vital in order to maximise our potential to provide a better quality of life for all, despite the significant economic challenges that we now face.

At EU level, Ireland has been to the forefront of identifying Active Citizenship as a policy area which needs to be addressed and strengthened. Lately I was pleased to chair the inaugural meeting of the Irish Steering Group for the European Year of Volunteering 2011 (EYV2011). Central to the year is the whole concept of Active Citizenship, of which volunteering is just one part.

Progressing the recommendations of the Taskforce is a matter for several Departments as well as my own. I am pleased that a number of the recommendations have been advanced to date, including the following:

- Audits of existing community facilities have been completed and appropriate arrangements are being made by local authorities to make them available at local level. The main purpose of the audits is to establish current level provision and that, in the event of future public funding for community facilities, any applications for such financing support would take account of the results of the audit in terms of identifying needs in specific geographic areas.
- The Taskforce recommended the strengthening of local civic participation, which informed the preparation of the Green Paper on Local Government: Stronger Local Democracy — Options for Change. The White Paper on Local Government, which will present settled Government policy on a range of local government matters, including participative democracy measures, is currently being finalised by the Cabinet Committee on Local Government.
- The Department of Education and Skills has encouraged schools to make their premises available for community use. In addition, a scheme is currently funded under the Dormant Accounts (Educational Disadvantage Fund) to enable DEIS Band 1 schools in Limerick City to open after school hours to maximise community use of school premises and facilities. All of the DEIS Band 1 schools in Limerick City, a total of 22 schools (16

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primary and 6 post primary), are participating in this scheme. There are approximately 200 new after-school activities running in all 22 schools.

- At second level senior cycle, the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum Assessment) is developing a syllabus for a full optional exam subject called 'Politics and Society' as an extension of the current Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) subject in Junior Cycle, which currently gives students practical experience of active citizenship.
- In relation to the adult education sector, the range of Further and Adult Education programmes are geared towards enabling participants to contribute more fully to the social, cultural and economic life of this country, through education and information courses.
- Active Citizenship was a key theme of the Social Inclusion Week arranged by local authorities last week as part of the Irish National Programme of activities supporting the EU Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010. My Department also supported an all-island conference on "Combating Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion" which I addressed last week. In this regard, the Steering Group liaised with my Department and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and advised on Active Citizenship awareness around the country.

Defence Forces Property

569. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 545 of 19 October 2010 the number, location and cost of each of the properties rented under subhead R in 2009 and to date in 2010; the expected cost of these properties in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38757/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): The Department currently has a total of fifty six properties rented for the use of the Reserve Defence Forces for training purposes. Ten properties are in use fulltime and the remainder are in use on a part-time basis. There are no properties rented by the Department for use as office space. The following tabular statement gives an outline of the properties concerned. Rents are reviewed on a regular basis and are based on a number of factors, including size, location and quality of the facility. Information regarding the specific rents paid in respect of each premises is commercially sensitive. However, the total annual rents being paid in respect of all such premises in 2009 was €92,501 and in 2010 is in the region of €122,350.

Property Rented on a Full-Time Basis in 2010

County	Address	Size	Terms
Clare	Kilrush Creek Marina (NSR) Kilrush,	Building — 4,000sq ft Yard — 3,400 sq ft.	Licence agreement from 1/1/2010 –31/12/2010 for one year only at the discretion of the Licensor
Cork	Weir St., Bandon, Co.	1,585 sq ft.	Letting agreement commenced in 2001 for a term of 10 years
Donegal	Unit 4, Court Place, Cardonagh	12.4 mtrs × 7.6mtrs	Letting agreement commenced 1985
Galway	Tuam Hutsite	Hutsite only 2,244 sq ft.	Longstanding local agreement

County	Address	Size	Terms
Leitrim	8 Park Lane, Carrick-on-Shannon	839 sq ft	Longstanding local agreement
Mayo	Foxford, Ballina	2 Storey Terraced House.	Longstanding local agreement Rent adjusted in accordance with C.P.I.
Monaghan:	Cross St. Carrickmacross	2 Storey Building	Longstanding local agreement
Monaghan	Drumgoask, Monaghan	40ft × 40ft	Letting agreement commenced in 2010 for a term of 5 years
Offaly	Kilcruttin, Tullamore. Ground Floor Unit	1,863 sq ft.	Longstanding local agreement Rent adjusted in accordance with C.P.I.
Sligo	Unit 12B, Cleveragh Business Centre	683.24 sq ft.	Agreement commenced in 2006 for a term of 10 years — rent review after 5yrs
Carlow	Hutsite, Carlow Workhouse Community Centre, Tullow	Hutsite only 150ft × 120ft 30ft × 21ft	Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement
Cork	Town Hall, Bandon — 2 rooms Parochial Hall, Wolfe Tone Square, Bantry Beara Sports Hall, Castletownbere Charleville Community Hall, Chapel St. Macroom GAA Club Industrial Hall, Clonakilty St. Patrick's Hall, Dunmanway Scoil Mhuire Hall, Kanturk Community Centre, Kilworth Kinsale Municipal Hall Parish Hall, Roscarbery GAA Club, Millstreet Scoil Phadraig, New Road, Mallow	34ft × 31ft & 21ft × 15½ ft. 50ft × 20ft 130ft × 75ft 20ft × 15ft Ent Hall 5.59m × 1.89m Hall 16.37m × 6.04m 60ft × 80ft 82ft × 35ft 98ft × 53ft Hall 50ft × 36ft 1430sq ft. 63.4ft × 40.3ft School Gym 70ft × 40ft	Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Licence agreement commenced in 2008 and from year to year thereafter Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement
Donegal	St. Finians Hall, Falcarragh Community Hall, Massinass, Creeslough,	37ft × 18ft 57ft × 21ft	Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement
Galway	Hall Einne, Carraroe Community Centre Glenamaddy Coláiste Na Toirbhirte, Headford Community Hall, Portumna Tuam Town Commissioners Community Centre, Oughterard Community Centre Glenamaddy Glenfarne Hall	80ft × 30ft 50ft × 80ft 30mtrs × 25mtrs 50ft × 16ft Plot measuring 141' × 48' 23ft × 20ft Hall Hall	Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement
Leitrim	Parochial Hall, Drumlea, Corrawallen Mayflower Ballroom, Drumshambo	Not available Not available	Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement
Limerick	Community Centre, Abbeyfeale Community Hall, Boher Muintir Na Tire Hall, Hospital	40ft × 20ft 31ft × 15ft 90ft × 60ft	Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement

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County	Address	Size	Terms
	Newcastlewest, (Hut Site) Community Hall, Pallas Green	Hutsite only 12ft × 15ft	Longstanding local agreement Term Year to Year Months notice in writing to vacate.
Mayo	Scouts Den, Ballina Claremorris Town Hall Roundford Community Hall, Hollymount Swinford Community Hall	40ft × 25ft 39ft × 90ft 72ft × 35ft 90ft × 60ft	Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement
Meath	Gilsen Boys School, Oldcastle	45ft × 60ft	Longstanding local agreement
Offaly	St. Mary's Hall, Ferbane	60ft × 30ft	Longstanding local agreement
Tipperary	St. Patrick's Parochial Hall, Ballymacarberry Tipperary Town (Hut Site)	70ft × 30ft Hutsite only	Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement
Waterford	Community Centre, Capoquin, Villierstown Community Hall, Courtnacuddy, Enniscorthy Cushinstown Parish Hall Scout Hall, Gorey	2000 sq mtrs. 45ft × 30ft Not available Not available	Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Commenced in 2007 and from year to year thereafter Commenced in 2010 rent paid annually in advance
Wicklow	Tinahealy Parochial Hall	38ft × 21ft	Longstanding local agreement

Defence Forces Recruitment

570. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Defence further to parliamentary Questions Nos. 554 and 555 of 19 October 2010 the number of persons expected to be recruited under the current general service recruitment competition; the breakdown of the numbers of new recruits by brigade including the Defence Forces training centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38758/10]

571. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Defence further to parliamentary Questions Nos. 554 and 555 of 19 October 2010 when he expects the selection process for the current general services recruitment to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38759/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 570 and 571 together.

It is intended to enlist a recruit platoon of 40 successful candidates to each of the Eastern and Southern Brigades in December 2010. The enlistment selection process of two further platoons, one each to the Western Brigade and the Defence Forces Training Centre, is scheduled to follow on when this enlistment has taken place.

Defence Forces Reserve

572. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Defence further to parliamentary Question No. 64 of 7 July 2010 the number of effective and non-effective personnel serving in the Reserve Defence Force; if he will provide a national breakdown of the effective strength by brigade, unit and rank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38760/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): I am advised by the Military authorities that the total strength of the Reserve Defence Force as at 30 September 2010, the latest date for which figures are available, was 6,075, comprising 5,254 effective personnel and 821 non-effective personnel. A national breakdown of the effective strength by Brigade, unit and rank is provided in the tabular statements overleaf. While the number of effective personnel has increased by 53 since 31 May last, I am aware that, overall, effective numbers in the Reserve have declined over recent years. Limited recruitment into the RDF is continuing subject to the overall strength level that existed at 1 January 2009 (7,671) not being exceeded. The limited recruitment will also be monitored and kept under review in the light of the uptake of paid training within the RDF and the future budgetary provision available to the Department. There is now a requirement to examine the progress that has been made and to chart the future direction of the Reserve. Work has commenced on a Value for Money Review of the Reserve which is being overseen by a Steering Committee comprising representatives from the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and the Department of Finance. The Steering Group are working towards a target date for completion of end March 2011.

The Department of Defence and Defence Forces Strategy Statement 2008 — 2010 includes the commitment to prepare a new White Paper on Defence, in line with the Agreed Programme for Government. The findings of the Value For Money Review including the lessons learned through the RDF Review Implementation Plan process will complement the development of the new White Paper on Defence. This will ensure that further development of the Reserve is appropriately informed by the lessons of the past and the requirements for the future.

2 E Bde RDF Effective

2 E Bde RDF	Effective	Comdt	Capt	Lt	2/Lt	Sgt Maj	BQMS	CS	CQMS	Sgt	Cpl	Pte	Total
	Lt Col												
HQ 2 E Bde RDF	1	4	4	2	2	1	1	3	4	3	6	2	33
62 Res Inf Bn	0	4	12	8	4	0	1	5	4	27	36	195	296
65 Res Inf Bn	0	6	8	7	8	0	0	5	6	26	48	196	310
67 Res Inf Bn	0	5	5	6	5	1	1	3	3	17	25	112	183
62 Res Arty Regt	0	4	12	9	4	1	2	4	2	32	37	97	204
62 Res Cav Sqn	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	1	1	9	8	29	53
62 Res Engr Coy	0	1	1	3	0	0	0	1	1	8	6	16	37
62 Res CIS Coy	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	5	5	12	29
62 Res Logs Bn	0	1	4	12	0	1	0	2	2	11	25	71	129
62 Res MP Coy	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	1	8	16	18	49
2 AD	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	1	10	10	18	45
Total	1	28	56	51	25	4	5	28	26	156	222	766	1,368

RDF Effective Strength by BDE, Unit, Rank as on 30 Sept. 2010

1 S Bde RDF	Effective	Comdt	Capt	Lt	2/Lt	Sgt Maj	BQMS	CS	CQMS	Sgt	Cpl	Pte	Total
	Lt Col												
HQ 1 S Bde RDF	1	4	8	3	1	1	1	5	3	2	2		31
32 Res Inf Bn	0	5	8	19	4	0	1	10	6	37	49	209	348
33 Res Inf Bn	0	5	13	22	7	0	1	5	4	36	55	164	312
34 Res Inf Bn	0	6	8	16	3	1	1	5	6	35	45	232	358
31 Res Arty Regt	0	2	7	9	0	1	1	2	4	34	23	90	173
31 Res Cav Sqn	0	1	2	3	1	0	0	0	1	11	12	20	51

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1 S Bde RDF	Effective	Comdt	Capt	Lt	2/Lt	Sgt Maj	BQMS	CS	CQMS	Sgt	Cpl	Pte	Total
	Lt Col												
31 Res Engr Coy	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	7	2	14	29
31 Res CIS	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	6	8	53	73
31 Res MP Coy	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	14	38	11	70
31 Res Logs Bn	0	3	3	6	0	0	1	3	3	16	24	91	150
3 AD	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	9	7	34	56
4 AD	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	9	6	51	73
Total	1	31	57	86	18	3	6	35	31	216	271	969	1,724

RDF Effective Strength by, Unit, Rank as on 30 Sept. 2010

4 W Bde RDF	Effective	Comdt	Capt	Lt	2/Lt	Sgt Maj	BQMS	CS	CQMS	Sgt	Cpl	Pte	Total
	Lt Col												
HQ 4 W Bde RDF	1	4	7	0	0	1	0	0	0	7	0	0	20
1	0		2	1	2	0	0	1	0	4	4	4	19
51 Res Inf Bn	0	6	12	11	1	1	0	4	4	44	76	279	438
56 Res Inf Bn	0	5	12	15	0	1	1	3	7	30	56	261	391
58 Res Inf Bn	0	5	10	12	11	1	1	4	5	41	82	281	453
54 Res Arty Regt	0	3	9	9	0	1	1	3	3	27	31	98	185
55 Res Cav Sqn	0	0	2	5	0	0	0	1	1	16	29	53	107
54 Res Engr Coy	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	8	16	61	89
54 Res CIS Coy	0	1	3	0	2	0	0	1	1	5	10	37	60
54 Res MP Coy	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	2	0	9	28	7	50
54 Res Logs Sp Bn	0	3	4	4	1	0	1	2	2	19	25	57	118
Total	1	29	64	59	17	5	4	22	24	210	357	1,138	1,930

RDF Effective Strength by BDE, Unit, Rank as on 30 Sept. 2010

RDF TA	Effective	Comdt	Capt	Lt	2/Lt	Sgt Maj	BQMS	CS	CQMS	Sgt	Cpl	Pte	Total
	Lt Col												
HQ DFTA	0	4	8	6	0	1	0	1	1	7	0	0	28

N S R	Effective	Capt	Lt	Ens	WO	SCPO	CPO	SPO	PO	LS	Seaman	Total
	Lt Cmdr											
Dublin	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	4	8	39	56
Waterford	1	2	0	2	0	1	4	0	3	8	34	55
Cork	1	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	6	34	47
Limerick	1	4	3	0	0	1	2	0	3	8	24	46
Total	4	9	5	2	0	3	10	0	10	30	131	204

Departmental Agencies

573. Deputy Lucinda Creighton asked the Minister for Defence the number of board

members sitting on the boards of each State agency under his Department's control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39232/10]

574. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Defence the annual budget of each State agency under his Department's control in each of the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39246/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 573 and 574 together.

The bodies under the aegis of the Department are the Civil Defence Board, the Board of Coiste an Asgard and the Army Pensions Board. The information requested in relation to the yearly budgets and number of Board members is as follows:

Board Composition

Name of Agency	Number of Board Members
Civil Defence	14
Army Pensions Board	3
Coiste an Asgard	11

Budget Allocation

Year	Civil Defence	Army Pensions Board	Coiste an Asgard
	€	€	€
2006	5,928,000	100,089	749,000
2007	6,099,000	103,000	879,000
2008	6,248,000	105,000	803,000
2009	6,148,000	104,000	830,000
2010	6,148,000	110,000	0
Spend to Date in 2010	6,061,000	82,457	0

The Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure published in July 2009 recommended that the National Sail Training Scheme operated by Coiste an Asgard be discontinued and as a result no funding was provided in 2010.

Departmental Records

575. **Deputy Michael Kennedy** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide the dates on which tenders were received from Magdalene Laundries; the way in which the Department was cognisant of the fair wages clause in such tender contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39261/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): The Department recently examined the contents of relevant files that were located following a review of file listings. Given that the initial question related to contracts that may have been placed up to seventy years ago, there was very little material found that referred to institutional laundries and much of what is available is incomplete. It is clear however from the review of files that some institutional laundries had tendered for the award of contracts from the Department. It is apparent from the files that a St Mary's Laundry (location and status unknown) had tendered for a laundry contract in 1975 but was unsuccessful. There are also references on file to the fact that the Magdalene Laundry

[Deputy Tony Killeen.]

in Galway had been unsuccessful in a tender competition held in 1981. It is also apparent from the files that High Park Laundry, Drumcondra and Gloucester Street Laundry, Sean McDermott Street had approached the Department in 1978 asking that they be included on the list of laundries invited to tender for future contracts.

In relation to fair wages, there is a reference on file to a meeting that took place in July 1982 regarding laundry contracts and it is clear that the fair wages clause, as it applied to “Convent Laundries”, was discussed.

The files that are the basis for the information contained in this response are not readily available owing to the Departments imminent relocation to Newbridge. When the files in question become available, I could, if requested, arrange for officials from the Department to meet with the Deputy to show him the relevant records that have been located and which form the basis of this response.

Defence Forces Property

576. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will instruct his Department to provide a site free of charge to another Government Department for a new Garda station at Tralee County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39440/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): The Department is aware that the Office of Public Works proposes to move three organisations, An Garda Siochana, Courts Service and a HGV testing centre into part of Ballymullen Barracks. The Department has been in contact with that Office and is awaiting a response. The site for the Garda station cannot be provided free of charge as, in line with a Government Decision, the funding realised from the disposal of surplus military property provides resources for the modernisation of the Defence Forces and is invested in new infrastructure, equipment and training area development. All properties that are deemed to be surplus to military requirements will continue to be disposed of and the funding invested to meet the current and future equipment and infrastructure needs of the Defence Forces.