

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 2 Samhain 2010.
Tuesday, 2 November 2010.

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

Paidir.

Prayer.

Resignation of Member

An Ceann Comhairle: Before I call on the Taoiseach, I wish to announce for the information of the House that I received a letter of resignation from Deputy James McDaid as a Member of Dáil Éireann with effect from Tuesday, 2 November 2010 and I have laid the letter before the Dáil. In accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 169, the resignation took effect upon my receipt of the letter.

Ceisteanna — Questions

National Security Committee

1. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach when the National Security Committee will next meet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30243/10]

The Taoiseach: Having regard to the confidential nature of the work of the National Security Committee, it would not be appropriate for me to disclose information about the dates of its meetings or its proceedings. The committee, which is chaired by the Secretary General to the Government, comprises representatives at the highest level from the Departments of Justice and Law Reform, Defence and Foreign Affairs, and the Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces. It is concerned with ensuring the Government and I are advised of high level security issues and the responses to them, but not operational security matters. The committee will continue to meet as required. As well as attending meetings, the members of the committee liaise on an ongoing basis to monitor developments which might have national security implications, particularly in the international arena.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is becoming obvious there is an ease of access to the fraudulent use of Irish passports, a passport which has particular integrity and credibility in international relations. In February this year, it emerged eight Irish passports were used fraudulently in an assassination in Dubai. This month several other Irish passports, possibly up to six, were used as a part of a Russian spy ring in the US. The concern, which I am sure the National Security Committee will consider, is the extent to which these fraudulent abuses continue and how little the Irish authorities know about them. British passports were abused in exactly the same man-

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ner in the Dubai assassination scandal and their security was increased immediately. No such security enhancement took place to protect Irish passports.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we have a question, please Deputy?

Deputy Enda Kenny: I am coming to it. The Taoiseach may be aware the number of Irish passports reported as lost or stolen in 2008 was 36,264, 6.3% of the total issued in 2008.

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question?

Deputy Enda Kenny: The figure for 2009 was 33,214, 6% of total issued. These are staggering figures.

Has the National Security Committee considered the ease of access to the fraudulent and illegal abuse of Irish passports? Has the committee made a recommendation that security enhancements for the protection of Irish passports should be implemented? Has it considered the implications of such large numbers of passports being reported lost or stolen?

The Taoiseach: As I stated earlier, due to the nature of the committee's meetings, it is not appropriate to disclose the information concerning its meetings or any of its proceedings. This is a matter to be directed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs who has responsibility for the Passport Office. There has been a debate in the House on the specific instances referred to by the Deputy. Clearly this is an issue concerning older passports. The questions the Deputy has raised are ones that can be directed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs so that the information will be available to him.

Deputy Enda Kenny: While I do not want to raise details of the matters discussed by the national security committee, the consequences of what the committee does in this case should become clear. In other words, there should be an analysis of what extra security arrangements must be made to protect the integrity of the Irish passport system. We cannot have a situation in which forged Irish passports are being used, as happened in the assassination case in Dubai. In addition, a number of Irish passports were used illegally by a Russian spy ring in the United States.

In recent days, the American President announced intelligence findings concerning at least two parcels containing explosives that were detected en route from Yemen to the United States. One of them went through Great Britain.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should put a question.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Some years ago, I raised a question here following reports that al-Qaeda cells were operating in this country. Given previous reports of terrorist personnel being located here, what is the Government's response to the fact that at least one of the recently discovered parcels was being sent to the USA through Great Britain? We have an interest in ensuring that freight passing through this country is screened properly. We must not have a situation where, for their own reasons, somebody presses a button on a mobile phone and a sim card explodes material. In the recent cases it was titanium in toner packages. This has serious implications for international freight activities, so I am sure the Taoiseach will convey that concern to the national security committee.

The Taoiseach: The gardaí are well aware of the international situation and the threat level involved. They are maintaining contacts with their international counterparts in this regard. The

Government is determined to continue to take all necessary measures to deal with international terrorism. It will play a full part in the international efforts to counteract the threat.

As regards the specific issue raised by the Deputy, the discovery of two explosive devices on cargo aircraft bound for the United States is a very worrying development. These devices are believed to have originated in Yemen and were bound for addresses in Chicago. This bomb plot is a further indication of the ongoing threat from al-Qaeda-inspired militants.

The threat from international terrorist groups against Ireland is considered to be low. However, the situation is being monitored constantly by the Irish authorities.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The director-general of MI5 has said that there is a persistent rise in the ambition and activities of dissident groups on the island of Ireland. I know there is a very high level of co-operation between the PSNI and the Garda Síochána and between both Governments, which I fully support. More than likely, the identities of those concerned are known to the security forces. In that context, what is the Government's latest assessment of the level of dissident or treacherous activity by so-called republicans? What is the Government's analysis of the latest position?

Has the Taoiseach yet received a copy of the 24th report of the Independent Monitoring Commission, which is due out this month? The personnel dealing with those reports are fully acquainted with the facts as they happen on the ground.

The Taoiseach: I understand that report has come to hand recently, is being considered by Government and will be published in due course. Regarding the earlier point about dissident threats, as the Deputy has suggested there is unanimous support in the House for full co-operation between the Police Service of Northern Ireland, PSNI, and the Garda Síochána in these matters. The Chief Constable of the PSNI and the Garda Commissioner have confirmed that the level of co-ordination and co-operation is at an all-time high. As one would expect, they co-operate fully in these matters and the necessary resources are being applied to deal with those who would constitute a threat to the security of the State or to others in terms of paramilitary activity or paramilitary intentions. These are operational matters that the Garda Commissioner and his people deal with on an ongoing basis.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: In his reply the Taoiseach stated that due to the confidential nature of the work of the National Security Committee it would not be possible to give the dates, frequency and so on of the meetings of the committee and I understand this. However, given the increased vigilance which is now being applied both in the United States and the United Kingdom with regard to the potential for and possibility of acts of international terrorism, has there been any increase in the frequency of meetings of the National Security Committee or in its work? Does the Taoiseach hold a view on the statements made in recent days by the British Home Secretary and Prime Minister, especially with regard to freight and flights from Yemen to the UK, where, as I understand it, a ban has been placed on freight from Yemen? Has any consideration been given to the source of freight entering Ireland or to any implications for security or for the shipment of freight through Ireland, especially through Irish airports? Has there been any increase in the deployment of gardaí to deal with the evidence of an increased threat from dissident republicans?

The Taoiseach: Regarding the third question, as the Deputy is aware these are operational matters. The Commissioner deploys resources as required and he does not communicate on an ongoing basis as to what resources are being deployed for obvious reasons and for fear that

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people might regard that as increasing the possibility of abduction or the possibility of being found to be doing things they should not be doing. These are operational matters with which the Commissioner deals all the time and resources are applied as required. The Deputy will be aware generally that the security services in Ireland are working very closely to seek to have these people thwarted in any of their activities or planning.

Regarding the question of cargo, as a result of what happened in recent days and the implications if any in Ireland, it is a matter in the first instance for my colleague the Minister for Transport. All Irish airports with regular commercial flights are required to comply with the requirements of the EU regulations on aviation security and the national civil aviation security programme. Aviation security practices and procedures implemented at Irish airports, including those related to cargo, conform to EU common rules and to the highest standards internationally. These practices and procedures are subject to monitoring by the Department of Transport and are also the subject of periodic reviews by international organisations such as the EU Commission and the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

It is not the practice of the Minister to comment on specific security measures currently in place or that may be implemented at Irish airports or on monitoring activities carried out by his Department. Aviation security arrangements at Irish airports are kept under continuous review by the Department of Transport and the National Civil Aviation Security Committee, which is chaired by a senior official from that Department. The committee comprises representatives of Departments, the State and regional airports, airlines, the Garda Síochána, the Defence Forces, Customs and Excise, An Post, the Irish Aviation Authority and the Irish Airline Pilots' Association. Everyone must take cognisance of these worrying developments and must liaise with the various international organisations with whom they normally deal in order to put in place, if required, any further scrutiny advisable in the circumstances.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I appreciate that the Taoiseach cannot go into great detail with regard to levels of security and police co-operation on these matters. In respect of the increased potential for acts of international terrorism and with regard to the increase in dissident activity, has there been an increase in the level of political contact between Ministers here and in Britain? Has there been an increase in political contact at a European level with a view to addressing these threats?

The Taoiseach: I am not specifically aware there has been ministerial contact in recent days in respect of what happened but there has been official contact. Reviews are immediately put in place when something as serious as this happens. There are procedures and protocols under various international conventions. These kick in very quickly in light of the sensitivity of the aviation industry to issues such as this. Ireland is in compliance with these and is an active participant in them.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Can the Taoiseach advise if it is within the scope of the national security committee to consider measures such as the further civilianising of the clerical and administrative roles within the Garda Síochána in order to maximise the release of trained officers to various policing responsibilities directly within the community and in any of the contexts described? If it is within the scope, has it been given serious consideration? Does the Taoiseach expect further action will be taken in that regard?

The Taoiseach: It is not the practice of the national security committee to discuss operational matters. The committee only deals with the question generally of what needs to be done with

an issue that arises and what liaison is taking place. It is not a question of getting into detail about policy implementation on civilianisation and matters of that nature.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Is the Government happy there are no international terrorist cells operating in Ireland at the moment in so far as the national security committee is concerned?

The Taoiseach: As I stated in a previous reply, the assessment is that the threat of the use of Ireland for such purposes is regarded as low but that is not to say there is a sense of complacency or that there is not activity in surveillance and monitoring.

Decentralisation Programme

2. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff in his Department who have applied for relocation under the decentralisation programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30244/10]

3. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach the number of members of his staff who have applied for relocation under the decentralisation programme; the number of such staff who have actually transferred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32310/10]

4. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach the status of the decentralisation programme in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32337/10]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 2, 3 and 4 together.

Of the 159 civil servants currently serving in my Department, 23 have applied through the central applications facility, CAF, to relocate under the decentralisation programme. The breakdown by grade is: assistant principal, seven; higher executive officer, three; administrative officer, two; executive officer, three; staff officer, one; clerical officer; seven. A total of 32 former members of staff have already been assigned to decentralised posts.

There are no proposals to decentralise my Department or any of the bodies under its aegis. It is a matter for those Departments to which staff from my Department have decentralised to assign such staff to locations outside of Dublin.

Deputy Enda Kenny: What is the status of the receiving point to which the 23 staff who have applied for decentralisation from his Department want to be decentralised? Are those locations live in terms of the decentralisation programme? Is the decentralisation programme in general now in suspension in perpetuity or is it intended to go ahead with it as was originally announced by the former Minister for Finance, Mr. McCreevy?

The Taoiseach: The 23 staff members who have applied to be decentralised from my Department have applied to the following Departments and agencies, the Department of Social Protection, the Office of Public Works, the Department of Defence, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Finance, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Revenue Commissioners, the Equality Authority, the Valuation Office, the National Roads Authority, Ordnance Survey Ireland and the National Standards Authority of Ireland.

The Department of Finance deals with the details of the programme more generally. In this phase of decentralisation that has been announced approximately 4,400 staff are due to be relocated. I understand approximately 3,180 staff have been relocated to date. The Department

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is continuing to finalise the relocation of the remainder of staff who have applied for decentralisation. In the case of a further 5,000 applications there was a deferral until 2011.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Office of Public Works in St. Stephen's Green has not been vacated yet because some of the staff do not want to leave. A further 180 staff were to go to Kanturk and Claremorris. The moves to both of those locations appear to be stalled. A total of 35 reviews on decentralisation are due to be carried out for next year. Can we take it that the remaining staff are not going anywhere, literally, in the sense that significant amounts of money have been spent on purchasing sites and consultants' reports? Are we leaving public servants living in a land of illusion that decentralisation to those locations will take place? I am supportive of well-managed decentralisation because they have spread benefits throughout the country but this was an almighty botched job. One is leaving thousands of people who have applied to be decentralised in a limbo in that they do not know whether it is ever going to happen. We are now faced with 35 reviews to take place next year. No one has any idea of whether they are going anywhere.

The Government bought sites at exorbitant prices, but there is no money in the kitty to build these things. Is it time to tell people that decentralisation will either not occur or not occur for a long time?

The Taoiseach: The fact is that decentralisation to Trim has taken place. Nos. 50 and 51 on St. Stephen's Green have been vacated, as I understand it. That is the up-to-date position. In respect of—

Deputy Enda Kenny: My information is that there are a number of architects who do not want to move out of St. Stephen's Green.

The Taoiseach: It is a voluntary scheme, as the Deputy knows. There is no coercion involved.

First of all, I welcome the Deputy's support for the decentralisation programme. That was not the position of his former finance spokesperson, but they did not agree on everything.

Regarding the situation of the transfer of places, we made the decision last year about deferring relocation in 35 cases — about 5,000 people — so that we could implement what was in hand, namely, the 4,400 being transferred. That is being advanced and more than three quarters of those people have been relocated. That is a significant move. The Western Development Commission looked at the impact this had in the Deputy's own area and came forward with a positive report about the benefits of decentralisation to towns in the west, for example. That is something of which the Deputy would be aware.

Regarding the other issue of costs, the Comptroller and Auditor General has done a report on all of this and I understand the Committee of Public Accounts will be dealing with this matter on 2 December. It is important to point out that the disposal and vacation of properties, etc., in Dublin in order to facilitate the funding of the decentralisation raised to the tune of about €550 million and the properties cost about €338 million for the relocations. Obviously, there are issues of costs to look at, but it is not correct to say that the thing has been unbalanced or that there has not been sufficient money raised to deal with that.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I said it was botched. A well-planned decentralisation programme has always worked well, but this one was not well-planned. In fairness to the man beside the Taoiseach and without being parochial about it, he wanted to send his Department closer to Knock Airport. That was objected to and turned down by An Bord Pleanála. The Minister

then sent those staff to Tubbercurry with the intention of moving them to Charlestown. A site was acquired, but the process is now stalled.

Some 35 reviews are pending for next year, many of which are in locations where land was bought for sites for decentralised offices, but nothing has happened or is happening. Arising from the reviews, will decentralisation go ahead as originally intended?

The Taoiseach mentioned the Comptroller and Auditor General's report. His September report was scathing of the lack of parliamentary scrutiny of how things were done and of the facts that FÁS paid more than double the original estimate for its headquarters' site in Birr, that 12 buildings there were lying entirely empty and that, in seven other locations, 40% of the available space is not being used. This is an indication of a type of scheme that traditionally has been successful when well planned. Due to the secrecy desired by the then Minister for Finance in this case, however, the programme has fallen asunder.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's report also stated that 12 sites costing €43.8 million were bought in locations where decentralisation is not proceeding and that five office blocks leased for €800,000 annually have been left under-occupied. If ever anything smacked of indecisiveness and a lack of confidence, this is one scheme that has those in spades.

The Taoiseach: The simple point I will make to the Deputy is that detailed questions on specific sites or issues should definitely be dealt with by the Department of Finance, which has overall charge. I make the general point that the disposal of properties in Dublin at that time brought to the Exchequer a sum of the order of €550 million which greatly exceeds any costs incurred elsewhere. I make that point because indications are often given about costs of acquisition but not about proceeds of sale. In addition, €75 million worth of property was transferred to the Affordable Homes Partnership which can be calculated into that sum, and joint venture development schemes have been worked out by the OPW that also have a value. These matters will be discussed in due course but I make the point to bring to attention the moves which have been made and those currently under way.

The building in Newbridge for the Department of Defence is now complete and staff based in Dublin are scheduled to move there during November. Similarly, in Roscommon town, the building for the Property Registration Authority was due to be completed before the end of October, with occupation to commence thereafter, and a preferred tender for the Tipperary town building for the Department of Justice and Law Reform has been selected and a letter of acceptance of tender is expected to issue shortly. This is the rate of progress in respect of those ventures for which there are moves and those cases where deferrals have taken place will be reviewed in due course.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Taoiseach stated that 3,180 staff had been moved to various locations as a result of decentralisation. How many of those staff were moved from Dublin? My understanding is that, to date, approximately half of the re-allocation of staff has been between locations outside Dublin and concerns staff who are already based outside Dublin.

The Taoiseach stated that some of the decentralisation proposals have been deferred until 2011. Is it still intended to go ahead with those proposals or will there be any scaling back?

We were told there would be a review of the entire decentralisation programme and a final decision would be made on the projects which were to go ahead. Has that review been completed and, if not, when is it likely to be completed?

The Taoiseach: As the Deputy knows, that review is due to be considered and completed in 2011. The current priority in the programme is to effect the decentralisation of those proposals which have been approved and are going ahead. I gave broad figures and have some supplementary information to the effect that 3,153 people have moved, with 5,000 positions subject to review. I do not have the numbers for movements intra-Dublin. The position concerns the number of posts that were to be created in decentralised locations. Where these are open they will be made available to people. The fact is that some 3,000 people have moved to those locations. Regarding decentralisation, if a person from Wexford in a position in Limerick had a possibility of moving to Wexford, that is as much a decentralisation for that person as it would be to move from Dublin to Tubbercurry. It is the same principle.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is not because we need to know how much double counting is involved. The Taoiseach stated that if somebody moves from Limerick to Wexford, that is a move according to plan. However, if there is a corresponding move by somebody from Wexford back to Limerick or from somewhere else to Limerick to fill the vacancy that arises, that is double counting. My understanding of the original plan for decentralisation was to move about one third of the Civil Service out of Dublin. If that is the case we need to have some measure as to how successful or otherwise that plan was. The original figure for decentralisation out of Dublin was 10,922. How much of that decentralisation has occurred? Also, will the Taoiseach say whether any assessment has been made on the impact of the efficiency of Departments as a result of decentralisation?

The Taoiseach: I do not have that level of detailed information, and it would be best to ask the Department of Finance. I am just giving the Deputy the information I have. Of the 3,180 staff who have been unable to move to various locations across the country, some 2,200 have been to various locations which are not the gateway and hub towns. The remaining 900 have relocated to gateways and hubs, and have increased the total number of civil servants in non-commercial State-sponsored bodies located in those gateway and hub locations outside Dublin. That figure has now moved to 13,300. Therefore, 3,180 posts have been allocated to almost 40 locations. Full completion of the projects under way and approved will result in approximately 4,400 moves overall.

That is the only information I have about the benefit from moves, efficiency and so on. However, the Western Development Commission did a study in 2009 which found the economic impact of the relocation of public sector jobs to the western region had been positive and significant. The report said public sector employees had taken up opportunities to relocate there for quality of life issues, in particular the many benefits realised by easier commuting to work. For those who had moved from Dublin, the western region offered many advantages, such as cost savings, lower living costs and house prices, as well as benefits from living within close communities, being closer to families and living in rural locations. The impacts were significant in all cases.

A wide range of factors has been taken into account and balanced against each other in the selection of Departments or agencies for decentralisation. The national spatial strategy envisaged that county towns and other medium-sized towns, particularly those strategically placed in a regional context, would have roles to play in acting as so-called local capitals. They would allow for the development of their service functions and provide opportunities for a diversified employment base and productivity growth, both in the towns and in the related smaller villages and rural areas.

Virtually all the locations included in the decentralisation programme are explicitly mentioned in section 4 of the national spatial strategy, which outlines how each region will participate in the strategy. The relocation of public service employment to towns such as these underpins the important role which many must continue to play into the future. That is as much information as I can give the Deputy.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Regarding the sites that have been purchased at a number of locations around the country at heavily inflated Celtic tiger prices, has any consideration been given to those sites that are clearly not now going to be utilised? The Minister for Social Protection is beside the Taoiseach; some €10 million was paid for a site of two acres at Drogheda.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am loth to interrupt the Deputy, but in this particular series of questions we have a problem in that quite a number of the questions should really be directed to the Minister for Finance.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I am asking the Taoiseach. I have only cited Drogheda as an example. We can take Mullingar or Waterford, where respectively €8 million and €8.25 million were spent in relation to the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Three sites cost a total of €26.5 million. What does the Taoiseach expect will now happen to these very high-priced sites?

The Taoiseach: A review of the next phase of the decentralisation programme will possibly indicate the use or otherwise of some of those sites. The issue, in terms of the current phase, including acquisitions such as the Deputy has mentioned, is to the effect that total expenditure on the property aspect of the programme up to December 2009 was €338 million. Those costs were offset by savings achieved through the reallocation of property by the OPW to other schemes at the end of 2008 valued in the region of €550 million.

Those costs were offset by savings from a reallocation of property by the OPW to other schemes at the end of 2008, valued in the region of €550 million. Of that amount, more than €350 million relates to the disposal of high value sites at the height of the property boom. Property valued at that time at €75 million was transferred to the affordable homes partnership. Those are the facts in that regard. If there are details required in relation to individual matters a parliamentary question should be tabled to the Department of Finance.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I accept that other properties were disposed of and that in this regard there is a net positive balance between disposal and purchase. However, I am speaking specifically of the sites purchased at high prices. Can I take it from the Taoiseach's reply that the sites at Drogheda, Mullingar and Waterford remain under consideration? Is it his intention to hold those sites open and for how long before a decision is taken on what use they will be put to or there being once again offered on the open market?

The Taoiseach: A question on the details in regard to individual sites should be directed to the Department of Finance. There is a review to take place next year in regard to the many sites in respect of which a decision has been deferred, which sites may well include those referred to by the Deputy. In that context, decisions will be made in regard to what arrangements will be put in place for the following phase of decentralisation, which may involve the use of those sites for that purpose. Until the review is complete, one cannot be certain what will happen.

Priority Questions

Social Welfare Appeals

45. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of social welfare appeals being processed; the average waiting time to process social welfare appeals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38980/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): 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 number received in 2007. I am advised by the social welfare appeals office that as of 26 October 2010 20,936 cases are being processed through various stages of the appeals system, 10, 227 of which are receiving attention in the social welfare appeals office; 9,277 of which are receiving attention in the Department and 1,432 of which are awaiting responses from appellants. As these figures indicate, the nature of the appeals process and its various stages mean that at any one time there are a significant proportion of appeals on hands which have not yet reached the stage of being ready for the attention of appeals officers.

A total of 20,171 appeals were finalised in the period January to end September 2010. The overall average time taken to process all appeals was 27.5 weeks. Of these, 5212 or 25.8% were revised decisions by deciding officers following receipt of the appeal and 2,267 or 11.2%, were withdrawn. The remaining 12,692 decisions were made by appeals officers as follows: 8,701 or 68.6% by summary decisions and 3,991 or 31.4% following an oral hearing. The average time taken to process a summary decision was 28 weeks and the average time to process an oral hearing was 44.5 weeks. A considerable period of time is added to the process when an oral hearing is required because of the logistics involved in such process.

During 2009, 59% of all appeal cases were dealt with by way of oral hearing but due to some of the initiatives outlined below this has been reduced to 31% to date in 2010. To be fair to all appellants, the vetting of appeals and the arranging of oral hearings are dealt with in chronological order.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

Of the 27.5 weeks overall average, 13 weeks was attributable to ongoing processes within the social welfare appeals office; 12.4 weeks was attributable to work in progress within the Department and 2.1 weeks was due to responses awaited from appellants. Of the appeals finalised, 8,69 or 43% were favourable to the appellant; 9,207 or 46% were unfavourable and the remaining 2,267 or 11% were withdrawn.

There has been a significant increase in the number of appeals being made to the social welfare appeals office. Currently, it is anticipated that some 33,000 appeals will be received for 2010, which is compared to roughly 15,000 a year in the years up to and including 2007. The scale of the increase has resulted in significant delays in the processing of appeals. Improving these processing times is a major objective of the office and, in that regard, a number of initiatives have been put in place to enhance the capacity of the office to deal with the current caseload and inflows, namely, three additional appeals officers have been assigned to the office since January 2009; additional staff have been assigned to the administration area of the office; more emphasis is now being placed on dealing with appeals on a summary basis so as to

increase productivity; a project to improve the business processes in the office was undertaken resulting 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 appeals officers strictly on a short term basis to supplement the current resources, eight of whom have been operating on a part-time basis 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.

Deputy Michael Ring: We are in the middle of the worst recession since the foundation of the State. Does the Minister believe it is right that people should have to wait, in some cases six to seven months, for their appeal to be heard? I want to know that from the Minister because I want to be able to tell my constituents, and the people of this country, what he, as Minister for Social Protection, is doing about that. What action is he taking? What staff is he employing to address the problem? Does the Minister believe it is right, with 465,000 unemployed, to bring back retired people when we have graduates with all kinds of degrees that we could train in a very short time and give them these jobs instead of bringing back people who are retired?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The following steps have been taken. Three additional officers were assigned to the office since January 2009. Additional staff have been assigned to the administrative area of the office. More emphasis is now being placed on dealing with appeals on a summary basis to increase productivity. A project to improve the business process in the office was undertaken which resulted in a number of improvements being implemented. Significant enhancement has been made to the office's IT and telephone systems and, in addition, as the Deputy referred to, experienced retired appeals officers have been taken on to supplement the current resources, strictly on a short-term basis, and eight of those have been operating on a part-time basis since July. In terms of the result of that work, because they are very experienced it has been dramatic and that is what has allowed us to increase dramatically the number of appeals dealt with this year. The difficulty we face, however, is that as the number of appeals dealt with has increased so has the number of appeals coming into the office.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Minister mentioned earlier the number of appeals that were overturned by the independent appeals officer. In regard to the way the Minister's schemes are being implemented by the staff, are the staff being trained correctly when so many appeals are being overturned because the initial decision was wrong? I am asking the Minister what he intends to do about that because it is not fair on people who are waiting for jobseeker's benefit or carer's allowance. The people who are waiting on decisions on appeals need to get them faster, and we need staff put in place.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I agree fully with the Deputy that we must process more appeals faster. We are doing that, and there has been a dramatic improvement this year. However, what has also happened is that the number of appeals has increased at the same time. While 43% of appeals had a successful outcome for the appellant, of the 8,697 favourable decisions in appeals cases, almost two thirds of those decisions — 5,212 — were revised decisions made by statutorily appointed deciding officers of my Department who reviewed the claim following the initial disallowance. In many cases those revised decisions arose as a result of new facts or fresh evidence produced by the claimant after the original decision on his or her claim. In such

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

cases an appeals officer decision was not necessary. In addition, it should be noted that of the 12,692 appeals decided by appeals officers, a total of 9,207, or 73%, upheld the original decision of the deciding officer.

One of the major challenges faced by us is the information provided on appeal. I am sure the Deputy has experience of somebody who comes in and appeals it, and he then encourages them to provide data which, if it had been available earlier, would have avoided the need for an appeal. The figures bear out clearly what we have to examine, namely, whether there are processes we could put in place that would encourage people to give the full information at the outset because if that happened it would cut out many delays and save a great deal of work in my Department.

Marriages of Convenience

46. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action he will take to address the problem of sham marriages [39266/10]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Marriages of convenience, or “sham marriages”, are marriages which are entered into for the purpose of one of the parties gaining an automatic right of residency based on marriage to a person who already has a right of residency. These marriages exploit Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council which deals with the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the member states. This directive came into force on 20 April 2006. The matter was further compounded by the ruling of the European Court of Justice in the Metock case on 25 July 2008, which held that these rights applied to non-EU national spouses of EU nationals. As has been widely reported in the media, the Garda National Immigration Bureau has lodged objections to a large number of marriages involving non-EU-EEA nationals under section 58 of the Civil Registration Act 2004.

Under the Act, if the objection relates to the possible existence of a specified impediment to the intended marriage, it is referred to the Registrar General to be investigated. The objection can only be upheld if it is based on the provisions of the Civil Registration Act and these do not include questioning the reason for marriage.

Since the enactment of the marriage provisions of the Civil Registration Act 2004 on 5 November 2007 a total of 73 objections have been lodged by the Garda National Immigration Bureau for investigation under section 58(4) of the Act. To date, one of the objections has been withdrawn, and the couple in question has been advised that the marriage could proceed. The remaining objections are still under investigation by the Registrar General.

While objections to marriages are upheld if there is an impediment, it is important to point out that issues which go to the identity of a party to a marriage or to consent to marry can also, potentially, render a marriage invalid. In such cases, it would be unsafe to allow the marriage to proceed.

Newly updated Guidelines for Registrars for Marriage Notifications containing requirements concerning notification procedures, including the verification of identity and marital status, have been recently issued by the Registrar General to all registrars.

I am also aware that this matter has been considered by the Department of Justice and Law Reform in the context of the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill 2010.

I can assure the Deputy that the matter is being researched urgently with a view to identifying the further measures that may be taken, including the possibility of legislating for any such

measures. I am aware that procedures to prevent marriages of convenience are in place in other EU member states, and I would hope that equivalent measures might be introduced here. The General Register Office, GRO, has sought legal advice as to its legal options and will proceed on the basis of this advice as quickly as possible once it is received.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Does the Minister accept that all of the indications are that this is a significant problem? The registrar suggested recently that as many as 15% of civil ceremonies could be sham marriages. We also know that there has been a huge increase in the number of non-EU citizens applying for residency based on marriage to an EU citizen. I understand the figure is over 1,000 in the first six months of this year. All the indications are, therefore, that this is a significant problem.

I want the Minister to clarify a number of aspects. First, is it the case that the Attorney General intervened recently to prevent registrars from asking probing questions and advised them that such an approach was not supported by the law? Second, can the Minister tell us now the legal position? Is it a criminal offence to enter a sham marriage for the purposes of circumventing residency rules? Furthermore, is it a criminal offence to assist or facilitate such a marriage?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: To deal with the first question the Deputy asked on the figures, it is not possible to state the number of marriages of convenience that have been solemnised in the State but it is recognised that this is a significant issue. What we do know is the number of marriages between EU and EEA nationals and non-nationals since 2008. In 2008 there were 2,292. In 2009 there were——

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Minister——

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Deputy was interested in the figures.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I told the Minister that. I am asking him to answer the two specific questions I asked.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The answer will elucidate what we are doing. In 2009——

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Is it a criminal offence?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please allow the Minister to answer.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: In 2009 the figure is 3,362 and in 2010 to date——

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I did not ask for any of that.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: ——it is 770. It would be inaccurate and unfair to characterise all such marriages as sham marriages but it is noteworthy that the number of such marriages has been falling dramatically this year. That is because of increased vigilance and scrutiny surrounding marriages of convenience in this country and abroad.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Will the Minister answer the two questions?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: As to whether it is a criminal offence, the position is that there is no such legal offence as a sham marriage but if a marriage is not valid it is not valid. My understanding of this issue, although I am not a criminal lawyer, is that the position regarding these marriages is the same as that concerning any other marriage wrongfully entered into.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: And the other question.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: It is in regard to the Attorney General's intervention.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I understand legal advice was given on the application of the rules. We are examining the possibility of changing the law as well as best practice in other jurisdictions and, if necessary, legislation will be brought in to deal with this issue.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: It is all very well for the Minister to say he is reviewing the matter. Most other EU states have laws to prevent such sham marriages and the fact that we do not means that Ireland has become a soft-touch location for such marriages. We are told by reports in the media that there has been intense lobbying of the Government by several EU countries about the growing problem of sham marriages. We also know that since as far back as 2006, the Latvian Government has been making regular approaches to this Government asking for the law to be changed in view of the large number of young Latvian women who have been enticed into this practice. Can the Minister tell us how many other countries have lobbied him to change the law? When are we likely to see some movement in this area, given the level of concern that has been expressed by other EU member states?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Deputy is right in that Latvia has been very much to the fore in protecting its female citizens in this regard. I understand other foreign embassies have stated their concerns by contacting the General Register Office. The feedback from these embassies suggests that the requirement in the new guidelines to obtain official authentication of foreign birth certificates is of assistance to embassies in identifying marriages of convenience. In such cases the embassy in question can interview the person concerned and advise him or her of the implications and risks of what they are undertaking. I assure the Deputy——

Deputy Róisín Shortall: There is no requirement for people to approach their embassies. That is the problem.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Sorry?

Deputy Róisín Shortall: There is no requirement for such people to approach their embassies.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Yes, but in the short term we are dealing with that by seeking authentication of foreign birth certificates.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Is that being done now?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: That is happening, yes. That is what I am saying to the Deputy.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Since when?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I am also saying to the Deputy that I am very concerned about this issue. The Árd Chláraitheoir is working on the issue, and it is my hope that we will introduce legislation because I believe every possible step should be taken. I understand consultations are taking place——

Deputy Róisín Shortall: This was first brought to the attention of the Department in 2006.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Allow the House to move on to the next question.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: When can we expect legislation?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: As I pointed out in the original reply, this became a matter of serious concern following the European Court of Justice judgment in the *Metock* case.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: When can we expect legislation?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I do not have a definite date for legislation, but the matter is being worked on proactively and I have had consultations with the *Árd Chláraitheoir*. The Deputy can be absolutely——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We are over time on this question, Minister.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I have not seen it on any list.

Social Welfare Fraud

47. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection his Department's fraud savings target for 2010; the amount that has been saved to date [38981/10]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The prevention of fraud and abuse of the social welfare system is an integral part of the day to day work of the Department. A key objective of the Department's control strategy is to ensure that the right person is paid the right amount of money at the right time. A four-pronged control strategy has been adopted by the Department, namely, prevention of fraud and error at the initial claim stage; early detection through effective review of claims in payment; measures to deter fraud; and the pursuit and recovery of overpayments. The rapidly changing economic environment, with large increases in the number of people unemployed, poses challenges for the prevention and effective management of fraud and control. The Department's response to these challenges has been to introduce new, evidence-based measures to target control activity at high-risk categories of claimants.

Control savings are an estimate of the value of the various control activities across the schemes in payment, and represent an estimate of the value of prevented expenditure on fraudulent claims. Actual recoveries arise where the Department raises overpayments in individual cases. A target of €533 million was set for control savings in 2010. At the end of September this year, some €323 million in estimated control savings had been recorded. However, work-to-rule measures in the Department earlier this year affected the reporting of the value of control activities.

Control activity is being focused on the prevention of fraud and error at claim application stage, as this is the most cost-effective mechanism of reducing losses in social welfare schemes. This is what I call a gate-keeper effect. However, savings made at application stage cannot be estimated as the claim does not go into payment.

In my view welfare fraud is theft. It is a serious crime and the Department is doing everything it can to target the people who abuse the system. The consequences for social welfare fraud can be severe. Criminal prosecutions may be taken against persons who defraud the social welfare payment system and employers who fail to carry out their statutory obligations. Fraud detection measures have increased and improved significantly over the last number of years and will continue to be reviewed to prioritise resources in order to achieve results.

The Department is committed to ensuring that social welfare payments are available to those who are entitled to them. In this regard, the control programme of the Department is carefully monitored and the various measures are refined to ensure they remain effective.

Deputy Michael Ring: I want to put a straight question to the Minister. In the week of the volcanic ash crisis this year, 3,500 fewer people signed on for the dole. I ask the Minister to confirm to the House and to the country that welfare tourism — that is, people flying in from other countries on cheap flights to claim social welfare — is not taking place. Did the Department investigate the reason 3,500 fewer people signed on during that crisis?

Why has the Minister reduced the projected savings due to reductions in fraud? He was hoping in 2009 to achieve savings of €616 million but this has been reduced in 2010 to €533 million. People are concerned about two different types of welfare fraud — one type in another jurisdiction not far from us and the other type perpetrated by people flying in from abroad. I want the country and the House to be reassured that this is not happening.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I answered that question comprehensively with facts and figures on Committee Stage of the Bill we debated during the early summer. However, I will send the detailed facts to the Deputy. These show that the week in question was not exceptional in terms of the number of people not signing on. Off the top of my head, around 90% of the people who did not sign on that week were Irish. Of the rest, some of the applicants were from faraway parts of the world, such as Pakistan, India, Australia and America, which does not fit in with the “cheap flights” idea. If anything, the figures from that week show that few people were discommoded by the ash cloud. The data shows that it is not true that thousands of people are flying in to collect social welfare payments. All the evidence is that because people must now collect unemployment payments every week — they must physically attend the post office and provide their identities to the postmaster or postmistress — that is not the area in which the greatest savings are to be made.

As the Deputy knows, we have done a lot of work on control savings. As I said in my reply, in the early part of the year the control measures were in place and savings were being made but, because of the industrial action, these savings were not reported. It did not make any difference to the savings that were made on the ground, but it did make a difference to the reporting, and that has affected the figures.

Deputy Michael Ring: I am not sure the Minister has answered the question or that he has reassured this House or the country that fraud was not going on.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Deputy——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Allow the Deputy to ask the question.

Deputy Michael Ring: I am very worried. I asked the Minister whether there was an investigation by his Department; I hope there was.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Yes.

Deputy Michael Ring: I am glad. My next question follows on from this. When will we have a system of identity cards for those collecting social welfare in order to prevent fraud? We need to do something. Money is valuable now and people are under extreme pressure. Those who need social welfare should get it, but those who are defrauding the social welfare system are taking money from the Minister’s pocket and from everybody else’s pockets. I want to make sure that social welfare goes to the people who should have it.

I ask the Minister for a breakdown of the savings made in the area of fraud and overpayment. How much of the overpayments were as a result of mistakes by the Department and how much were due to fraud?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: On the Deputy's first question, I will obtain the information for him. I hope that when he gets the information he will consider it factually and objectively.

Deputy Michael Ring: Of course I will.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: He will see that the story is not as it has been portrayed. We are very keen to eliminate fraud and, as the Deputy will be aware, we have made substantial savings through, for example, the fraud control measure on child benefit this year. I will do anything I can to try to eliminate fraud.

The Deputy asked about the identity card. I would hope to have the first of them by the end of the year and to introduce it early next year. It will be a chip and PIN card with a high-quality photograph — a similar arrangement to that which exists in a passport. However, it is not strictly speaking an identity card and perhaps we should not use that term; it is a social services card. While it will enable people to avail of State services, it has nothing to do with the justice system so a garda will not be able to stop someone on the street looking for——

Deputy Michael Ring: No, but we want to know——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please, let the Minister finish.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I believe it will stop many of the abuses that are taking place and is a necessary step in the right direction.

We are also stepping up on the national employment action programme. If one listens to what is being said on the street, there is a temptation for people to work and draw at the same time. We need to activate people back into work and to close down on that.

What was the Deputy's final question?

Deputy Michael Ring: How many are Department errors and how many are fraud? The Minister can send the details to me later.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is very hard at times to identify whether——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister might revert to the Deputy.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I will revert to him, but I must warn him that it is very hard to know in some cases whether it was genuine error or whether someone purposely gave wrong information. Where we know it is genuine fraud, we prosecute and if it is a genuine error, obviously we do not.

Employment Support Services

48. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide details on 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. [40183/10]

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 streamlined response to the income support and job search needs of people who are unemployed.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

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. This new initiative will be an important element in the development and delivery of employment and community services and will aim to provide quality work opportunities to the unemployed and beneficial outcomes to the community. A key feature of the new scheme will be to provide a new activation route that will support unemployed people in remaining job-ready for re-entry to employment as the economic environment improves.

Deputy Michael Ring: In the summer during the Dáil recess, the Minister announced that he would create 10,000 to 15,000 community scheme places. The rural social scheme has worked very well and while I would like to see more places on that scheme, it would only deal with a certain section of society. How does the Minister propose to get the other 300,000 people on to community schemes such that there is no extra cost to the State?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Approximately 270,000 people are getting payment for a full week; in other words, many people on the live register are working part-time. It is intended to focus particularly on people on jobseeker's allowance who have been in receipt of unemployment payment for more than a year. It will be done using the model of the rural social scheme but extending eligibility to people who have been on long-term jobseeker's allowance; in other words, it will take away the requirement to be either a fisherman or a farmer. It seems to be the most efficient and simplest way to do it. It will require an extension of the scheme into the cities where there is serious unemployment as well as in rural areas and I hope to be able to roll it out in the near future.

However, it must be linked to the other part, which is an employment action plan. The idea is to identify the people eligible for a scheme and to get agreement to provide their names to the various groups that would be organising the schemes and then to allow them to provide the employment. Obviously, those who are not available to go on a scheme, including those who do not respond to employment action programmes, will be intensively interviewed. People who do not turn up for interviews after two requests without some valid excuse will have their payments suspended. We cannot have people available for work and actively seeking work, but unavailable for interview when asked to do so.

Deputy Michael Ring: Will this be compulsory? We do not want unemployed accountants and doctors asked to go out and clean the streets, which would be a very unfair way to get people off social welfare and I hope this scheme will not do so. When people lose their jobs and go to their local social welfare office, they are advised of their entitlements, but are not told of the training or job opportunities available and how they can get retrained. When will we have a one-stop shop so that they do not need to go all over the place to get the information? What plans does the Department have to develop such a solution?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There are two questions there. I said that we would make the names available to the various community groups. The Deputy has been working with the community sector for long enough to know that a community group will try to place people in jobs that suit them. I am astounded that the question of whether community groups would force people with qualifications to do jobs that do not suit them keeps coming up; I have never come across a community group that would do that. However, it will be mandatory for an accountant on the dole or a doctor on jobseeker's allowance who is called for interview to attend that interview. Obviously, the first avenue for people attending interview will be to try to get them into productive employment; the second avenue is training or education; and the third avenue would be a scheme job. It is absolutely fair to say that people will be placed in occupations that would

be suitable for them. The level of community work goes way beyond trimming the hedges on the side of the road — important and all as that is. I have a list of all the different community work jobs, which is considerably wider than that. It is very degrading of community work to continually refer just to trimming of hedges.

I hope the Deputy will facilitate this happening. As he knows, I will shortly introduce a Bill, which I hope to enact before Christmas, to facilitate the final transfer of responsibility for FÁS to my Department. The purpose of that transfer is to do precisely what the Deputy suggests. In future when people go into an employment exchange they will also be activated in the same place in a seamless service. I look forward to the Deputy's full co-operation in getting the Bill through quickly so that we can move early in the new year on that.

Deputy Michael Ring: We will wait until we have seen the Bill.

Pension Provisions

49. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of defined benefit pension schemes which fail the minimum funding standard; the number of persons affected by this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39269/10]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Under the Pensions Act, defined benefit pension schemes must meet a minimum funding standard which requires that schemes maintain sufficient assets to enable them discharge their accrued liabilities in the event of the scheme winding up. Where schemes do not satisfy the funding standard, the sponsors or trustees must submit a funding proposal to the Pensions Board to restore full funding within a three-year period.

At the end of 2009, there were 254,325 members in 1,192 defined benefit schemes subject to the funding standard. It was estimated at that time that in excess of 75% of these schemes were in deficit. A recent survey undertaken by the Pensions Board found that 70% of schemes were reported to be in deficit. However, the extent of the level of under-funding will not be fully apparent until all schemes carry out their next actuarial assessment and report the results to the Pensions Board.

The Government is conscious of the pressures on both sponsoring employers and pension scheme trustees, arising from the very significant losses incurred by pension funds during 2007 and 2008. While schemes recovered some of their losses in the past year or so, I am anxious to ensure, in so far as possible, that pension scheme trustees and employers have sufficient time and space to assess fully the implications for their schemes and the remedial action they can take. This was the thinking behind the implementation of a number of temporary measures in December 2008 to ease the funding pressures on pension schemes.

In addition, the Pensions Act was amended by Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2009 to provide for a number of measures which would support the trustees and employers in responding to the significant challenges they encountered following the down turn in the financial markets. In March this year, the Government launched the national pensions framework. It sets out our intention for a radical and wide-scale reform of the Irish pension system. I announced last month that work on the new defined benefit pension model, as outlined in this framework, would be expedited. My Department will aim to introduce this new model following legislative changes on 1 July 2011.

Following this announcement, the deadline of 30 November for the submission of funding proposal to the Pensions Board was deferred. It is anticipated that the deferral of this deadline will allow schemes time to take account of reforms to the defined benefit model in the preparation of funding proposals for submission to the Pensions Board by a date which will be announced by the board.

Deputy Billy Timmins: Does the Minister agree that the ineptitude of the Government is best reflected in its failure to deal with the issue of the pensions time bomb for more than a decade? Does he also agree that it is disgraceful that 200,000 people who have paid into defined benefit schemes might not have their expectations met and that nothing has been done by the Government in the interim other than to defer dates? When will there will be positive results? When will the new defined benefit scheme be established? Everything appears to have been put on the long finger. What proposals has the Minister to deal with the shortfall? What message can he send to the 200,000 people who will not receive the pensions they expected?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: As I announced recently, it is our intention to bring forward a new defined benefit model, the idea of which is to have core benefits and then to have top-up benefits, depending on the market. It will not be mandatory for schemes that are properly funded to transfer to this scheme but it will be available for schemes with funding difficulties. There is a tight timeframe for introducing all the necessary legislation by 1 July 2011 and, therefore, the Deputy cannot say we are dragging our heels on this. Legislative changes will be required and that is our intention.

The Government also published a comprehensive pensions framework last February and I reject the contention that it has not been active on this issue. The collapse in the value of equities on markets worldwide has had a devastating effect on the pensions industry and while some of the losses have been made back this year, they do not compensate for the losses of previous years.

Deputy Billy Timmins: I disagree with the Minister. The Government has dragged its heels on this issue for more than a decade. With regard to the pensions framework, when can we expect the implementation group to be established?

The Minister referred to returns on equity investments being bad over the past number of years. Returns were not bad over the past year. However, the National Pensions Reserve Fund only achieved a return of 2.5% on an investment of €7 billion in 2009. The fund was set up to protect pensions into the future but every policy from every political party proposes to raid the fund. At this stage it has probably been raided ten times over. What is the Minister's view on the raiding of the fund? Has he considered other measures to deal with the pensions shortfall such as increasing the pension age or reducing pensions? Has he thought of anything outside the box?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An implementation group has been set up and four sub-committees are working on various aspects of the framework. I have expedited the work on the defined benefit scheme, which is important, because I agree with the Deputy that this is an urgent issue. I am dealing with it as an urgent issue and will continue to do so.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Minister has deferred it. He has not expedited anything.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I have. I said I will bring forward new proposals, which include legislation, and I will have them implemented by 1 July 2011. I have expedited the process because of its urgency. What happened subsequently was the Pensions Board decided to defer the date to give schemes the opportunity to avail of the new scheme. That makes a great deal of common sense.

The National Pensions Reserve Fund is a matter for the Minister for Finance. It does not relate to this discussion because the fund was established specifically to cover public service pensions.

Other Questions

Social Welfare Appeals

50. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to recruit and divert more appeals officers to the Social Welfare Appeals Office to deal with the backlog of social welfare appeals [40035/10]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There has been a significant increase in the number of appeals received by the social welfare appeals office in recent years, largely as a result of increased unemployment during the economic downturn. The number of appeals received by the office in 2009 increased by 46% compared to 2008, which, in turn, was 27% greater than the numbers received in 2007. In response, my Department assigned three additional permanent appeals officers in January 2009.

The Department has also pursued other options to deal with the increasing inflow of appeals including operational and process changes. These have included additional staff who have been assigned to the administration area of the office; more emphasis is now being placed on dealing with appeals on a summary basis 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.

The social welfare appeals system is quasi-judicial in nature and the determinations made by appeals officers are governed by relevant social welfare legislation and by case law. It takes considerable time for newly appointed officers to become fully proficient in the full range of the Department's schemes and legislation. Accordingly, as an exceptional measure, it was decided to re-employ, on a temporary contract basis, a number of retired officers. Eight retired appeals officers, working on a part-time basis, have been employed in my Department since June 2010. It was expected that the provision of experienced staff resources would yield an immediate dividend in terms of making inroads into the number of appeals on hand. This has proven to be the case with 3,000 cases having being finalised by them in the period June to the end of September. It is expected that a further 3,000 cases will be finalised before the end of the year. It is intended that the retired officers will be retained until the end of 2011 if the number of appeals on hands warrants this.

The Department is reviewing the situation on an ongoing basis and will seek to ensure that adequate resources are provided to the appeals office, having regard to the current moratorium on recruitment and promotions.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Does the Minister agree the appeals system is a shambles? Every Member is only too well aware of the difficulties. For example, the Leas-Cheann Comhairle recently drew attention to this problem. The typical waiting time for an appeal is in excess of nine months. Oral hearings that were first requested in August 2009 have not yet been heard. That is how bad it is. The Minister referred to the additional staff he has provided. Does he accept the information I received in reply to a recent parliamentary question, which stated the capacity of the appeals office is to handle 29,000 appeals in the current year? However, there is demand for 50,000 appeals. How does he intend to bridge that gap? Not only are the delays costing the State and claimants money, waiting times will worsen unless the Department meets demand. What action does the Minister intend to take?

4 o'clock

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I have outlined considerable actions that have been taken and the results can be seen. Up to the end of September 2009, 12,873 appeals were heard while the figure up to the end of September 2010 increased to 20,171. The challenge we face is that up to 2007 the average number of appeals per annum was 15,000 but that has jumped——

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Minister is not meeting current demand.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: ——and it is expected that upwards of 33,000 appeals will be received this year. The number of appeals, therefore, has more than doubled. We are taking many steps to streamline the process and to make sure, for example, where further information is provided that the case does not go through the appeals process and is referred back to the Department where the decision can be revised. These steps are having the desired effect.

Furthermore, as I pointed out in my answer, some of the steps we took did not happen until mid-year, such as bringing back retired appeals officers, so I hope we can build up to a situation where we at least meet the increased demand. Our next challenge is to get ahead of ourselves and reduce the existing lists. I see this happening in a multifaceted way; we must look at why so many people make appeals in the first place.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Minister is not accepting the facts of the situation and the maths involved. He already said the capacity of the appeals office is 29,000 but the demand is for 50,000 appeals in a year.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No, it is not.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: According to replies to parliamentary questions, it is. The Minister is not doing enough and the waiting times will get longer.

The other point I ask him to accept is that given 40% of those appeals fail, and that many of those whose appeals do not succeed are entitled to supplementary welfare allowance, every month there is a delay in hearing appeals that costs the taxpayer €600,000. What is the Minister doing to put in place a modern public service in the appeals office that will deal with appeals in a timely fashion and why is he not attaching more urgency to this given the huge costs involved to the taxpayer, costs that could be avoided?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I attach a huge degree of urgency to this. The Deputy is wrong on a number of points, she is adding the number of appeals that will come in this year and the full backlog but there will always be some appeals on hand and because it takes time to deal with appeals, they will never reach zero. The Deputy has added the number of appeals on hand and the expected number.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: That is the demand this year and the Minister is not meeting it.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There will always be carry over of appeals into the following year, which the Deputy totally ignores in her mathematics. It takes time to deal with appeals because this is a quasi-judicial situation. I outlined the time taken in the answer to the priority question; it is needed because when an appeal is made, it is examined, if there is new information it is sent back for an opportunity for the deciding officer to change the decision, then it comes back and an appeals officer looks at it. In some cases, the appeal then goes to an oral hearing. There will never be a situation where zero time is taken for an appeal, there will always be appeals under way, that has always been the way. The Deputy's mathematics ignore that.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Is nine months acceptable?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The other thing wrong with the Deputy's mathematics is that supplementary welfare is paid but if the appeal is awarded, the money paid in supplementary welfare is taken into account.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: What if it is not awarded?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: In many cases supplementary welfare is not paid. Supplementary welfare is only paid where the community welfare officer, having done his own means test, believes there is a *prima facie* case for the payment of supplementary welfare.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: This costs €600,000 a month.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Therefore, the figure the Deputy gave for the cost of supplementary welfare is wrong.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Would the Minister not admit there has been a dramatic increase in the number of appeals because of a dramatic increase in the number of refusals for various payments? Will he confirm the number of cases on appeal is the highest ever and that a scoping section in the Department provides at least a year in advance to deal with the level of queries under a particular category and that it is being done now to provide for next year?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The first thing I paid attention to when I entered the Department was the length of the appeals process. As a constituency politician, I am more than aware of the problem. In fairness to the appeals office, which is independent, it has taken a huge number of steps to deal with the large increase in the number of applications.

It is obvious that many decisions are now being revised before they go through a full appeal because the applicants are giving information on appeal that they are not giving in the initial application. It is interesting to look at the statistics I gave this afternoon that show we must look at ways to encourage people to give the information at the first stage that obviates the necessity for an appeal because many successful appeals are based on further information being provided the second time around. I should look at Deputy Durkan's point, that there should be a way to engineer a situation where people do not feel the need to appeal.

Social Welfare Benefits

51. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he has considered easing the qualification requirements for back to education allowance having regard to the rising needs in the present economic situation and the necessity to ensure availability of an up skilled labour force in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39972/10]

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The back to education allowance 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.

With effect from 19 July 2010, changes have been made to the qualifying conditions of the back to education scheme to reflect the present economic situation. The period for which a person is required to be on a qualifying social welfare payment before accessing BTEA was reduced from 12 months to nine months. A two 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.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

In addition, a person can avail of BTEA to resume studies in a second or subsequent year of a third level course whereas, prior to July, a person could only apply for BTEA if he was commencing year one of a course. This also applies to people who are granted an exemption from a period of the third level course. A person who completed an earlier year or years of his 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.

These enhancements build on other improvements made to the scheme in recent years in response to the changing economic climate. From September 2007, the qualifying period for illness benefit was reduced from three years to two years; from September 2008, the cost of education allowance, which is an additional annual payment made to cover the cost of books and materials, was increased from €400 to €500; and from September 2009, the six month waiting period for those pursuing second level courses was reduced to three months.

A jobseeker who wishes to participate in a part-time course may do so under the Department's part-time education option. Participants may continue to receive their existing social welfare entitlements provided they continue to satisfy all the existing terms and conditions of their jobseeker scheme including availability for work.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

The number of participants on the back to education scheme in the 2009-10 academic year was 20,808, which represented a 79% increase on the previous year. The number of participants in the 2008-09 academic year also represented an increase of 31% on the previous academic year. As of 22 October, approximately 21,500 participants were approved for the back to education allowance. Due to the nature of the scheme a significant number of applications are processed in October and indications are that BTEA numbers will increase noticeably again for this academic year.

The Government has devoted significant resources to the back to education allowance. The challenges presented by the changed economic circumstances are being addressed at a cross departmental and agency level. Specifically, joint approaches have been adopted by the Departments of Social Protection, Enterprise, Trade and Innovation and Education and Skills to the development of a range of activation programmes which support the unemployed in getting work, work experience or the education and skills that will support them in the search for employment.

The national employment action plan is the main measure that addresses progression of those on the live register. Under the NEAP, the Department refers persons to FÁS at three months. The process provides a stimulus to job search and affords an opportunity to explore, under professional guidance, the full range of employment and training services offered by FÁS. A total of 157,000 training and work experience places will be provided by FÁS in 2010, compared to 66,000 places in 2008 and 130,000 places in 2009.

Full-time opportunities are being provided for more than 40,000 learners, including the unemployed, under the Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centre, vocational training opportunity scheme and post-leaving certificate, PLC, programmes. VTOS, Youthreach and STTC participants receive a training allowance in lieu of their social welfare payments and are eligible for a range of additional meal, travel and long-term unemployment bonus allowances. They are also eligible to access child care supports. Unemployed PLC participants may avail of the BTEA. Part-time opportunities, targeted at the low-skilled, the disadvantaged and the hard to reach, including the unemployed, are available through the back to education initiative,

adult literacy and community education schemes and together will cater for an estimated 125,000 learners in 2010.

Other activation measures include the work placement and the short time work training programmes, sponsored by the Department of Education and Skills. Also included is a range of third level labour market activation initiatives for jobseekers, which in 2009 supported more than 3,000 unemployed people to embark on a range of newly developed transition and accelerated programmes in institutes of technology, as well as part-time undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in institutes of technology and universities that support the goals of the smart economy. In addition, the labour market activation fund is supporting almost 60 innovative projects and 12,000 participants in 2010.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Given the qualification requirements now in place, and having regard to his references to 2007, 2008 and 2009, and the fact that this is 2010 and the economic situation is more serious than was the case one, two or three years ago, will the Minister look at the obstacles that exist to ensure the greatest possible number of young people who are anxious about going back to education, to provide for themselves now and in future, be dealt with as a matter of urgency?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Since 22 October, 21,500 participants were approved for the back to education scheme. This compares with 20,808 in 2009-10, which was a 79% increase on the previous year. The scheme has been broadened and increased dramatically. We must be careful in drawing up terms for this scheme not to create dead weight. It is clear we should focus much of the effort on second level qualifications because those who are further down the education chain find it more difficult to get a job. Those who experience the greatest difficulty getting employment are those with the least employment opportunities. The case has been made to extend the scheme to cover masters' degrees and second primary degrees but that would involve a major commitment to expenditure and we must compare that with the chances people who already have a degree have to get a job.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: I am bringing to the Minister's attention the case of a young man who was on jobseeker's benefit and who had to transfer to jobseeker's allowance. His allowance was not through by the time he started back in education. He is now getting neither allowance, which is serious. He has been dealing with his social welfare office but, as of yet, has not received an answer.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am not sure the Minister can deal with specific cases.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: If the Deputy passes me on the details of this case, I will have it investigated.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Will the Minister accept this scheme is in need of urgent reform? The Department's view is that everything is okay as long as it is treading water. The fact is there is a huge demand for places on this scheme. What on earth is the reason for not allowing people to participate in third level courses after being unemployed for three months? There seems to be a mindset in the Department that people will give up their jobs if it is made too easy for them to do so. The nature of unemployment has completely changed. What is the sense in making people wait longer than three months before allowing them to participate on a course through this scheme? Should we not encourage people to go back to education and enhance their educational qualifications so that they will be ready to avail of employment opportunities when the economic recovery eventually comes? What is the Minister's defence for not allowing this to happen?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It comes down to using the limited resources available. A large number of people who lose a job regain other employment in the first six months. This figure then tails off——

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That was the way it used to be.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It still is the case. After the first six months, the figure tends to tail off.

A person getting access to a third level course through the back to education scheme will be paid the equivalent of the jobseeker's allowance, a minimum of €10,000 a year, for the foreseeable future. That is an expensive commitment to make, so the best use of resources and money must be ensured. Until recently, allocating the allowance was focused on those finding it difficult to get employment. That same argument applies to allowing people to do second degrees, as I pointed out earlier to Deputy Durkan. It is important for the scheme's focus to be retained at second level education participation because the evidence shows people with degrees have a much better chance of getting jobs than those who do not complete second level education.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: That is the very point we are making.

Deputy Ulick Burke: I support Deputy Shortall's request for a review of this scheme. I had the case of a young girl on jobseeker's allowance who fell four weeks short of the time criteria for qualifying for the back to education scheme. She was accepted, however, into the first year of a nursing course but was denied the back to education allowance. She appealed the decision and continued to participate in the course. Now, the Department has even withdrawn her jobseeker's allowance. There is neither rhyme, reason or consistency in the Department's actions. Will the Minister review the scheme urgently?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I cannot comment on the individual case in question. No matter where one draws the line when it comes to the cut-off criteria for allowances, there will be always someone on the wrong side of it. I accept it is difficult for the individuals affected but it is inherent in the whole social welfare system.

Regarding the wider question of whether it should be easier to get on to the scheme, it is important to bear in mind the overall cost and using the moneys for the best.

Deputy Ulick Burke: The Minister's Department is making it difficult to get on the scheme.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is not the case.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister without interruption.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: No, that is a fundamental mistake made when assessing this scheme. For example, making a commitment to 100 people to do a five-year degree course would amount to €50,000 per person for the course's duration, €5 million in total. This must be compared to their chances——

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It should be compared to what is best for the economy.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: ——which are very high, of getting jobs in the intervening period. As there is a finite amount of moneys available, it is important such a long-term burden is not placed on the State, particularly when it could mean others would be deprived of other welfare payments.

Written Answers follow Adjournment Debate.

Adjournment Debate Matters

An Ceann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 21 and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Jimmy Deenihan — the acquisition of a site for a proposed new Garda station in Tralee, County Kerry; (2) Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh — the urgent need for the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation to intervene immediately to prevent the closure of the FÁS training centre in Cabra, Dublin, which caters for 450 full-time trainees and apprentices and nearly 250 evening course trainees, especially given the fact there is a large waiting list to get on courses there and more than 450,000 people are on the live register, many of whom are seeking retraining, upskilling or a change in their employment directions, some of which could be catered for in a fully staffed, properly resourced and repaired FÁS centre in Cabra; (3) Deputy Emmet Stagg — the remediation of 1.1 million tonnes of unauthorised, unspecified waste, at the landfill site at Kerdiffstown, Naas, County Kildare; (4) Deputy Thomas McEllistrim — the potential for developing and nurturing entrepreneurship in schools; (5) Deputy Mattie McGrath — the need for a new Garda station in Clonmel, County Tipperary; (6) Deputy Paul Connaughton — the failure of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his Department in not paying the correct single farm payment and area based payment to thousands of farmers over the past month, the reason five farmers were not contacted much earlier in the year about alleged mapping errors, given that the applications were in his Department as far back as last April, and if he will state why some farmers received letters outlining problems that did not exist, why it has taken the private company which is re-digitising the maps in question so long to complete the exercise and if the Minister is aware of the large number of farmers who have bank commitments to meet and who are now in grave financial circumstances as a result of this bureaucratic mess; (7) Deputy Martin Ferris — the urgent need for the National Roads Authority to approve a realignment of a dangerous section of the N21 at Barnagh, County Limerick which has claimed the lives of five people so far this year; (8) Deputy Michael Moynihan — issues in funding for an association (details supplied); (9) Deputy John O'Mahony — the urgent need to address the recent job losses in Mayo namely 200 jobs at Baxter Healthcare; (10) Deputy Lucinda Creighton — the National Asset Management Agency's efforts to pursue developers; (11) Deputy James Bannon — the need for the Minister for Health and Children to explain why a teenage girl should suffer and her health deteriorate while essential funding to allow vital spinal surgery is not available, although timely surgical treatment is essential.

The matters raised by Deputies McEllistrim, Creighton, Deenihan and Mattie McGrath have been selected for discussion.

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Government lost another man overboard today.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Not over here.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is always a point of discussion when a member of Parliament decides for his or her own reasons to resign. It is one fewer vote and one fewer voice.

James McDaid has been an advocate for a general election for some time. We now have the unprecedented, bizarre, even GUBU-esque, situation where the number of vacant seats exceeds the Government's working majority. It is bad for democracy, is anti-democratic and smacks of cowardice on the Government's part when those in the constituencies with vacancies are not allowed their mandate or the people a national verdict on the Government. The Taoiseach continues to brazen it out when he knows he does not have a valid authority to

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

govern. The people no longer believe the Government and neither do those outside the country. The Taoiseach's credibility has crumbled, the Government's integrity shattered. The 7.42% interest rate demanded by the bond markets this evening means the Government's proposed budgetary plan is already dead in the water because the international markets see no credibility in the projections for the economy's growth.

The only credible action that will restore people's faith in politics is if the Government goes to them to test its mandate for whatever budgetary proposal it wants to make. In view of the continuing instability both at home and abroad, I challenge the Taoiseach and the Government to stand up and be counted. Is the Taoiseach prepared to put his budgetary plan to the people?

Deputy Finian McGrath: He will next Monday.

The Taoiseach: Given recent events, one would have expected some measure of responsibility from the Leader of the Opposition, who aspires to the office of the Taoiseach——

Deputy Frank Feighan: That is a good one coming from the Taoiseach.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: The Taoiseach is one to speak about responsibility.

The Taoiseach: ——not to characterise the country's prospects as he just did.

Data from the October tax returns will be available today at 4.30 p.m. which will confirm our tax take and budgetary plans are on track and expenditure is under control. The urgency to bring forward a four-year economic plan and a budget that will front-load the necessary adjustments of €15 billion is in the national interest. The Government will not abdicate its responsibility in this respect and will look, where it is possible, to obtain responsible support.

As was stated by the Ceann Comhairle at the opening of today's proceedings, Dr. Jim McDaid has tendered his resignation as a Member of this House. I wish him well. He has been a friend and colleague for many years. The Ceann Comhairle echoed what he stated first in September 2009 since when he has had an opinion on those issues. However, this Government's intention is to do its job at this time, and to use this House as a means by which we will put forward our budgetary policies.

I ask the Deputy to desist from suggesting that my authority is any different from that of any other Taoiseach, including the one under which he served. The authority of a Taoiseach is decided by the majority support of this House.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The difference between having an election and not having one is the mandate, the authority from the people by a ballot on the plan to rescue this country from the financial crisis the Taoiseach and his Government have led it into. As one of the Ministers told after the Farmleigh episode, "If you are on antibiotics for 13 years, you do become immune to a lot of things". That comment came from the Taoiseach's own ranks.

The country is unable to borrow money now. The Government cannot go back to the bond markets because the interest rates are too high and we are paying too much money to deal with this. The reason is that the international markets have no faith, credibility or belief in the strategy the Government is adopting. It is depicted by the first line of the Government's amendment to the Fine Gael Private Members' motion, which is down for discussion this evening. The motion refers to the lack of impetus in dealing with serious crime and activities at a high level in banking institutions here, for which nobody has been punished.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should put a question.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The amendment, recognising the sudden onset and serious nature of the worst global financial crisis in more than 75 years, commends the Government for the rapid and effective response it has made to reform the structures of financial regulation, support the banks, restore confidence, protect consumers and establish a basis for a sustainable banking sector in the future. That is just how far out of touch the Government really is. It does not matter to a carer for an Alzheimer's patient what condition the subordinated bond investors are in.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should ask a question, please.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is the lack of front line services, as evidenced by the Government's gross incompetence, that has led to this.

The Taoiseach mentioned Deputy McDaid, whom I commend for his courage. In his letter to the Taoiseach, he said he believed that neither the ECB, the European Commission, the IMF nor the international bond markets have confidence in the Government. Dr. McDaid said that he is a citizen first and a Fianna Fáil member afterwards. However, the reverse applies in the case of the Government because it is the party first and the country second. The Taoiseach is now being threatened by the absent Greens also.

In my time in this House I cannot recall a situation where the Government of the day had more unfilled vacancies than its working majority. The people are not being allowed to have their say.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we have a question, please?

Deputy Enda Kenny: Irrespective of the people's decision, the only way to restore some sense of confidence, belief and integrity is to have a mandate from the people for a Government to rescue our country. The Taoiseach has led us to this crisis and is now afraid and lacking in courage to put his plan to the people.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is way over time.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Taoiseach should put his plan to the people and let them give their judgment and mandate. That is the only thing that will restore some sense of credibility, belief and integrity given the situation in which we now find ourselves. Is the Taoiseach prepared, as head of Government, to put his case to the people and let us sort it out? If that responsibility is given to this party we will gladly lead as we have done in the past.

The Taoiseach: It would be fine if, in the present, we could perhaps have some leadership from the Opposition. In terms of our excess expenditure over income at the end of October, the reduction in the Exchequer requirement is €14.4 billion. It was €22.7 billion for the same period last year. Through its policies therefore the Government is in the process of closing the gap that needs to be closed between what we are spending and what revenues are coming in.

A Deputy: They are closing the country.

The Taoiseach: As a result of the budgetary policies we are implementing this year, which were strenuously opposed by Deputy Kenny and his party last year, we are seeing our revenues coming in on profile. So far from the Deputy's continual depiction of this economy as not being in a position to recover, the stabilisation we are seeing at the moment——

Deputy Enda Kenny: As the Taoiseach well knows, I actually defended him and the country in the United States and Europe in recent weeks.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach is in possession.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy does far more harm in public than anything he can do in private.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I have defended the Taoiseach and this country abroad, in the United States and other places.

(Interruptions).

A Deputy: The Taoiseach has done a great deal of harm in recent years in this country.

The Taoiseach: I listened in silence to the Deputy's meanderings.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: It would be better if the Taoiseach was silent.

The Taoiseach: This Government is pursuing the policies that are necessary to deal with the issues of the day, including how the country will recover. That is what is happening and it has been strenuously opposed by the Deputy's party at all times.

Deputy Seán Barrett: Who wrote this stuff?

The Taoiseach: His continual depiction of this economy as being incapable of recovery or not in fact being stabilised, is a mantra that does nothing to give confidence at home or abroad. I ask the Deputy to reflect on some of what he said in his first intervention here, which does nothing to help this country at this time either.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I pointed out that there was not any kind of stimulus in our economy.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Eamon Gilmore.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Those are the words of a desperate Taoiseach.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: We will not support the Taoiseach.

Deputy Michael Ring: We will not back the Taoiseach in Opposition, although that is what he wants.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I join the Taoiseach and Deputy Kenny in wishing Dr. Jim McDaid well in his retirement.

On yesterday's statement by the Minister for Health and Children in which she announced a voluntary redundancy scheme in the Health Service Executive, from that announcement, it would appear that it is intended to have a scheme for about 4,000 HSE staff. This voluntary redundancy scheme has been a while in coming. As far back as November 2004, the then chairman of the interim HSE, Mr. Kevin Kelly, told us that there was too much bureaucracy in the system. On 17 October 2007, the Minister herself told the Dáil that there was scope for a voluntary redundancy programme and that she intended to discuss it with the new health forum. In his statement on 8 July 2008, the Minister for Finance told us that his Department and the Department of Health and Children were drawing up proposals for a targeted scheme to reduce surplus staff in the HSE. On 27 September 2008, the then chief executive of the HSE told us that 1,000 backroom jobs would go over the following 12 months. In his budget speech on 14 October 2008, the Minister, Deputy Brian Lenihan, said that discussions were under way on the development of a redundancy scheme for the HSE. On 25 November 2008, the Minister for Health and Children said she hoped the redundancies would commence in 2009.

Having spent three to four years discussing this matter, the Minister announced the scheme yesterday and has given the staff two weeks to reply. The date set for the receipt of applications is 19 November. The date by which the redundancies are to take effect is 30 December. Given that the scheme took three to four years to emerge from the Government, does the Taoiseach think it is realistic to get 4,000 redundancies on a voluntary basis in the HSE, with applications in by 19 November and all done and dusted by 30 December?

The Taoiseach: As the Deputy knows, there was already a wider incentivised scheme for early retirement which was taken up by some. However, it was clearly not as successful as the scheme that is now being suggested. The latter scheme is arising at a time when the Government is seeking to protect front line services to the greatest possible extent. Therefore we have an obligation to reduce the cost of delivering those services. We are bringing forward the voluntary early retirement and redundancy scheme for that purpose for administrative and management grades and, where replacements are not required, for support staff as well. It has been long mooted that there would be a scheme in place and available and there had been an earlier one. We wish to proceed on the basis that the Government is providing moneys for this particular scheme during the course of 2010 to effect savings from 2011 on, as has been outlined. It is a voluntary scheme and it is for people to consider in their own time in the coming few weeks. I understand there were 900 expressions of interest overnight.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The issue here is not whether there should be voluntary redundancy scheme. Indeed, this is something the Labour Party has been advocating since the publication of our document on the reform of the HSE as far back as May 2008. The issue is that having delayed until now to bring forward the scheme, is it practical to have it carried out in this short timeframe? Some 4,000 staff in any organisation represents quite a large number. Presumably even if there are 4,000 applications received by 19 November, there will be a process of identifying whether those staff or the posts are surplus to requirements and can be released. There may well be a process of selection if more than envisaged subscribe to the scheme. Then there is the process of redeployment of staff because presumably one may have a situation where someone in one particular area might volunteer for redundancy and that job must be filled by someone else.

An Ceann Comhairle: A question please, Deputy.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Quite a process must be followed under the Croke Park agreement, including consulting and making arrangements for re-deployment and so on. Are these dates, 19 November and 30 December, absolute or is it intended that if practical difficulties are encountered in the scheme, the dates will be extended?

The Taoiseach: The terms outlined yesterday require the applications to be made by 17 November, as has been said, and for people to leave the service on 31 December in order that the moneys provided in this financial year can be disbursed on that basis. Of course this is a challenging issue for management and employee representatives to deliver but it must be done in the context of the availability of funds during the current financial year. That this is coming is not a surprise; it has been mooted for some time at these grades and I am sure contingency plans can be put in place. I accept that it is a challenging timescale but it is one we must meet. I believe with the spirit of the Croke Park agreement, the facilitation of re-deployment and the fact that these grades have been identified as having some surplus capacity, it should be possible to do this without any major disruption of services.

As we have seen with the medical card scheme, the centralisation of services has provided change. In the past under the old structure, there had been administrative staff throughout the

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various health boards but we now have one third of that number with the ability to provide a centralised service.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Some 16 weeks is the current waiting time to get a medical card.

The Taoiseach: As the Deputy is aware, the fact is there were delays in these matters regarding inspection and directors of community care adjudicating on certain matters. A whole range of people has been involved in the adjudication of eligibility for medical cards. It is indisputable that centralisation has helped to bring about a situation whereby fewer people are required for the administration of the scheme. Similarly, there are obvious opportunities here that can be taken up quickly. Although it cannot be anything to go on by 17 November, the initial response has been quite positive in this respect.

Requests to move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 32

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

Deputy Paul Connaughton: I seek the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise an urgent matter of national importance concerning the failure of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his Department to pay out the correct single farm payment and area based payment to thousands of farmers in the past month; to establish the reason farmers were not contacted earlier in the year about alleged mapping errors given that the applications were in the Department as long ago as last April; to establish why some farmers received letters outlining problems that did not exist; to establish why it has taken the private company, which is re-digitising the maps in question, so long to complete the exercise; and if the Minister is aware of the vast number of farmers who have bank commitments to meet and who are now in grave financial circumstances as a result of this bureaucratic mess. It is time the Minister did something about this.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: This is directly the call of the Minister and he cannot blame anyone else for it.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Connaughton should resume his seat please.

Deputy Brendan Smith: Some 90% of farmers have got it. Deputy Connaughton is misrepresenting the case as usual. We are six weeks ahead with the single farm payment.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Finian McGrath.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Members desist from engaging across the floor, please?

Deputy Paul Connaughton: The figures are off the wall.

Deputy Brendan Smith: Deputy Connaughton is misrepresenting the case as usual.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Connaughton, please.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister for Agriculture, please. I call Deputy Finian McGrath.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I have given that commitment.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy McGrath without interruption, please.

Deputy Finian McGrath: It is very hard to get a word in around here, especially when one is an Independent.

Deputy Noel J. Coonan: He could introduce a Good Friday agreement.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The Minister for Justice and Law Reform was not right in that case either.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I got four minutes last week, Ceann Comhairle.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: The Deputy is a very mild man. He must be right.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The Minister is not right.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Durkan, please. Deputy McGrath is in possession.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I seek leave to move a motion for the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to discuss an issue of national importance and concern, namely, the urgent need to protect services and benefits for the sick, the disabled and our senior citizens. I deplore any attempt in the recent Department of Finance documents to sack teachers, cut pensioners, reduce carers' payments, cut drug payment schemes and long-term benefits and any proposed cuts to cystic fibrosis patients. I call on all Members to resist these cuts to our social services and to make these issues a priority in the build-up to the budget.

Deputy James Bannon: The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has taken his eye off the ball. He also took his eye off the maps and he is getting very red about the gills on this issue.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy stick to the script, please?

Deputy James Bannon: I seek the Adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to raise a matter of national and local importance, namely, the failure by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to honour the plan to pay farmers half their EU annual subsidy leaving the rural economy at a loss of €635 million. Shame on the Minister.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

Deputy Brendan Smith: More than 90% of farmers in Longford have already got their payments.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Ba mhaith liom an Dáil a chur ar Athló faoi Bhuan-Ordú 32 chun an gné rithábhachtach seo a phlé: the need for the Government to recognise that it is not acceptable to claim to be interested in protecting the vulnerable while stating that everything is on the table in its consideration of cuts and to acknowledge the areas of public service provision which have been chronically under-funded for decades and which should have been off the table from the outset such as, for example, mental health services, in which spending is now at its lowest level in modern history. More than half of all staff cut from the HSE in 2009 came from the mental health services despite mental health representing only 9% of the HSE workforce. Residential conditions in some centres are inhumane. Some 200 children were admitted to adult centres due to the dearth of appropriate facilities and people with intellectual disabilities are in inappropriate places in psychiatric institutions in large numbers. There is an urgent need for the Government, at a minimum, to hold funding for mental health at its current level next year.

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

Order of Business

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 7, motion re appointment of members to Standing Joint Committee on Consolidation Bills; No. 8, motion re proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the report by the Minister for Defence regarding service by the Defence Forces with the United Nations in 2009 (back from committee); and No.15, Value-Added Tax Consolidation Bill 2010 — Order for Second Stage and Second Stage. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that Nos. 7 and 8 shall be decided without debate; and Parliamentary Questions next for answer by the Taoiseach on EU matters shall be taken on the same day as the statements on the EU Council meeting in Brussels, scheduled to be taken on Wednesday, 3 November 2010, and shall be moved to be taken first as ordinary Oral Questions to the Taoiseach on that day. Private Members' business shall be No. 74, motion re resourcing of the Garda Síochána and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with Nos. 7 and 8, motions re appointment of members to committee and proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the report by the Minister for Defence regarding service by the Defence Forces with the United Nations in 2009, without debate, agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with parliamentary questions next for answer by the Taoiseach on EU matters agreed to? Agreed.

Deputy Enda Kenny: On behalf of the Fine Gael Party, we extend our deepest sympathies to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Micheál Martin, his wife, Mary, and the family on the death of their beautiful child, Léana. At a time of unspeakable grief for any family suffering the loss of a child, the dignity as a family unit will be of consolation to everyone who has lost a child in any circumstances. I am sure I speak for everyone in the House.

While we may have differences of opinion politically, I condemn and deplore the attack on the Minister for Health and Children yesterday.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Enda Kenny: This is not the kind of Ireland we want. As a people, we are able to have rational discussion about difference. I deplore the attack on the Minister for Health and Children while she was performing an official function.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: She was a ferocious woman in red paint.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Can the Taoiseach give an indication when the Government expects to consider the revised wording for the children's referendum? When does the Taoiseach expect the Government to approve this and is it the intention of the Government to name a date?

The Taoiseach: I agree that we have great sympathy for our colleague, the Minister, Deputy Micheál Martin, Mary and the family. They have our prayers, support and solidarity.

I also agree the incident yesterday as it affected the Minister for Health and Children was unfortunate, but I am glad to say she was at her desk very shortly afterwards making decisions and getting on with her job, leaving the consequences of it to the appropriate authorities. I am sure it will be followed up on in due course.

The matter referred to by Deputy Kenny is being examined in thorough detail by the Minister of State with responsibility for children, Deputy Barry Andrews, who will be reporting to the Government in due course. It is a matter of high priority for him. The area is very involved and, as I stated on Question Time last week, the issues arising concern constitutional amendments, for which every word and sentence must be examined, as must every foreseen and unforeseen consequence. A very long draft proposal was made by the committee and I have commended it for its work on many occasions. It is the responsibility of Government to ensure we thoroughly examine it and come back to the House for further discussion if necessary.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I join with the Taoiseach and Deputy Kenny in extending my sympathy and that of the Labour Party to the Minister, Deputy Micheál Martin, and his wife, Mary, on their tragic loss. I also join the Taoiseach and Deputy Kenny in condemning absolutely the assault on the Minister for Health and Children.

In the course of a newspaper interview published on Saturday, the Taoiseach indicated the writ for the Donegal by-election will be moved in the first quarter of next year but he did not commit to holding the by-elections for Dublin South and Waterford on the same day. Will he clarify if it is his intention to hold the three by-elections on the same day? There are now four by-elections to hold. Given what the Taoiseach said to Deputy Kenny, that his mandate and authority derives from this House, I draw his attention to the fact that it now derives from a House that is down four in number. It is not sustainable to have a situation where Dáil Eireann has its membership depleted by that number for such a period of time.

There has been speculation that the budget day will be earlier than 7 December. Will the Taoiseach confirm the date of the budget is 7 December? Given the financial state of the country and the uncertainty in the markets, I am sure he agrees it is not helpful to have uncertainty about the date of the budget. I invite the Taoiseach to confirm that the budget will be on 7 December. If not, he should tell the House what date it will be.

Regarding the wording of the children's referendum, the Taoiseach indicated the Government is considering a new wording. Is it his intention to refer the new wording to the all-party Oireachtas committee that drafted the original wording and did so much work, as generally acknowledged by the House? Can he give an indication when the Government will have the wording ready?

The Taoiseach: On the first matter, I refer to the statement made by the Chief Whip on the occasion of the debate in the House to the effect that writs will be moved in the first quarter of next year.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: For all three or four?

The Taoiseach: We have not given consideration to anything beyond that.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: Is the Taoiseach expecting the number to rise?

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Deputy Rabbitte should not leave us now. We could not do without him.

The Taoiseach: Rumours of Deputy Rabbitte's demise are greatly exaggerated. There has been no change to the Government decision to have the budget on 7 December.

Regarding the children's referendum, I cannot give a date for when the work currently being undertaken by the Minister of State and the Government will be completed. We are pursuing this matter. I expect that whatever emerges from the Government's consideration of the matter will come back for discussion in the Parliament in whatever committee it wishes to hold it.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Chomh maith leis an bheirt Theachta romham, ba mhaith liom thar mo cheann féin agus thar ceann an pháirtí comhbhrón ó chroí a ghabháil leis an Aire, an Teachta Micheál Martin, agus lena chlann ar bhás a iníon. Rud an-bhrónach é i gcónaí nuair a fhaigheann páiste bás sa tslí seo. Mar a dúirt mé, comhbhrón ó chroí chuig an chlann.

The ground rents Bill is used to appear on the Government legislative programme for many years and then disappeared. Is there any indication from the parliamentary draftsmen that they will ever get to grips with a ground rents Bill to remove for once and for all that hangover from the empire from those people who must deal with ground rents on a regular basis?

The Taoiseach: I am not aware that the Bill is on the list.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I refer to items of promised legislation. The first concerns the growing problem of sham marriages for the purposes of circumventing the residency laws. The Latvian authorities have been in touch with the Government on a number of occasions, going back to 2006, expressing grave concern for the welfare of many of their citizens who engage in, or are enticed into participating in, sham marriages. The Minister for Social Protection has promised legislation to make it a criminal offence to engage in or facilitate such a marriage. When does the Taoiseach expect to have that legislation ready for publication?

What is the timescale for the promised legislation to ban corporate donations?

The Taoiseach: I understand the first matter may be incorporated in the immigration Bill.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: May be?

The Taoiseach: Yes. The Minister has raised the issue at European level on a number of occasions. He did not have the support of the Latvian Government on those occasions. I am not too sure what the issue is in that regard.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The matter has been raised with the Minister by many eastern European governments.

The Taoiseach: I am making the point——

Deputy Dermot Ahern: None of whom supported me when I raised the matter in Brussels. It is ironic.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Is it not the case that the laxity in the law is in this country?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Shortall please.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: Ireland was on its own.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have a discussion at this point. We can only have a simple query about the legislation.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: A serious issue arises about the welfare of their citizens.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: Very serious.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Shortall, please.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: They should have supported the issue when I raised it.

The Taoiseach: These issues are under consideration. The second matter to which the Deputy referred is also under consideration at present and will be published as soon as it is approved.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Is there no timescale?

The Taoiseach: No.

Deputy Noel J. Coonan: In the context of the road traffic (amendment) Bill amending the Road Traffic Act, will the Taoiseach and the Minister for Transport take on board the situation regarding the motorway, in particular the M7 from Nenagh to Castletown, the last stage of which has been closed off in recent days because subcontractors are not being paid. Some have not been paid since as far back as last March and many small businesses are being put to the wall. I have asked the Taoiseach to take action on the matter as the road is in his constituency. The Minister for Transport is present.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should submit a question to the line Minister.

Deputy Noel J. Coonan: This is not good enough. It is the last stage of the motorway and many contractors have not been paid coming up to Christmas.

An Ceann Comhairle: I know. I am sure it is important. The Deputy should submit a parliamentary question. It is not appropriate on the Order of Business.

Deputy Noel J. Coonan: A Portuguese company received the money but it did not pass it on to contractors.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Coonan is abusing the privilege of the Order of Business.

Deputy Noel J. Coonan: I urge the Taoiseach to intervene in the matter, take responsibility for it and ensure that those people are paid.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to submit a question to the line Minister.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: Can we expect the publication of the Dublin commission's report in respect of matters being investigated in the diocese of Cloyne?

The Fines Act 2010 was enacted this year. The commencement order has not been signed yet. I tabled a parliamentary question on the matter. When is the exact date for the commencement of the legislation? Its purpose is to make imprisonment a last resort on default of payment of a fine. In other words——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's point is well made.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: —people are still being committed to prison for non-payment of fines—

An Ceann Comhairle: I will inquire of the Taoiseach when the legislation is due to be commenced.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: —in spite of the fact that we have enacted the legislation in this House. We are already hearing reports about Cork Prison and other prisons being overcrowded. They are partly overcrowded because of such situations.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have a debate at this time.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: When will we see the commencement of that legislation?

The Taoiseach: A direct question to the Minister for Justice and Law Reform could get the exact information. My understanding is that most of the provisions of the Fines Act will be brought into operation on 1 January next. On the specific point raised, the reason commencement orders are sometimes inserted into legislation is to facilitate some work to be done, in this case by the Courts Service, on how the matter would work in practice. The point has been made by the Deputy and it will be followed up by the Minister to introduce it as quickly as possible.

5 o'clock

Deputy Seán Sherlock: On a point of order, am I given to understand then that the negotiations on the appointment of the receiver have concluded and that the Taoiseach is satisfied that the Act will commence on 1 January?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Sherlock will have to pursue the matter in another way. It is not appropriate for the Order of Business.

The Taoiseach: It is hoped to be able to meet such a deadline based on the work that is ongoing in the Department of Justice and Law Reform in that regard. That is the objective. The Minister made a detailed reply to the matter last week on Question Time. I refer the Deputy to it for the exact position.

On the report on the Cloyne diocese, we acceded to a request from the judge for a further extension until the end of the year in the hope that it is the final extension sought so that the report can be completed.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: From the many recent leaks it appears that there will be cuts in all kinds of areas. The one area that seems to be subject to no control is legal costs. We had a Minister for Justice seven years ago who promised a legal costs Bill. When will such a Bill come to the House?

Deputy Seymour Crawford: —seven years ago who promised a legal costs Bill. When will such a Bill come to the House?

An Ceann Comhairle: On the basis of sentiment so far a parliamentary question to the Minister would be very helpful.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: The legal costs Bill is on the list of promised legislation. It is essential that we control costs at every level. That is the purpose of the Bill.

In the light of the news that the Minister for Health and Children has at last taken a hold of the over-manned structures in the Health Service Executive, will there be an opportunity to discuss the eligibility for health and personal social services Bill in the House because the removal of 5,000 staff in a matter of three weeks or one month will have some effect on front-line services? When will we get an opportunity to discuss that?

The Taoiseach: I indicated to the House last week that the legal costs Bill would probably be due before the House next year, as will the second Bill to which the Deputy referred. I accept the entitlement of Deputies to raise such questions but at the same time we must consider what arrangement we can make in order to avoid repetition on the same Bills from various Deputies on different days. I do not know how we will get around it but it is a growing trend.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I have studied the pink sheet again and considered the number of Bills outstanding.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: I expect Deputy Durkan knows it off by heart.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Yes. There are 23 Bills promised, many of which are urgent. I am sure the Dublin Lord Mayor Bill is equally urgent.

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a specific inquiry?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I have. I do not wish to delay the House by reading into the record each of the Bills——

An Ceann Comhairle: Please do not.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: ——so I will encompass them in a single question. Of the 63 Bills that are grey and vague on the white paper, given that at least six Bills are important in improving this country's standing in the international markets — three banking Bills, an insurance Bill and another Bill — could urgency be applied by the Taoiseach to bring all of those Bills before the House in early date as opposed to consigning them to what looks like a five-year plan?

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no need to elaborate. The Deputy has made an inquiry. I am sure we will get an answer shortly.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I was merely explaining for the benefit of your good self, a Cheann Comhairle, and the Taoiseach.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not appropriate to have a debate on the Order of Business.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The Taoiseach will wish to give a comprehensive answer. Could I hear it please?

The Taoiseach: On the Deputy's concern about the markets, the most important thing we can do is proceed with a budgetary policy that will deal with the issues that arise, pass it and bring forward a finance Bill. I look forward to his support in that respect.

The banking Bills are at various stages of preparation. Most of them are due before the House next year. There has been considerable reform in the banking area as a result of legislation passed already during the course of this year.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I am not so sure about that.

Deputy Joe Costello: In the context of the new spirit of consensus and the Taoiseach's invitation to the spokespersons on finance to the Department of Finance to view the books in the context of the budget and the four-year plan, would he extend that invitation to other spokespersons in the context of major multi-billion capital projects such as metro north and the interconnector so that they could examine the business plan or cost-benefit analysis in the Department?

An Ceann Comhairle: There are other ways to raise the matter.

Deputy Joe Costello: I accept there is sensitive commercial information that cannot be disclosed.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are other ways to raise this matter. It is not appropriate for the Order of Business. There are other ways to make inquiries on legislation.

Deputy Joe Costello: These important multi-billion euro projects are getting planning permission. This Government will not construct them, but it may well be the one making the decision. In this context and given the amounts involved are multi-billion rather than multi-million, will the Taoiseach extend the same courtesy to spokespersons in the various portfolios and invite them to view the information?

An Ceann Comhairle: Perhaps the Deputy could submit a parliamentary question to the appropriate line Minister.

Deputy Joe Costello: This is the only opportunity to raise this serious question.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we get to the point, please?

Deputy Joe Costello: Will the Taoiseach extend the same courtesy he extended to the finance spokespersons to other spokespersons to view the cost benefit analyses and business plans on these matters, particularly in the context of the recession, unemployment levels and the economic situation?

Deputy Noel Dempsey: I am starting to see Deputy Costello will not support 4,000 jobs.

The Taoiseach: The business case for the metro proposals is, as I understand it, on the web. The issue raised by the Deputy is a good one.

Deputy Joe Costello: The business case is not on-line.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Metro north.

The Taoiseach: I understand it is for metro——

Deputy Joe Costello: I am referring to sensitive commercial information.

The Taoiseach: Excluding——

Deputy Joe Costello: It is a business case without information.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: It is to protect taxpayers.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we have the Taoiseach without interruption, please?

(Interruptions).

Deputy Joe Costello: That would be the whole idea of spokespersons.

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

The Taoiseach: To the obvious exclusion of commercially sensitive information.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: Will Deputy Costello make up his mind? Is he for or against it?

An Ceann Comhairle: Minister, please.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: There is a good chance of recovery if the Minister, Deputy Dempsey, is protecting the taxpayer.

Deputy Noel Dempsey: The Deputy is trying to have it both ways. It is like everything else.

Deputy Joe Costello: Perhaps we could get the Taoiseach to answer the question instead of the Minister for Transport.

The Taoiseach: It depends on where one is. As I was telling Deputy Costello, the business case on-line excludes commercially sensitive information, which is not surprising. If something is commercially sensitive, one does not show it to anyone. That is the whole idea——

Deputy Joe Costello: That is the whole idea of spokespersons.

The Taoiseach: It is the whole idea of what defines commercially sensitive information. We could have a word game. I want to answer the question seriously, but if the Deputy wants to interrupt me, maybe I will leave it.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Do not be like that, Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: Hello Bernard. How are you? I thought we were finished with you for the evening.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputies, please.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: We will have to meet again.

Deputy Joe Costello: Go ahead, Taoiseach. We are waiting for words of wisdom.

The Taoiseach: I would not say that they will be words of wisdom to Deputy Costello's ear. I am sure that, if he wants discussions with the Minister for Transport in respect of these matters, the Minister could facilitate such a discussion to the best of his ability without giving the Deputy all of the commercially sensitive information, if that is okay.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is appropriate.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: Given the commitments made at the time, is it still the Government's intention to appoint a NAMA oversight committee?

The Taoiseach: That is a matter on which I will revert to the Deputy in terms of where it is at currently.

Deputy James Bannon: Since the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is sitting beside the Taoiseach, has failed to honour his commitments to pay farmers their due entitlements——

An Ceann Comhairle: We are on the Order of Business, not any other business.

Deputy James Bannon: I would like to ask the Taoiseach—

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will need to find another way to raise this matter. I recollect similar sentiments being expressed when discussing requests made under Standing Order 32.

Deputy James Bannon: When will the long delayed veterinary practice Bill be before the House? The situation is causing a great deal of undue concern to farmers throughout the country.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Silence.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Would the Taoiseach like to telephone a friend?

The Taoiseach: Is Deputy Bannon finished?

Deputy James Bannon: Yes.

The Taoiseach: When the Deputy resumes his seat, I will certainly answer.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will get an answer for the Deputy. We have an inquiry on legislation.

Deputy James Bannon: Does the Ceann Comhairle want me to continue?

Deputy Brendan Smith: Definitely not.

An Ceann Comhairle: No. Suigh síos. Will Deputy Bannon resume his seat, please? We have an inquiry on legislation.

The Taoiseach: I understand that it is the intention of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to move an amendment to the Veterinary Practice Act 2005 in due course to deal with some of these issues. Finally, in respect of the Deputy's critique of the situation regarding advance payments, they have been paid six weeks in advance of previous dates and 90% of farmers have been paid. It is one of the most efficient systems in Europe and I congratulate those who negotiated an advance payments for Irish farmers, which is not available to all EU farmers.

Membership of Committee: Motion

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

That the following members be appointed to the Standing Joint Committee on Consolidation Bills:—

Deputies Michael Ahern, Michael McGrath and Jim O'Keeffe.

Question put and agreed to.

Service by Defence Forces with United Nations: Motion

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

That Dáil Éireann approves the report by the Minister for Defence regarding service by the Defence Forces with the United Nations in 2009, copies of which were laid before Dáil

Éireann on 23rd July, 2010, in accordance with section 13 of the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006.

Question put and agreed to.

Value-Added Tax Consolidation Bill 2010: Order for Second Stage

Bill entitled an Act to consolidate enactments relating to value-added tax.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): I move: “That Second Stage be taken now.”

Question put and agreed to.

Value-Added Tax Consolidation Bill 2010: Second Stage

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): I move: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

I am delighted to introduce Second Stage of the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Bill 2010, not least as a former member of the tax strategy group between 1997 and 2002. The Bill consolidates the law relating to VAT which is contained in the Value-Added Tax Act 1972, as amended. The VAT Act has been amended in almost every Finance Act since then and was significantly amended by the Value-Added Tax (Amendment) Act 1978. Furthermore, changes to the Act have also been made by numerous ministerial regulations made under the European Communities Act 1972.

The new VAT consolidation Bill continues the successful process of the ongoing consolidation and modernisation of the tax code. In 1997, the Taxes Consolidation Act consolidated direct taxes legislation dealing with income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax. Following on from this, further tax consolidation took effect with the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 and the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003. It is the Government’s intention to modernise and consolidate law relating to customs over the coming year.

VAT is a general, broadly based consumption tax assessed on the value added to the supply of goods and services. VAT is levied at each stage in the chain of production and distribution. However, VAT-registered persons can generally reclaim the VAT they have paid. Therefore, VAT principally affects consumers. VAT is governed by EU law, was introduced in Ireland in preparation for our joining the EEC and took effect from 1 November 1972. Prior to this, Ireland had a turnover tax, introduced in 1963, and a wholesale tax. These taxes were replaced by the new VAT regime, which operated a system of five separate VAT rates. The number and level of VAT rates applying in Ireland varied substantially throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, the range of goods and services to which those rates applied were changed.

The attempt to extend VAT to children’s shoes and clothing in the January 1982 budget has entered the political annals. The amended March 1982 budget introduced by Mr. Ray MacSharry, which applied VAT at point of entry, also took the step of exempting books from VAT, which gave a significant and lasting boost to the Irish publishing industry. Very high VAT rates, such as the 35% standard rate introduced in the 1983 budget which lasted a couple of years or the opening up of more recent gaps between the Irish and British rates, since closed, have, along with often more important exchange rate differences — I shall put it diplomatically — stimulated cross-Border trade to an extent that was not intended and probably contributed to Newry acquiring city status. VAT is first and foremost a vitally important source of revenue, but also where margin for discretion exists an instrument of policy. Arising from agreement

[Deputy Martin Mansergh.]

at EU level, by 1993 the current system of two VAT rates along with the zero rate came into effect.

As Deputies will be aware, changes to VAT law at domestic level may only be made within the confines of EU VAT law, which is continually subject to reform. The most recent extensive revision to the EU VAT code was the recasting of VAT law in the 2006 EU VAT directive, which is the current text that governs VAT within the EU. In this context, there has been little change in Ireland's VAT rates since 1993 and major VAT changes have generally related to administration, countering fraud and implementing EU provisions.

In Ireland, as indeed in other EU member states, VAT is a major source of Exchequer revenue. In Ireland, VAT accounts for around one third of the overall tax yield to the Exchequer, some €10 billion in recent years. The VAT Act is now substantially different from and more complex than the original 1972 text. The need for consolidation has been recognised by the Revenue Commissioners and stakeholders for some time. Earlier plans for consolidation were put on hold, because of significant changes that were ongoing to the VAT code at domestic and EU level, with the 2006 VAT directive recast and the extensive new VAT on property regime introduced in the 2008 Finance Act. More recently, the VAT code was amended by the ministerial regulations in late 2009, which implemented the EU VAT package that involved significant changes to the rules governing the place of taxation of supplies of services and cross-border refunds within the EU. However, the time is now opportune to consolidate the VAT code.

The preparatory process for consolidating VAT followed the same rigorous process that was adopted for the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 and the Capital Acquisitions Tax Act 2003. The aim at all times was to ensure the most accurate consolidation of the existing law with nothing left out and nothing added. This is what has been achieved in this Bill. The Bill was considered by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government, and has been duly certified by the Attorney General as a consolidation of existing VAT law. The Attorney General's certificate was included in the Dáil First Stage motion introducing the Bill on 20 October.

In preparing the VAT Consolidation Bill, an initial draft of the Bill was placed on Revenue's website for consultation with interested parties and was separately made available to the Law Society of Ireland, the Irish Taxation Institute and the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies Ireland. These bodies were afforded an opportunity to submit comments on a draft of the Bill.

In regard to the layout of the VAT Consolidation Bill, as stated earlier, Irish VAT law is governed by the EU VAT Directive, and, in this context, the provisions of the new VAT Consolidation Bill have been remodeled as far as possible on the VAT Directive in order to facilitate better alignment and thereby easier reference to the directive. To this end, and in preparation for the consolidation exercise, changes were made in recent Finance Acts. In particular, the Finance Act 2010 reordered the Schedules to the VAT Act, so as to reflect their origins in terms of where the appropriate exemption or reduced rate is permitted under the VAT Directive. The most notable effect of this remodeling exercise is the fact that there are now a much greater number of sections in the Bill. The 1972 VAT Act as amended contained 44 sections with a number of additional sections inserted throughout the Act. The new VAT Consolidation Bill contains 125 sections. This is primarily due to expansive sections in the Act being replaced and clarified by a number of separate sections in the Bill. For example, the VAT provisions relating to accountable persons in section 8 of the Act have become Part 2 of the Bill, accounting for 15 sections, namely, sections 4 to 18 inclusive. Furthermore, the use of

archaic language in general and of the old-fashioned device of using provisos to change the meaning of a section have also been eliminated in the Bill.

To facilitate readers of the Bill, the statutory derivations for the legislation provided for in the Bill are set out in the margin, in the side-note to each section. These entries show the source of each section in the Bill. In addition, the memorandum published with the Bill, often referred to as the destination table, sets out the provisions of the 1972 VAT Act in chronological order, and indicates where the provision is located in the new Bill. If a provision of the VAT Act has not been enacted in the Bill, the memorandum explains why. The most common reasons for not including a provision in the Bill are that the provision in question has already been repealed, or is unnecessary, where, for example, it might be superfluous.

The Bill before the House is the culmination of considerable work. The greatest benefit which will result from this consolidation will be the restructuring of the VAT code in a more clear, coherent and logical way. This will make it more accessible and user-friendly for all users, including members of the Oireachtas, businesses, tax practitioners and students of taxation, who have to cope with annual changes to VAT legislation.

I do not intend to go through every section of the Bill. The explanatory memorandum, which has been published with the Bill, sets out in summary form the purpose of each section of the Bill. However, I would like to give Deputies some flavour of the overall structure of the Bill.

The Bill contains 125 sections, which are divided into 14 parts. It also contains eight Schedules. Part 1 contains the Short Title, defines certain terms, and sets out rules for the construction of certain references used in the Bill. It also provides for the charge to VAT. Part 2 contains the provisions relating to persons who are accountable for VAT. Accountability is a key concept in VAT, as persons who are accountable must register for VAT, submit tax returns and payments, keep records and comply with the provisions of VAT legislation. The part defines persons who are accountable for VAT by default or election, and persons deemed not to be accountable. Provision is made for VAT accountability in the case of intra-Community acquisitions of goods; certain services received from abroad; certain services of the State and public bodies and the activities of VAT groups. This part also provides for reverse charge mechanism in certain circumstances.

Part 3 sets out the rules relating to taxable transactions for VAT purposes. A transaction has to be taxable in order for VAT to apply. Taxable transactions include the supply of goods, services and intra-Community acquisitions, all of which are defined in Part 3, along with self-supplies, transfers not considered to be supplies, and supplies where there is no consideration.

Part 4 contains the provisions relating to the place of supply rules for goods, services and intra-Community acquisitions, which are central to the operation of VAT. Provision is made for the supply of goods to unregistered persons, special rules for the place of supply of gas and electricity supplies, and general exceptions to the rules relating to services.

Part 5 contains provisions relating to the amount on which tax is chargeable. In general, VAT is payable on the full consideration including any ancillary charges made, such as additions for packing, transport, etc, although in some cases open market value may apply.

Part 6 contains the provisions relating to rates of VAT. It sets out the rates of VAT that apply in the State, providing rules for composite supplies, and for special rating rules for works of art and contract work. It also provides that VAT will not be charged on exempted activities, which are set out in Schedule 1.

Part 7 contains the VAT provisions relating to imported and exported goods. For VAT purposes, imports are goods brought into Ireland from outside the EU and VAT is normally paid at import. Exports are goods supplied, subject to a condition that they are to be trans-

[Deputy Martin Mansergh.]

ported to a place outside the EU and zero-rated for VAT purposes. In addition, Part 7 provides for temporary importation, the special scheme where exporters can have their inputs zero-rated, and the retail export scheme.

Part 8 provides for VAT deductibility. An accountable person may deduct the VAT charged on most goods and services that are used for the purpose of their business, where they have appropriate documentation, such as a VAT invoice. This part also outlines where deductions may not be made as well as situations where deductibility is apportioned. Provision is also made for the capital goods scheme for property. A capital good is defined in terms of property that has been developed and related only to persons carrying on a business activity and not to private individuals.

Part 9 provides the rules relating to registration, invoicing, returns and payments of VAT. It also contains rules on statements required by traders in respect of supplies of goods and services to other member states and provisions in regard to records that must be kept for VAT purposes.

Part 10 sets out the provisions relating to a number of special schemes that are provided for in the VAT Act. These include the scheme for flat-rate farmers, investment gold, as well as the margin schemes for taxable dealers, travel agents and auctioneers. Under the margin schemes, suppliers pay VAT on their profit margin in certain circumstances.

Part 11 covers VAT rules on property. Under the new VAT on property system, the first supply of newly developed property is taxable for five years from completion. The second and subsequent supply is taxable for two years following occupation. Transitional rules apply for properties that have been developed under the old VAT on property system.

Part 12 deals with refunds and repayments provisions, including ministerial refund orders and refunds to foreign traders. This includes an electronic refund procedure for businesses operating from other EU member states, and provides for regulations to allow repayment of deductible Irish VAT suffered by non-EU based businesses.

Part 13 sets out the provisions relating to the administration of VAT, including placing VAT under the care and management of Revenue. Provision is made for estimates, assessments, electronic returns and time limits. Interest, penalties and appeal provisions are also covered in this part.

Part 14 covers the repeals, transitional and other housekeeping measures needed to bring the VAT Consolidation Act into effect.

Finally, there are eight Schedules to the VAT Consolidation Bill. Schedules 1 to 3 list the activities that are exempt from VAT, zero-rated and charged at the reduced-rate, respectively. Schedule 4 lists agricultural activities, and Schedule 5 lists items of art and antiquities, as specified in section 46 of the Bill. Schedule 6 lists the activities that are within the scope of VAT as required by the EU VAT Directive when undertaken by State or public bodies unless the activity is otherwise exempt from VAT. Schedule 7 makes necessary consequential amendments to references to VAT in other legislation and Schedule 8 lists legislation that is being repealed or revoked as a result of the new Bill.

The Revenue Commissioners are in the process of preparing guidance notes on the VAT Consolidation Act which they will publish as soon as possible after the Bill is enacted. I understand that these notes will also be made available on their website. For the information of Deputies, the guidance notes will follow the format and style of the guidance notes published in regard to the previous consolidated tax enactments. I understand that these notes will also be made available on their website. For the information of Deputies, the guidance notes will

follow the format and style of the guidance notes published in relation to the previous consolidated tax enactments.

With regard to the timetable for passage of the Bill, it is important that the VAT Consolidation Bill is afforded priority, to ensure that it is enacted into law by end November 2010, as any VAT changes made by regulation to implement VAT directive changes, or by financial resolution on budget night, or in the Finance Bill 2011 would invalidate its status as a consolidation Bill. This would necessitate a recommencement of the consolidation process, create additional work, and delay its implementation unnecessarily until later next year. For this reason, it is proposed that the Bill be referred to the standing Joint Committee on Consolidation Bills for consideration next week.

A number of motions will be included on the Order Papers of both Houses to comply with the various rules and procedures, as set out in the 2007 Standing Orders for Public Business of Dáil Éireann, to facilitate the timely passage of the Bill. These motions will facilitate the taking of Committee, Report and Final Stages, and will shorten the minimum periods of time provided for in the standing orders.

As this is a consolidation Bill, and is so certified by the Attorney General, the effect of the law governing VAT in Ireland will remain unchanged. No substantive changes are made in the Bill which would change the regulation of VAT. During its passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas, the only amendments which can be taken on a consolidation Bill such as this are those intended to remove ambiguities and inconsistencies, substitute obsolete or inconvenient language, or achieve uniformity of expression. Indeed, substantive changes to existing law are not permitted under the consolidation process.

I would like to place on the record the Minister for Finance's, my own and the Government's appreciation of the amount of work which went into preparation of the Bill. In particular, the staff of the Revenue Commissioners and the Parliamentary Counsel's office are to be congratulated on an excellent undertaking. I commend the Bill to the House, and I look forward to the co-operation of Members in its rapid enactment.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I thank the Minister of State for his introductory remarks and I compliment everybody involved in producing this fine piece of work, in particular the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the Parliamentary Counsel and officials of the Department of Finance. It is a really fine piece of work and follows the excellent work done previously on the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 and the Capital Acquisitions Tax Act 2003, which were consolidated and introduced here. It is really a work for stakeholders, professional tax advisers and, indeed, for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas. It puts the VAT code within a single set of covers and makes it very easily accessible to all of us whose work requires us to have an interest in these matters.

I should like to compliment everybody who has been involved in a fine piece of work. I was going through it earlier and I found it is very accessible. The explanatory memorandum, which accompanies the Bill, makes it even more accessible because it is in the simplest of English and does not use some of the more arcane expressions one sometimes finds in legislation. Its accessibility is its principal virtue and I am sure that all those who labour in tax law and in accountancy offices will be very pleased that they can take it from the shelves or look at it on their computer screens, and deal with the information it contains in a ready manner.

There is not much more to be said in Parliament about this particular legislation. As a consolidation Bill it has been certified by the Attorney General as adding nothing to the law and taking nothing away from it as it exists. Of course we accept that. It will now proceed, as consolidation Bills do to the Select Committee on Consolidation, of which my colleague,

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

Deputy Jim O’Keeffe, is a member. Even under the thorough scrutiny of that committee, the amendments will be confined to matters of drafting, in effect, and no amendments of substance will be appropriate.

I do not need to delay the House. I thank the Minister of State for his explanatory remarks, and again I thank all those who have been involved in bringing forward this consolidation Bill.

Deputy Seán Sherlock: I should like to share time with Deputy Arthur Morgan, with the permission of the House.

I, too, on behalf of the Labour Party, welcome this legislation. As with any consolidation Bill, it is for the purposes of simplifying procedures and that is to be welcomed. It will potentially reduce the compliance burden on small and family businesses and family farms, and this is to be welcomed.

I noted the Minister of State’s remarks on the January 1982 budget. My late father played no small part in that particular decision as regards VAT on children’s shoes, so that is a decision which has worked its way into the annals of our family, and we are proud of it. There is not much to be said, apart from acknowledging it as being a fine body of work. The Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, instigated by Deputy Ruairí Quinn, had a similar type of effect. However, the 1997 Act has been amended in every Finance Bill since, and arguably has led to an unwieldy tax system. One hopes that this legislation will remain as codified and in that sense, retain its purity.

There is not much more to be said. We have some amendments in respect of certain parts of the Bill, but nothing substantive. We shall deal with those on Committee Stage. We congratulate the Minister, officials of the Department and everyone who had a part in drafting the legislation. It was no easy task and they are to be commended.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: It is a change for the Minister of State and I not to be locked in combat on matters, whether across the floor of this Chamber, or in venues outside. The Vincent Browne show comes to mind. Rather, we are dealing with the modernising and consolidation of legislation as regards value added tax, and I very much welcome that. I accept the Attorney General’s verdict completely to the effect that it does what it says on the tin, and neither adds nor takes away from the tax system.

I find that almost unfortunate in a way, as someone who represents a Border constituency. Clearly, the whole differential in the VAT rate on the island is an issue, and I hope that following the consolidation some moves will be made to align or merge the taxation systems. That would be good for business, generally, and good for all.

The Bill has eliminated the use of arcane language. That is wonderful because the Dickensian-type phrasing still being used in some legislation can be somewhat frightening in a modern Parliament. Hopefully this will set a positive tone for any legislation coming through the Oireachtas. On a broader note, the whole issue of VAT as a tax tool is very regressive because clearly low and middle income families pay proportionately more as a percentage of their earnings than those on higher incomes. In that regard I clearly have a problem with VAT as a taxation tool. It will not happen under this Government, but sooner or later I hope the whole taxation system will be overhauled and modernised. I am sure the Minister of State would concur with that given the number of levies that have been introduced. We all know the reason the levies were introduced mid-tax year in the emergency budget in 2009. A whole series of rates of PRSI were also introduced and these need to be streamlined and modernised and, more important, made fairer. We need a fairer taxation system in which people can have confidence.

I have strayed a little in terms of this being a consolidation Bill. However, neither I nor my party have a problem with this Bill and wish it a fair wind through the House.

Deputy Michael Ahern: I join colleagues on both sides of the House in complimenting the Revenue Commissioners, Parliamentary Counsel and the Department of Finance on the preparation of the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Bill 2010.

The history of consolidation of taxation measures dates back to the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 and Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003. Anyone who deals with VAT knows the intricacies involved. Having to reference back to previous years and so on is an onerous task. I know that practitioners will be delighted when this Value-Added Tax Consolidation Bill 2010 comes into force. The Minister of State can be assured that the Select Committee on Finance and the Public Service will expedite its work on the Bill as there are no contentious issues involved and it is not a Bill to which substantive changes can be made.

I note from briefing that this legislation must be enacted prior to introduction of this year's Finance Bill. It is important that we consolidate taxation measures. In this regard, the Minister of State might consider having the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 further consolidated given the complications arising in terms of the changes in income tax, corporation tax and, in particular, VAT which is extremely complicated because of our ties to the European scene. Many of the changes made during recent years have been as a result of directives from Europe.

I thank everybody involved in bringing this legislation to this Stage. The type of language used is more understandable to the ordinary person and those educated in tax matters. It is time the archaic language previously used was updated and this has been successfully done in this legislation. I congratulate everybody involved in that.

I join the Minister of State in commending the Bill to the House.

Deputy Jim O'Keeffe: When in a moment of weakness the Chief Whip contacted me and asked if I would accept an appointment as a member of the Select Committee on Finance and the Public Service, which is to consider this Bill in detail, I agreed not realising the committee would deal with a Bill consisting of 125 sections and eight Schedules, all of which would have to be teased out and carefully analysed before the committee put its imprimatur on it. This will not be the first time I have dealt with a consolidation Bill. I recall, following my election to this House being appointed a member of the committee which dealt with consolidation of social welfare Bills. It may, therefore, be appropriate for me to deal with this Bill at this stage.

Much work done on this Bill to date has been worthwhile. The work to be done by the committee will be also worthwhile in that it is important that there is complete clarity and certainty in regard to taxation provisions. There is nowadays a huge obligation on taxpayers to self assess and to make their own returns. This also applies in respect of VAT, in respect of which penalties apply where people get it wrong. It is important for those making self assessments that there is clarity in regard to their obligations. From that point of view, this consolidation Bill will be worthwhile in terms of it being the one central reference point for any such queries. Currently, there is in place a hotch potch of legislation with the original Act having been amended every year, in some instances twice yearly, since its introduction. I am happy to work with members of the committee, including Deputies Michael Ahern and Michael McGrath, on this task. The only consolation is that work on this Bill must be completed by the end of this month. It will not be an easy task to get through our work on the Bill in time. It will be three weeks' hard labour.

Deputy Michael Ahern: The committee had previously to work through more than 1,000 sections of the Income Tax 2007.

Deputy Jim O’Keeffe: We will get through this Bill. While I am not looking forward to the three weeks’ hard labour, I am glad to have an opportunity to contribute to ensuring the Bill, as requested by the Minister of State, is ready and in place before the end of the month thus enabling it to be enacted by Parliament.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Bill. This is one of only a few occasions when I have been in the House and there has been unanimity and good will towards a Bill. In that context, the Minister of State is one of the lucky ones. I do not intend to take away from that.

This is important legislation which seeks to clarify and ensure the structures in place are more easily understood. The Minister of State in his contribution stated:

The Bill before the House is the culmination of considerable work. The greatest benefit which will result from this consolidation will be the restructuring of the VAT code in a more clear, coherent and logical way.

This is important given the difficulties that can arise in regard to such matters. It is important this legislation is accessible and user-friendly, in particular by small businesses given the amount of red tape in that area.

I draw the attention of the Minister of State to the fact that a person in financial difficulty who sought to pay his taxes on a weekly basis was able to do so. Given current technology, it is hard to understand why a person wishing to pay employee taxes, such as PRSI and PAYE — I am not sure about VAT — on a weekly basis cannot be accommodated. As one who lives on the Border, I am aware that the VAT rates in the different areas of the country are extremely important and I want to highlight the grave difficulties we come across in the entire Border region. At the time the euro and sterling rates were very close. We increased our VAT rate by a small amount and, at the same time, the United Kingdom Government increased its rate by a significant amount. That increased the flow of VAT transactions and business in general across the Border and cost us jobs. It is difficult to put a figure on how much it cost us in unpaid VAT and other issues because much of the material came across the Border without any issues attaching. It is important that we try to ensure, even in a very difficult budgetary position, that we do not raise VAT to a level that will force people to go out of the country to shop.

The Minister likes to reflect on history and in his contribution he highlighted Mr. John Bruton’s VAT on children’s shoes and so on. That may be interesting but it is very light reading in light of the current economic position in which we find ourselves. As we come nearer to the time of the budget the Minister of State should be cognisant of the serious implications of VAT in the Border region and I ask him to try to keep it in line.

The second issue may not be directly to do with this Bill but we have a major opportunity to increase the income from tourism and in that regard the levels of VAT being charged in that sector should be examined.

We are trying to encourage alternative energy production yet if I, as a farmer, put up a solid building on my farm I am entitled to reclaim the VAT as a non-registered farmer. That is the way the system works. However, if I put up a windmill to provide power for that farm and green energy to go into the grid, I cannot reclaim the VAT in the same way. That is a major anomaly in the system and if we were serious about alternative energy and maximising our green energy, we must look at those areas.

I was talking to a pig farmer who has a pig unit in County Monaghan and one in Northern Ireland and the differences between the allowances they get North of the Border for producing electricity and the ones we get here are unreal. If we are serious about alternative energy and maximising green energy we must rectify that situation.

In general I have no problem with the Bill. It is the job of my party spokesman on finance to go through the issues with the Minister, and I know he will do that very carefully. I wish the Minister well with it and I thank the Acting Chairman for the opportunity to say a few words on it.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie O'Connor): As there are no further speakers offering, I invite the Minister of State to reply.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): Like all previous speakers I will not necessarily take up my full allocation.

I thank Members on all sides of the House for their welcome and constructive response to this legislation, understanding that the detail has to be teased out in committee. As Deputy Crawford would be aware, it is the time of year those of us who might have some income from self-employment, in farming for example, tend to pay calls on what we call practitioners in this debate. Accountancy practices particularly are very grateful for consolidated legislation, which makes reference to it easier.

I reiterate congratulations on the Bill. The relative unanimity in the House, at least on the principle of the Bill, does not conceal the fact that an enormous amount of work was put in at an expert, legal and revenue level to putting together this legislation. We are very grateful for that.

To reply to one or two points that were raised in the course of the debate, Deputy Crawford should know that I always find that a little bit of history illuminates every subject. I try to introduce it in as noncontentious a manner as possible but it is interesting to recall debates over turnover tax. What happened seemed to have touched the pride of Deputy Sherlock and his family in regard to the 1982 budget but obviously that is not——

Deputy Jim O'Keeffe: The Minister touched more than him.

Deputy Martin Mansergh: ——what we are primarily discussing. That has a relationship, and I made this point in my opening speech, to economic activity in different sectors. It is not just revenue raising, even if revenue raising is its principal purpose.

Deputy Morgan and Deputy Crawford referred to cross-Border shopping, and I referred to that in my contribution. The Central Statistics Office published the results of a survey of cross-Border shopping on 4 December 2009 as part of its quarterly national household survey of quarter two, 2009. It showed that 16% of households in the Republic made a shopping trip to Northern Ireland in the 12 months to the second quarter, with 41% in the Border area and 21% in Dublin so doing. Anecdotally I would say the percentage going from Tipperary or Cork would be in the low single figures.

The cause of the price differentials between goods in Northern Ireland and the Republic were operating costs, mark-up, taxis and, most importantly, a significant depreciation of sterling against the euro. That said, VAT rates have a certain headline psychological effect independent of their actual substance or weighting in the difference in prices.

There is not more recent data available but the CSO will estimate losses for 2009 and into 2010. However, the UK standard VAT rate, which had been lowered shortly after we put up the 0.5% in 2008, went from 15% to 17.5% in 2010 and will rise further to 20% on 4 January

[Deputy Martin Mansergh.]

next. The gap, therefore, will be nearly closed; it will have been reduced from 6.5 percentage points to one percentage point. That, combined with a reduction of approximately 20% in alcohol excise duty rates since December 2009, should provide less incentive for people to shop outside the State.

If one goes North of the Border and looks at the prices on the petrol station forecourts they are nominally roughly the same level in sterling as they are in euro, which means, depending on the exchange rate on the particular day, there is probably a 12% or 13% difference between the two.

Deputy Morgan also made the point that VAT, like most forms of indirect taxation, bears more heavily on less well off households. However, it must be borne in mind that this is the reason that food, drink and children's clothes and shoes, for example, are exempt from VAT. It is precisely to counter the effect mentioned by the Deputy. As we know, food in particular constitutes a much larger proportion of spending in poorer households compared to richer ones.

Deputy Crawford raised the question of VAT refunds on wind turbines for farmers, if I am correct. Farmers who are registered for VAT are accountable persons for VAT in respect of all their taxable activities, whether those activities consist solely of farming or of farming and other activities such as the generation of electricity for provision to the national grid. As accountable persons for VAT they are entitled to claim input credit for VAT charged on the installation of alternative energy generators such as wind turbines for use in their taxable activities.

The real issue is that of farmers who are not registered for VAT. They are not in the normal course of things entitled to credit for or repayment of VAT incurred by them on their business inputs. As adverted to by Deputy Crawford, the Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No. 25) Order 1993 provides for refunds to unregistered farmers for tax borne on the construction, extension, alteration or reconstruction of any building or structure that is designed for use solely or mainly for the purposes of a farming business. While the installation of an alternative energy generator may be the construction of a structure, however, such a structure is not necessarily designed for use solely or mainly for the purposes of a farming business but, rather, to generate electricity for wherever it is required. That is the reason the installation of alternative energy generators does not come within the scope of the VAT refund order. However, I appreciate Deputy Crawford's belief that this should be changed.

These are all the issues I noted as having been raised. I thank everyone again for their help in expediting this Stage of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie O'Connor): In accordance with Standing Order 141, the Bill, with the concurrence of both Houses, will be referred to the Standing Joint Committee on Consolidation Bills. I understand the motion of referral will be moved shortly.

Sitting suspended at 5.53 p.m. and resumed at 7 p.m.

Message from Select Committee

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Innovation has completed its consideration of the Chemicals (Amendment) Bill 2010 and has made an amendment thereto.

Private Members' Business.

Resourcing of the Garda and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move:

That Dáil Éireann condemns the Government for its incompetence in dealing with the banking crisis and, in particular:

- the failure of the Government to ensure adequate supervision of the banks;
- the failure of the Regulator, Central Bank and the Department of Finance to monitor the banks and provide advance warning of the crisis;
- the failure of the Government to act in a timely fashion when banks abroad had collapsed and it was clear that banks here were facing difficulties; and
- the failure of the Government to change bank directors, to make senior appointments from outside the banks and to change banking culture in dealing with customers;

recognises the widespread public anger that those chiefly responsible for the crisis have not been held to account despite extensive inquiries by An Garda Síochána and the Director of Corporate Enforcement; and calls on the Government to adequately resource the Garda and the Director of Corporate Enforcement to enable them to complete their inquiries as soon as possible so that files may be forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and prosecutions taken if appropriate.

I propose to share time with Deputies Alan Shatter, Kieran O'Donnell, James Bannon, P.J. Sheehan and Leo Varadkar. The Government's policy on banking has been an absolute fiasco. On every step of the road from the misguided guarantee, given under pressure in the last days of September 2008, to the recent decision to wind down Anglo Irish Bank, the policy of the Government has been seriously flawed and has led to ever-increasing estimates of the cost of the bank rescue to the taxpayer. We started at €1.5 billion on the night of the guarantee, it became €4.5 billion on the day of nationalisation. Subsequently it became €10 billion, then €18 billion, then €24 billion and has ended up at €32 billion. The guarantee was flawed and should not have covered Anglo Irish Bank.

Since the night of the guarantee in September 2008, Fine Gael has maintained that the bondholders in Anglo Irish Bank should have shared in the losses that completely wiped out the shareholders. The Minister has argued very forcefully that while some discounts could be made in respect of subordinate debt, no discounts could be made in respect of senior debtors, as in law they are the equivalent of depositors. The Minister claimed he had legal advice to this effect and I presume this is from the Attorney General. He was as good as his word three weeks ago when he agreed that €7.9 billion be paid to senior Anglo Irish Bank bondholders just three weeks ago without any discount.

The Minister may be interested in a recent editorial in the *Financial Times* in respect of the new policy of the Government of seeking discounts on Anglo's subordinated debt. It states:

It has dawned on the Government that the Irish people should not spare Anglo's creditors the cost of the foolish eagerness with which they funded the bank's real estate punts. After burning 29 bn of taxpayers money Dublin has found the gumption to let Anglo pick a fight with investors one rank up from the already-wiped-out private shareholders.

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

In a deathbed conversion, the Minister has realised he can take discounts on subordinate debt held by Anglo Irish Bank. That is the faint praise in the editorial that damns. The editorial continues:

This is why, regrettably we are unlikely to see similar “liability management” for senior debt. Ireland’s leaders remain convinced they cannot force a haircut on senior bank creditors anymore than on depositors or holders of Irish sovereign debt. They are mistaken.

Senior debt ranks equal to deposits under insolvency rules. But a government can selectively bail out depositors of an insolvent bank in exchange for their *pari passu* claims on its estate, as the UK did with Icesave depositors. The equivalence of private and sovereign debt is a creature of Dublin’s imagination — though increasingly one of its making: the government has far too promiscuously expanded its legal guarantees of bank liabilities.

That is an astounding indictment of Government policy and of the Government’s legal advice. It shows this side of the House was correct all the time and that taxpayers have carried an unnecessary burden because the Government did not, would not, and thought it could not, get discounts on senior debt. That is the view of the *Financial Times* of the Minister’s actions, of his failure to protect the Irish taxpayer and of his legal advice. The *Financial Times* goes to every boardroom in Europe and beyond. It is a journal of incomparable influence in the financial world. Is it any wonder there are problems in the bond market and that Irish bonds were being traded up to 7.3% at close of business this afternoon? Is it any wonder the country is in trouble? When the question was raised, the Minister assured us he had legal advice to the effect that what the *Financial Times* is suggesting was impossible and that senior debtholders always had to be treated as equivalent to depositors under Irish law. According to today’s article, this is not true so I would like the Minister to publish the legal advice he received. Whatever about the Minister’s reputation, the country’s reputation cannot afford any more damage.

The failure to protect the taxpayer and to punish recklessness leads us on to another concept much ignored in this country, moral hazard. This concept is fundamental to capitalism — people and institutions who behave recklessly should not gain from their recklessness but should be punished and be seen to be punished as an example to others who might be tempted to take reckless measures in the future. This concept was much debated in the United States, which led to Lehman Brothers being allowed to collapse without any attempt to rescue it. There are different views of what moral hazard should be and some argue that Lehman Brothers should have been saved. As a concept, it seems to be unknown in Ireland, especially in Irish banking circles.

AIB has had a scandal in each decade. It had to be rescued by the State when ICI collapsed in the 1980s; it was exposed as being involved in widespread and systemic tax evasion in the 1990s; in this decade it has become insolvent and the State has been forced to bail it out and acquire 92% of the bank in doing so. Moral hazard does not stop at AIB. Anglo Irish Bank has wiped out its shareholders and Bank of Ireland shares were trading at 52 cent yesterday. That is some hit for those who hold Bank of Ireland shares in their elderly years as a safe place to put money — usually on the advice of bank managers who claimed people would get a better income stream from dividends than from the highest deposit interest available in the banks at the time. Irish pension funds also put money in bank shares and yet Anglo Irish Bank shares have been wiped out, AIB is practically wiped out and Bank of Ireland shares were trading at 52 cent yesterday. What do we have in terms of moral hazard? Despite these disasters, 32 of the directors on whose watch the decisions leading to the collapse of Irish banks and

building societies were made are still in position. The Minister's amendment refers to the directors who have moved on. What about the 32 who were there for the past two years and held office while this was happening and served on audit and lending committees? Who are the 32 untouchables left there? I am not saying they are personally culpable but they presided over the policy that led to the disaster. The rules of capitalism are that if it happens on one's watch, one is responsible and must take a hit. No one in Ireland takes a hit for anything. It is a case of "It will be all right". If we had an honours system in the country, these people would have been knighted five or six years ago. When people argue about reform of this House and want Ministers to be parachuted into Cabinet without going through the electorate, these are the people who would have ended up in the Cabinet if that facility had been available to the former Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern. Until very recently the top management at AIB and Bank of Ireland were recruited from insiders. The culture of the bank has remained the same. Unreasonable targets are again being set. Staff are being pushed towards further charges on customers and salary packages are linked to achievement of those targets. The banks are not providing the stream of credit the economy needs. The Government is perplexed that the banks are not functioning as intended. Einstein said the definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again and to expect a different result. That is where the Government now finds itself and that is what it is doing.

I hope the inquiries of the Garda and the Director of Corporate Enforcement are speedily concluded and that the files to be forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions will have sufficient evidence to support prosecutions. Why does everything take so long? There is an old joke that a Mexican tourist in Ireland inquired what word was used here for *mañana*. The reply is that we do not have any word that would communicate that sense of urgency. Two years later the inquiries of the Garda and the Director of Corporate Enforcement continue.

How can the Government stand over an appointment to the new banking commission under the Central Bank Act of a person who wants to take Ireland out of the eurozone? Is that the kind of appointment that inspires confidence in the halls of Brussels, among the bankers in Frankfurt and in the International Monetary Fund? The Government has appointed someone well known by the media whose first statement as a commissioner is that Ireland should get out of the eurozone. God help us. It is time the Government went.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It is right that we consider why we need this motion. For too long there has been an attitude of "anything goes" in our politics and economy. We have seen a shocking disregard for the truth by bankers, developers and the Government. At the heart of our financial, economic, and sovereignty crisis has been a crisis of truthfulness. This deficit of truth has had a disastrous consequence for our country. Telling the truth is a critical requirement of a properly functioning economy and of properly functioning politics.

At the heart of Government there has been a moral void — a black hole lacking any moral compass. This was recently graphically depicted by the Minister for Justice and Law Reform, Deputy Dermot Ahern, first proposing a charge on cash withdrawals from ATM machines and then denying in this House that he had said anything of the sort. Unfortunately for him, it was all caught out on YouTube.

We must squarely face the ugly reality that under Fianna Fáil's and the Green Party's watch, there has been a succession of disastrous banking scandals and failures, scandals relating to State agencies such as FÁS and the Health Service Executive, reckless lending, a home mortgage crisis and a fiscal meltdown. These scandals have happened under the watch of Fianna Fáil-led Governments that have shown an almost sociopathic disregard for the truth.

For almost 14 years Fianna Fáil-led Governments have acted as the political wing of unprincipled self-serving bankers and avaricious developers. The former Taoiseach, Deputy

[Deputy Alan Shatter.]

Bertie Ahern, led the troops in the charge and the former Minister for Finance, now Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen, was his financially illiterate sidekick for more than five years. Many remember the tawdry days of these dons of incompetence in their Galway tent, a tent that had all the dangerous allure for business people of a Don Vito Corleone wedding marquee. Their distinctive contribution to this Republic was to openly elevate greed in an emporium of reckless financial gambling to a plane where it was the only value in sight in our exploited, betrayed, Republic.

We have tabled this motion because this feckless Government, which has become a byword for unprincipled politics, incompetency, and financial illiteracy, cannot be trusted. Their noses were so deep into the trough that it was too late before they realised that they were leading the country in a nose-dive to economic meltdown and financial ruin. They have breached the principle of government as trust. Their incompetence has created a debt of up to €50 billion to bail out the banks and an additional debt of €100 billion to date from excessive public expenditure and left decent citizens abandoned and betrayed. We tabled this motion because this Government cannot be trusted to police the delinquent bankers and builders who were its gilt-edged clientele.

Our country needs a new attitude of responsibility and a Government it can trust. This has been explained repeatedly by Deputy Kenny, the leader of Fine Gael, with the principled consistency of a leader who puts personal integrity and responsibility first. We must do the hard work of entrenching a new attitude of responsibility, accountability and more than anything else, a new political morality. There are specific steps we must take. Those who criminally exploited Fianna Fáil's era of light-touch regulation to do financial wrong as a highroad to wealth must be punished. Those who fabricated accounts or who carried out off-the-books or fictitious transactions to misrepresent the true financial position of financial institutions in order to lure others into detrimental deals, should realise that they have written their own tickets to a prison cell.

It is true that the Government has put a pious emphasis on making wrongdoers answerable before the criminal courts. Since 2008, when the corpse of the collapsed Anglo Irish Bank had barely cooled, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, solemnly pledged to make gangster bankers answerable. There have been no prosecutions to publicly vindicate the fundamental importance of truthfulness in the marketplace. Let us make no bones about it; public trust in the Government to make bankers answerable for their wrongs has collapsed. Any true commitment to the rule of law demands that we confirm that the powerful are not above the law and that where appropriate criminal prosecutions are initiated expeditiously. Few in this State believe that those truly responsible for our banking disaster will be brought to justice. This Parliament, this Dáil, must do all it can to prove them wrong and to ensure any obstacles to justice taking its course constructed by Government are dismantled.

The Garda Commissioner's recent statement in Templemore Garda college indicates that he is aware that there is a growing public mood for the two-year investigation to yield results soon. He warned, however, that investigating fraud is a complex and time-consuming exercise. He is right. He reported that approximately 150,000 e-mails and other communications are being examined, that up to 400 witnesses have been interviewed, and that some witnesses have given statements of up to 150 pages long. While that is reassuring it is not the point nor is it enough. I have no doubt the Garda is doing Trojan work.

Speaking also in Templemore, the Minister for Justice and Law Reform, Deputy Dermot Ahern, dishonestly presented himself as some sort of detached commentator with no responsibility for bad decisions made by the Government of which he is a part. He said "nobody is more annoyed" than Cabinet Ministers over past banking practices. He stated: "Unfortunately,

outrage and anger is no good in a book of evidence. What you have to get is hard evidence.” On the issue of the investigation concluding, he said “the sooner the better”, but that it is entirely a matter for the appropriate prosecution authorities. One would think that the Minister was inhabiting the planet Zog at the time when Government supported light-touch regulation and not sitting in Cabinet and bound by collective Cabinet responsibility for the banking disaster, some of the unnecessary expenditure incurred in trying to prop up banks and excessive general public expenditure which is at the root and core of the destruction of the economy.

The same Minister should have, but failed to put in place a distinctive, adequately resourced, cohesive, inter-agency unit with a mission to complete the banking investigation expeditiously. Not only that, but he has failed to clarify the ambit of the investigation. Some 150,000 e-mails and witnesses’ statements of up to 150 pages is a long paper trail. Any vigilant observer must ask, as I do, whether the paper trail stretches from the head office of Anglo Irish Bank to desks in the Department of Finance or into any other Department? One must also ask whether the paper trail stretches from the head office of Anglo Irish Bank to any former Financial Regulator or Governor of the Central Bank. One must further ask whether the paper trail stretches from the desks of the various banks and banking regulators to the desks of the present or previous Taoiseach or any Minister in government.

Those questions are important. It is probable that key bankers will offer the defence that any questionable actions they performed were beforehand notified to a regulator, Department or member of Cabinet and were either expressly approved or given the sort of nod or wink for which Fianna Fáil is famous or rather infamous. The incompetence and deceitfulness of successive Fianna Fáil-led Governments was abetted by inept regulation. Regulators allowed banks and building societies to lend billions of euro in the face of inadequate collateral without uttering a whimper. Regulators failed to spot or ignored sharp practices. Both this and the previous Government, deliberately led regulators to believe that maladministration and looking the other way was the acceptable norm. The failures of regulation were not accidents. They were the outcome of the light touch regulation obsession that gripped the Government’s Galway tent mindset. Successive Fianna Fáil-led Governments actively fostered regulatory failure.

So we must ask these questions. Have investigators questioned Deputy Bertie Ahern as a former Taoiseach? Have they questioned the current Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen, regarding his role as Minister for Finance? Have they interviewed senior civil servants in the Department of Finance? Have they been able to ascertain the exact state of these people’s knowledge of some of the exotic banking and share transactions undertaken that are now subject to investigation?

The job of Government is to serve the public interest, but it is still failing to do so. Take a simple example of necessary reform. We urgently need new legislation to govern the mortgage market. I will mention three specific reforms. First, borrowers must be protected from bankers, developers and estate agents who conspire to inflate property prices and to provide excessive mortgage funding for which there is no adequate security. Second, all brokers or lenders must be required to verify a borrower’s reasonable ability to service and discharge a mortgage obtained within the timeframe stipulated. Third, the law must say that mortgage brokers have a fiduciary relationship with the borrower and an obligation to act in the borrower’s best interest and in good faith.

The Minister for Justice and Law Reform has made an art of entering the House happy to blame others for the Government’s incompetence and failings. Tonight, he should answer the questions asked. He should tell the House whether the Garda or representatives of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement have interviewed members of the Government and senior civil servants during the course of their two years of investigation, whether all relevant

[Deputy Alan Shatter.]

files and papers from the Taoiseach's office and the Department of Finance have been furnished to the Garda, the extent to which the former Financial Regulator and the former Governor of the Central Bank have co-operated with the investigation and whether full co-operation has been received from current and former employees of Anglo Irish Bank and from former board members of that bank, as it is now a State institution. The Government should publish a draft constitutional amendment to give our Parliament inquisitorial committee powers that are effective and fair so that we can hold people who abuse the financial markets or misuse public funds accountable.

The elemental dishonesty of this financially illiterate Government in respect of the economy is yet again illustrated tonight in the amendment it is proposing to Fine Gael's motion. Despite all we now know and all the reports published in the past 18 months, it is still so delusional as to claim that all of our economic and banking woes result from "the worst global financial crisis in more than 75 years". The Taoiseach and his Ministers occupy a parallel fictitious world in which they cannot even acknowledge that their own appointee to Governor of the Central Bank, Professor Patrick Honohan, a well respected individual, has stated that this crisis is essentially home grown. The public rightly are no longer willing to tolerate the Government fabricating the facts and covering up its disastrous failures.

The elemental incompetence of this Government and that of its predecessor is evidenced by their monumental waste of taxpayers' hard-earned money, the extent to which the former has mortgaged the future of this and future generations and its complete failure to stimulate growth. My political colleagues, including Deputies Noonan, Bruton and Varadkar, have needed to remind the Government repeatedly that taxation and cutbacks will not resuscitate the economy and create or save jobs. No Government has done as much in the history of this benighted Republic to undermine the institutions of this State in the minds of an understandably aggrieved public.

No one should be fooled by the Government's ducking and weaving and its pathetic attempts to deny responsibility yet again this evening for the catastrophe economic failures with which we are all confronted. A succession of Fianna Fáil-led Governments have ruled over not the free market, but the greed market. People outside the House should demand an election and no longer tolerate the sad spectacle of a Government desperately holding onto office by its fingertips, holding onto its cherished Mercs and perks and long past its sell-by date. To the Independents in the House who continue to support the Government, I say have the courage and the sense of public duty to vote it out. It no longer has the people's support. If Independents had any sense of public duty, they would no longer maintain this Government in office. Indeed, if the Green Party retained any vestige of pride or moral compass and was not so fearful of being held to account by the people, it would also in the public interest end the life of this discredited Government. It is time that the electorate was afforded an opportunity to elect to Government Fine Gael politicians who can be trusted and who will restore international and domestic confidence in the institutions of this State.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: When I have one minute remaining, the Leas-Cheann Comhairle might let me know.

I am delighted to support this motion and I will touch on a number of points. The public are angry. The national debt has doubled to nearly €100 billion and the banking situation could cost more than €50 billion, €35 billion of which will go into dead banks, namely, Irish Nationwide Building Society, INBS, and Anglo Irish Bank, neither of which will ever lend or function again. People are asking how we have reached this point. The Government and the regulatory system failed the public.

Going back to when this crisis began, Northern Rock failed roughly around September 2007. In April 2008, Anglo Irish Bank's share price collapsed. For a long time prior to the bank guarantee scheme being put in place, the former CEO of the National Treasury Management Agency, NTMA, stated that he had an issue with providing deposits to Anglo Irish Bank. The Government should have been actively considering putting a bank resolution in place, specifically in respect of Anglo Irish Bank, which will now cost the taxpayer up to €35 billion.

The situation requires that the truth come out. We are two years down the road since putting the guarantee in place, investigations are ongoing and the Garda Commissioner wants something to happen before the end of the year. A number of issues, including the resources required by the Garda, must be addressed. Regarding the back-to-back loans between Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Life & Permanent, it is incredible that an institution like the latter would give €7 billion to another institution that clearly had problems. There was no logical financial reason for it. Was Irish Life & Permanent told to put on the green jersey, as reported by its former CEO? It was a manipulation of Anglo Irish Bank's money. The money was routed through Irish Life & Permanent and returned as consumer deposits rather than interbank deposits.

The golden share transaction with Anglo Irish Bank was done by way of contracts for difference. Effectively, the taxpayer could end up bailing out the cost of the transaction.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy has one minute remaining.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: We need to know the reason for the golden share situation.

The public's perception that certain people are above the law must be changed. A bank resolution scheme needs to be introduced. We have debated it for long enough and it should be in place before Anglo Irish Bank is split into the asset recovery bank and the funding bank. Measures to tackle reckless trading in financial institutions and banks should be put on a statutory footing so that people who trade recklessly will know that they will be held to account by the law.

People are entitled to justice. Some people cannot repay their mortgages, are worried about the banks foreclosing and are losing their jobs, yet a burden of up to €54 billion is being placed on their backs and the backs of their children and grandchildren. We need results. We need to see the Government bringing this situation to finality and providing whatever resources the Garda requires to allow that to happen.

Deputy James Bannon: Reckless lending by banks and reckless spending by the Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government have made for a sorry state of affairs. Unfortunately, it is not the Cabinet which is sorry, rather it is the unemployed, the poor, the elderly, the disabled and the young.

Last week the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, stated that reckless lending was the core problem of the banks. However, he failed to mention who had slept on the job of regulating the banks and thereby did not provide the country with advance warning of the crisis that has brought us to our knees. Essentially, he failed to mention the total mismanagement of our finances by his predecessor, the present Taoiseach.

The only efficiency that has come to light in the last two years is that of this Government which has shamefully manipulated the country's finances and resources to shore up the shameful dealings of its cronies. The Government is a model of efficiency in this regard. A whole country has been held to ransom for the good of a number of bankers, developers and speculators, members of the gold circle of cronies, the men of the Galway tent.

[Deputy James Bannon.]

There is huge anger in the country that not one banker or politician has been brought to trial for reckless abandonment of the trust was put in them. Despite a bill, to date, of €2 million there is no expected timescale for convictions and criminal investigations are set to last for years. It is a nightmare to consider that one third of the staff of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement is working on the investigation into Anglo Irish Bank because the matter will drag on and more and more personnel will be needed.

Along with the investigations into reckless banking, it appears it may take more than 60 years to correct the chronic over-development and re-zoning of lands in some parts of the country, including the midlands, a direct consequence of the failure of Government to regulate the planning sector. On the one hand banks were recklessly lending, while on the other planning permissions were also recklessly handed out because lending and building were tied together. I refer to the figures for my constituency of Longford-Westmeath, where, combined with figures for counties Cavan, Leitrim, Roscommon and Sligo, housing stock increased by 49.8% between 2002 and 2009, from 90,491 to 135,544 units. By April 2006, 19% of houses in these counties were vacant but nevertheless 20,500 extra units were built up to 2009.

The amendments tabled to this motion by the Government are at best laughable and at worse a deliberate attempt to deceive. Like a parrot mindlessly repeating what it has learnt by rote, the Government once again blames the situation on the global financial crisis and follows this with a litany of meaningless justifications for the so-called remedial measures it has taken. No mention is made of what should have been done prior to the crash but was not. There is no mention of the collusion with the banks. or of the bank bail-outs which come at the expense of the jobs, health and well-being of our citizens.

Deputy P. J. Sheehan: The Deputies on the opposite side will vote down this motion and in doing so will claim this Government provided adequate supervision of the banks. We all know it did not. The country knows it did not. The Deputies believe the regulator, the Central Bank and the Department of Finance monitored the banks so well that adequate advance warning was provided of this crisis and we are now having the soft landing the Government promised us. The facts of today's crisis, however, prove that is not true. The Deputies believe this Government acted in a timely fashion when the banks abroad collapsed. I cannot remember it doing anything until the heads of the banks sneaked into Government buildings after dark in their Mercedes to put a gun to the heads of Ministers and the Irish tax payer.

The Deputies want us to believe that this Government has replaced those responsible for leading us into this crisis by making new appointments of directors and other senior staff to run our now nationalised banks, and that the public has faith in them. The majority of bank directors who were there three years ago are still in place today. Is that radical change?

The Deputies do not recognise there is any public anger or that those chiefly responsible for the crisis have been held to account, including members of the present Government. That is a joke. Not even the 19% who claimed they would vote for this incompetent Government at the next election would believe even one of those arguments, let alone all five.

I have a request to ask those Deputies across the House — of whom, God knows, there are not many present to listen to us. It seems they have completely reneged on their responsibility. I ask them to consider their position, as did their former colleague last night. In order to save this country and prevent further disaster being inflicted on the good people of this country by the worst and most incompetent and corrupt Government in the history of the State I ask them to do the honourable thing, resign their seats and go to the country.

I paraphrase a famous statement. Never in the history of mankind have so many owed so much because of the actions of so few. Included among the few is every member of the Cabinet during the past 13 years who was responsible for bringing this country to its knees. I hold my greatest contempt for those people across the House who still blindly support the most disastrous Government in Irish history. I appeal to those Members who will vote down this motion tomorrow to consider their position, resign now and cause an immediate general election.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: Perhaps the Minister of State might tell the House whether the Minister for Finance, Deputy Lenihan, or the Minister for Justice and Law Reform, Deputy Ahern, intend to address the debate tonight.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Perhaps tomorrow night.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: Their presence would be most welcome. I have three points to make in the time I have. First, I wish to congratulate Deputies Michael Noonan and Alan Shatter for tabling this motion which I fully endorse. The motion condemns the failure of the Government to ensure adequate supervision of the banks, the failure of the regulator, the Central Bank and the Department of Finance to do their job, the failure of the Government to act in a timely manner when it was clear that a banking crisis was unfolding in Britain and the United States, and the failure of the Government to get rid of the untouchable directors who remain in positions on bank boards despite having being in situ during the banking crisis. The motion also calls for the Garda, the Office of Corporate Enforcement and the Director of Public Prosecutions to be given the resources they need to bring about prosecutions as quickly as possible.

My second point relates to the Anglo Irish Bank bondholders. In particular, I wish to ask the Minister and his colleagues if they are prepared to name those bond holders, or, at very least, to confirm names that have been released. Some Members will be aware of leaks and a British website that was involved in releasing information on the scandals involving MPs' expenses. Lists have been produced on that website of the Anglo Irish Bank bond holders. Will the Minister either name them or confirm that the list is accurate? The Anglo Irish Bank bond holders are the only winners from the bail out of Anglo Irish Bank by the Minister, Deputy Lenihan. The shareholders lost their money and the customers must pay back the money they owe unless they become bankrupt. The taxpayers, of course, will be hit with the bill of €25 billion. Clearly, the bondholders are the major beneficiaries of the Minister's bailout and it is my party's view they should be asked to bear some of the cost of the bank's failure. That is what would happen if the rules of capitalism were applied. At very least, the people of Ireland have a right to know who the bondholders are, especially when an alternative to this policy existed. The bank should have been put into administration and wound down with the cost being shared by the investors and creditors. There should have been a resolution regime, as Deputy O'Donnell stated. It is amazing that two years into the banking crisis, or three years later, there still is no resolution legislation in the State. Perhaps somebody can explain to me why there is no such legislation. If the Anglo Irish Bank situation were to happen again tomorrow we would have to take the same action, or the Government might end up doing the same thing, simply because there is no resolution regime.

My final point relates to the Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions. Nobody doubts the independence of the DPP but to suggest it is entirely up to the DPP to decide whether to prosecute is incorrect. Article 30.3 of the Constitution provides for the Attorney General to take prosecutions. The Attorney General sits at the Cabinet table. I am aware that power was transferred to the DPP under the 1976 Act but that does not mean the Attorney General's constitutional right to take a prosecution has been extinguished. This view

[Deputy Leo Varadkar.]

was supported by Mr. Justice Walsh in the Supreme Court decision of the State, *Collins v. Ruane* in 1984, Irish Reports 105, 118-219, which states that the prosecutorial function of the State can be shared between the Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions as long as the Oireachtas deems it fit. If the DPP decides not to prosecute — I would be appalled if that were the case — the Government should at least give consideration to the possibility of initiating a prosecution by the Attorney General. If the DPP decides not to prosecute — and I would be appalled, in the event — the Government should at least give consideration to the possibility of the Attorney General initiating prosecution.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Dara Calleary): I move amendment No. 1:

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

“recognising the sudden onset and serious nature of the worst global financial crisis in more than 75 years, commends the Government for the rapid and effective response it has made to reform the structures of financial regulation, support the banks, restore confidence, protect consumers and establish a basis for a sustainable banking sector in the future; and in particular, recognises:

- the rapid response of the Government in introducing the Central Bank Reform Act 2010 to restructure the financial regulatory system including:
- the creation of a fully integrated Central Bank;
- the replacement of the board of the Central Bank and the Financial Regulatory Authority with a new Central Bank Commission chaired by the Governor, Professor Patrick Honohan;
- the appointment of international expert, Mr Matthew Elderfield, as Head of Financial Regulation within the new structures to lead internal renewal of financial regulation;
- and providing a statutory basis for a new regime of fitness and probity for senior management and board members in banks and other financial service providers;
- the effective response of the Government to the crisis in putting in place protections for the savings of households and businesses through the Deposit Guarantee Scheme and the general guarantee for the banks;
- the changes at director and senior executive levels at the covered institutions that have been made since September 2008, in which the chairpersons and chief executives of all of the covered institutions bar one — in each case — have changed: some 47 directors have vacated their positions with 33 new appointments being made and some 31 senior executives have departed;
- the establishment of NAMA and the work it has already completed in dealing with transferred assets;
- the nationalisation of Anglo Irish Bank and more recent developments in relation to the funding bank and the asset recovery bank;
- the recapitalisation of AIB and Bank of Ireland and the other financial institutions experiencing difficulties;

- the extensive inquiries under way by An Garda Síochána and the Director of Corporate Enforcement; that these inquiries are proceeding in an efficient manner;
- that the Garda have adequate resources to carry out their work and have no higher priority than completing these investigations;
- and the independence of An Garda Síochána and the Director of Corporate Enforcement in their investigations and supports them in bringing those investigations to a conclusion; and notes the intensive work underway within the Government to further strengthen and renew the banks while, and at the same time, ensuring that banks fulfil their commitments given to the Government in relation to lending to Irish households and businesses and, in particular, small and medium sized enterprises.”

The Irish banking system has endured an unprecedented crisis. The Government has responded forcibly and decisively to this challenging position. How we continue to manage our collective response to the crisis will affect every Irish citizen now and into the future. The banking system is fundamental to a strong economy. The core purpose of a banking and financial system in a modern economy is to contribute to the economic welfare of all citizens by helping borrowers — both households and businesses — to obtain and utilise funding to meet their investment and consumption needs. A healthy banking system facilitates the most efficient allocation and pricing of risk by paying interest rates on the deposits of savers and by charging rates of interest to borrowers related to the purpose, duration and risk weighting of the loan required.

The Government has commissioned two reports on the banking crisis, *The Irish Banking Crisis — Regulatory and Financial Stability Policy 2003-08* by Professor Patrick Honohan, Governor of the Central Bank and *A Preliminary Report on the Sources of Ireland’s Banking Crisis* by Messrs Regling and Watson. The findings of both reports were published in June this year.

Internal safeguards and proper risk management procedures in the banks did not function effectively in the institutions as they should have done. Some of these matters are under investigation. All investigations into Anglo Irish Bank are at an advanced stage and are being progressed as a matter of priority. The matters under investigation are detailed and complex. The appropriate authorities must be allowed to take the time needed to finalise these investigations. My understanding is that a large number of personnel from the Garda and the Office of Director of Corporate Enforcement are involved in these investigations. I also understand that the relevant interviews have taken place, or are to take place, as part of this wide-ranging inquiry and that the relevant files are being prepared for submission to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The Garda Commissioner had indicated that a file will be sent to the DPP before the end of the year. That is how criminal investigations are conducted in this and in neighbouring jurisdictions. I accept that inquiries on the other side of the Atlantic tend to be much sharper and quicker than they are here. The nature of our criminal justice system is such that investigations in this jurisdiction — like those in the UK and France — take a substantial period of time.

The Garda has adequate resources to carry out its investigation. The Minister for Justice and Law Reform has been assured by the Garda Commissioner that the Garda has no higher priority than completing this investigation. For his part, the Commissioner regularly meets his officers involved, ensuring that, at all times, they have every resource they require.

I will not comment further on the investigations at this stage. The House is aware of the independence of An Garda Síochána and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in carrying out their investigations. Let us look at the facts. In response to the weaknesses exposed by the crisis in the structure, systems and staff responsible for financial regulation

[Deputy Dara Calleary.]

and supervision, the Government has acted vigorously and effectively. Professor Honohan was appointed Governor of the Central Bank in September 2009 and Mr. Matthew Elderfield was recruited as head of financial regulation at the bank at the beginning of this year. The appointment of these two gentlemen has done much to restore public confidence in the Central Bank and in our capacity to regulate and supervise the financial sector. The Central Bank Reform Act was commenced by the Minister for Finance on 1 October 2010, and the House will be aware of its key provisions. In addition, new and enhanced accountability and oversight mechanisms have been put in place, including a specific focus of the Central Bank Commission on regulatory performance, including development of performance benchmarks. Annual performance statements on regulatory performance must now be prepared by the Bank, presented to the Minister for Finance and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. There is now a statutory requirement for regular international peer reviews of regulatory performance and a committee of the Oireachtas may call the Governor or the heads of functions to be examined on the performance statement.

The Act provides for a new statutory arrangement to ensure the fitness and probity of persons appointed to high level positions in the management of banks and on their boards. These are designated as “controlled functions”. Under the new arrangements the Central Bank may prescribe the functions which are controlled functions within certain parameters set out in the Act. The Act permits a flexible and incremental approach to the prescription of controlled functions so that, for example, it is possible to introduce the fitness and probity provisions in respect of the most urgent functions first, and expand them subsequently to a broader range of functions. A controlled function relates to the provision of a financial service where the person appointed exercises significant influence on the conduct of the financial service provider’s affairs. People who perform controlled functions are liable to be removed from the performance of those functions in the event that the Central Bank determines that they are not fit and proper persons to perform those functions.

Last month, the Minister for Finance appointed five members to the Central Bank Commission, namely Mr. Max Watson, Professor John FitzGerald, Mr. Des Geraghty, Mr. Michael Soden and Professor Blanaid Clarke. The new members serve alongside the Central Bank Commission’s *ex officio* members, who include Governor Honohan, Mr. Elderfield, Mr. Tony Grimes, head of central banking, and Mr. Kevin Cardiff, Secretary General of the Department of Finance. The new commission members have brought a diversity of knowledge and experience to the Central Bank, drawing from sectors including economics, financial services, social policy, corporate governance and law.

The Central Bank Reform Act is an important element in a comprehensive legislative programme. The new structure of the Central Bank establishes a domestic regulatory framework for financial services that meets Government objectives for the maintenance of the stability of the financial system. It provides for effective and efficient supervision of financial institutions and markets, and in the future, it will safeguard the interests of consumers and investors. The new structures will also encourage more responsible and transparent management and lending policies in financial institutions. The Government will bring forward a second Bill shortly which will provide for the enhancement and adjustment of the regulatory powers and functions of the restructured Bank.

This Bill will deal with the prudential supervision of individual financial institutions. It will help strengthen supervision and enforcement and also protect consumer interests and overall stability of the financial system. This second Bill is of critical importance to the future of the financial services industry in Ireland. The enhancement of the Central Bank’s powers of financial regulation and supervision will be grounded in best practice within the European Union

and internationally. I would like to assure the House that the Central Bank remains fully independent in the discharge of its operational responsibilities. Taken together, these two items of legislation will ensure that there is appropriate accountability to the Minister for Finance and the Houses of the Oireachtas and greater transparency and cooperation in the exercise of regulatory and supervisory powers.

A third Bill will consolidate the existing statutory arrangements for the Central Bank and financial regulation in the State. Building on the provisions of the Central Bank Reform Act 2010 — and in response to the regulatory failures identified by the two banking reports — the Central Bank has published its new more assertive approach to banking supervision. In future, banking supervision will be more intrusive and challenging. Banks will be required to change their behaviour and improve governance, risk management and lending practices. Under the new regime, the Central Bank will demand decisive follow through by both supervisory staff and supervised institutions.

Specifically, the Central Bank will bring forward initiatives on internal governance requirements; remuneration standards; risk exposures; and standards on credit risk management and valuation.

The Central Bank has also recently opened consultation on a revised code to strengthen consumer protection. The revised code requires regulated entities to act in consumers' best interests by ensuring that they know and understand the consumer's needs, sell them products and services that are suitable and provide them with appropriate information to enable them to make an informed choice. The code also requires firms to have in place an effective complaints handling procedure and sets out a timeframe within which regulated entities must deal with complaints from consumers.

In addition to the programme of legislation, the Government has progressed a broad range of effective policies to resolve the banking crisis. The Government's approach has been based on three broad principles; not to let any systemically relevant financial institution fail, this involves protecting depositors and creditors; any State involvement in the financial institutions will protect taxpayers' interests; and to ensure the flow of credit to the real economy.

In formulating the strategic approach to the crisis and developing the detail of individual policies for the banking sector, the Government has taken advice from and consulted with the Central Bank, the National Treasury Management Agency and legal and financial advisers. In formulating the strategic approach to the crisis and developing the detail of individual policies for the banking sector, the Government has taken advice from and consulted with the Central Bank, the National Treasury Management Agency and with legal and financial advisers. Moreover, it has sought to reflect agreed principles at EU level and to comply with state aid guidance.

The Government has ensured that there is no return to business as usual.

Contrary to the Opposition's motion, significant changes have been made at director and senior executive levels in the covered institutions. Since September 2008, the chairpersons and chief executives of all of the covered institutions, with the exception of chairman of Irish Life & Permanent and the chief executive of the EBS, have changed. There has also been a substantial turnover of non-executive directors since 2008. In total, based on information supplied by the covered institutions, 47 directors have vacated their positions since September 2008 for a variety of reasons and 33 new appointments have been made. In addition, some 31 senior executives have departed.

Without firm and immediate action to stabilise the banks at an early stage in the crisis, the detail of departures at senior level in the institutions would have been irrelevant. An early example of the Government's effective response to the crisis was the Credit Institutions

[Deputy Dara Calleary.]

(Financial Support) Scheme introduced in October 2008. This scheme provided for a blanket guarantee by Government of the deposits and liabilities of Irish institutions. It was introduced in the face of clear and present danger to the financial stability of the State at that time. Had that guarantee not been introduced, it is doubtful whether the economy, let alone the banking system, would have survived. When the Government made the decision on the guarantee scheme, funding had all but dried up and the banks faced closure within days. Anyone who doubts the seriousness of the situation should read the recent report of the Governor of the Central Bank, in particular his remarks in the first chapter referring to the discussions that took place on the night of 29 September.

I accept that Professor Honohan raised in his report the inclusion of dated subordinated debt in the guarantee scheme. However, as the Minister for Finance has explained to this House, there was on that night simply too much at stake to discriminate between different types of bondholders and in the end those whom the Governor felt should not have been included accounted for just 3% of the covered liabilities. The Credit Institutions (Eligible Liabilities Guarantee) (Amendment) Scheme 2010 introduced in September last amended the bank guarantee scheme, known as the eligible liabilities guarantee scheme, ELG, which had been in effect since December 2009. The scheme is now more focused and targeted than was the original guarantee scheme and it is in line with the European model of bank guarantees developed in its wake. The scheme no longer covers subordinated debt and imposes significantly higher fees on participating institutions for the benefit of a State guarantee of their liabilities. At the end of June 2010, bank liabilities covered under the ELG scheme stood at €153 billion

The original guarantee scheme provided a necessary and critical support to banks as other measures to repair and renew the banking system were introduced. The Government's guiding principle in all its interventions since September 2008 has been to provide a financial system that will serve our industry, businesses and households.

Deputy Beverley Flynn: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. It is fair to say that the public is extremely angry at what has happened, the roles played by bankers in bringing the country to its knees and the economic crisis we are now going through.

It is important to say that we on this side of the House are angry too. The Opposition does not have a monopoly in terms of anger in this respect. Everyone in the country is outraged at what has happened. We all want to see anyone who has broken the law brought to justice. I welcome the recent statement by the Garda Commissioner that the investigation in this regard is receiving the highest priority possible and that he hopes to be able to bring it to a conclusion at the earliest possible opportunity. It must be recognised that the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation has informed us that this is the most complex investigation ever undertaken by the State, having dealt with approximately 100,000 documents. It is hoped that this investigation when complete will result in an outcome which satisfies Members of this House and the public.

To suggest that nothing has been done in terms of dealing with this situation is completely outrageous, in particular as far as boards of directors of the various banks are concerned. There has been a huge amount of change in the boards of directors of the covered institutions of which we are speaking tonight. Some 47 board members who were *in situ* pre-September 2008 have departed, with 27 remaining. That is a 64% change in board members, representing a significant change in the past number of years. In addition, there have been 33 new appointments, including 12 Government nominees. There has been a huge amount of change across all the boards. The appointment by Government of two public interest directors to all major covered institutions is an important mechanism in terms of accountability to this House and the public.

I welcome that there is a mix of board members from the domestic and overseas markets. The Opposition's motion states that there has not been a change of personnel, but it is wrong. What is more important than a change of personnel across the boards is a change of culture. It is important there is a change of culture in all of the banking institutions and that the new board members challenge the management structures in terms of the decisions they are making. That is the only way we will get the type of robust boards across our banking system that we deserve.

My colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Calleary, referred to the introduction of the guarantee scheme in 2008. That guarantee was absolutely essential to ensure the stability of the banking system. One, if not more, of our banks was close to collapse. In terms of the protection of deposit holders, it was critically important for confidence in our banking system that the guarantee scheme be introduced. This has been reflected in the banking reports subsequently published. The Government introduced NAMA, a work-out vehicle to remove all the development loans from the banks' balance sheets. That process is working efficiently. It is hoped that process will be completed by February of next year. It is through NAMA and the recapitalisation of the banks that we are bringing about stability in our banking system. We are dealing with a financial crisis that is changing week by week. Much of what happens is based on confidence. In this regard, I might add that the role of the Opposition throughout all of this has done more damage to confidence in this country. It has played no small part in the rising rates we must pay to borrow. It was suggested by the Opposition that we should default on senior bondholders. From whom do they think we will secure additional funds when we return to the markets in the new year?

The reality is that our credibility as a country is at stake. I support the position taken by the Government.

Deputy Mary O'Rourke: I am glad to have an opportunity to contribute to this debate. I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Calleary, for his clear statement to the House this evening. It will be a useful speech.

When I read the Opposition's motion, I was unable to determine whether it was referring to the past or the present. It is not timeframed. The Minister of State, Deputy Calleary, has adequately set out the actions taken by Government since 2008. I want to echo what Deputy

8 o'clock Flynn said, namely, that there is no premium on anger. It is not that Members on that side of the House are angry and we, on the other side, are cold and callous. We are as incensed as anyone else in the country at the manner in which the various people at the top of the financial institutions behaved. They have squandered the trust people put in them. I saw on television last night a clip showing all of the people who attended the Allied Irish Banks special meeting. I felt sorry for them and do not know what stopped them pelting apples or oranges at the people concerned, even though it was not the man currently in charge who was in place at the time. Those people lost all of their savings. The banks took their money and even though they have lost all their savings, they were politely sitting in their seats listening to what Mr. David Hodgkinson was saying. It was parroted from sections of this and the opposite side of the House that the Government was "in bed" with the bankers and speculators and that it was encouraging this heinous behaviour, which is incorrect.

I, too, wish to see some of them in handcuffs being brought in and out of prison but it will not happen because we have embraced a different justice system here. Whether one believes the American system is good and ours is not, that is our system of justice and it has served us well.

I heard Garda Commissioner Fachtna Murphy, say clearly on television last night that they were getting ahead with their business and that there was no word of any shortage of funding

[Deputy Mary O'Rourke.]

to him or to his men to enable them to continue their investigations. He said he hoped to carry them through to a fruitful end.

I listen to some of the talk shows at the weekend that interviewed some people who have been very much involved in speculation of the wildest nature and they get a great hearing, although not when the e-mails come in. They want to tell their story but I wonder what is the point of that because it only enrages people further.

I commend the Minister's speech earlier and support the work the Government has undertaken in the past two years.

Deputy Frank Fahey: This is a populist motion by the Fine Gael Party, the key to it being that it "recognises the widespread public anger that those chiefly responsible for the crisis have not been held to account" and "calls on the Government to adequately resource the Garda". There is public anger. Everybody is angry about the way in which the banking system failed miserably.

Regling and Watson, and Governor Honohan, put the blame squarely on the banks. Messrs Regling and Watson stated that the primary cause of the banking crisis lies with the banks and their boards. While mistakes were made in regard to macro-economic policy, the Government has taken the blame for that, principally that counter-cyclical policies were not put in place by the Government during the period from 2000 onwards after we joined the euro up to 2005 to 2006.

The reality is that between January 2003 and January 2007 the total outstanding credit from the banks here increased from €160 billion in 2003 to €380 billion in 2007. That was an increase of €220 billion of outstanding credit from the banks. That is the cause of the crisis. We can put whatever connotation we want on it but that is what led to the difficulty we have today.

One of the interesting points made by Regling and Watson was that there was not the kind of expertise available to deal with the situation that was occurring. I did not see anybody—

Deputy Alan Shatter: That was the Government's fault.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Allow Deputy Fahey to speak.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It was the Government that was entirely responsible for the lack of expertise within the regulatory bodies.

Deputy Frank Fahey: It is interesting that Deputy Shatter says that because the reality, and Regling and Watson pointed this out, was that going back to the time of T K Whitaker, who tried to put in place the proper economic and fiscal expertise within the Department of Finance, it was not put in place, not when the Deputy's party was in Government or when our party was in Government.

Deputy Alan Shatter: The Deputy's party has been in Government for 14 years.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Allow Deputy Fahey to conclude.

Deputy Alan Shatter: This has happened on Fianna Fail's watch.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Shatter, nobody interrupted you when you were speaking. Please allow Deputy Fahey speak.

Deputy Frank Fahey: During that four year period, I did not hear anybody from the Fine Gael benches calling for any reduction in the amount of credit that was being given out by the banks. It is fair to say that all parties in the House wanted to see that credit regime continue.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Not so, Deputy.

Deputy Frank Fahey: In fact, some of the Opposition parties were calling for more money to be spent and for money to be taken out of the National Pensions Reserve Fund to fund further infrastructural development.

This motion will not fool anybody. There is great anger about the situation. We all want to see people who have broken the law brought to justice but Deputy Shatter knows more than anybody else that there is due process. There is a Garda investigation and it must take its course. The Garda assured the Minister and this Dáil that it has adequate resources to carry out its inquiries, and this Fine Gael motion will do nothing other than try to be populist in that respect.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It should not take two years.

Deputy Michael Ahern: This motion and the contributions from the other side of the House go back to the accusations made in the past two years, specifically with regard to the bank guarantee scheme. The credit institutions support scheme introduced in 2008 provided for a blanket guarantee of the deposits and liabilities of Irish institutions. Without that guarantee, the banking system would have collapsed. As the Governor of the Central Bank said in his report on the banking crisis, “An extensive guarantee needed to be put in place”. Otherwise, our banks would have run out of money within a matter of days and “would have had to close their doors”. The Governor went on to state: “Closure of all, or a large part, of the banking system would have entailed a catastrophic immediate and sustained economy-wide disruption . . .”.

The bank guarantee provided breathing space to allow necessary measures to fix the banking system be introduced. That included NAMA, the bank recapitalisation, reform of the Central Bank and a new Financial Regulator put in place, and the ongoing restructuring of the individual institutions. As all Members are aware, attracting funding remains difficult for the banks, not least in light of the stress in sovereign debt markets. It is also important to point out that about a dozen other European Union countries also recently extended their bank guarantee schemes to 31 December. They include countries such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Spain and Sweden. It is also important to note also that the State has already earned more than €1 billion from guarantee fees in less than two years.

Messrs Klaus Regling and Max Watson, in their report, questioned the fiscal and macro-economic policy of the Government but they went on to state:

. . . that bank governance and risk management were weak — in some cases disastrously so. This contributed to the crisis through several channels. Credit risk controls failed to prevent severe concentrations in lending on property — including notably on commercial property — as well as high exposures to individual borrowers and a serious overdependence on wholesale funding. It appears that internal procedures were overridden, sometimes systematically. The systemic impact of the governance issues crystallised dramatically with the Government statements that accompanied the nationalisation of [Irish banking].

It has been stated also that the Government has done nothing in recent years to face up to the problem but that is untrue. The creation of a fully integrated Central Bank has been announced. That was recommended in the FRS report of the then finance committee in the 1997-2002

[Deputy Michael Ahern.]

period. We recommended that to the House. It was an outside report which recommended breaking up that body. The wisdom of the House was correct on that occasion. Deputy Noonan was the spokesperson on finance at the time and I was chairman of the committee at that time.

There has also been the replacement of the board of the Central Bank and the Financial Regulator with a new Central Bank Commission chaired by the Governor, Professor Patrick Honohan. Mr. Matthew Elderfield was appointed as Head of Financial Regulation, and has been doing tremendous work since he took up office. There has also been provision on a statutory basis for a new regime of fitness and probity for senior management and board members in banks and other financial service providers.

A total of 60% of the members of the boards of the banks have vacated their positions. It is often put forward that there have been no changes in that area but it is clear from the facts that there has been change. Regarding what has been done to make the people answer for what they have been doing in the banks, the Garda Síochána and the Director of Corporate Enforcement have been doing extensive work in that area and from the statement of the Garda Commissioner in recent days it is hoped that work will come to an end in the near future and will go to assuage the anger that exists, and rightly so, among the public.

Deputy Joan Burton: I would like to share my time with Deputy Arthur Morgan.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: And Deputy Seán Sherlock?

Deputy Joan Burton: Yes, tomorrow evening.

Recent revelations have added massively to the cost and uncertainty surrounding Fianna Fáil's bailout of its pals, the bankers and developers. So badly has Fianna Fáil's blanket guarantee turned out that the interest rate on Irish bonds, as we have seen today, is now well over 7%. If we stay at this rate, our national debt will double in ten years. We are on an upward escalator the size of Mount Everest. Although ordinary Irish people are taking tremendous hits in terms of cuts in services, extra taxation, pension levies and so on, the amount involved does not come near the actual increase in interest costs that Fianna Fáil and its disastrous mismanagement of the bank bailout and guarantee have brought down on the heads of the unfortunate citizens of this country.

There are two major contributors to the cost of the bailout, as mentioned in the recent announcement by the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan. The bailout IOUs, or promissory notes, give rise to super-sized interest payments, adding at least €1.7 billion to the deficit in 2011, which means that higher taxes and harsher cuts will be needed to meet deficit targets. Many people have been surprised by the rise in the deficit from €7.5 billion to €15 billion. The answer is simple. Most of it — almost all of it — relates to higher interest costs, particularly with regard to promissory notes to Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide. When he announced this last Easter, the Minister seemed to think there would be no interest charge at all, or else he did not tell us about it. Thus, either he was stupid — which I do not think he is — or he exercised his discretion and did not share his knowledge with the plain people of Ireland.

In addition, the Government has agreed to buy all shares in the AIB rights issue at a price of 50 cent — as announced on black Thursday — even though the shares are trading on the open market at about 35 cent. This reminds me of the purchase of Farmleigh by the former Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, in his salad days. It was on offer on the open market at €15 million, but by the time he managed to acquire it the cost, believe it or not, had risen to well over €20 million. AIB shares cost 33 cent, yet the poor unfortunate taxpayer will pay 50 cent per share for them. Of the total €5.4 billion rights issue, upwards of €1.6 billion will be a

straight gift to existing AIB shareholders, including the many who took a punt on those shares — hedge funds and private equity funds — when they were floating at the bottom.

Bankers have treated taxpayers as doormats. It is a case of all take and no give. It is time this balance was redressed and the banking sector made to contribute to the cost of cleaning up its own mess and preventing a similar mess in the future. There are two options I will recommend to the Government in this regard. The first is to provide that 100%, rather than 50%, of the cost of financial regulation be covered by the industry, which will result in savings of about €30 million per year, or €150 million over five years. At the moment, the banks, financial institutions and insurance companies pay half the cost of regulation, with the State paying the other half, which runs to about €30 million per year at present. Why should the industry not pay for all of this? Why should the banks and financial institutions not also pay the cost of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement? It is the least they could do, given the billions of euro we have poured into them.

The second recommendation, which would require a little courage and engagement by the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance, is to campaign for an EU-level financial transaction tax on speculative transactions in derivatives and other types of financial product. Believe it or not, this would raise €1 billion to €2 billion per annum for the Irish Exchequer. However, it could only be done on an EU-wide basis, and therefore our Government should lobby for the introduction of such a tax in the EU. It would help to curb speculation and to document transactions, which is important.

The Taoiseach shed some light on how Ireland is to pay down the IOUs incurred in bailing out Anglo Irish Bank, Irish Nationwide Building Society and EBS when he described the promissory notes — a cool €31 billion — as being akin to paying a mortgage. This is a €31 billion mortgage on Irish households for the sake of Anglo Irish Bank, Irish Nationwide and, in a small way, the EBS. To date, the Minister for Finance has issued €18.88 billion in promissory notes to Anglo Irish Bank, with the issue of a further €6.4 billion to take place before the end of the year. A promissory note for €2.6 billion has been issued to Irish Nationwide Building Society, but the Minister has indicated that this will very soon increase by a further €2.7 billion. A smaller promissory note, amounting to a mere €0.25 billion, has been issued to EBS.

These IOUs will total €31 billion by the end of 2010, but that is not the end of the story. The interest rate on the promissory notes will average around 5%, because the interest rate on the day the note is issued is applied. With repayments totalling €3 billion per annum, the total interest charge will add a further €10 billion to €14 billion to the final bill for bailing out the banks. The Minister for Finance must come clean on the interest rate, the term, the annual cost and the total overall cost of paying off these IOUs. We need to see the small print of the “mortgage agreement” which the Minister has signed the country up to.

The use of the word “mortgage” by the Taoiseach in the Dáil confirms the Labour Party’s view that these IOUs will generate large annual interest payments in the budget every year for the next ten to 15 years. This makes the target of a 3% deficit by 2014 more challenging and will result in more tax hikes and spending cuts in the Government’s four-year plan.

On 8 October, I tabled a parliamentary question on the proposed rights issue to recapitalise AIB. I was concerned that this €5.4 billion transaction, which is to be underwritten by the National Pensions Reserve Fund, could involve an immediate and significant write-down on taxpayers’ investment. In his reply to me on 14 October, the Minister confirmed to me that he intends for the rights issue to go ahead at a price of 50 cent, even though the market price has ranged between 30 cent and 40 cent in recent weeks. In the topsy-turvy world of Alice in Wonderland, when, in a market-driven transaction such as this, would one pay 50 cent for a share that is currently trading at 33 cent, with an average of between 30 cent and 40 cent? It

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

is customary for shares to be offered at a discount; instead, the State is taking them on at a premium, which will result in a further loss of €1.6 billion in the State's investment in the NPRF, because the share values will be diluted. The net beneficiaries of Fianna Fáil's largesse will be existing AIB shareholders, particularly bottom-feeders who bought when the shares were very low — including hedge funds and private equity funds — whose investments will not now be diluted as much as they would have been. A further €1.6 billion gift to punters on bank shares may not sound like a large amount to those in the Department of Finance in the context of an overall bailout cost of well over €50 billion, but to put this in context, €1.6 billion is approximately one third of the total budget cuts and tax rises Fianna Fáil has in store in the December budget. The cause is the blanket guarantee that Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and even Sinn Féin passed in these Houses in September 2008. Had we avoided the blanket guarantee, we could have probably avoided tens of billions of euro in losses that now lie on the backs of the taxpayers.

We must make the bankers pay for the crisis. Even if it takes 100 years as far as I am concerned and as far as the Labour Party is concerned, we will get every cent these bankers have swallowed and that Fianna Fáil has given its cronies in the banks. When these people move away from being in government, we will produce a serious programme for reform and corporate governance that will end the cosy old boys' club that exists between Fianna Fáil, the developers and the bankers.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: I thank Deputy Burton for sharing her time with me. I support the Fine Gael motion, which Deputy Fahey described as populist. I wonder why it is popular for people to want to hold these bankers to account. I must be leading a sad life because recently I started to listen carefully to Fianna Fáil speeches, which I regard as dangerous. This evening I thought the Minister of State, Deputy Calleary, was doing particularly well. It was a very technical statement almost devoid of saying anything except what some Garda Commissioner or some other person might have said in the past with very little reference to the Fianna Fáil backroom team. However, he eventually made a bit of a slip when he said: "On the night of 29 September 2008, there simply was too much at stake to discriminate between different types of bondholders and in the end, those whom the Governor felt should not have been included accounted for just 3% of the covered liabilities." So the Minister of State believes it is not a big deal at all even though that 3% amounts to €5 billion. However, on 7 December the Government will rip off the people of this State to the tune of €5 billion in what will probably be the worst budget ever. While it apparently has to be done for the greater good, the Government regards the 3% as pocket change and we should not be excited about such a meaningless amount. However, if it had done its homework properly on 29 September 2008 and shared honestly with this House what the situation really was, then the State would be €5 billion richer, but that is not the case because of gross incompetence on the part of the Government.

Deputy Conor Lenihan: The guarantee did not cost anything.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: Well the Government covered it. Whoever crafted the Minister of State's statement — I suspect he had a hand in it himself——

Deputy Conor Lenihan: If the Deputy——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Allow Deputy Morgan to speak.

Deputy Conor Lenihan: Does the Deputy think——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: It is a pity I cannot hear that character when he talks because I would like to respond to him. It is a pity that whoever was given the job of crafting the statement was not given the job of crafting the amendment. The person or people who crafted the amendment to the Fine Gael motion obviously were in old mode and less competent than those who crafted the Minister of State's speech because the amendment commends the Government on "the rapid and effective response it has made to reform the structures of financial regulation, support the banks, restore confidence..." Whoever might be replying to the debate should tell us in whom the confidence has been restored because the report on the front of today's *Financial Times* and the interest rate of 7.24% on international bond markets today hardly suggest confidence. The confidence is certainly not restored in anyone in whom it should be restored and certainly not to the people. It has not even been restored to Government backbenchers; one has stepped away and more may follow, which does not suggest confidence in the Government.

The amendment also refers to "ensuring that banks fulfil their commitments given to the Government in relation to lending to Irish households and businesses and, in particular, small and medium sized enterprises". However, that is simply not happening. Through their work in their constituencies, all Deputies know that small businesses are screaming out for support from the banks, but are not getting it. Overdrafts and term loans are simply not being extended to small businesses which means that the very backbone of the economy on which we will depend to find our way out of this economic mess is being wiped out. Really someone should have a chat with whoever crafted this amendment.

While we know a number of inquiries are going on, who is inquiring into the activities of the auditors of these banks? Ernst & Young were the auditors for Anglo Irish Bank. I am sure the Minister of State is familiar with the figures from the 2008 accounts audited by Ernst & Young, which indicated a profit of €784 million, but a few months later we were told it was a €12.7 billion loss. I must correct the record; of course there is an investigation is going on into the auditors, but the auditors are investigating themselves. I am sure that will be a very fruitful investigation and I can tell the House now what the results will be, and it certainly will not be very heartening for the taxpayers who will need to carry the can for these characters.

I will return to the bank shortly, but before I do I want to address the other side of the Fine Gael motion, which deals——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy has 2.5 minutes left.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: That is what I meant; I do not have much time to deal with the matters I would have like to have covered. There needs to be greater efficiency in the Garda. There are gardaí hanging around courthouses waiting for cases to be called when the DPP knows that those cases are not likely to be taken that day and in some cases knows definitely that they will not be taken that day, leading to substantial time being wasted. We need to get gardaí out from behind the desk doing silly things like answering phones, which is a telephonist's job. Highly trained police officers should be doing the job for which they are trained rather than wasting time answering the phone.

I am somewhat concerned about the work of CAB, which appears to be used increasingly as a revenue raising agency. While I do not disagree with the work it is doing and welcome it, I wonder whether there are bigger fish to fry.

Let me finish with bank regulation. The Government claims it has done great things, but for the past three sessions the list of promised legislation has contained the Bills for the financial regulatory reform. On the publication of the Central Bank Reform Bill in March, I met Department of Finance officials and was told that the second and third parts of this three-stage legislat-

[Deputy Arthur Morgan.]

ive programme would be almost finished by the end of 2010. The briefing document provided by the officials stated that the text of the second Bill would be available early in autumn, but now we are told that publication of the final two Bills is not expected until 2011. Why is financial regulation being dragged out? Why is it not all wrapped up and done and dealt with? The code has not even been published yet and we are supposed to have a consultation on it, which means it will not be introduced until sometime in the second half of next year. According to the Government's amendment and to the contributions from Members on the Government side all of the legislation on bank regulation is supposed to be urgent, but there is no sign of it. I wonder why it is being delayed and dragged out, and I am concerned about the message that sends to the banking sector.

It is a pity I could not deal with the issue of directors and the cliques who remain in place. We need more time to deal with those characters and I hope we get an opportunity in the future.

Debate adjourned.

Adjournment Debate

School Curriculum

Deputy Thomas McEllistrim: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me to raise this important issue.

As business is the engine that keeps the country running and drives the local and national economy, perhaps it is time that we considered the enhanced fostering of entrepreneurship in schools and its gradual development as a formal subject. I recently received correspondence from a young and enthusiastic secondary teacher who, after involvement in the young entrepreneur programme, YEP, in County Kerry became convinced that entrepreneurship should become a subject at second level.

As part of the programme, students at both second and third level come up with a business idea, research it and submit a comprehensive business plan. Following assessment and shortlisting, they must pitch their business idea to a panel of business people who decide on 12 finalists. They then go forward to the final where they make a concluding pitch and face questions from a panel of nationally recognised experts. The winner is later announced at a gala evening attended by all — students, teachers, mentors and organisers. The YEP and similar projects in other parts of the country demonstrate the huge potential of students. Those who did not study business but who recognised gaps in the market excelled in making business plans. Many students completing the programme have a business plan for potentially viable business ventures. The experience gained in the programme arms students with the tools to better themselves and their communities. The skills learned will stand to them in whatever careers they choose.

The global economic downturn has led to a focus on the need for job creation and competitiveness to stimulate the economy into recovery. Large scale businesses and multinationals across the country are important in providing jobs but so too are the small and medium enterprises scattered across every county. The fostering of entrepreneurship in our young people, through education, is the way forward. Given the right stimulation and support, their initiative and perception could lead to the innovation needed to create new opportunities for business and for jobs.

Traditional enterprise programmes tend to teach the theoretical side of enterprise and the formulation of business plans but there is also a need to be more hands-on and practical in our approach. Making the programme examinable would give it greater credence and put the emphasis on the student taking control of their own learning. The involvement of the wider community will allow the students to derive practical knowledge from the learning pool of local established ventures through work placement and mentoring components. Students will gain self-esteem and confidence, improving their ability to research and improving their interpersonal skills, information communication technology skills, problem solving skills, accountancy and economic skills and responsibility, adaptability and independent learning. These are all important skills not only in business but in life.

Regardless of whether these students take up a career in business, these skills and a can-do spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation will stay with them in any future career they choose. It is a win-win situation. The aims and objectives of promoting entrepreneurship in schools would allow our young people the prospect of becoming self-reliant on their own initiatives, teach them how to develop their business plans, give them the necessary tools to implement their business ideas and encompass the wider community collectively in stimulating economic growth through the implementation of business ideas through to start-up businesses. It would ignite young people's passion and pride in their country and, therefore, the motivation to develop the indigenous industries that make their country economically sound. It would also foster a positive attitude and understanding of all aspects of business and promote maturity in all aspects of life, personally and socially.

The fostering of entrepreneurship would involve a coalition of partners in which each partner would be a cog in the wheel of success. Each would serve different functions and roles, ultimately achieving the same goal, which is to bring entrepreneurship to life, to bring to students an understanding of the business world and, potentially, to bring their ideas to a successful conclusion, that is, a profitable enterprise.

I understand there would be major practicalities involved in expanding these projects into leaving certificate subjects and considerable research and development would have to be done in advance. However, a review of current entrepreneurship projects in various parts of the country would be an excellent place to start. The Department could investigate why they were successful, what is to be learned from good practice, what could be improved, how the local business and school communities interacted and the dividend both for community and students involved. At the very least, projects such as YEP should be expanded and supported throughout the State. Business will drive our country forward and out of recession. Mol an óige and tiocfaidh sé.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): I am taking this matter on behalf of my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills.

I thank the Deputy for raising this issue and I welcome this opportunity to outline the position in on entrepreneurship in schools. At a European level, the EU Commission has identified enterprise as one of eight key competences all students should have by the end of second level education. The Commission defines enterprise as being able to make change happen, as well as being able to support and adapt to change, taking responsibility for ideas, setting objectives and meeting them, and being motivated to succeed. My Department supports enterprise in schools through the development of core skills in the curriculum such as literacy and numeracy, ICT, higher order thinking and problem solving; ensuring an appropriate basket

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

of competences in junior and senior cycles; and specific programmes in enterprise in senior cycle.

One of the principles underpinning the primary school curriculum is that the child's higher order thinking and problem solving skills are developed. Through the curriculum, the child is encouraged to observe, to ask relevant questions, to recognise the essence of a problem, to suggest solutions and to make informed judgements. These skills are fundamental to engendering enterprise in our young people. At junior cycle level, an enterprise culture is promoted by ensuring an appropriate range of competences through a broadly based programme encouraging investigative approaches and offering science, ICT, languages, technology and a range of academic and practical subjects. These offer a foundation for active citizenship and lifelong learning.

In senior cycle students taking the transition year option, the leaving certificate vocational programme and the leaving certificate applied are provided with specific opportunities to acquire enterprise skills. These programmes place a strong focus on active learning, community-based approaches, personal development and teamwork. Students also engage in work experience. As part of transition year, which is now taken by 50% of students, Mini-company is among the range of options supported. Mini-company is a tuition programme and class activity undertaken over the period of the transition year. After generating the business idea, the company is set up and registered, different students assume the roles of different actors in the company — chief executive officer, production manager, human resources, industrial relations, finance, etc. The same process is gone through leading to the production of the product or service, the accounts, the business report, and also the winding down of the company, and the presentation and interview process.

Enterprise education and preparation for work are the link modules which form an explicit part of the curriculum within the leaving certificate vocational programme. In the leaving certificate examination this year, the link modules were taken by 15,596 candidates. The enterprise dimension of the programme is designed to give students the opportunity to meet enterprising people and investigate business and community enterprises. As part of the modules, students are encouraged to set up their own enterprise projects as vehicles of learning at home, in a school, in the community or in business. The vocational preparation and training aspects of the leaving certificate applied, taken by 3,358 students in 2010, also include enterprise and work experience dimensions.

The leaving certificate business syllabus has a strong focus on enterprise. The syllabus is designed to provide a clear understanding of the role of enterprise and to develop in students a positive and ethical attitude to enterprise in personal, business and public life. The syllabus covers the relationships of people in a business environment; handling conflict; identifying, marketing and starting a business; the domestic and international environment; entrepreneurs and enterprise skills; and their application to different situations. In the leaving certificate in 2010, some 18,790 students sat business. It will be seen, therefore, that enterprise is an intrinsic part of the curriculum in senior cycle supported by continuing professional development programmes and resources for teachers.

The county and city enterprise boards organise a student enterprise award scheme in second level schools and Youthreach centres. Students are required to generate the business idea, research it, undertake a risk assessment, produce the product or service, market it, prepare costings and accounts and a business report. In 2009 for the first time, the top three winners of the transition year mini-company "Get Up and Go" competition and the CEB student

enterprise awards were presented with the Seán Lemass award for enterprise by the Taoiseach. There was also media coverage, including on “The Late Late Show”, of businesses developed by students in the competitions. This was the first year of the Seán Lemass award and it reflects a commitment in the Government strategy “Building Ireland’s Smart Economy: A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal” to raise the profile of these competitions and encourage more second level students to participate in enterprise programmes.

Enterprise does not relate only to setting up a business and there are other examples across the school system which promote the skills which underpin an enterprise culture. Young Social Innovators is an initiative to promote social awareness among students and is available for schools providing the transition year programme. The students are encouraged to identify a social issue, research it and engage in an action plan to promote change. The skills of teamwork, research, planning, evaluation, critical reflection and active citizenship are developed. The results are showcased in an annual exhibition and award scheme. Some of the projects can result in social enterprises being explored. Some 6,000 students annually take part. The Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition, now the largest and longest running exhibition of its kind in Europe, is another example of the innovation and creativity which is being fostered and promoted in our schools.

In addition to the above, a variety of voluntary and other agencies have been promoting links between schools and business, either in the form of junior achievement or the business in the community schools business partnership programme concentrating on schools serving disadvantaged communities. This work is also supported extensively through the county enterprise boards and chambers of commerce.

We are continuing to promote key skills and active learning as part of ongoing curriculum reform. The junior cycle review currently under way will present new opportunities to strengthen these skills and promote enterprise, creativity and innovation in our schools.

I thank the Deputy once again for raising this matter.

National Asset Management Agency

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: I wish to raise the important issue of NAMA and its efforts to date in pursuing developers who owe money to the agency, particularly focusing on the foreclosure of bankrupt developers. I raise this matter having already submitted a parliamentary question to the Department of Finance, to which the response from the Minister was less than satisfactory.

As far back as 13 April, Mr. Brendan McDonagh, the CEO of NAMA, appeared before the Oireachtas Committee on Finance and the Public Service and made estimates and projections for how and when bankrupt developers and unco-operative developers would be pursued. At that point, Mr. McDonagh stated that NAMA would start to foreclose on bankrupt developers by September, after assessing how they intended to deal with their debts. He clearly stated at that meeting that NAMA would take a strong view and would apply a zero value to developers’ personal guarantees when considering loans.

The disappointing aspect of all of this is that, to date, NAMA has worked on 12 potential cases where legal action is being taken against some of these people. So far, as matters have proceeded through the Commercial Court, it has been clear that NAMA has been ineffectual and ill prepared when dealing with these cases. For example, on 18 October, Mr. Justice Peter Kelly criticised what he described as the sloppy and careless manner in which legal proceedings were being brought by the various banks in efforts to recover multimillion euro debts. He

[Deputy Lucinda Creighton.]

noted that in one case taken by Anglo Irish Bank, the bank's legal team sued for €3 million, as opposed to the €9 million owed. It is clear that the banks in their proceedings in the Commercial Court, along with NAMA in its failure to progress matters through the legal system, are failing in their duty. There is a significant duty of care now to the taxpayer, who has pumped billions of euro into Anglo Irish Bank, Bank of Ireland and AIB, and there should be some return for this in terms of reckless developers being pursued to ensure they do not get off scot free.

It is puzzling to the public that one developer could be heard on an RTE radio programme on Saturday talking about the salary he could expect to receive from NAMA. As we know, NAMA has not even set a cap on the fees that will be paid to developers. This grates with people because they do not understand why salaries are being paid to developers who were reckless by their own admission and why those fees have not had a maximum level put in place.

There have been delays in identifying properties that have been transferred into the names of developers' spouses. There are lists of properties that have been identified in the national press owned by developers where substantial assets worth up to €2 million have been transferred since 2008 into the names of the developers' spouses. When properties have been transferred within the five years, NAMA is well within its rights to set aside those transferrals.

I hope there will be a more detailed answer from the other side of the House than was the case in response to my parliamentary question.

Deputy Seán Haughey: NAMA has made significant progress in the ten months since its establishment last December. In its second quarterly report, released earlier today, NAMA recorded a profit of €6 million in the three months to the end of June 2010. The report also illustrates that loans are continuing to transfer on schedule to NAMA, which in turn has begun to directly manage those loans for the first time.

NAMA advises that it is currently engaging directly with some 30 debtors. As their loans are acquired by NAMA, debtors are being asked to produce business plans which will set out detailed and credible targets for reducing their debt. It is not an option for debtors to survive on taxpayer-funded life support until the market improves; a debtor must set out how he plans to reduce his debt significantly over a three to five year horizon. For most debtors this means identifying assets which can be sold to raise cash which will be used to repay debt. NAMA will endeavour to work with debtors where this is a commercially feasible option. It will work with debtors who are co-operative, in asset funding and in the lifestyle implications for them. The agency will also work with debtors who can prove they possess the will and the managerial capacity to deliver on targets. In cases where they cannot do so, the only option will be foreclosure.

NAMA expects the property underlying the loans it acquires will be worth about half of the amount advanced by banks. That is the most that NAMA could notionally recover today if it foreclosed on all debtors. The market, however, is in no condition to absorb a large volume of property sales currently. NAMA's best interest, therefore, is served by working with debtors, where possible, to enable them to improve their capacity to repay their debts.

The coming months will be pivotal for NAMA in its key decisions on the viability of individual debtors. The agency will seek to optimise the income it can extract from loan portfolios. Part of that involves ensuring debtors pay to NAMA all of their available cash flows in circumstances where they are unable to fully meet their current interest repayment obligations. While it may be seen as an obvious step, NAMA is discovering it was not, by any means, the universal

practice among financial institutions to secure asset cash flows for purposes of debt repayment. Other options available to NAMA include debt rescheduling, loan restructuring and the potential sale or assignment of loans or loan portfolios to third parties. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and the decision will be dictated by commercial criteria.

Inevitably, it will be necessary to foreclose on debtors incapable of managing the burden they have taken on. Accordingly, NAMA will become more the manager of a portfolio of property assets. To date, NAMA has approved enforcement action on 15 debtors. Not all of this will lead to actual enforcement, as the experience so far has been that debtors begin to cooperate when faced with actual enforcement. In cases in which NAMA will enforce, it will have to pursue the normal avenues through the courts in Ireland and elsewhere.

Banks and debtors are enduring significant pain as part of the current process — the banks through the write-downs they must accept on the sale of their loans to NAMA; debtors, through loss of their equity. NAMA has advised it is well placed to break even, or do better, on behalf of the taxpayer. The agency will pay no more than a realistic price for the loans it acquires and has the advantage of time to extract optimal value from the loans and from any property it may acquire through foreclosure.

While not directly related to this Adjournment matter, it should be noted that NAMA yesterday was successful in facing down the first significant legal challenge it encountered with a comprehensive ruling in its favour in the High Court. There should be no doubt that the agency will pursue developers who owe money to it and foreclose on bankrupt developers where this is the best course of action to take.

Garda Stations

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: The Department of Justice and Law Reform, the Garda Commissioner, the Office of Public Works, OPW, and local Garda management all agree the current site for Tralee's Garda station is not suitable for a divisional headquarters or appropriate to the policing demands of the Tralee district and Kerry division. For eight years, several new sites have been considered but have been found not to be suitable.

A site at Ballymullen Barracks was identified and considered the most appropriate for several reasons. It was also proposed to move the local driving test centre and part of the Courts Service to the Ballymullen site. Negotiations to ensure the transfer of the site to the Office of Public Works have been under way for some time with the Department of Defence.

While the site is not required by the Department for future purposes, it seems not to be prepared to pass it on free of charge to the OPW but insists on receiving the current value for it. The OPW is not prepared to exchange money for a site it believes is State property and will remain in State ownership if developed as a divisional Garda headquarters. Transfer of the site free of charge would make the site more attractive for the location of a new station and make financial sense.

Policing in Tralee is good with excellent interaction between the local policing committees and Oireachtas and county council members and a good relationship between the several effective community gardaí and local communities. The current premises are not suitable for modern policing requirements as they are overcrowded, lack parking facilities, are inappropriately located and probably pose health and safety risks. While the local police force is efficient and effective, its members feel these problems with the current station may affect the quality of policing they can give.

[Deputy Jimmy Deenihan.]

There is a precedent regarding the free-of-charge transfer of Department of Defence lands to the OPW to facilitate a new Garda station in Ballincollig, County Cork, which is under construction, on the old Collins Barracks site. Will the Minister of State clarify this when replying?

In the southern Garda region, Tralee is recognised as the third busiest station after Anglesea Street, Cork and Henry Street, Limerick, respectively. A new Garda station is critical for policing in Tralee and the surrounding areas. A new divisional headquarters would provide proper accommodation for the technology the Garda must now use to combat increasingly more sophisticated criminals. The local gardaí deserve the same accommodation enjoyed in most other parts of the country. Tralee is rapidly expanding and is one of the largest provincial towns in the country. For a town of its size, it is important that it has an appropriately sized station that can deal with the current challenges faced by its local Garda force.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I am taking this Adjournment debate matter on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Law Reform, Deputy Dermot Ahern. I would like to thank the Deputy for raising this matter on the Adjournment.

With regard to Garda accommodation generally, the position is that the provision of Garda requirements is progressed by the Office of Public Works, on the basis of priorities established by An Garda Síochána. In that context, capital expenditure on Garda accommodation, including all site purchases and new buildings, and the examination of potential sites for the location of Garda stations, comes under the remit of the Office of Public Works. That office has overall responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

The Minister for Justice and Law Reform has been informed that the Office of Public Works has been engaged for some time in a process of identifying a suitable site for the construction of a new Garda divisional headquarters in Tralee. In addition, the Minister has been advised by the Office of Public Works that, despite repeated efforts, no suitable privately-owned sites have been identified in Tralee.

As a consequence, the Office of Public Works has subsequently concentrated on the possibility of State-owned property being made available. In particular, it has indicated that a Department of Defence-owned site has been identified as being potentially suitable to meet the accommodation needs of a number of State agencies, including An Garda Síochána.

I understand that the Deputy is aware of the situation and that, in fact, he has put down a written parliamentary question on this specific matter, which was answered by the Minister for Defence earlier today. The Deputy will appreciate from the reply provided to his question, that the Minister for Defence is of the view that military property should be disposed of on a fully commercial basis. In that regard, the funding realised would be used to provide resources to meet the current and future equipment and infrastructure needs of the Defence Forces.

The Office of Public Works has reported that it has been engaged in ongoing negotiations to secure the Department of Defence property in Tralee. The Minister for Justice and Law Reform has confirmed that this is a process he fully supports. In addition, the Minister has indicated that he and his Department will work with the other relevant parties to bring the process to a successful conclusion as quickly as possible.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am glad to be able to raise this matter which is very important for my constituency. It concerns the provision of a new site for a modern Garda station in Clonmel. At the outset, I wish to compliment all the Garda officers in Clonmel station under

the command of Superintendent John Courtney. In this day and age, they need a proper facility to be able to carry out all the duties that are required of them.

They need a modern building in order to deal 24 hours a day with all eventualities, including tackling crime, and responding to the needs of the community generally. I compliment Superintendent Courtney for the leading role that his officers play in community policing, including their support for the community alert and neighbourhood watch programmes.

It is incumbent on the OPW to acquire a new site. The current building, which is owned by the county council, is antiquated. It is adjacent to the county council buildings which in turn require additional space. The council has rented property all over Clonmel to try to cater for its own needs. We need a modern site of which many are available in the town. I have identified a number of good sites in town to the Office of Public Works and the Department of Justice and Law Reform, which could provide a one-stop-shop facility.

The population of Clonmel is approximately 17,000. It is the second biggest inland town in the country. In addition, it covers a large area of the county as well as part of County Waterford across the River Suir. It also covers rural districts including Kilcash, Kilsheelin and Mullinahone.

Two years ago, the then Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy Brian Lenihan, visited the constituency along with the Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Deputy Mansergh. The Minister saw for himself that the current Garda station is totally unsuitable. The public office area is tiny and totally unsatisfactory both for Garda personnel and the general public who must use it. The lack of privacy is an issue, and although Garda officers do their best for the public it is not suitable.

We recently received funding from the OPW to carry out minor upgrades on certain aspects of the station, but the building is really sub-standard and totally unsuitable. Therefore a new accessible site is needed, which can be used as a one-stop-shop for everything from a Garda front-desk to a vehicle pound. A new facility could also provide all technical aspects associated with the fight against crime. We must fully support the Garda Síochána in the fight against crime in rural and urban areas.

The public in Clonmel has a good relationship with the Garda, which we welcome and support. The joint policing sub-committee had a meeting this evening and I wish its members well. I also attend that committee when I can and there is a good relationship between both public and Garda representatives on that body. I welcome the new Garda chief superintendent to Thurles.

Some funds have been provided recently but they only covered a small aspect of what is required overall to bring about the new facility. The current location was suitable at one time but is no longer so because the town has outgrown the station's capacity. A greenfield site, of which there are a number, is required. In addition, there are vacant factories and an old telecom site in Clonmel. Such premises could be used to build a modern facility with sufficient parking, a suitable public office and other areas for consultation with legal representatives, as well as secure areas in which to store impounded vehicles. A modern facility could be developed on a greenfield site, which is imperative for the future of policing in South Tipperary, including Clonmel. The Garda Síochána needs proper facilities to allow its members to carry out their duties. They have an onerous task which requires our support and they need modern facilities, including the tools of the trade, to deal with the sophisticated crimes perpetrated by gangsters in South Tipperary and other parts of the country.

The Garda is willing, ready and able to respond but needs the tools of the trade to do so. Above all it needs proper, decent facilities for the superintendent and his team, including

[Deputy Mattie McGrath.]

clerical staff. In that way, they can carry out their duties to service the people of South Tipperary in accordance with health and safety regulations.

Deputy Seán Haughey: On behalf of the Minister for Justice and Law Reform, Deputy Dermot Ahern, I would like to thank Deputy Mattie McGrath for raising this matter on the Adjournment.

The Deputy will be aware that the provision of new Garda stations and Garda accommodation generally is a matter for the Office of Public Works. The provision of such accommodation is progressed by the Office of Public Works on the basis of priorities established by An Garda Síochána. In that context, capital expenditure on Garda accommodation, including all site purchases and new buildings, and the examination of potential sites for the location of Garda stations, comes under the remit of the Office of Public Works.

The Minister for Justice and Law Reform has been advised that the Office of Public Works has previously examined a number of potential sites in Clonmel with a view to providing a new Garda district headquarters. Unfortunately, none of the sites assessed to date has been deemed suitable for Garda requirements. The Minister has also been informed that the Office of Public Works is continuing to examine all available options for the provision of a Garda station in Clonmel with a view to progressing this matter.

The Minister also understands that in the interim, the Minister of State with responsibility for the OPW, Deputy Mansergh, has recently announced that — as part of a national programme agreed with the Garda authorities covering around 170 stations — three cells each in Tipperary and Cahir Garda stations, and four in Clonmel, are to be refurbished by the OPW over the next 12 months or so.

The Minister is also aware that the Deputy has expressed a strong interest in having a new station built in Clonmel. The Minister supports the project and it will be pursued in the context of the availability of a site which meets the needs of An Garda Síochána, its identified accommodation priorities and in the light of available resources.

The Dáil adjourned at 9.10 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 3 November 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 4, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 5 to 44, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 45 to 51, inclusive, answered orally.

Social Welfare Code

52. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to reform rent supplement so that payment is made directly to the landlord instead of the tenant. [40034/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The purpose of rent supplement 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 any other source. The scheme is intended as a temporary income support payment and is not designed to be a medium to long term housing support or a permanent solution to a person's housing needs. Rent supplement has responded to the dramatic increased demand for income support to support accommodation costs. There are currently 96,500 people in receipt of rent supplement, an increase of 62% since the end of December 2007.

Current legislation already provides for the making of a rent supplement payment to another person (e.g. a relative, a landlord or landlord's agent) on behalf of the recipient, at the tenant's request and is subject to the consent of the Health Service Executive (HSE). Approximately 20% of rent supplement payments are currently paid to a person other than the tenant. Under the legislative provisions governing rent supplement, the Department's relationship is with the tenant; the tenant makes the application for rent supplement and payment is made to the tenant. Rent supplement is specifically for the benefit of tenants to assist them with their accommodation needs. To remove the right of the tenant to receive this payment by making it payable only to the landlord would require legislative amendment and I have no plans at present to make this change.

Under the current arrangements, even with direct payment, landlords still have to collect the tenant contribution towards their rent (a minimum of €104 per month). The amount of rent supplement payable depends on the tenant's income; in some cases tenants pay only the minimum contribution while for others the tenant makes an additional contribution to their rent

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

based on their financial circumstances. For example, where a person is in part-time income and receives just 10% of his or her rent directly from the State, the landlord would receive the 10% directly whilst still having to collect the 90% from the tenant.

The efficiency of the scheme would be significantly affected if this arrangement were to be changed, for example, Community Welfare Officer's (CWO's) would potentially have to create a formal relationship with some 96,500 additional clients, the landlords. This would involve greater complexity and significant resources to deal with a new set of third parties. In particular, it would also result in CWOs being drawn into disputes between landlords and tenants. There may also be financial and control implications in cases where a tenant moves address and neither the landlord nor tenant inform the Department. Similarly, where a tenant is no longer eligible for rent supplement and the Department ceases paying the landlord, the Department may find itself involved in eviction proceedings.

Where a landlord has a grievance in relation to the non-payment of rent by a tenant, s/he may apply to the Private Residential Tenancies Board to have the dispute resolved through the board's dispute resolution process. It is also open to the landlord to bring to the attention of the HSE any instance where a tenant is receiving rent supplement but is not paying their rent. Where a CWO becomes aware that a person receiving rent supplement is not using that supplement for the purpose for which it was intended the matter is investigated.

Since 2004 local authorities have specific responsibility for meeting the longer-term housing needs of people receiving rent supplement for 18 months or more. Local authorities are now meeting the housing needs of these individuals through a range of approaches, including the traditional range of social housing options, the voluntary housing sector and, in particular the rental accommodation scheme (RAS). In such cases the local authority has a direct contractual relationship with the landlord in RAS tenancies and as part of that contract the local authority pays rent directly to the landlord.

The current arrangements provide tenants with flexibility in terms of location, the freedom to move to a different location whilst allowing recipients time to seek alternative long-term housing solution provided by their local authority. The tailoring of additional payments, such as rent supplement, to meet the specific needs of individuals and making the payment direct to the tenant is regarded as an effective way of helping individuals realise their potential and take individual responsibility.

Social Welfare Benefits

53. **Deputy Noel J. Coonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons claiming rent supplement for more than 18 months in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40005/10]

84. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action he is taking to ensure a greater transfer of rent supplement claimants to the rental accommodation scheme. [40046/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 53 and 84 together.

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 any other source. The overall aim is to provide short term assistance, and not to act as an alternative to the other social housing schemes operated by the Exchequer. There are currently over 96,500

tenants benefiting from a rent supplement payment — an increase of 61 per cent since the end of 2007. Over 44,500 have been in payment for 18 months or more. A tabular statement is attached showing the number of persons claiming rent supplement for more than 18 months in each of the past three years.

The rental accommodation scheme (RAS), which was introduced in 2004, gives local authorities specific responsibility for meeting the longer term housing needs of people receiving rent supplement for 18 months or more. Details of these cases are notified regularly by the Department to the local authorities. Local authorities meet the housing needs of these individuals through a range of approaches including: the traditional social housing, the voluntary housing sector and, in particular, the RAS. Latest figures from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government show that a total of 28,939 transfers from rent supplement to local authorities have occurred since 2005: 15,986 rent supplement recipients to RAS accommodation and a further 12,953 to social housing.

It is accepted that progress in relation to RAS was initially slower than expected. However the pace of delivery has improved significantly. In total, 14,000 recipients were transferred to RAS and social housing in 2008 and 2009; achieving targets set for RAS transfers for these years. The target established for 2010 is for a further 8,000 rent supplement tenants to be provided with a housing solution by local authorities. In consultation with the Department, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government has approved a number of pilot programmes in different local authorities to increase the flow of transfers. These include allowing applicants for RAS to seek out their own properties which, subject to compliance with the normal conditions and the agreement of the landlord, may then be taken into the leasing programme. Approved housing bodies under the leasing initiative have also been advised that they can source applicants for social housing support from long-term rent supplement tenancies also.

The Department continues to work closely with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and is represented on a number of RAS implementation groups. The purpose of these Groups is to ensure that the RAS meets its objective of catering for those on long term rent supplementation while enabling rent supplement to return to its original role of a short-term income support.

Number Claiming Rent Supplement for more than 18 Months, 2007 to 2010.

	Total Recipients	Recipients 18 months+
2007	59,726	32,123
2008	74,038	31,667
2009	93,030	35,133
2010*	96,100	44,573

*At end September 2010.

Employment Support Services

54. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide details on his Department's efforts to help persons return to work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39993/10]

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. These

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

include the employment support schemes, the activation programme and the Department's role in the National Employment Action Plan. The Department also supports new activation measures undertaken by other agencies, for example, the Work Placement Programme administered by FÁS and the Labour Market Activation Fund 2010 administered by the Department of Education and Skills.

The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) is operated by my Department and is designed to provide a monetary incentive for people who are long term dependant on social welfare payments to make a return to work financially attractive and viable. The main purpose of the BTWEA is to encourage the long term unemployed to develop a business while allowing them to retain a reducing proportion of their qualifying social welfare payment. The Short Term Enterprise Allowance is payable to a person who qualifies for Jobseekers' Benefit and who wishes to commence in self employment. This allowance is payable for the duration of their Jobseeker's Benefit entitlement.

The Employer Job (PRSI) Incentive Scheme was launched on 20th June 2010. Under the scheme, if any employer takes on additional member of staff in 2010 who has been unemployed for 6 months or more, s/he will be exempted from paying employers' PRSI for 12 months. The job must be new and additional, be for at least 30 hours a week and last for at least 6 months. The purpose of the scheme is to support job creation and counter the drift of people into long-term unemployment and welfare dependency.

There is also a network of Facilitators (currently 66 serving) at a local level in my Department. Facilitators work with social welfare recipients to identify appropriate training or development programmes which will enhance the skills that the individual has and ultimately improve their employment chances, as well as help them to continue to develop personally. They work in close co-operation with other agencies and service providers including FÁS, VEC, other education and training providers and the local and community and voluntary sector. In addition they provide advice and support to customers who wish to access the back to education scheme, the back to work scheme, and the short term enterprise allowance scheme of the Department.

While the primary responsibility for job creation rests with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Innovation, this Department already has a role in supporting people from welfare to work. The National Employment Action Plan is the main activation measure for jobseekers and provides for a systematic engagement of the employment services with unemployed people. It has been in operation since 1998 and has proven successful in that period in assisting people on the live register back into employment. Under the Plan, all persons between the ages of 18 and 65 years who are approaching 3 months on the Live Register, are identified by the Department of Social Protection and referred to FÁS for interview with the aim of assisting them to enter/re-enter the labour market.

In the period January to end of August, 2010 (the latest period for which data is available to this Department) a total of 60,797 persons were referred to FÁS — this is an increase of 9% (4,914) over the same period in 2009. 46,146 (76%) were interviewed by FÁS and 9,489 (16%) were placed in jobs, training or education. The Employment Action plan process is a key element in addressing the progression needs of those on the Live Register. It provides a stimulus to job search and affords an opportunity to explore, under professional guidance, the full range of employment and training services offered by FÁS.

Currently under the National Employment Action Plan customers are referred on an individual basis by this Department to FÁS. Under a new initiative, aimed at increasing the capacity and the efficiency of the process, jobseekers are being referred to group engagement sessions.

These group engagements are hosted jointly by FÁS and my Department. At the engagement presentations are given by FÁS and my Department's Facilitators providing relevant information and advice and arranging follow-on individual appointments where appropriate.

Recent statistics (CSO QNHS Q2 2010) show that long term unemployment has increased from 1.5% in Q2 2008 to 5.9% in Q2 2010. Preventing long-term unemployment is important from both economic and social perspectives, especially because long-term unemployment tends to lead to erosion of skills and self-confidence, and damages future employment prospects. Effective prevention depends on being able to identify those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed at an early stage, and referring them to appropriate labour market programmes to improve their chances of obtaining employment. This was the motivation for a recently published ESRI report (*National Profiling of the Unemployed in Ireland* ESRI Research Series No. 10) which developed a statistical profiling model for Ireland that would identify those individuals with a high risk of becoming long-term unemployed. This model is now being developed for use in the Department.

Under changes in ministerial responsibility announced earlier this year, the rural social scheme and community services programmes have transferred to this Department from the former Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Work is also underway to finalise the transfer of both the Employment and Community Services divisions of FÁS to my Department. Overall, the transfer of functions being implemented will facilitate the delivery of a more effective and streamlined response to the needs of the unemployed. Bringing together, under the aegis of one department, the employment services of FÁS, the expertise of its Placement Officers and the unemployment services of this Department as well as the Community Employment Schemes, Job Initiative Scheme, Community Services Programme and the Rural Social Scheme will offer significant opportunities to generate synergies, improve efficiency and, ultimately, improve service delivery to those availing of those services.

Social Welfare Code

55. **Deputy Dinny McGinley** asked the Minister for Social Protection in view of the introduction of the carbon tax on 1 May 2010, the reason the promised vouched fuel allowance scheme has not been developed to offset the increases for low income families at risk of fuel poverty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40010/10]

71. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason he has not yet adopted measures to compensate the poor for the increase in fuel costs arising from the introduction of the carbon levy in May 2010. [40032/10]

90. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to address the increased fuel poverty resulting from recently imposed price increases and the carbon levy; if the fuel allowance rate of payment will be increased or extended using the carbon tax income fund and if he has had discussions with the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government regarding making the fuel allowance payment more effective through retrofitting of these homes. [40070/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Question Nos. 55, 71 and 90 together.

The Department of Social Protection already assists low income households with heating costs through their basic payments, through the fuel allowance scheme and through the household benefits package of electricity and gas allowances. These schemes have been improved significantly in recent years. The fuel allowance is paid for 32 weeks each year from end

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

September to early May. In the 2010/2011 heating season it is estimated that over 350,000 recipients will benefit from the allowance at a cost of over €239 million.

There are also 380,000 pensioner and other households in receipt of the household benefits package which provides up to 2,400 electricity units per annum (or the gas equivalent) over the year. It is estimated that 140,000 of these households are receiving both the fuel allowance and the electricity/gas allowance under the household benefits package to assist with heating and other energy requirements. The electricity and gas allowances under the household benefit package cost €184 million in 2009. I have recently announced that the electricity allowance has been increased with effect from 1 October 2010 to cover the cost of the Public Service Obligation levy on domestic electricity, which will increase the annual cost of the scheme by €12.6 million.

The Government is committed to protecting vulnerable households from the impact of energy costs through a combination of supports, investment in programmes to improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock and energy efficiency awareness initiatives such as the Keep Well and Warm booklet and accompanying associated website. Some 150,000 copies of the booklet have been distributed to date in the last couple of years. The Warmer Homes Scheme administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), under the aegis of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources is the primary mechanism for alleviating the key underlying cause of energy poverty — that of thermal inefficiency of houses. Over 19,000 low-income houses were retrofitted in 2009 with a target of a further 22,500 in 2010.

In his Carbon Budget Statement, the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government, outlined details of €130 million in funding for insulation, €76 million of which will be used to assist low income families.

The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources has overarching responsibility for the energy portfolio and has convened an Inter- Departmental/Agency Group on Affordable Energy to coordinate and drive Government policy in this area. They were tasked with devising an Energy Affordability Strategy. This strategy will set out existing and future approaches to addressing energy affordability and will have regard both to the impact of the carbon tax on low income households and the range of supports outlined above in making its recommendations.

56. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on Sinn Féin's proposal that rather than cutting, taxing or means testing child benefit it should remain universal and at its current rate and the wealthy should be taxed more; his plans regarding child benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40076/10]

61. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way he intends to reform family income supplement to ensure that more low income families qualify. [40040/10]

67. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to reform child income support payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40026/10]

83. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he is committed to maintaining the current value of child benefit in 2011. [40067/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56, 61, 67 and 83 together.

Between 1997 and 2009, overall expenditure on Child Income Supports (Child Benefit, Family Income Supplement, Qualified Child Increases, Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance) grew from just below €900 million to approximately €3.5 billion per year. Clearly social welfare spending and specifically Child Benefit, is a very significant part of overall Government spending. The Government is proud to have been able to direct such substantial increases in financial support to all families in recent years. However, given the scale of the current economic crisis, it is necessary to address all aspects of the public finances so as to ensure that they are sustainable and to ensure that resources are allocated fairly.

With regard to Child Benefit, the Government is conscious that this universal payment can be an important source of income for all families and so in Budget 2010 decided against withdrawing Child Benefit completely from any family. In the context of Budget 2010, the Minister for Finance noted the legal and logistical reasons why means testing or taxing Child Benefit could not be done at that stage. For these reasons in 2010, the Government decided to reduce the Child Benefit payment rates while protecting those children in families who were dependent on social welfare or in low income employment by increasing Qualified Child Increases and FIS income limits.

Social welfare expenditure for 2011, including expenditure on Child Income Support payments, is currently being considered in the context of the preparation of the departmental estimates for that year. Any plans to change the Child Benefit and Family Income Supplement payments are a matter to be decided in a budgetary context and announced on Budget day.

The Department is currently carrying out a value-for-money review in the area of Child Income Support payments. The review is nearing completion and in line with the overall approach of the expenditure review process, conclusions reached in the review, while not necessarily representing Government policy in this area, can be expected to play a role in informing future policy development particularly directed at securing more coherent, effective and efficient spending of public money on families with children. The question of higher levels of taxation for those with higher wealth or incomes is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Finance.

57. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way his work for the dole scheme will operate and if the scheme will be compulsory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40050/10]

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. This new initiative will be an important element in the development and delivery of employment and community services and will aim to provide quality work opportunities to the unemployed and beneficial outcomes to the community. A key feature of the new scheme will be to provide a new activation route that will support unemployed people in remaining job-ready for re-entry to employment as the economic environment improves.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

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 roll out of this initiative will be made available as soon as possible.

Marriages of Convenience

58. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action, if any, he is taking to address the problem of sham marriages. [40066/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Marriages of convenience, or “sham marriages” are marriages which are entered into for the purpose of one of the parties gaining an automatic right of residency based on marriage to a person who already has a right of residency. These marriages exploit Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council which deals with the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States. This directive came into force on April 20th 2006. The matter was further compounded by the ruling of the European Court of Justice in the Metock case on 25th July 2008, which held that these rights applied to non-EU national spouses of EU nationals.

As has been widely reported in the media, the Garda National Immigration Bureau has lodged objections to a large number of marriages involving non-EU/EEA nationals, under Section 58 of the Civil Registration Act, 2004. Under the Act, if the objection relates to the possible existence of an impediment to the intended marriage, it is referred to the Registrar General to be investigated. The objection can only be upheld if it is based on the provision of the Civil Registration Act and these do not include questioning the reason for marriage. Since the enactment of the marriage provisions of the Civil Registration Act, 2004 on the 5th November 2007 a total of 73 objections have been lodged by the Garda National Immigration Bureau, for investigation under Section 58(4) of the Act. To date, one of the objections has been withdrawn, and the couple in question has been advised that the marriage could proceed. The remaining objections are still under investigation by the Registrar General.

While objections to marriages are upheld if there is an impediment, it is important to point out that issues which go to the identity of a party to a marriage or to consent to marry can also, potentially, render a marriage invalid. In such cases, it would be unsafe to allow the marriage to proceed. Newly updated Guidelines for Registrars for Marriage Notifications containing requirements concerning notification procedures, including the verification of identity and marital status, have been recently issued by the Registrar General to all registrars. I am also aware that this matter has been considered by the Department of Justice and Law Reform in the context of the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, 2010.

I can assure the Deputy that the matter is being researched urgently with a view to identifying what further measures may be taken, including the possibility of legislating for any such measures. I am aware that procedures to prevent marriages of convenience are in place in other EU member States, and I would hope that equivalent measures might be introduced here. The GRO has sought legal advice as to its options and will proceed on the basis of this advice as quickly as possible once it is received.

Public Services Card

59. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social Protection when the roll out of

identity cards will commence for social welfare recipients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39967/10]

76. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated overall cost of the introduction of a system of public service cards with a breakdown of such estimated costs and when it is expected that such cards will be available for issue. [39971/10]

95. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social Protection the time table for the complete roll out of identity cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39968/10]

96. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide details of the public service card with photographic identity to be rolled out from 2010; the estimated cost of same; the category of claimant to whom it will apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40022/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59, 76, 95 and 96 together.

The Department has developed, in conjunction with a number of other Government Departments, the specifications for a Public Services Card (PSC) under the Standard Authentication Framework Environment, or SAFE, programme. The specification provides for identification features, including a photograph. The aim is to develop a card that acts as a key for access to public services in general, identifying and authenticating individuals as appropriate and where required.

Legislative provisions in relation to the introduction of the Public Services Card have been included in Section 263 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended by Section 32 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007). These specify that the Minister may issue a Public Services Card in the format that he or she deems fit with the person’s name, personal public service number, photograph, signature, card issue number and card expiry date to be inscribed on the card. Provision is also included for the person’s name, personal public service number, date of birth, sex, all former surnames (if any) of the person’s mother, photograph, signature and card expiry date to be electronically encoded on the card. In addition, provision is made for any other information that may be prescribed to be either inscribed or electronically encoded on the card. It is my intention to provide for the addition of place of birth and nationality to the data set to be encoded on the chip in the Act before the end of this year.

Over the past few years significant progress had been made on the implementation of the project including the selection of a preferred bidder to provide a managed service for card production and related bureau services. Technical specifications were finalised and the necessary organisational change was designed. However, in view of the uncertain economic climate, the project was suspended until formal sanction to proceed was received from the Department of Finance at the end of last year. A contract was agreed with the managed service provider from early January.

The remaining elements of the project commenced at that time and are expected to take several more months to complete. Significant preparatory work has been undertaken including decisions regarding the final design of the card and the commencement of the development of a secure site for the personalisation of the cards. It is also necessary to develop a technical infrastructure within the Department to support the management and administration of the cards. Some of this development is being undertaken internally while procurement for the remainder is underway. Exact costs for this aspect are not yet known.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

At the moment it is estimated that, following implementation of the necessary registration infrastructure, the production capability will be ready in December and card issue for customers of the Department will commence early in 2011. The overall timeframe for completion of initial deployment of a Public Services Card is dependent on the rate at which it will be possible to securely register all of those to whom it will be issued. Initial registration will be carried out in the Department and it is also exploring what other options exist for external registration. Initial registration will be for those customers seeking PPS Numbers and this will be followed by registration for selected groups of claimants, including phased issue to Free Travel customers.

The Public Services Card will replace cards currently in use, such as the Social Services Card and the Free Travel card, with highly secure cards. Other Departments and agencies will also be in a position to use the card and the infrastructure that will support it. Features such as photographs and signatures and electronic card authentication are expected to minimise the rate of fraud and error arising from incorrectly identified and authenticated individuals.

The managed service provider's costs are for some €24m for a population of 3m with issuance taking about three to five years (i.e. about €8 per card including postage at the volumes stated). The Department's current estimates provide for the cost of technical systems development and initial issue of a quantity of cards. It is intended to mitigate the costs of the PSC through reliance on existing resources and utilisation of relevant data already held by the State, for instance photographs and signatures held by the Department in relation to the All-Ireland Free Travel Scheme, possible use of Passport Office data.

A further benefit of the Public Services Card will be the efficiencies that can be achieved by all agencies and customers using the card. The time spent on establishing identity and authentication will be reduced on both sides, leading to significant potential savings nationally.

Social Welfare Code

60. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to update guidelines regarding the habitual residency rule to ensure a consistent approach by all deciding officers and his further plans to amend the habitual residency rule to provide greater weight to the length of previous residency by the applicant. [40045/10]

69. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason increasing numbers of returning emigrants who declare their intention to stay, have family ties and produce evidence of disconnection with their previous place of residence are being refused social welfare benefits on the basis of the habitual residence rule; the guidelines on which deciding officers are operating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40011/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 69 together.

The determination of a person's habitual residence is made in accordance with Section 246 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended. Subsection (4) specifically directs the deciding officer to "take into consideration all the circumstances of the case, including, in particular, the following:

- (a) the length and continuity of residence in the State or in any other particular country;
- (b) the length and purpose of any absence from the State;
- (c) the nature and pattern of the person's employment;

(d) the person's main centre of interest, and

(e) the future intentions of the person concerned as they appear from all the circumstances.”

These five specified factors have been derived from European Court of Justice case law which examined the concept of habitual residence in the context of social welfare benefits. The Department's guidelines go on to point out that “No single factor is conclusive. The evidential weight to be attributed to each factor will depend on the circumstances of each case. It is necessary to weigh up all the information and balance the evidence for and against an applicant satisfying the habitual residence condition”.

The current guidelines regarding determination of habitual residence address the issue of returning emigrants very specifically under the heading: Resuming previous residence.

“A person who had previously been habitually resident in the State or within the Common Travel Area and who moved to live and work in another country and then resumes his/her permanent residence in the State may be regarded as being habitually resident immediately on his/her return to the State. In determining habitual residence in such cases the deciding officer should take account of

- purpose of return e.g. expiry of foreign residence permit
- the applicant's stated intentions
- verified arrangements which have been made in regard to returning on a long-term basis e.g. transfer of financial accounts and any other assets
- length and continuity of the previous residence in the State
- the record of employment or self employment in another State and
- whether s/he has maintained links with the previous residence and can be regarded as resuming his/her previous residence rather than starting a new period of residence.”

These guidelines are currently being revised with a view to making them more user-friendly for deciding officers and customers alike. All issues that have been raised recently by Deputies and interested groups are being fully considered in this process.

Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 56.

62. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for Social Protection his policy regarding the ending of the ban on cohabitation for persons in receipt of one parent family payment and the replacement of this payment with a parental allowance. [40047/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The One-Parent Family Payment, by its nature, is not payable where the lone parent is cohabiting with the other parent of the child or with someone else as husband and wife. The Government discussion paper, “Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents”, which was published in 2006, proposed that the category of lone parenthood would be abolished. Instead, a parental allowance would be made to all parents (living alone or with a partner) with young children on a low income, thus ending the cohabitation rule. It will not be possible for my Department to progress this aspect of the proposal due, in part, to the current economic climate. These proposals have, however, informed deliberations regarding the One-Parent Family Payment scheme.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

The current duration of the One-Parent Family Payment, which is payable until the youngest child in a lone parent family reaches the age of 18 years — or 22 years if in full-time education — is not in the best interests of the recipient, their children or society. Social welfare supports for lone parents should be designed to:

- prevent long-term dependence on social welfare supports and facilitate financial independence;
- recognise parental choice with regard to the care of young children but with the expectation that parents will not remain outside of the labour force indefinitely, and
- include an expectation of participation in education, training and employment, with supports provided in this regard.

To meet these social policy objectives, my Department has introduced changes to the One-Parent Family Payment in the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2010. For new customers, from April 2011, the One-Parent Family Payment will be paid until the youngest child in the family reaches the age of 14 years. For existing recipients of the payment, there will be a six-year phasing-out period to enable them to access education and training and to prepare them for their return to the labour market. Special provisions will be made for families with children for whom the Domiciliary Care Allowance is paid and for the recently bereaved (both married and cohabiting). These changes will bring Ireland's support for lone parents more in line with international provisions, where there is a general movement away from long-term and passive income support.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

63. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average waiting time to access the money advice and budgeting service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40016/10]

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 role of money advisers is to help clients to assess their financial situation, make a budget plan and deal with creditors. It is important that people coping with debt difficulties take early action and approach MABS for help and guidance. This can be the first positive step for people in addressing debt difficulties.

There are 52 independent MABS companies operating the local MABS services from 65 locations throughout the country, with national support provided by the MABS NDL. In addition, the MABS National Telephone Helpline is available from 9am to 8pm Monday to Friday and the MABS website can be accessed 24 hours a day at www.mabs.ie. 90% of clients presenting to MABS are assisted through the telephone helpline, which provides assisted self-help to ensure clients take steps to assess and address their situation.

The Citizens Information Board (CIB), who has responsibility for MABS, compiles information on the waiting times in each MABS office on a quarterly basis and posts it to the www.mabs.ie website. Based on the latest information available, at the end of September 2010 the average waiting time from first point of contact to first appointment with a money adviser is some 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.

Social Welfare Code

64. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide details on the review of the mortgage interest supplement scheme; the changes envisaged under this review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40024/10]

74. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans, if any, to abolish the 30 hour rule in respect of mortgage interest supplement. [40038/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 74 together.

There are approximately 18,000 persons currently in receipt of mortgage interest supplement (MIS). This represents a 120% increase since the end of 2008 when there were 8,100 recipients. The Department's review of the administrative, policy and legal aspects of the mortgage interest supplement scheme was published in July 2010 in conjunction with the interim report of the Mortgage Arrears and Personal Debt Review Group, chaired by Mr Hugh Cooney. The main purpose of the Department's review was to examine how the scheme could continue to meet its primary objective of catering for those who require short-term assistance. The review group included representatives from my Department, the Community Welfare Service, the Departments of Finance and Environment, Heritage and Local Government, together with a representative from the Office of the Financial Regulator. The Department's review is available on the Department's website.

The Department's review of the mortgage interest supplement scheme set out a number of recommendations. These recommendations are centered on the delivery of significant customer service improvement by ensuring that State support for those unable to deal with mortgage arrears is better targeted, consistent and easily understood. Allied with the focus on customer service improvement are recommendations that seek to ensure that lending institutions, borrowers and the Exchequer share responsibilities and commitments in a balanced way.

The key proposals of the Department's mortgage interest supplement review are as follows:

1. Mortgage interest supplement will become a time bound payment.
2. To remove the '30 hour rule' — this will allow couples / single people who, due to the economic downturn, have suffered a significant loss of income and now find themselves in a distressed mortgage and require MIS support. Under current rules, due to these people working a full working week they would not be entitled to MIS.
3. The rule excluding mortgage interest supplement where a property is offered for sale is unduly restrictive in the current market and should be suspended and re-introduced when the housing market recovers.
4. Mortgage interest supplement should not be provided where repayments of the capital element of the loan are being made to the lender. This will insure the borrower is not placed under additional financial stress.
5. The applicant should be afforded a six month period of forbearance with the lender before the State intervenes in providing mortgage interest supplement.

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6. Mortgage interest supplement should not be payable in respect of any housing loans of other State agencies or housing authorities.
7. Successful applicants must be assisted to ensure that their long term housing support needs, if any, are met prior to the cessation of mortgage interest supplement payment.

My Department is currently developing an implementation plan that will set out a framework for the future of the mortgage interest supplement scheme. This plan will be completed when the recommendations of final report of the Mortgage Arrears and Personal Debt Review Group are available. This report is expected to be completed shortly.

Social Welfare Benefits

65. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on the recent research by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice which showed that the income supports available to lone pensioners, families with teenagers and single men all living in rural areas are inadequate to meet their minimum essential budget. [40069/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the research report of the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, titled “*Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Household Types in Rural Areas*” which was published in October 2010. The report has been furnished to my Department and is being studied by my officials. Social welfare expenditure for 2011 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.

Employment Support Services

66. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action he is taking to increase the number of interviews and consultations for persons during the course of their unemployment. [40031/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The number of interviews or consultations that a jobseeker will attend over the course of his or her claim will vary from person to person. Customers claiming jobseeker’s allowance may have to be interviewed by an inspector at the beginning of their claim and at any subsequent review of their means. Once a customer is three months on the Live Register, he or she will be selected for interview by FÁS under the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) and may also be interviewed or elect to consult with the job facilitator at any stage during their claim. The Department refers a number of people that have been through the NEAP process to facilitators on a monthly basis.

For entitlement to jobseeker schemes the customer must be available for and genuinely seeking work. As part of the normal control process, a future review date is entered on the payment system for all jobseeker customers. Additional review dates are entered, as necessary, throughout the life of the claim. At each date the claim is reviewed and, where necessary, the customer is interviewed to ensure that he or she continues to satisfy the conditions of the scheme. The current system of interviews and consultations provides the Department with opportunities to assess a customer’s commitment to seek work and his/her availability for work. In addition, it provides customers with opportunities to discuss the employment and education

opportunities available to them at various points in their claim. The current arrangements are kept under review.

Question No. 67 answered with Question No. 56.

Social Welfare Benefits

68. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of serving members of the Permanent Defence Forces who are receiving family income supplement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39976/10]

100. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of persons in receipt of family income supplement; the number of these who are public servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39975/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 68 and 100 together.

There are currently some 27,228 people in receipt of a weekly Family Income Supplement (FIS) payment of which 3,074 are public servants. The number of serving members of the Permanent Defence Forces who are receiving family income supplement is included in the figure for Public Servants. A separate breakdown is not currently available.

Question No. 69 answered with Question No. 60.

Employment Support Services

70. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide details on the proposed integration of the public employment functions of FÁS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39985/10]

82. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding the plans to transfer a number of FÁS responsibilities into his Department; if his Department's responsibilities are likely to include responsibility for setting the materials budgets of community employment projects and if transferred if he intends to reverse recent developments whereby senior FÁS personnel are severely restricting those budgets (details supplied). [40073/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 70 and 82 together.

The Taoiseach announced on 23rd March 2010 that the Department of Social and Family Affairs would be reconfigured as the Department of Social Protection with the transfer to it of a number of functions including the employment and community services programmes of FÁS and the transfer from it of functions relating to social inclusion and family supports. The training services of FÁS will remain under the remit of my colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills. The purpose of this reorganisation is to provide a more effective and streamlined service to the unemployed by integrating the income support provided through the social welfare system with supports for activation and re-entry to employment.

The Social Welfare Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2010 provided the legislative basis for transferring policy and financial responsibility for the employment and community services programmes of FÁS from the Minister for Education and Skills. It is intended to commence this part of the Act shortly. From date of commencement, FÁS will continue to provide these services but under the direction of my Department. Further legislation is under preparation to

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provide for the transfer the relevant staff and related resources from FÁS to my Department during the course of 2011.

A major programme of change is currently being developed by my Department, in close consultation with senior management in FÁS and the Department of Education and Skills, with the objective of developing a new service vision and model for the integrated Department. The aim is to create a Department which is structured around the customer rather than the schemes it delivers so that people can obtain the services they require, and are entitled to, in a seamless, effective and efficient way.

In this regard, a number of significant steps have already been taken to develop a more streamlined and integrated service between FÁS and my Department. For example, as a result of a review of the National Employment Action Plan, a number of enhancements are being made to improve the delivery of services to people who are unemployed. These include the introduction of group engagements with people referred to the employment services and the development of a new case management approach to managing interactions with people signing on for jobseekers payments.

Where the funding of Community Employment projects is concerned, the current resources allocated to this programme will be transferring to my Department. Any decisions as to the future funding of these projects will be taken in the context of the Government's deliberations on the four year budgetary framework.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 55.

Social Welfare Code

72. Deputy John Deasy asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to centralise the means testing of social welfare benefits; if he has had discussions with the Health Service Executive to ensure non-duplication of this process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39969/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): My Department operates a range of means tested schemes and these schemes, including the means testing elements, are administered through a network of local offices, central offices and, in the case of supplementary welfare allowance, through the offices of community welfare officers. My Department is not currently considering the centralising of means testing of social welfare payments. However, two important projects are underway which will enhance the delivery of means tested payments. Firstly, a project to facilitate the capture and storage of means information and the calculation of customer means across social assistance schemes is being undertaken at present. These schemes include Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance (currently administered by the Health Service Executive).

One of the benefits of this project is that the Department will be, where appropriate, able to re-use means information already held which in turn will provide better customer service by reducing the need for different parts of the Department to request information from the applicant. Other benefits of this project include:

- achieving qualitative and quantitative improvements in productivity
- achieving value for money in the use of resources;
- implementing secure control processes;

- providing better management information;
- allowing for the future introduction of mobile working to facilitate the electronic capture of data at time of investigation; and
- placing the Department in a position to anticipate and respond to changing business demands e.g. additional means factors, changes to scheme rules etc.

This project is expected to be completed in by April 2011.

Secondly, the integration of the Community Welfare Service (CWS) into the Department will result in a more coordinated approach to the provision of service to the public. This will create opportunities to remove duplication of work, including in the area of means assessment. The target date for the transfer is 1st January 2011 and discussions in that regard are continuing with the unions representing the CWS employees concerned and with the unions representing the Department's existing staff.

Social Welfare Fraud

73. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated extent of fraudulent claims of social welfare and in particular jobseeker's payments by those who are living abroad and return occasionally to sign on or otherwise claim payments and the steps being taken to deal with this activity. [39974/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Department processes in excess of two million claims each year and it makes payments to over one million people every week. It is important to emphasise that the vast majority of people are receiving the entitlement due to them. The Department has a broad-ranging and comprehensive control strategy, which aims to keep fraud and abuse to a minimum. The emphasis is to minimise risks of fraud and eliminate incorrect payments.

Controls are exercised at both the initial claim stage and at subsequent stages during the claim life cycle. Claims are reviewed on a regular and targeted basis. At the end September 2010 over 546,000 individual claims were reviewed across all schemes. The Department has introduced measures, which are evidence based, to target control activity at higher risk schemes and categories of claimants. These include addressing residency risks in appropriate schemes. An estimate of the extent of fraud described by the Deputy is not available. However at the end of 2009 approx 10% of cases which were specifically targeted for residency reviews resulted in savings in Jobseekers payments while in the Child benefit scheme approximately 3% of overall residency reviews resulted in savings.

Specific controls to target residency as a risk factor include the following:

1. Nationwide residency checks were introduced for non-Irish nationals on a jobseekers payment.
2. New claimants for jobseekers payments do not receive payment into their bank account.
3. Stricter identity checks have been introduced in Post Offices throughout the country for people collecting Social Welfare payments.
4. A comprehensive set of rigorous checks are being applied by Local Offices and Inspectors on claims from people who move from Northern Ireland.

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5. Officials also liaise regularly with colleagues in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain to establish if claimants are in receipt of welfare payments outside of Ireland.
6. The Department participates in multi-agency vehicle checkpoints with other agencies.
7. The facility to report suspect activity on the Department of Social Protection website was introduced early this year.
8. The Department's Special Investigation Unit is managed centrally since February, 2010.

Other measures which address control risk factors include the appointment of additional Inspectors. In addition fraud detection systems have been improved through data matching with other organisations. The consequences for social welfare fraud can be severe. Criminal prosecutions may be taken against persons who defraud the social welfare system and employers who fail to carry out their statutory obligations. The Department is committed to ensuring that social welfare payments are available to those who are entitled to them. In this regard the control programme of my Department is carefully monitored and the various measures are continuously refined to ensure that they remain effective.

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 64.

Pension Provisions

75. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of defined benefit pension schemes which fail the minimum funding standard; the number of persons affected by same. [39978/10]

81. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection his response to the sovereign annuity proposal made to his Department by the Irish Association of Pension Funds and the Society of Actuaries. [40041/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 81 together.

Under the Pensions Act, defined benefit pension schemes must meet a minimum Funding Standard which requires that schemes maintain sufficient assets to enable them discharge their accrued liabilities in the event of the scheme winding up. Where schemes do not satisfy the Funding Standard, the sponsors/trustees must submit a funding proposal to the Pensions Board to restore full funding within three years, although as part of measures announced by the Government, the Pensions Board can now allow a scheme ten years or more to meet the standard in certain circumstances.

At the end of 2009, there were 254,325 members in 1,192 defined benefit schemes subject to the funding standard. It was estimated at that time that in excess of 75% of these schemes were in deficit. In a recent survey undertaken by the Pensions Board 70% of schemes reported to be in deficit. However, the extent of the level of under-funding will not be fully apparent until all schemes carry out their next actuarial assessment and report the results to the Pensions Board.

The Government is very conscious of the pressures on both sponsoring employers and pension scheme trustees, arising from the very significant losses incurred by pension funds during 2007 and 2008. While schemes recovered some of their losses since then, we are anxious to

ensure, in so far as we can, that those involved have sufficient time and space to fully assess the implications for their schemes and the remedial action they can take.

Indeed, this was the thinking behind the implementation of a number of measures introduced to ease the pressures being felt by many pension funds. Those measures included the granting of extra time for schemes to formulate funding proposals and allowing longer periods for recovery plans. In addition, the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2009 amended the Pensions Act to allow for the restructuring of underfunded schemes; to ensure a more equitable distribution of assets in the event of the wind-up of a defined benefit scheme and to strengthen the powers of the Pensions Board in ensuring that pension contributions deducted from wages and salaries are remitted by employers to scheme trustees. This Act also introduced the legislative provisions to enable the Minister for Finance to establish the Pensions Insolvency Payments Scheme (PIPS) to reduce the cost of purchasing pension payments for trustees of pension schemes where the employer has become insolvent. The PIPS came into effect in February 2010 and will ensure a more equitable distribution of assets following the wind up of underfunded pension schemes.

In March of this year the Government launched the National Pensions Framework. As the Deputy is aware, the framework sets out the Government's intention for a radical and wide-scale reform of the Irish pension system. I announced last month that work on the new defined benefit pension model, as outlined in this Framework, would be expedited. My Department will aim to introduce this new model, following legislative changes on 1 July 2011. Following this announcement, the deadline of the 30th November for the submission of funding proposal to the Pension Board was deferred. It is anticipated that the deferral of this deadline will allow scheme time to take account of reforms to the defined benefit model in the preparation of funding proposals for submission to the Pensions Board by a date which will be announced by the Pensions Board.

As you are aware, the Government has established an implementation group charged with bringing forward proposals for the introduction of measures contained in the National Pensions Framework. As part of its deliberations, the proposal for a sovereign annuity mentioned by Deputy Shortall is also being given serious consideration. It must be stressed that the issue is by no means straight-forward and the benefits and risks involved for all stakeholders are being fully assessed.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 59.

Social Welfare Code

77. Deputy Pat Rabbitte asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to abolish the 30 hour rule in respect of rent supplement and his estimate of the cost of same. [40039/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is to provide short-term income 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 any other source. Rent supplement is not payable where a person or their spouse or partner is in full-time employment, that is for 30 hours or more a week. However, provision was made in 2007 whereby a person on rent supplement, who is accepted as eligible for accommodation under the rental accommodation scheme, may return to full-time work, subject to a means test, without losing entitlement to their rent supplement payment.

The 30-hour per week limit has been in place since 1977 when the SWA scheme came into operation. The use of 30 hours as the part-time limit for SWA is designed to be as advantageous as possible to individuals returning to the employment market without including those in full-

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time employment, thus reflecting the scheme's original purpose of a short-term income support payment. Support for those in full-time employment and who require long term housing support are provided by local authority housing initiatives which include the rental accommodation scheme and other social housing placement schemes.

Employment Support Services

78. **Deputy Deirdre Clune** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his Department has been contacted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation to resolve the outstanding issues that exist regarding work placement and internship schemes; the way they impact on jobseeker's payments; the steps he will take to resolve these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39970/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Government is currently examining ways of providing further support to graduate retention in the economy, with policy matters in this area being primarily the responsibility of the Minister for Education and Skills. The main existing employment support mechanism for graduates is the work placement programme administered by FÁS. A key element of the programme is that the customer retains their social welfare entitlement. This facility has also been extended to the IBEC gradlink programme. While on either programme a person must be genuinely seeking work and must take up an offer of paid employment if one arises. In this way participants may continue to satisfy the social welfare criteria of being available for and genuinely seeking work.

However, if a participant is paid a top-up by their employer this constitutes reckonable earnings from employment. On this basis they can no longer be considered unemployed. Additionally, in relation to those in receipt of a means tested social welfare payment, such income would fall to be assessed as means. The distinction between employed and unemployed is of crucial importance in the design and administration of any such scheme. Design of a scheme that permits retention of social welfare benefits while a person is in receipt of wages or non-pecuniary emoluments must take cognisance of substitution and replacement effects, while remaining attractive to both interns and hosts. On this basis careful control and demarcation is essential in schemes of this nature. Payments by employers also raise fundamental issues in relation to employment rights, taxation and social insurance. These matters are informing ongoing policy discussions in relation to internships.

Social Welfare Code

79. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans, if any, to reform the withdrawal rate for rent and mortgage interest supplement. [40044/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The supplementary welfare allowance scheme provides for a weekly or monthly supplement to be paid in respect of rent or mortgage interest to any person in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs. The supplementary welfare allowance scheme is administered by the community welfare service of the Health Service Executive on behalf of the Department. 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 any other source. Similarly, mortgage interest supplement provides short-term income support to eligible people who are unable to meet their mortgage interest repayments in respect of a house which is their sole place of residence. The supplement assists with the interest portion of the mortgage repayments only.

Significant improvements to the means test for rent supplement and mortgage interest supplement were implemented in 2007. The assessment of means for these schemes now provides for a gradual withdrawal of payment as hours of employment or earnings increase. Those availing of part-time employment and/or training opportunities can continue to receive a rent or mortgage interest supplement subject to their satisfying the standard means assessment rules. Since June 2007, where a person has additional income in excess of the standard weekly rate of supplementary welfare allowance, the first €75 of such additional income together with 25% of any additional income above €75 is disregarded for means assessment purposes. This ensures that those returning to work or participating in training schemes are better off as a result of taking up such an opportunity.

Social Welfare Benefits

80. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action he will take to alleviate the congestion in the processing of all forms of social welfare payments having regard to the hardship caused to the persons in need at a time of economic, social and personal stress; if he will arrange for the redeployment of the necessary staff from other Departments to deal with the backlog of applications and appeals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39973/10]

91. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action he is taking to reduce waiting times for processing claims across all schemes. [40042/10]

357. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action he is taking to deal with the backlog on social welfare claims. [40366/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80, 91 and 357 together.

The Department is committed to delivering the best possible service to its customers. To this end, operational processes and procedures and the organisation of work are reviewed in all areas of the Department. These reviews are supported by modern technology, the potential of which is continuously harnessed. Claims are processed in the most efficient and expeditious way possible, having regard to the eligibility conditions that apply to each scheme.

Processing times vary across schemes because of both the volume of applications and the differing qualification criteria. For example, means assessments are required for all of the social assistance schemes; medical examinations are required for some of the illness related schemes and customers must also satisfy the habitual residence conditions. In the case of the insurance-based schemes, it may be necessary to ascertain details of foreign insurance records.

The main impact on service delivery has arisen due to the increase in the Live Register which increased from 240,217 at September 2008 to 419,854 at September 2009 and 442,417 at September 2010. In response, all aspects of the work associated with the processing of claims has been examined and streamlined wherever possible. 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 their Local 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;

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- 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.

Since May 2008, 766 staff have been assigned to my Department, mainly through the transfer and redeployment of staff from other Government Departments. The staff assigned have filled additional posts and critical vacancies in Local Offices, 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.

A number of initiatives have also 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,
- 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.
- Eight experienced retired Appeals Officers have been re-employed on a part-time basis since July 2010.

In conclusion, I wish to assure Deputies that service delivery remains a key priority in my Department and that processes are kept under continuous review to ensure that services are delivered promptly to customers. Staffing needs are also kept under constant review to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources.

Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 75.

Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 70.

Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 56.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 53.

Social Welfare Code

85. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Social Protection the outcome of his discussions with insurance companies in respect of the suggestion of changing social welfare legislation to provide for the reimbursement to the Department by insurance companies of social

welfare payments deducted from awards of special damages in respect of loss of earnings.
[40051/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Social welfare legislation does not currently provide for reimbursement to the Department by insurance companies in cases where adjustments may have been made to special damages awards on foot of social welfare payments received by plaintiffs. Preliminary work has been undertaken by my Department in relation to the issues involved. These issues are complex, not least insofar as there could be consequences for economic competitiveness and negative downstream costs for employers and employees in terms of increased insurance premia in respect of employer liability, public liability and transport cover.

Against that background, the introduction of any changes in this area would necessitate extensive consultations with a wide range of interested parties, including not only representatives of the insurance industry but also the legal profession and employers' representatives amongst others, in order to adequately assess all of the possible implications and to comply with formal Regulatory Impact Assessment requirements. In view of the wider potential implications, I intend to consult with my Government colleagues with a view to securing agreement on the most appropriate course of action in relation to this matter.

86. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the back to school clothing and footwear allowance falls short of the cost associated with returning to school by between €260 and €510 depending on the age of the child and his plans to address this shortfall and make education affordable for families who are struggling. [40071/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme provides a one-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when children start school each autumn. The allowance is not intended to meet the full cost of school clothing and footwear but only to provide assistance towards these costs. A person may qualify for payment of an allowance if they are in receipt of a social welfare payment (including family income supplement), or Health Service Executive payment, are participating in an approved employment scheme or attending a recognised education and training course and have household income at or below certain set levels. The purpose of the household income limit is to ensure that the allowance is directed at those with the greatest need.

In Budget 2009, the income thresholds for entitlement to back to school clothing and footwear allowance were increased by €50. The rates of back to school clothing and footwear allowance have been increased significantly in recent years. Since 2005, the allowance has increased from €80 to €200 in respect of qualified children aged from 2 to 11 years and from €150 to €305 for those aged 12 to 22. These are increases of 150% and 103% respectively. As a special measure introduced in Budget 2009, an additional allowance of €215 is payable to 18 year olds only in respect of whom compensatory child benefit is in payment. Total payment in respect of children aged 18 is €520.

The number of children benefiting from the allowance increased from 161,000 in 2006 to over 277,000 in 2009. The number of families benefiting has increased from 79,000 in 2006 to almost 140,000 in 2009. Approximately 170,000 families were expected to benefit from the Scheme in 2010 year. At 15 October 2010 in excess 160,444 claims had been paid at a value in excess of €76.5m.

My Department established a Working Group to undertake a review of the back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme as part of its Expenditure Review Programme. The

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Working Group published its report in August 2004. In relation to the adequacy of the payment rates of the scheme, the review noted that while the value of the BSCFA had increased by 152% for children under 12 and by 194% for children over 12 since 1990, the Consumer Price Index figure for clothing and footwear dropped by over 24% in the same period. The review concluded that payment rates did not warrant adjustment. Nevertheless, the rates of payment for BSCFA were increased in recent years, including increases in the income limit which have enabled more people to qualify.

The most recent Consumer Price Index figures show that clothing and footwear costs have:

- Fallen by 7.4% in the last 12 months;
- Fallen by 27.6% since December 2006;
- Fallen by 38.1% since December 2001.

The adequacy of back to school clothing and footwear allowance payments will be kept under review. Any further changes to the scheme would have to be considered in the context of future Budgets and in the light of the resources available to me for improvements in social welfare generally.

Pension Provisions

87. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he is committed to safeguarding the State pension in budget 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40028/10]

93. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he is committed to maintaining the value of the State pension at current levels in 2011. [40052/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87 and 93 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.

Departmental Information Services

88. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps he is taking to improve information services available to employees and employers on the benefits for unemployed persons moving from welfare to work. [40068/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The primary objective of the Department's information policy is to ensure that all customers are made aware of the wide range of schemes and services available and that they are kept informed of changes and improvements as they occur. The Department operates a network of some 125 local and branch offices throughout the country. Each local office has officers who are dedicated to providing information and are available to explain supports and services to people. Information officers provide a range of information to customers on their entitlements including, in broad terms, the effect that taking up work may have on their social welfare payments.

In addition, the Department's network of facilitators work closely with FÁS and other agencies at a local level to identify and target appropriate education, training and development opportunities for people. This locally-based service is supported by a central Information Unit which operates a LoCall information line (1890 66 22 44) which customers may call for information and guidance on their entitlements.

The Department produces a comprehensive range of information leaflets and booklets and these are available in a wide range of outlets, including Social Welfare Local Offices, Citizens Information Centres and Post Offices. Leaflets can also be requested through the Department's website www.welfare.ie. The website contains full information on the range of schemes and services, including supports that may be available to jobseekers on return to the workforce such as Family Income Supplement, Money Advice and Budgeting Service, etc. There is a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section dedicated to Jobseekers which is available in English, Irish and Polish and provides answers to some of the most common queries the Department receives on topics such as taxation of benefits and on options available regarding training, employment, self-employment and voluntary work.

The Employer Job (PRSI) Incentive Scheme, which was launched on June 21st this year, is prominently advertised on our website's home page. The Department also operates a PRSI Mailing List via its website, and the almost four thousand subscribers, primarily employers and tax practitioners, receive mails on PRSI changes each year. Funding is also provided annually to the Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed (INOUE) to produce their booklet "Working for Work", which contains full information on jobseekers payments, the training and development options available to jobseekers as well as advice on job searching, tax and other social services provided by other Departments and agencies. INOUE provide free copies of the "Working for Work" booklet to people in receipt of social welfare payments.

The Citizens Information Board, which comes under the aegis of the Department, is the national information agency with responsibility for supporting the provision of independent information and advice on the broad range of social services including social welfare services. Information is provided through Citizen Information Centres and other offices throughout the country, through the Citizens Information Phone Service (1890 777 121) which operates from 9am to 9pm Monday to Friday and on their website at www.citizensinformation.ie. The Citizens Information Board recently launched a new website dedicated to people recently made unemployed, called www.losingyourjob.ie. This site provides a single point of information for anyone looking for assistance with unemployment or reduced hours. The Department will continue to increase and improve the channels through which it delivers information services to all its customers.

Pension Provisions

89. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if in recognition of the role played by the State pension in reducing poverty among older persons and in view of the fact that for the majority of older persons the State pension and associated benefits are their only source of income, he will make a commitment to maintain the current rates in the upcoming budget. [40077/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Between 1994 and 2008 social welfare pensions increased by 148% while the Consumer Price Index for this period increased by 51%. Increases in the State pension (contributory) have brought the personal rate of pension to a maximum weekly rate up to €230.30 per week. A pensioner couple would be eligible for a weekly income of €436.60. These pension increases demonstrate the significant improvements which were made in real terms in pension rates. In Budget 2010, the Government avoided any

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cuts in the State pension. Weekly rates of payments to pensioners (those 66 and over) were not reduced and neither were other supports such as the household benefits package which includes the free TV licence, electricity/gas allowance and telephone allowance. The living alone and over 80 allowances were also retained at existing levels.

I have been engaged in an intensive round of consultations with a wide range of welfare representative organisations and I am listening carefully to their views. In an uncertain international environment, my priority will be to ensure that the overall Government strategy is advanced and to protect those most in need in a manner which is sustainable in the years ahead. It is important to stress that, at this stage, no decisions have been taken either by me or by the Government with regard to the forthcoming Budget.

Question No. 90 answered with Question No. 55.

Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 80.

Social Welfare Benefits

92. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the national carers' strategy; if he is committed to helping carers in the community; if he will protect the carer's allowance from drastic cuts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40029/10]

99. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will offer a commitment that he will not remove the half-rate carer's allowance or reduce the current rate and that he will retain the annual non-means-tested respite care grant at its current rate in the upcoming budget. [40072/10]

103. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will publish the national carers' strategy. [40043/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 92, 99 and 103 together.

During 2008, an interdepartmental group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, with secretariat support provided by my Department, undertook work, including a public consultation process, to develop a National Carers' Strategy. However, because of the prevailing economic situation, it was not possible to set targets or time limits which could be achieved. In that context, rather than publishing a document which did not include any significant plans for the future, the Government decided not to publish a strategy. This position remains unchanged.

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.

Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 87.

Social Welfare Appeals

94. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he intends to consolidate the appeals process for supplementary welfare claims from a two-step appeals process to one. [40036/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Where a person is not satisfied with a decision in relation to their entitlement to Supplementary Welfare Allowance, they have a right of appeal in accordance with the terms of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005. This provides for the appeal to be considered by an Appeals Officer within the HSE. However, where this appeal is unsuccessful, the appellant can make a further appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). It is assumed that this is the two-step appeals process to which the Deputy refers.

The appeals process in the case of the schemes administered by the Department differs in so far as there is only one right of appeal and that is to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. Part of this process involves a review of the case by a deciding officer before it is forwarded to the SWAO. When the Community Welfare Service is transferred to my Department, the HSE Appeals Office will no longer have a role in relation to the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme. Instead it is proposed that appealable decisions will be dealt with by the Social Welfare Appeals Office in the same way as for other schemes administered by my Department. The legislation governing Supplementary Welfare Allowance appeals when the Community Welfare Allowance transfer to my Department was provided for in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007. The provision is subject to a Commencement Order.

Questions Nos. 95 and 96 answered with Question No. 59.

Social Welfare Benefits

97. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to allow far greater access to postgraduate study under the back to education allowance. [40048/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): With effect from 19th July 2010, changes have been introduced to BTEA to increase flexibility in terms of accessing the scheme. The period for which a person is required to be on a qualifying social welfare payment before accessing BTEA was reduced from 12 months to 9 months (a 2 year qualifying period continues

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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. In addition, a person in certain circumstances can avail of BTEA to resume studies in a second or subsequent year of a third level course whereas prior to July, a person could only apply for BTEA if s/he was commencing year one of a course.

The back to education scheme covers courses of education from second level to higher diploma level in any discipline [level 8 in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)] and to a Graduate Diploma in Education (Primary and Secondary Teaching; level 9 in NFQ) which add significantly to a person's employability. BTEA will not usually be approved if a person holds a qualification equivalent or higher than the qualification for which the application has been received. Other postgraduate qualifications (level 9 or level 10) are not included.

However, a small number of cases have arisen where a college has granted an exemption from the requirement to hold a primary degree and has admitted a person to a Master's course on the basis of relevant life experience. In the context of the ongoing monitoring of the operation of the scheme, it has been decided to extend entitlement to the Back to Education Allowance in these instances on an exceptional basis.

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. People in possession of a third level qualification have already achieved a high level of academic attainment which should impact positively on their employment prospects. Furthermore, the scheme was never intended to be an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third level education system.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

98. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to make a charge on financial institutions and or utility companies to subsidise the work undertaken by the money advice and budgeting service in respect of mutual customers and clients. [40037/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) is a free, independent and confidential service which assists people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems. MABS promotes the importance of people coping with debt difficulties taking early action with their creditors and approaching MABS for help and guidance. This can be the first positive step for people in addressing debt difficulties. Often people will have multiple creditors and MABS money advisers will assist clients in working out budgets and negotiating on behalf of all creditors, including financial institutions and sub-prime lenders, to secure better terms for the client in managing the repayment of their debt.

In addition to face-to-face meetings with a money adviser, MABS operates a National Telephone Helpline, available from 9am to 8pm Monday to Friday. As 90% of clients presenting to MABS are assisted through the telephone helpline, which provides assisted self-help to ensure clients take steps to assess and address their situation, it would not be appropriate to place a financial charge on financial institutions and or utility companies in these instances.

In addition, MABS companies around the country are involved in many local education and information initiatives. This close involvement of MABS staff in education activity ensures that

community education remains at the heart of the money advice process; promoting effective household budget management and empowering individuals to help themselves.

I do not propose to introduce measures whereby financial institutions and or utility companies subsidise the work of MABS as this would compromise the independence of MABS services, would not be appropriate where people use assisted self-help services, and would be extremely difficult to do given that most people have multiple creditors.

Question No. 99 answered with Question No. 92.

Question No. 100 answered with Question No. 68.

Social Welfare Code

101. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way he intends to reform the social welfare system to provide greater social security for the self-employed. [40049/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Self-employed people pay PRSI class S contributions which provide cover for long-term benefits such as state pension (contributory) and widows/widowers pension (contributory). Employees are covered by PRSI classes A, E, H and P, which provide cover for the above benefits as well as for short-term contingencies such as jobseekers and illness benefits. PRSI coverage is related to the risks associated with employment or self-employment, the annualised system of contributions for self-employed people and the practicalities of administering and controlling access to short-term payments. Self-employed people pay class S contributions at a rate of 3% per annum, as compared to the 14.75% full Class A contributions paid by employees and their employers, to reflect the narrower range of benefits they receive. A system of separate arrangements for employed and self-employed workers within a social insurance context is common in other European social protection systems.

There are no plans to extend cover for short-term benefits to this group of insured workers. Any such measure would have significant financial implications and would have to be considered within a budgetary context. Consideration would also have to be given to an appropriate increase in the rate of the PRSI Class S contribution.

Self-employed workers who do not qualify for an insurance-based benefit may establish entitlement to assistance-based payments such as jobseeker’s allowance. They can apply for the means-tested jobseeker’s allowance if their business ceases or if they are on low income as a result of a downturn in demand for their services. In general their means will take account of the level of earnings in the last twelve months in determining their expected income for the following year. In the current climate account is taken of the downward trend in the economy and the process recognises the potential for significant upward or downward variations in income from one year to the next.

Employment Support Services

102. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way the PRSI employers incentive scheme has been promoted, and his intention to extend the scheme into 2011. [40053/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Employer Job (PRSI) Incentive Scheme has been promoted through a number of channels. Information on the scheme is available on the Department’s website at www.welfare.ie and also on the FAS website. The main

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

information web page on this scheme on the Department's website was viewed 9,709 times between the 21st June and 22nd October 2010. There has also been a number of press releases in relation to the scheme.

In addition, information regarding the scheme was circulated through a number of agencies including Forfás, the Small firms Association and IBEC. Information was also circulated to the 3,754 people who have subscribed (free of charge) to the Department of Social Protection's PRSI mailing list. This mailing list primarily comprises employers and tax practitioners. The scheme is open to employers who create new and additional jobs in 2010. Successful applicants are exempted from liability to pay their share of PRSI for certain employees for 12 months from the date they are approved for the scheme. Extension of the scheme into 2011 is a matter for the Government to consider in a budgetary context.

Question No. 103 answered with Question No. 92.

Regulatory Management

104. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Taoiseach if the OECD peer review team has yet published its report on the Government's regulatory management capacity; if it has made the report available to the Government; and the key findings of the report. [40359/10]

The Taoiseach: The OECD Report on Better Regulation in Ireland was published today on the OECD website. It had been presented to Government in October to note its upcoming publication. The publication of the Report is being formally marked by a special conference organised by my Department in which the OECD will participate on 29th of this month.

The Report recognises the considerable progress made on the Better Regulation agenda since the original OECD review in 2001 which compares well with other EU countries. In particular, it commends the Better Regulation Unit (BRU) in my Department for its role as a highly active advocate of Better Regulation across Government and beyond. It acknowledges the BRU's role in raising awareness of the Better Regulation agenda and in the provision of supports for conducting Regulatory Impact Analysis. However, the report also identifies a need for greater engagement with the agenda across the Government system including a need for strong linkages between this agenda and economic renewal and public service transformation strategies.

There are a number of key areas which the report focuses on. With regard to the issue of Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA), the OECD note that the Irish model and supports such as training, guidelines and helpdesk assistance compare well with those developed in other EU Member States. However, they also point out that the quality of RIAs require improvement together with more frequent publication. These issues are to be addressed by individual Ministers and their Departments. The report notes that while some work is underway to reduce administrative burdens on business considerable further effort will be required from all relevant Departments if the target of a 25% reduction by 2012 is to be made. The team acknowledged also that a good start had been made on addressing the issue of risk-based enforcement.

In addressing the issue of the accessibility of the law, the OECD note the complexity of the Irish legal system which makes a focus on accessibility all the more important. They stress the importance of maintaining a momentum on projects in this area in the face of tight resources. This includes, in particular, Statute Law Revision, Restatement, consolidation and the maintenance of the Statute Book. It is suggested that Local Authorities would be invited to take part in the administrative burden reduction programme. Enhanced consultation mechanisms between the national and local level are also suggested.

As part of its work on the implementation of the Government Statement on Economic Regulation of October 2009, the Senior Officials Group on Economic Regulation, which is chaired by my Department, will pursue the implementation of recommendations set out in the OECD report (from within existing resources).

Departmental Expenditure

105. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Taoiseach the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39684/10]

The Taoiseach: The following table details grants paid by my Department, to date in 2010. These amounts were paid under Subhead C, Commemoration Initiatives Fund which is a fund established to make resources available to groups and organisations for the study and commemoration of historic events of national importance. By providing financial support to local organisations, the aim of the Fund is to assist and encourage the development of local programmes of commemoration. Given the limited budget available, such funding is, in general and by necessity, of a token nature. In assessing projects for funding issues such as: impact, significance and relevance, geographic spread, balance between popular and academic, educational content and viability are taken into account annually.

Commemoration Initiative Fund — 2010 — €100,000 in the Taoiseach's Vote

Grants paid include:

- €1,135 towards the restoration of a grave of John Moyney VC;
- €2,000 towards the publication of book on the Famine, covering the Act of Union (Northern Ireland Building Communities Trust);
- €2,000 towards a book on the experiences of Irish soldiers during World War 1 (O'Brien Press);
- €1,500 towards research work into the history of Ulster (UCC);
- €1,000 to the Suffolk Historical Society for the 150th anniversary of the consecration of its local Church of Ireland;
- €5,000 to the National Folklore Collection towards a publication to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Irish Folklore Collection in 2011;
- €23,000 to the Somme Association for a commemoration event held earlier this year in Gallipoli in recognition of the Irish men who fought and died there in World War 1.

Ireland Newfoundland Partnership

106. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Taoiseach the year the Ireland Newfoundland Partnership was set up; the role of the partnership; the annually funding it secured from his Department in each year from the year it was set up to when funding ceased in 2009; if he will provide a breakdown of the annual expenses of each board member of the agency for each year from when the partnership was set up until 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39705/10]

The Taoiseach: The Ireland Newfoundland Partnership (INP) was established in 2001 on foot of a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Government of Ireland and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The original agreement, signed by former Taoiseach John Bruton in 1996, together with then Premier of Newfoundland, Brian Tobin, was re-affirmed by my predecessor, Mr. Ahern in 1999 and 2004.

The role of the INP is to manage the agreement between the two Governments, recognising the deep historical links between the two Islands, and to identify new areas for collaboration. It assists Irish organisations to identify and carry out joint projects with Newfoundland partners through government, research, business, educational and cultural activities. The Partnership also aims to raise the awareness of Newfoundland and its Irish heritage. The administrative office of the INP, originally located under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, has operated under the aegis of my Department since January 2004.

Since late 2009, the work of the Partnership was integrated into the main structure of my Department. There has been a budgetary saving of €300,000 which was previously provided in my Department's Vote. The Board has also been re-structured and renamed the Ireland Newfoundland Advisory Council. The annual budget provided for the INP from 2004 is outlined in the following table.

Year	Subhead
	€
2004	313,000
2005	321,000
2006	337,000
2007	361,000
2008	354,000
2009	300,000
2010	0

Members do not receive a fee in connection with their work on the Advisory Council. Travel and subsistence expenses are paid in accordance with Department of Finance guidelines. The following members received expenses from 2004 to date.

Name	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
	€	€	€	€	€	€	
Tomas C Hyland	4,696	7,378	2,593	4,132	2,340	795	0
Walter Kirwan	0	1,247	627	2,650	1,047	660	0
Patrick Murphy	620	1,016	0	343	0	0	0
Una Murphy	1,537	27	107	1,266	1,409	1,136	0
Caroline Senior	1,459	656	368	0	0	467	0
Total	8,313	10,324	3,695	8,391	4,796	3,058	0

Census of Population

107. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide details of his plans for census 2011; the number of persons that will be employed by the Central Statistics Office for the completion of field work in Cork city and county. [39768/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy John Curran): The 2011 census will be managed in the field by specially recruited census field staff organised nationally as follows:

- 6 Census Liaison Officers located in census HQ in Swords responsible for the overall management of the census field operation for their area;
- 44 Census Regional Supervisors located in regional offices across Ireland responsible for the conduct of the census within their region;
- 440 Census Field Supervisors working from their own homes responsible for the work of a local team of 11 census enumerators;
- 5,000 Census enumerators working from their own homes responsible for the delivery and collection of census forms to every home in their area.

Within Cork city and county a total of 436 census enumerators and 50 census field supervisors will be employed; a further 4 people will have responsibility for the management of 4 census regions either completely or partially located in Cork County.

Departmental Properties

108. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Taoiseach the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39807/10]

109. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Taoiseach the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39822/10]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 and 109 together.

My Department does not rent or lease any premises or sites.

Departmental Expenditure

110. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Taoiseach the savings that have been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39927/10]

The Taoiseach: Procurement of goods and services by my Department is carried out under procedures recommended by the National Public Procurement Policy Unit in the Department of Finance which is responsible for procurement policy, national procurement guidelines and the application of EU directives. These procedures are designed to ensure that appropriate competitive processes are in place to select the providers of goods and services which represent best value to the Department, taking account of a number of important criteria including cost and suitability for purpose.

The procedures in place in my Department, which vary according to the nature and amount of the procurement involved, require purchasers to specify accurately their requirements; to select an appropriate competitive process whether by seeking quotations, advertising, use of central purchasing facilities and centrally negotiated framework agreements or more formal tender processes; to evaluate alternatives according to preset criteria; to agree clear contract terms and to monitor service delivery.

[The Taoiseach.]

Open source software solutions and generic consumables are not explicitly specified when seeking quotations/tenders but if offered by providers are evaluated against the preset criteria to determine the provider that represents best value to the Department. While no open source software packages are used as part of my Department's email and work support systems the most recent website developed was built using an open source content management system.

Departmental Staff

111. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide a breakdown of the number of persons employed in the different sections or divisions of the Department of the Taoiseach; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39960/10]

The Taoiseach: In accordance with the business needs of my Department, divisions and sections change from time to time. The following table provides a breakdown of whole-time equivalent staff numbers working in the various divisions in my Department at the end of October 2010.

Divisional breakdown	Staff Numbers — (whole-time equivalent)
Government Secretariat and related	13.80
Government Information Services and Communications Unit	17.80
Protocol and General	7.85
Private Office (Taoiseach, Government Chief Whip and Office of the Minister of State for European Affairs)	33.00
Northern Ireland	7.80
European and International Affairs	8.60
Social Policy	6.60
Economic Policy	9.60
Social Partnership	4.00
Public Service Modernisation	17.60
Personnel and Change Management Unit	12.53
Finance Unit	7.00
Information Technology	9.40
Management Services Unit (including support staff), Archives and Library	31.30
Internal Audit	1.60

Departmental Procurement

112. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40255/10]

The Taoiseach: No printing contracts for my Department have been awarded or given to any company from outside the State in the past three years.

Interdepartmental Committees

113. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Taoiseach if he will name all Cabinet committees in operation here in the year 2009 and to date in 2010; the number of times each committee has met in 2009 and to date in 2010. [40329/10]

The Taoiseach: The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Cabinet Committee	Number of Meetings in 2009	Number of Meetings in 2010
Economic Renewal and Jobs	12	6
Science Technology and Innovation (subsumed into Economic Renewal and Jobs in June 2010)	1	—
Health	8	4
Social Inclusion, Children & Integration	2	1
Irish and the Gaeltacht	3	—
Transforming Public Services	7	3
Climate Change and Energy Security	2	—
European Affairs	6	3
Aspects of International Human Rights	2	—
Strategic Directions for Local Government (established in January 2010)	—	17 (including on date of establishment)

Departmental Bodies

114. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Taoiseach the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40341/10]

The Taoiseach: In answering these questions I am interpreting “high level groups” as groups which are working on issues of specific interest, which are chaired by my Department and which include representatives from other parts of the civil/public service and elsewhere. Accordingly, the information sought by the Deputy is detailed in the following table.

Name of High Level Group	Purpose	Year Set Up	Number of Meetings Approximately
Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee on European Affairs (ICCEUA)	Works to ensure that there is a coordinated Irish approach to key policy issues at European level. The Committee has a particular focus on ensuring the timely transposition of European measures by Ireland. The Committee is also briefed on issues arising at key working groups in the EU. The meetings of the Committee serve to share information among Government Departments on EU issues.	2002	82
Senior Officials Group on European Affairs (SOG EU)	Works to ensure that there is a coordinated national approach to EU Affairs. It may also prepare specific material for the Cabinet Committee on European Affairs as required.	2004	87

[The Taoiseach.]

Name of High Level Group	Purpose	Year Set Up	Number of Meetings Approximately
Senior Officials Group on Health	Supports Cabinet Committee on Health.	2004	49
Working Group on Long-term Care	Taking account of the proposals in the Mercer and O'Shea Reports to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the policy options for a financially sustainable system of long-term care; and • rationalise the range of benefits, services and grants (both statutory and non-statutory) currently in place, and address associated issues. 	2005	24
National Disability Strategy Stakeholders Monitoring Group	Monitors progress on the implementation of the National Disability Strategy (NDS).	2006	8
Senior Officials Group on Disability	Monitors the NDS and reports to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration.	2006	9
Advisory Group on Social Finance and Philanthropy	Monitor and advise on the implementation of the social finance commitments in Towards 2016.	2007	2
Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) Network	To promote best practice and facilitate the use of Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) within and across Government Departments and Offices.	2007	10
Senior Officials Group on Climate Change & Energy Security	To support the work of the Cabinet Committee on Climate Change and Energy Security and ensure appropriate synergies with the relevant Cross Departmental Teams.	2007	30
Senior Officials Group on Economic Renewal	To support the work of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Renewal	2008	26
Senior Officials Group on Labour Market Issues	To support the Cabinet Committee on Economic Renewal in relation to labour market activation policies.	2008	18
Marine Co-ordinating Group	To promote increased co-ordination among relevant Departments in relation to marine related matters.	2009	20
Transforming Public Services Secretaries General Steering Group	Supports the Cabinet Committee on Transforming Public Services.	2009	29
Senior Officials Group on Economic Regulation	To monitor and implement the actions set out in the Government Statement on Economic Regulation which was published in October 2009.	2009	8
Regulatory Liaison Group	The Regulatory Liaison Group, which includes the Senior Officials Group on Economic Regulation and key economic regulators, was set up following the first Annual Regulatory Forum in February 2010 in order to progress key actions set out in the Government Statement on Economic Regulation and other issues agreed at the Forum.	2010	2
Transforming Public Service (TPS) Assistant Secretary Group	To widen consultation into the development of the transformation agenda for the Civil Service.	2010	6

Business Regulation

115. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Taoiseach if his Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if his Department has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if his Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40356/10]

The Taoiseach: The Department of the Taoiseach is represented on the Interdepartmental Group on Administrative Burden Reduction. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is represented separately on the Group. The Department itself has no legislation that impacts on business. As the CSO has legislation that impacts on business, they are fully engaged in the burden reduction programme.

It should be acknowledged that the compilation of business statistics is absolutely necessary. Therefore, while it is essential to minimise burdens, it is neither possible nor desirable to completely eliminate burdens of this kind. In this context, the CSO published a ranked list of 20 information obligations in *the Standard Cost Model Report — Measurement of administrative burden imposed on Irish business by Central Statistics Office inquiries*. This report was published in August 2010 and is available on the CSO website. The report estimates that the total cost of the burden to businesses arising from CSO activity for 2008 (the most recent year available) was €10.8 million using the standard cost model (which assumes full compliance). The CSO also publishes an annual statement on total burden to business arising from CSO activity. These reports are available on the CSO website.

FÁS Training Programmes

116. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of places filled under the short-time working training programme; the amount spent on the scheme; when the scheme commenced and when it is due to wind up; the number of employers involved; if she will provide any information she has on any reviews of the effectiveness of the scheme; her plans to expand the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40224/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): The Pilot Short Time Working Training Programme was introduced in May 2009. FÁS initially administered the programme, which aimed to provide training to people on systematic short time for the days they are not working. The programme aimed to provide two days training a week for up to 277 workers over a 52-week period and they received training free of charge for these two days. The Department of Social Protection continues to pay participants social welfare entitlements whilst receiving this training.

In the 2010 budget, FÁS was not allocated funding for the Short Time Working Training Programme, instead Skillnets has been providing for its inclusion in its training networks programme (TNP) of limited numbers of unemployed persons with the emphasis, where possible, on priority cohorts on the live register. It is intended that this will also include provision for some people on reduced working weeks and this supersedes the FÁS Short Time Working Training Programme initiative. Skillnets are now providing training to approximately 4,800 unemployed persons. Skillnets have embarked on an initiative to provide learning support to the unemployed via existing structures of networks who support the learning needs of the unemployed. This has resulted in a very high standard of quality and depth of the support for the unemployed.

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

In June 2010, Skillnets surveyed unemployed individuals who trained with networks between June and May. 86% of all respondents agreed that the training increased their chances of securing employment. Since completing Skillnets training, one in five people secured work, one in four progressed into further education/training and one in seven became self employed. FÁS are currently in the process of collating other specific information requested about the Short Time Working Training Programme and when this information becomes available FÁS will forward it directly to the Deputy.

Adult Education

117. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will approve the mobility allowance scheme under a fund (details supplied); if she will address other concerns of persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39671/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): The issues raised by the Question are currently being progressed by my Department in conjunction with FÁS and the Waterford Crystal EGF Co-ordination Unit.

Departmental Expenditure

118. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from her Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39677/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The detailed information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and would involve a very significant amount of administrative time to compile. However, details of public funding disbursements are made available in a range of publications on an annual basis. The Revised Estimates Volume, published annually by the Department of Finance, contains a significant level of detail regarding funding allocations for the year of publication, together with details of funds disbursed by the Exchequer in the previous year. Additionally the Comptroller and Auditor General publishes the Appropriation Accounts, which are the annual accounts of Government Departments.

Both the Revised Estimates Volume and the Appropriation Accounts categorise expenditure by Government Department and by subhead designation. Within the subheads categorised, major organisations funded by individual Departmental Votes, including the Vote for my Department, can be identified. Other tables within these publications contain significant further information. Additionally, on an annual basis, my Department posts on its website details of organisations part-funded from National Lottery funds. In this regard, funding details for the years 2007-2009 are provided in tabular form in the following spreadsheet. If there is a specific person or body in which the Deputy has a particular interest I would be happy to supply any additional information that is held by my Department in this matter.

2007 National Lottery Funding from Vote 26 — Education and Science

National Lottery Voted Funds Payments in the year ended 31 December 2007	€
General Expenses of Youth Organisations and Other Expenditure in Relation to Youth Activities (Subhead B.9.)	42,616,671
Cultural Activities (Subhead B.14.)	229,700
Irish Language (Subhead B.10.)	1,178,401
Expenses of Adult Education Organisations (Subhead B.1.)	929,000
Total	44,953,772
<i>Analysis of Payments from the Grant-in-Aid Fund for General Expenses of Youth Organisations and Other Expenditure in relation to Youth Activities (Subhead B.9.)</i>	
Assessor of Youth Work — Salary Costs	79,124
Belvedere Youth Project, Dublin	60,000
Causeway	83,056
Child Protection Training	142,267
Co-operation Ireland	55,134
Council of Europe English Language Course	45,000
Curragh Youth Project, Co. Kildare	60,000
Development Fund for Youth Work Organisations	450,969
Gaisce — President's Award Scheme	933,000
Garda Vetting	300,000
Grants to Youth Organisations (Schedule A)	12,698,180
Intercultural Strategy	90,000
Irish Girl Guides	35,250
Leargas	692,242
Local Voluntary Youth Councils	65,000
Local Youth Club Grants Scheme	1,600,003
Local Youth Club Grants Scheme — Administrative Costs	63,000
Maynooth Diploma Course	165,000
Milford Community Youth Project, Co. Donegal	13,500
Miscellaneous Expenses	17,235
Miscellaneous — Youth Information	8,365
National Association of Youth Drama	45,000
National Youth Arts Programme	127,000
National Youth Council of Ireland	15,000
National Youth Health Programme	123,500
National Youth Work Advisory Committee	8,568
No Name Club	101,663
North/South Youth Work	5,505
Ogras	24,600
Other Projects under Disadvantaged Youth (Schedule B)	349,264
Remember US Youth Project	60,000
Scouting Ireland	291,000
Skibberreen Youth Project, Co Cork	13,500
Special Project for Youth Schemes	19,910,652
VEC's — Additional Programme Costs	146,200
Young Irish Film Makers	80,000
Young Mens Christian Association	26,500

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

National Lottery Voted Funds Payments in the year ended 31 December 2007	€
Youth Card/USIT	4,640
Youth Officers — Capacity Development of VEC's	1,488,815
Youth Information Centres	2,114,074
Youth Programme — External Evaluation	24,865
Total	42,616,671
<i>Cultural Activities (Subhead B.14.)</i>	
Cultural Organisations (Schedule C)	229,700
<i>Irish Language (Subhead B.10.)</i>	
Courses in Irish	1,178,401
Expenses of Adult Education Organisations (Subhead B.1.)	
Aontas	472,000
Irish Countrywomen's Association	23,000
National Adult Literacy Agency	327,000
People's College	107,000
Total	929,000
<i>Schedule A</i>	
<i>Grants to Youth Organisations (Subhead B.9.)</i>	
An Óige	240,969
Athlone Community Services	49,161
Boys Brigade	75,250
Catholic Guides of Ireland	344,274
Catholic Youth Care	1,134,290
Church of Ireland Youth Department	237,203
Comhthraenáil na nOgeagrais Gaeilge	21,367
Confederation of Peace Corps	171,956
ECO — UNESCO Club	161,938
Experiment in International Living	35,556
Feachtas	117,552
Foróige	2,492,926
Girls Brigade	57,805
Irish Girl Guides	562,512
Junior Chamber Ireland	22,619
Macra na Feirme	596,401
National Association for Youth Drama	133,041
National Federation of Archery Clubs	71,339
National Youth Council of Ireland	787,539
No Name Club	194,074
Ogra, Chorcaí	728,803
Ogras	247,322
Order of Malta	63,173
Scouting Ireland	1,144,117
Voluntary Services International	107,712
Young Christian Workers	126,019
YMCA	147,507
Youth Work Ireland	2,625,755
Total	12,698,180

National Lottery Voted Funds Payments in the year ended 31 December 2007	€
<i>Schedule B</i>	
<i>Special Projects for Youth (Subhead B.9.)</i>	
City of Dublin Youth Service Board — Annual Grant	129,881
Foróige Development Officer, North Co. Dublin	103,062
Foróige Development Officer, Co. Donegal VEC	87,624
Ronanstown Pilot Project	15,407
Sheelin Project, Co. Cavan VEC	13,290
Total	349,264
<i>Schedule C</i>	
<i>Analysis of Payments from the Grant-in-Aid Fund for General Expenses of Cultural, Scientific and Educational Organisations (Subhead B.14.)</i>	
Artane School of Music	45,000
Feis Maitiu	45,000
Foras Éireann	12,700
National Youth Orchestra of Ireland	127,000
Total	229,700

2008 National Lottery Funding from Vote 26 — Education and Science

National Lottery Voted Funds Payments in the year ended 31 December 2008	€
General Expenses of Youth Organisations and Other Expenditure in Relation to Youth Activities (Subhead B.9.)	43,567,137
Cultural Activities (Subhead B.14.)	229,700
Irish Language (Subhead B.10.)	1,431,705
Expenses of Adult Education Organisations (Subhead B.1.)	956,000
Total	46,184,542
<i>Analysis of Payments from the Grant-in-Aid Fund for General Expenses of Youth Organisations and Other Expenditure in relation to Youth Activities (Subhead B.9.)</i>	
Causeway, Exchange Programme	72,298
Child Protection Unit	125,380
Co-operation Ireland Exchange Programme	49,270
City of Cork VEC	36,035
Development of Quality Standards Framework	30,613
Development Fund for Youth Work Organisations	300,000
Gaisce — President's Award Scheme	956,000
Grants to Youth Organisations (Schedule A)	13,465,132
Intercultural Strategy	39,731
Leargas	638,552
Local Voluntary Youth Councils	58,500
Local Youth Club Grants Scheme	1,800,000
Maynooth Diploma Course	115,000
Maynooth Research	50,000
Milford Community Youth Project, Co. Donegal	15,000
Millstreet Youth Project/Club	30,000
Miscellaneous Expenses	4,498
Miscellaneous — Youth Information	8,735

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National Lottery Voted Funds Payments in the year ended 31 December 2008	€
National Association of Youth Drama	25,000
National Youth Arts Programme	154,278
National Youth Health Programme	142,000
National Youth Work Advisory Committee	6,092
North/South Youth Work	4,915
Other Projects including Disadvantaged Youth (Schedule B)	21,381,006
Quality Standards Framework — Salary and related expenses	89,771
Scouting Ireland	8,900
The Fuse Youth Café, Co. Cork	30,000
The Hive, Wexford	25,000
VEC's — Capacity Development — Youth Officers	1,561,900
VEC's — QSF Fund	144,000
Youth Card/USIT	4,164
Youth in Action Programme — Annual Declaration of Assurance — Leargas	4,437
Youth Officers — ICTU	9,000
Youth Information Centres	2,166,930
Youth Information — Support Partnership	15,000
Total	43,567,137
<i>Cultural Activities (Subhead B.14.)</i>	
Cultural Organisations (Schedule C)	229,700
<i>Irish Language (Subhead B.10.)</i>	
Courses in Irish	1,431,705
<i>Expenses of Adult Education Organisations (Subhead B.1.)</i>	
Aontas	487,000
Irish Countrywomen's Association	23,000
National Adult Literacy Agency	336,000
People's College	110,000
Total	956,000
<i>Schedule A</i>	
<i>Grants to Youth Organisations (Subhead B.9.)</i>	
An Óige	246,993
Athlone Community Services	50,390
Boys Brigade	78,631
Catholic Guides of Ireland	354,381
Catholic Youth Care	1,295,147
Church of Ireland Youth Department	246,133
Comhthraenáil na nOgeagrais Gaeilge	21,901
Confederation of Peace Corps	176,255
ECO — UNESCO Club	167,486
Experiment in International Living	39,445
Feachtas	121,991
Foróige	2,590,249
Girls Brigade	62,250
Irish Girl Guides	596,575
Junior Chamber Ireland	23,184

National Lottery Voted Funds Payments in the year ended 31 December 2008	€
Macra na Feirme	611,311
National Association for Youth Drama	139,367
National Federation of Archery Clubs	74,622
National Youth Council of Ireland	807,227
No Name Club	267,051
Ogra, Chorcai	749,023
Ogras	255,005
Order of Malta	66,252
Scouting Ireland	1,202,720
Voluntary Services International	111,905
Young Christian Workers	130,669
YMCA	210,570
Young Irish Film Makers	47,000
Youth Work Ireland	2,721,399
Total	13,465,132
<i>Schedule B</i>	
<i>Special Projects for Youth (Subhead B.9.)</i>	
Dun Laoghaire VEC	501,901
City of Dublin VEC	4,782,197
City of Cork VEC	1,367,153
County Cork VEC	476,672
City of Galway VEC	1,128,766
Co. Galway VEC	38,823
Co. Leitrim VEC	39,109
City of Limerick VEC	482,143
Co. Limerick VEC	405,728
City of Waterford VEC	1,202,187
County Dublin VEC	2,745,071
Co. Wicklow VEC	300,815
Co. Kerry VEC	247,235
Co. Tipperary VEC	230,000
Catholic Youth Care	37,991
National Association of Travellers Centres	871,393
Youth Work Ireland	5,605,293
Offaly County Council	60,240
Tionscadal Oibre don Ogra	76,364
Health Service Executive	61,500
Co. Donegal VEC	106,441
Co. Wexford VEC	115,000
Co. Longford VEC	106,441
City of Dublin Youth Service Board — Annual Grant	133,128
Foróige Development Officer, North Co. Dublin	115,000
Foróige Development Officer, Co. Donegal VEC	115,000
Ronanstown Pilot Project	15,793
Sheelin Project, Co. Cavan VEC	13,622
Total	21,381,006

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National Lottery Voted Funds Payments in the year ended 31 December 2008	€
<i>Schedule C</i>	
<i>Analysis of Payments from the Grant-in-Aid Fund for General Expenses of Cultural, Scientific and Educational Organisations (Subhead B.14.)</i>	
Artane School of Music	45,000
Feis Maitiu	45,000
Foras Éireann	12,700
National Youth Orchestra of Ireland	127,000
Total	229,700

National Lottery Funding Under subheads B.1 and B.14, a total of €1.148 million was grant aided to support adult education and cultural activities. The subheads in Vote 26 from which the funding was paid are noted below.

2009 National Lottery Funding from Vote 26 — Education and Science

Recipients of Funding from National Lottery	2009	2008
	€000	€000
Expenses of Adult Education Organisations (Subhead B.1.)	941	956
Cultural Activities (Subhead B.14.)	207	230
General Expenses of Youth Organisations and Other Expenditure in Relation to Youth Activities (Subhead B.9.) ¹	—	43,567
Irish Language (Subhead B.10.)	—	1,432
Total	1,148	46,185

¹Functions in relation to Youth Organisations and Youth Activities were transferred out of Vote 26 with effect from 1 January 2009 to Vote 41 (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs).

Recipients of Grants from Subhead B.1 — Adult Education Organisations in 2009

Name of Recipients	Sum received
	€
Aontas	477,000.00
National Adult Literacy Agency	333,000.00
Peoples College	108,000.00
Irish Countrywomen's Association	23,000.00
Total	941,000.00

Recipients of Grants from Subhead B.14 — Cultural Activities in 2009

Name of Recipients	Sum received
	€
Foras Éireann	11,400.00
National Youth Orchestra of Ireland	114,000.00
Feis Maitiu	41,000.00
Artane School of Music	41,000.00
Total	207,400.00

FÁS Training Programmes

119. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if the FÁS Cabra training centre is due to close, or part close, in December or at any point in the near future; if all participants in training courses will be facilitated in completing their training courses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39696/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): I am advised that, following a recent inspection of the roof of the FÁS training centre in Cabra, a proposal will be brought to the FÁS Board in November for the phased exit from the centre. These necessary measures are being taken by FÁS primarily with the health and safety of the centre's staff and its trainees in mind. All current courses taking place at Cabra will, where necessary, be redeployed to other Dublin training centres. Where possible, future night training will be facilitated in other FÁS training centres.

Schools Building Projects

120. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the action she has taken to resolve the dispute at a school (details supplied) regarding completion of works to standard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39723/10]

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 certification 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. My Department has written to the School Management Authority seeking a meeting to discuss the ongoing difficulties.

Special Educational Needs

121. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39759/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): 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. I have arranged for the details supplied to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

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. The NCSE has introduced an appeals process whereby schools and parents, where appropriate, may seek to appeal the decision of a SENO in relation to the allocation of resources. Information regarding the appeals process is available on the NCSE's

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website at www.ncse.ie. It is open to a school to appeal a SENO's decision under this appeals process.

122. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39760/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): 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. As the Deputy's question relates to matters concerning operations of the NCSE, I have arranged for the details supplied to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

Schools Building Projects

123. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for phase two of a primary schools development (details supplied) in County Cork. [39774/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Phase I development of the school to which he refers was completed in June of last year under my Department's rapid delivery programme. My officials are currently undertaking some preliminary work on the proposed Phase II development. Officials from my Department will be touch with the school authorities shortly, in relation to progression of the project.

124. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the details of the revised tender arrangements to apply for the construction of a national school (details supplied) in County Cork and when she expects the project to move on site. [39776/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): As the Deputy will be aware, the project to which he refers encountered delays in securing planning permission and land transfers. These problems were compounded by certain issues that subsequently arose with the preferred bidder and which resulted in a recent decision to re-tender the project. It is envisaged that the project will be re-tendered shortly. Subject to no issues arising, it is anticipated that it will progress to construction in early 2011.

Higher Education Grants

125. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if the Student Support Bill will make allowances for students who attend a college (details supplied) and are unable to avail of third level grants because it is recognised as a private commercial college; if the Department of Education and Skills will base its grants system on financial circumstances instead of the form of education being received; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39788/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): 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. 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.

Departmental Properties

126. **Deputy John O’Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39799/10]

127. **Deputy John O’Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of premises and sites rented or leased by her Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39814/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 127 together.

The renting / leasing of Government offices and properties is the responsibility of the Property Management Services, Office of Public Works, which acts as an agent for all Government Departments. The terms and conditions of the leases are a matter for OPW.

Special Educational Needs

128. **Deputy Charlie O’Connor** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on contacts with a school (details supplied) in Dublin 24; if she will note the concerns of the school community in respect of issues regarding staffing and the need for immediate action; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39826/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Deputy is aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is an independent agency with responsibility for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs in all mainstream and special schools. The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support and conveys decisions on applications directly to schools without recourse to my Department. Neither I, nor the Department of Education and Skills, interfere with the allocation decisions taken by the NCSE in schools.

As I have previously clarified, I can confirm that my Department has been in contact with the school in question, by letter of 3rd September, to clarify issues raised by them in relation to the school’s enrolment policy and also to advise of the role of the NCSE regarding the determination of support levels for pupils with special educational needs in special schools. It is my understanding that the NCSE is presently liaising with the school in question to monitor supports in place for pupils currently enrolled in the school as well as evaluating further appli-

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cations for support. The NCSE has advised my Department that it hopes to conclude this process shortly.

I wish to assure the Deputy that supports will continue to be made available to schools which have enrolled pupils who qualify for such support and children with special educational needs will continue to have access to an appropriate education in line with my Department's policy. I have arranged for the details supplied to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

School Accommodation

129. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will facilitate a school (details supplied) that is currently paying €60,000 annual rent for facilities that are less than ideal at an alternative educational facility in the town; if she will expedite this matter in view of the fact that a decision would have to be made and communicated to the various relevant parties by the end of November 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39838/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school to which he refers has provisional recognition from my Department and that the matter of school accommodation is one, in the first instance, for the school Patron. My Department has no record of having received correspondence from the school authority in question regarding a proposal to relocate from their current premises. Any such proposal received from the school authority will be considered and a response communicated to the school authority in due course.

Skills Development

130. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the assistance that can be given to participants on a course (details supplied) who took their examinations in June 2009, to enable them to receive their certificates and to ensure that the certificates are dated 2009 [39840/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): It is a matter for providers or organisers of programmes of education and training such as the one referred to by the Deputy to provide the relevant information and documentation to FETAC for certification in a timely manner, and FETAC encourages providers to do so. It would seem that in this case an unacceptable period of time has elapsed between the completion of courses and assessments and the submission of a request for certification to FETAC. I understand that a number of providers use the premises referred to by the Deputy, and if the Deputy provides further details on the particular provider concerned I will forward that information to FETAC.

With regard to the date of certification, FETAC is not in a position to certify retrospectively learning which has been undertaken. FETAC can only certify learning once all of the relevant information and documentation has been submitted to it by the provider concerned, and FETAC provides opportunities for certification four times per year.

Vocational Education Committees

131. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills her plans regarding the proposal to amalgamate the vocational educational committees of Kerry, Limerick and Limerick city; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39858/10]

138. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the estimated savings that will accrue from the restructuring of the vocational education committee model; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40079/10]

139. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the criteria considered in the context of developing the restructured vocational education committee model; the factors that led to the final proposal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40080/10]

140. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if, in the context of the restructuring of vocational education committees, administrative staff will be made redundant or redeployed; the savings that will accrue in this regard; the number of staff that will be affected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40081/10]

157. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the amount of money she expects to save by the amalgamation of the vocational education committees; the savings expected and the way they will be made regarding the amalgamation of Cavan and Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40308/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 131, 138 to 140, inclusive, and 157 together.

The Government has decided to reduce the overall number of VECs from 33 to 16 and to the merger of particular city and or counties. My Department has commenced work on the preparation of legislation so that it can be brought forward in 2011. I have framed this restructuring, having regard to the need to address the current low scale and size of operations in particular VECs together with the need to retain and support the flexibility and adaptability which has characterised the VEC sector to date along with the requirement to meet future challenges across the school sector generally. In addition, geographic factors such as the total area covered by a VEC, the distance between extremities of the area, the road network within the area and the alignment of other regional structures have been taken into account in arriving at these combinations.

I am satisfied that the scale of operations of a significant number of VECs makes restructuring of the sector a key priority to ensure that each VEC has the critical mass of activity while at the same time, retaining the flexibility and responsiveness to meet the needs of the population for which it caters. A VEC's budget for service delivery is the broadest measure of activity. In order to ensure that each VEC will have the required critical mass of operations under the revised structure, I sought to bring as many of the new VEC areas as possible, taking account of the other criteria outlined earlier to a level of activity which would require a budget of €50 million. In this new arrangement, the smallest VEC will have a budget of €39 million and the median for the individual budget measure of scale of operations will move from €26 million at present to €59 million with 13 of the proposed 16 VECs having a budget of €50 million or more.

Flexibility and responsiveness to changing and emerging needs has been a general feature of the operation of VECs. I am satisfied that this restructuring of VECs will not only retain and support this demonstrated capacity for flexibility and adaptability but also position the VEC sector to meet future challenges across the school sector generally and the proposed reconfiguration has been framed on that basis. Some of the likely savings from the restructuring of the VECs will come from the sale of existing VEC buildings. The potential revenue to be raised

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from the sale of these assets, however, is closely linked to the current state of the property market and it may not be possible to dispose of such buildings satisfactorily in the short term.

This reconfiguration can over time yield savings in the recurrent cost of the headquarter functions of VECs which at present is of the order of €42 million in total, primarily comprising pay provision. The Special Group suggested savings of €3 million. I am satisfied that a saving of that order is reasonable in the medium term.

Many of the detailed aspects of the restructuring, including the location of the headquarters of the new VECs and the number of administrative staff which each of the new VEC entities will have, will be considered and worked through by my Department in conjunction with the VECs involved in any one merger before decisions are taken. Implementation will involve consultation and negotiations with the unions representing employees in the sector and other stakeholders. The Croke Park Agreement provides the backdrop for these negotiations.

Schools Building Projects

132. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide information in relation to progress made in regard to the full purchase of the site upon which a school (details supplied) in County Meath is to be located; if she will set out a timeframe for the completion of the purchase of the site; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39890/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department is currently in negotiations with a landowner with a view to acquiring a site for the school referred to by the Deputy and to this end has recently made a formal offer to acquire the lands. A response is awaited. Due to the commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions, I am not in a position to comment further on the matter at this time. 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.

Special Educational Needs

133. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills when the National Council for Special Education will allocate a special needs assistant to help a student (details supplied) attending a school in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39896/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): 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. I have arranged for the details supplied to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply. 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.

Schools Building Projects

134. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills when funding will be provided for a new school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39904/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): It is my Department's intention to provide a new building for the school to which the Deputy refers on a site which is being made available by the VEC. My officials are currently undertaking some preliminary work on the proposed project. Officials from my Department will be touch with the school authorities shortly, in relation to progression of the project.

Special Educational Needs

135. **Deputy Bernard Allen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) was refused an education laptop. [39905/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The application in respect of the pupil referred to by the Deputy has been examined by the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) with assigned responsibility for the school in question. The SENO has advised my Department that based on documentation provided, the pupil in question does not meet the criteria for the provision of this equipment. Accordingly, my Department is not in a position to sanction funding.

Departmental Expenditure

136. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the savings that have been made in her Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39919/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department uses both proprietary and open source software. There is ongoing debate as to whether proprietary or open source software delivers lower total cost of ownership. Any savings that may have accrued from the use of open source software within my Department cannot be accurately quantified as systems of comparable specification have not been developed in both technologies. Generic consumables are not in use within my Department as hardware vendors recommend and only support use of their own brand consumables in their equipment.

FÁS Training Programmes

137. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will respond to correspondence (details supplied) in relation to FÁS payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39944/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Haughey): The issue of present entitlement to payment of a FÁS training allowance is set out in policy measures that were announced as part of the Budget for 2010. The matter raised in the correspondence referred to by the Deputy is currently under review.

Questions Nos. 138 to 140, inclusive, answered with Question No. 131.

Schools Building Projects

141. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the provision of a new post-primary school building at a location (details supplied) in County Meath for which a site has been purchased in 2009 to facilitate this project; when will the design team be in a position to advance the school project; when she envisages construction works to commence; the reason for the delay in the process to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40096/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has completed the acquisition of a site for the provision of a new post-primary school in County Meath. A proposal to construct a new school was 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.

School Staffing

142. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will allow the same appointment numbers for assistants to a school as apply to another school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40106/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The number of mainstream class teachers appropriate to a school for the current school year is determined by reference to the school's valid enrolment on 30 September, 2009 in accordance with the staffing schedule (Primary Circular 0021/2010) which is available on my Department's website. The schedule sets out in a clear and transparent way the staffing schedule for Ordinary National Schools, Gaeltacht Schools and Gaelscoileanna.

Overseas Students

143. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills, further to Parliamentary Question No. 174 of 19 October 2010, if she will clarify the discrepancy between the figures given by her for full-time overseas students as given to her by Enterprise Ireland at 26,000 in 2009 and the statistical data published by the Higher Education Authority; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40107/10]

144. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she is satisfied that the statistical information on the country of origin of students at full-time higher education colleges here, as published by the Higher Education Authority, is accurate and comprehensive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40110/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 144 and 143 together.

There are a number of differences in the way the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Enterprise Ireland collect and report data pertaining to international students, reflecting the different purposes for which the data sets are intended. In brief, the Enterprise Ireland data is collected from a larger number of institutions, and covers more categories of student than the HEA data. In line with its remit to promote international education, including both the public and private sectors, Enterprise Ireland reports data from 51 institutions, including universities, institutes and technology and other institutions in receipt of State funding and also HETAC-recognised private sector institutions. In this data, it includes short term exchange students.

The HEA restricts its reporting to full-time students in the universities, institutes of technology and seven other institutions which are in receipt of public funding. Their figures do not

include certain categories of exchange students. In line with the Government's new international education strategy, Investing in Global Relationships, it is intended that, from 2011, an annual report on international education will be produced which includes data on all international students in Ireland, bringing together data from the HEA, Enterprise Ireland and also Fáilte Ireland, which collects information on English language students.

Schools Building Projects

145. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will visit to see at first hand the problems experienced at a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40113/10]

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 certification 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. My Department have recently written to the School Management Authority seeking a meeting to discuss the ongoing difficulties.

Teachers' Remuneration

146. **Deputy John Cregan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the reason a teacher (details supplied) is only paid a pass primary degree allowance despite the fact that they hold an honours degree in accountancy and if the reason for this decision can be verified by way of identifying the appropriate departmental guidelines. [40116/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The rate of the honours degree allowance payable by my Department is provided for in Circular Letter 0004/2010. It is payable in respect of primary degrees conferred and designated as first, second or third class honours degrees by appropriate awarding authorities. My Department also accepts full membership of certain professional bodies for the purpose of granting certain qualification allowances. The person referred to by the Deputy does not hold a primary honours degree or full membership of a professional accounting body. Therefore she is not entitled to payment of an honours degree allowance.

Schools Building Projects

147. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of planning applications for new or extended school buildings lodged to planning authorities where her Department has been informed of such, since the start of September; the number expected to be submitted up to the end of the year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40132/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department has been made aware of eight planning applications for major school building projects which have been lodged since September 2010. It is expected that approximately fourteen planning applications for major school building projects will be ready to be lodged before the end of the year. This is subject to all prerequisites being in order and no issues arising.

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

The information above does not take into account projects for smaller works, the management of which, including the submission of planning applications, is devolved to school authorities. In addition my Department and the OPW are working towards submitting a number of applications by end 2010 as part of contract exchange between the Department and the relevant site vendor. The purpose of these applications is to ensure that the site to be purchased will be deemed suitable for land usage purposes to accommodate the required school. Due to the commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions, I am not in a position to comment further on the matter at this time.

Computerisation Programme

148. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be provided to a school (details supplied) in County Mayo to purchase equipment. [40136/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): As part of the implementation of the Smart Schools = Smart Economy Report and the 2008 ICT Strategy Report, I recently announced ICT grants of over €20m for post primary schools. The school referred to by the Deputy received a grant of €12,232. The grant should be used by the school to work towards equipping each classroom in the school with a teaching computer, with a long range wireless mouse and keyboard, and a fixed digital projector with a particular priority to be placed on equipment for use in the teaching of Project Maths. This latest investment brings the total equipment grant outlay under the ICT in Schools programme to more than €43m within the past twelve months and further grants will issue to primary schools shortly.

Schools Building Projects

149. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the progress regarding an extension to a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40141/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The school referred to by the Deputy was authorised earlier this year to tender for the appointment of a design team. The Board of Management have finalised their assessment of the tenders and, subject to no issues arising, the appointment process is expected to be completed shortly.

150. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the progress regarding an extension at a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40170/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The school referred to by the Deputy was authorised to tender for the appointment of a design team. The Board of Management is expected to revert to my Department shortly to finalise the appointment process.

151. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the progress regarding a new school building for a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40171/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The school referred to by the Deputy was authorised earlier this year to tender for the appointment of a design team. Representatives from the Board of Management of this school attended a briefing given by my Department to explain the tendering process and the steps involved. The tender process is currently in progress.

152. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application by a school (details supplied) in County Kerry to extend an existing classroom which is urgently needed given the increase in enrolment this year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40177/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I can confirm that the school to which the Deputy refers has recently applied to my Department for an extension to an existing classroom. The application is currently under consideration in my Department and a decision will issue to the school authority in due course.

153. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding funding allocated to a school (details supplied) in County Cork for the replacement of prefabricated classrooms with permanent structures; if her attention has been drawn to the ongoing effort and expenditure by the school to draw down these funds; if she will confirm that the funds in question remain available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40204/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The School in question was approved a Devolved Grant for the provision of a mainstream classroom and a resource room in June 2010. My Department is aware of the difficulties being experienced by the school in relation to planning matters and understand that works are due to commence in early 2011. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the funding allocated for this project will be available in 2011.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

154. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number and job description of persons who have been vetted by the Garda vetting unit for each of the past three years who are at present employed in first and second level education in any capacity full-time, part-time or temporary; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The arrangements for vetting of teaching and non-teaching staff are set out in Department Circular 0094/2006 which is available on my Department's website. My Department will shortly be issuing a new circular updating the requirements for Garda Vetting as part of the recruitment process for all primary and post-primary schools.

The specific data on vetting requested by the Deputy is not readily available from the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU). Irrespective of the position on vetting by the GCVU, where facts or information comes to a Board of Management's attention calling into question a person's suitability to work with children it is a matter for the Board to satisfy itself that the person is suitable to work in that capacity. This will naturally have to be assessed on a case by case basis. The Board will have to consider all the circumstances of the case, give due weight to all relevant factors, and afford fair procedures to the individual concerned before making a decision.

Departmental Procurement

155. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if any printing contracts for her Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40247/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department has availed of printing services provided by two companies located outside the state. Paragon Group UK Ltd., located in Tyne and Wear, England, prints pressure seal forms (used for printing payslips, cheques and payable orders) and was paid the following amounts in the years indicated, 2007 — €81,845.34; 2008 — €63,594.97; 2009 — €80,753.03; 2010 (to date) — €63,549.99. Another company, Enterprise Stationery, located in Lurgan, Northern Ireland, prints file covers and was paid the following amounts in the years indicated, 2007 — €3,479.47; 2008 — €7,331.81; 2009 — €3,683.33; 2010 (to date) — €3,476.16. I understand that the use of these companies by my Department arises from a procurement process that was centrally organised by the Office of Public Works.

Aitheantas Scoileanna

156. **D'fhiafraigh Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** den Tánaiste agus Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an raibh coiste bunaithe i bhfeidhm san Uaimh, Co. na Mí, chun bunscoil a bhunú faoi phátrúnacht an Choiste Ghairmoideachais i mbliana; más rud é go raibh, ag cén céim den phróiseas ag lorg aitheantais don scoil a bunaíodh an coiste bunaithe; ar chomhlíon an ceantar na riachtanais dhéimeagrafacha chun scoileanna nua a bhunú; an raibh gá leis an scoil; an ndearna pobal an cheantair iarratas ar scoil nua; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [40284/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Faoi mar is eol don Teachta, b'fhéidir, tá athbhreithniú ar siúl ag an gCoimisiún um Chóiríocht Scoile i láthair na huair ar na nósanna imeachta um bunú scoileanna nua. Táim ag súil le tuarascáil an Choimisiúin go luath agus nuair a bheidh sé agam breithneoidh mé cúrsaí beartais agus na socrúithe riachtanacha mar aon le haon nósanna imeachta leasaithe a bheidh riachtanach. Fad atá an t-athbhreithniú ar siúl níl i gceist aon bhunscoileanna nua a bhunú ach i gcásanna ina bhfuil gá le scoileanna nua de bharr ardú daonra. Ciallaíonn sin nach mbunófar aon bunscoileanna nua ar aon chúis seachas méadú daonra.

Ní heol don Roinn seo an raibh coiste ar bun san Uaimh chun bunscoil a bhunú faoi phátrúnacht Choiste Gairmoideachais Chontae na Mí. Fós féin, agus bunaithe ar fhaisnéis déimeagrafach, cinneadh scoil nua a oscailt san Uaimh le haghaidh Meán Fómhair 2010. Roimhe sin bhí dhá cheann de bhunscoileanna pobail i mBaile Átha Cliath i dtreoirscéim de shamhail nua na Bunscoile Pobail. Agus leathnú na treoirscéime seo chuig Baile Brigín, an Uaimh agus Nás á fhógairt ag mo réamhtheachtaí, an tAire O'Keefe, dúirt sé go raibh sé aireach ar an ráiteas beartais a bhí déanta aige chun samhail na Bunscoile Pobail a leathnú sa bhliain 2010. Chun an tsamhail a mheas i suíomhanna difriúla, gheall an tAire go leathnófaí samhail na Bunscoile Pobail chuig suíomhanna nua, mar aidhm bheartais, sa bhliain 2010. Trí líon teoranta bunscoileanna eile a áireamh sa treoirscéim, beidh sé níos fusa fadhbanna praiticiúla a shaináithint agus réitigh nua a thriail. Beidh ar ár gcumas ansin an tsamhail nua pátrúnachta seo a mheas i suíomhanna difriúla sula ndéanfar cinneadh eolasach ar cheart a leathnú tuilleadh sa todhchaí.

Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 131

School Services Staff

158. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if she will address the situation whereby in many cases school secretaries and caretakers are not subject to a salary scale, have no pension rights and no sick leave entitlement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40317/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): In the context of the Towards 2016 Review and Transitional Agreement in 2008, it was agreed that the relevant parties would enter into discussions regarding the terms and conditions of both school secretaries and caretakers. Accordingly, a forum was set up with the aim of establishing the position in schools regarding the terms and conditions of employment of school secretaries and caretakers. The forum is jointly chaired by my Department and the Department of Finance and includes the relevant management bodies and the unions involved (SIPTU and IMPACT).

In order to establish the factual position of secretaries and caretakers, a survey, developed in conjunction with the school management bodies and the relevant unions, was carried out in all schools. The results of the survey will feed into the work of the forum. As the discussions of the forum are currently in progress, it would not be appropriate for me to make any further comment at this time.

Schools Building Projects

159. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the steps she is taking to ensure that a new school is provided at a location (details supplied); if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the current arrangement in relation to accommodation is only for a temporary period of three years, and if the opportunity to secure additional lands which is necessary, to provide space for the original is also time limited; when this school is likely to proceed to tender; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40324/10]

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 a new school building. The application was assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects and assigned a band rating of 1.3. 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. In December 2009, my Department approved grant-aid to facilitate the re-location of the school to its current site. Officials from my Department are in ongoing contact with the school authority regarding their accommodation situation and their proposals regarding the long term accommodation solution for the school.

Departmental Bodies

160. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the number of high-level groups operating within her Department; the purpose of each group;

[Deputy Lucinda Creighton.]

the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40334/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The information requested is being collated and will be forwarded to you separately.

School Accommodation

161. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills the amount her Department has spend renting prefabricated buildings in the year 2009 and to date in 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40344/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The amount spent on renting temporary accommodation at primary and post-primary level, including — but not limited to — prefabricated accommodation in 2009 was €39m. To date in 2010, the equivalent expenditure is €20.2m.

Business Regulation

162. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills if her Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if her Department has yet listed information obligations that her Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if her Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if her Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40349/10]

Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Coughlan): My Department participated in the Inter-Departmental Group on Administrative Burden Reduction in 2008. The administrative burden reduction focused on commercial private sector organisations and regulations made by my Department which impact on education related bodies such as schools were not included. My Department conducted a comprehensive analysis of higher education legislation and found no substantial administrative costs are imposed on businesses arising from provisions in that legislation.

Tax Code

163. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance if motorhomes will be liable to the 13.3% vehicle registration tax rate after 1 January 2010; the cost of the national car test and VRT for motorhomes that weigh less than 3,000 kg unladen; if motorhome providers will receive concessions in the form of delayed VRT bills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39731/10]

169. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance if motorhomes will be liable to the 13.3% vehicle registration tax rate after 1 January 2010; the cost of the national car test and VRT for motorhomes that weighs less than 3,000 kg unladen; if motorhome providers will receive concessions in the form of delayed VRT bills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39730/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 163 and 169 together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that Section 130 of the Finance Act 1992 (as amended by Section 102 of the Finance Act 2010) provided for the introduction, from 1 January 2011, of a revised classification system for the assessment of vehicle registration tax (VRT), which reflects the categories used for classification of vehicles at European level under various EC Directives. It also brings the definitions of individual vehicles into line with EC definitions and introduces new definitions for certain terms used for vehicle registration tax purposes.

Accordingly, from 1 January 2011, motorhomes (defined as motor caravans in VRT legislation) with an EC vehicle classification of M1 with a *bodytype SA* will be charged VRT at 13.3% of the open market selling price of the vehicle in the State. The Commissioners confirm that *unladen weight* will no longer be a determining factor in the calculation of VRT on the registration of motor caravans from 1 January 2011. The Deputy may wish to note that the VRT charged on registration of a vehicle is reduced by the amount of the fee charged by the NCTS to carry out the pre-registration examination and therefore does not result in any additional charge to the customer. Finally, from 1 January 2011, the 13.3% rate of VRT will be payable on the registration of all motorhomes in the State.

Departmental Expenditure

164. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Finance the costs associated with voting and counting arrangements of the 2007 general election campaign; the costs associated with the voting and counting arrangements associated with the 2009 Dublin South by-election; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40326/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The costs associated with the voting and counting arrangements for the 2007 general election campaign was €14,269,095.99. The costs associated with the voting and counting arrangements associated with the 2009 Dublin South by-election was €212,136.84.

Bank Guarantee Scheme

165. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Finance, in view of the Financial Regulator's statement to the Joint Committee on Economic Regulatory Affairs on 6 October 2010, that the Government has made its position clear on this matter, that it does not intend to impose losses on senior bondholders, however, this does not rule out the possibility of some negotiations or a liquidity management exercise agreed by consent, if his attention has been drawn to or if he has authorised any such negotiations to take place by any covered financial institution and to provide details of such negotiations, specifying the outcomes and the sums involved. [39644/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I wish to reaffirm my Statement of 30 September in relation to the senior debt obligations of Irish financial institutions that these obligations rank equally with deposits and other creditors under Irish law and that I have no plans to change this position. There is no intention to impose losses on holders of senior debt in any credit institution in the State through any legislative measures. I have not authorised, and am not aware of, any covered financial institution in liability management exercise negotiations with senior bondholders.

European Council Meetings

166. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance the consideration at Council of Finance Ministers regarding the issue of rating agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39646/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): On June 2nd last, the European Commission published a proposal to amend the existing Regulation governing the activities of Credit Rating Agencies (CRAs). This proposal is currently being examined at Council working group level, as well as within the European Parliament under the co-decision process. The proposal is principally a technical measure to allow the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) to assume responsibility for the regulation of CRAs which operate in the EU. ESMA, which is being established as part of the implementation of the recommendations of the de Larosière Report on financial supervision, will become operational at the start of 2011. The proposal amends the existing CRA Regulation (No. 1060/2009) in which national competent authorities (i.e. central banks or financial regulators) were responsible for supervising the activities of CRAs. The national competent authorities will be required to co-operate with ESMA.

The proposal also seeks to put in place a provision whereby national competent authorities would be required to ensure that all regulated financial institutions, which use ratings produced by CRAs, comply with certain requirements when using those ratings.

The proposal also introduces greater transparency on the ratings provided for structured financial products (e.g. asset backed securities). This obligation, which is already in place in some non-EU jurisdictions, will help avoid possible conflicts of interest, for instance, where CRAs are paid by issuers to produce ratings, and will enhance the transparency and quality of ratings. Ireland has supported the basic thrust of the proposals.

The main issue which is emerging is in relation to the treatment of ratings produced in countries outside the EU. Some Member States believe that the regulatory regime for non-EU countries should be equivalent to the European model, whereas others consider that ESMA's endorsement of these regulatory regimes should be sufficient. Ireland is in the latter camp. The Council working group discussions are progressing well and the Belgian Presidency has indicated its desire to achieve agreement on this proposal before the end of the year.

Tax Code

167. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance the tax or VAT concessions available to a person returning to the workforce as self-employed sole trader after being unemployed for over 12 months following redundancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39667/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, in relation to income tax, there is no specific relief or allowance available to a person returning to the workforce as a self-employed sole trader after being unemployed for over 12 months following redundancy. However, the rules governing the submission of tax returns provide a concession for new business in respect of the first tax year. In general, failure to submit a tax return for a year by 31 October in the following year will result in a surcharge being added to the final tax bill for the year. However, in the case of a new business, the surcharge will not be imposed if the return for the first tax year is made by the return filing date for the following tax year i.e. by 31 October in the second year after the year in which the sole trade started.

The rules governing the payment of preliminary tax can also facilitate start-up business in terms of cash flow. A person has the option of paying preliminary tax on 31 October in the tax year in which trade commences based on either (i) 90 per cent of the liability for the year or (ii) 100 per cent of the liability for the previous year, in order that interest charges will not apply. Where the person opts for the 100 per cent rule, the preliminary tax payment required

for the first year can be nil where that person had no taxable income in the year prior to the year in which the trade started. Additionally, where the person wishes to pay preliminary tax in the first year of trade, the person can pay by way of direct debit monthly instalments. This facility is designed to spread the burden of payment throughout the tax year.

In so far as VAT is concerned, there are no concessions for a person who commences business as a sole trader following unemployment — the normal VAT rules apply. Where a person is supplying taxable goods or services and certain turnover thresholds (€37,500 for services and €75,000 for goods) are exceeded, or are likely to be exceeded, in any 12-month period, then, the person is obliged to register and account for VAT at the appropriate rate or rates on his or her supplies of taxable goods and services.

168. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Finance the income level at which a new 48% income tax rate would have to apply in order to raise €5 billion, €10 billion and €15 billion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39727/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the income level at which a third rate of income tax of 48% would have to apply in order to raise €5 billion, €10 billion and €15 billion. The position is that it would not be possible to raise yields in the order of magnitude the Deputy has outlined by introducing a third rate of income tax of 48% without restructuring the current rate band system. Alternatively, if the 41% rate in its current structure was increased to 48% it would yield in the region of €1.3 billion in a full year, estimated by reference to 2011 incomes. A third rate above this income level would raise even less. 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.

Question No. 169 answered with Question No. 163.

Banks Recapitalisation

170. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the value of the promissory notes issued to date in respect of the capital injection in Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39766/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below in respect of each institution.

€m	Issue Date	Interest Rate
Anglo		
8,300	31 Mar 2010	4.2%
2,000	28 May 2010	4.6%
8,580	23 Aug 2010	5.1%
18,880		
INBS		
2,600	31 Mar 2010	4.2%
EBS		
250	17 Jun 2010	5.5%

*Will depend on Irish Government 10 year bond yield at time of issue.

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

The additional capital required by the two institutions referred to in the Deputy's question which I set out in my Statement on Banking on 30 September will be provided by an increase in the value of the Promissory Notes taking into account the burden sharing achieved in relation to holders of subordinated debt in the two institutions.

171. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of the interest liability expected this year and in subsequent years arising from the promissory notes issued in respect of the capital injection in Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society. [39767/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Under the current interest terms, it is estimated that the total interest accruing into 2010 in respect of the Promissory Notes issued to date to Anglo Irish Bank, Irish Nationwide Building Society and Educational Building Society is around €560 million. The appropriate accounting treatment of these Promissory Notes under General Government accounting rules is currently under active consideration between the Irish authorities and Eurostat. However, under the current terms of the coupons on the Notes it is estimated that the annual accrued interest element will initially be of the order of €1½ to €1 " billion before declining in future years.

The additional capital required by Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society which I set out in my Statement on Banking on 30 September will be provided largely by an increase in the value of the Promissory Notes. It is, however, not possible to determine the future interest liability which this will give rise to as it will depend on the appropriate Irish Government 10 Year Bond Yield at the time of issue as well as the outcome of the Irish authorities discussion with Eurostat on the General Government accounting treatment of the Notes.

The impact of the Promissory Notes on the agreed target to achieve a General Government deficit of below 3% of GDP by the end of 2014, and their accounting treatment will be finalised by the Department of Finance in the context of preparations for the Four-Year Plan for Budgets and Economic Growth. However, in broad terms taking account of the Promissory Notes means that the deficit will be impacted by about 1% of GDP over the forecast period.

Black Economy

172. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his Department's estimate of the value of the black economy in Ireland in 2010 and the estimate of the annual loss to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39769/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Department does not produce estimates of the size of the informal economy nor of the estimated loss to the exchequer arising from such activities. Internationally, a considerable amount of research has been undertaken in this area but, by definition, it is always difficult to quantify the scale of the informal economy. Having said that, the Central Statistics Office in compiling estimates of national income, and in line with best international practice, makes adjustments to the figures in order to control for informal activity in some sub-sectors of the economy. This is done at a very detailed level, with the result that an overall economy-wide estimate is not available.

National Debt

173. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his current estimate of the

amount of interest payable on the national debt for each of the years 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 [39771/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The detailed macro-economic and fiscal projections for the period 2011-2014 are currently being revised by my Department in the context of the publication of the Government's Four-Year Plan. Projections for debt servicing interest costs are not currently available for the period beyond 2014. While the up-to-date forecasts are still being finalised, the debt servicing costs previously set out are informative. Based on the Budget 2010 estimates, a table outlines the debt servicing interest costs for the period to end-2014 as calculated by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) at that time. In respect of the forecast for 2010, on advice from the NTMA, my Department has already signalled publicly that debt interest costs in 2010 will be approximately €350 million lower than was forecast at Budget time.

	2010**	2011	2012	2013	2014
Debt Servicing Interest Costs €bn*	4½	5¾	6½	7½	7¾

*Figures in table based on forecasts contained in Budget 2010.

**Budget 2010 forecast, on the advice of the NTMA the latest estimate for 2010 is €4.1 billion.

Departmental Properties

174. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Finance the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39802/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Office of Public Works has the following leased buildings with are not currently in use.

Building	Status	Maintenance/Security Yearly Costs
Sligo, Waterfront House Bridge Street	Surrender of Lease will be negotiated with Landlord	€2,640.98 to date in 2010
Dun Laoghaire, 111 Lower Georges Street, Co Dublin	Alternative tenants being sought	€4,174.50
Cahir, The Mill — Church Street, Co Tipperary	Early surrender of Lease being explored with the Landlord	No maintenance costs in 2010
Ballaugh House, 73-79 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2	Allocation being considered by the Department of Justice and Law Reform	€20,656.09

The surrender of a number of other buildings (3) is at an advanced stage and these negotiations are at a commercially sensitive stage.

175. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Finance the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39817/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Office of Public Works (OPW) leases 458 properties on behalf of Government Departments/Offices. These properties, which attract a rent exceeding €10K per annum, are currently in use. Table A provides the location details of the properties and Table B schedules the rental costs, by Department/Office, for 2008 and 2009.

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

Table A

County	Location	Number of Leased Properties at Location
CARLOW	CARLOW	6
CAVAN	BAILIEBOROUGH	1
	CAVAN	8
CLARE	CRUSHEEN	1
	ENNIS	3
	KILRUSH	1
	SHANNON	2
CORK	BANDON	2
	BANTRY	2
	BLARNEY	1
	CARRIGALINE	1
	CARRIGTWOHILL	1
	CASTLETOWNBERE	1
	CORK	29
	DUNMANWAY	1
	FERMOY	2
	MACROOM	1
	MALLOW	2
	SKIBBEREEN	1
	YOUGHAL	1
DONEGAL	BALLEYBOFEY	1
	BALLYSHANNON	2
	BUNCRANA	1
	DONEGAL	1
	DUNFANAGHY	1
	FALCARRAGH	1
	KILLYBEGS	1
	LETTERKENNY	5
	RAMELTON	1
DUBLIN	BALBRIGGAN	2
	BLACKROCK	1
	CABINTEELY	1
	DUBLIN 01	31
	DUBLIN 02	68
	DUBLIN 03	2
	DUBLIN 04	3
	DUBLIN 05	2
	DUBLIN 06	3
	DUBLIN 07	15
	DUBLIN 08	9
	DUBLIN 09	2
DUBLIN 10	1	
DUBLIN 11	7	

County	Location	Number of Leased Properties at Location
	DUBLIN 12	1
	DUBLIN 13	1
	DUBLIN 14	3
	DUBLIN 15	4
	DUBLIN 18	2
	DUBLIN 22	4
	DUBLIN 24	12
	DUBLIN AIRPORT	4
	DUN LAOGHAIRE	2
	LUCAN	1
	MALAHIDE	1
	SWORDS	6
GALWAY	BALLINASLOE	1
	CLIFDEN	1
	GALWAY	18
	LETTERMORE	1
	LOUGHREA	9
	SPIDDAL	1
	TUAM	3
KERRY	BLENNERVILLE	1
	KENMARE	1
	KILLARNEY	4
	LISTOWEL	2
	TRALEE	5
KILDARE	ATHY	2
	BALLYMORE EUSTACE	1
	ENFIELD	1
	KILDARE	1
	NAAS	7
	NEWBRIDGE	1
LAOIS	PORTARLINGTON	1
	PORTLAOISE	11
LEITRIM	BALLINAMORE	1
	CARRICK ON SHANNON	1
LIMERICK	KILMALLOCK	1
	LIMERICK	14
	NEWCASTLEWEST	1
LOUTH	ARDEE	1
	DROGHEDA	4
	DUNDALK	3

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

County	Location	Number of Leased Properties at Location
MAYO	BALLINA	4
	CASTLEBAR	4
	CLAREMORRIS	2
	SWINFORD	1
MEATH	KELLS	1
	NAVAN	5
	OLDCASTLE	1
	TRIM	1
MONAGHAN	BALLYBAY	2
	CARRICKMACROSS	1
	CASTLEBLAYNEY	1
	MONAGHAN	2
OFFALY	TULLAMORE	8
SLIGO	SLIGO	12
	TUBBERCURRY	2
TIPPERARY	BORRISOKANE	1
	CLONMEL	1
	NENAGH	2
	ROSCREA	5
	TERRYGLASS	1
	THURLES	2
	TIPPERARY	1
WATERFORD	DUNGARVAN	1
	WATERFORD	7
WESTMEATH	ATHLONE	5
	MULLINGAR	4
WEXFORD	ENNISCORTHY	1
	GOREY	1
	ROSSLARE HARBOUR	3
	WEXFORD	3
WICKLOW	ARKLOW	1
	ASHFORD	1
	BALTINGLASS	1
	BRAY	1
	DUNLAVIN	1
	WICKLOW	1

Table B

Department	2008	2009
	€	€
Agriculture & Food	5,344,949.36	6,372,464.46
Arts, Sports & Tourism	1,073,290.49	1,090,403.10
Attorney General	86,015.97	89,730.79
Central Statistics Office	964,181.31	1,222,105.00
Chief State Solicitor's Office	609,737.01	746,193.18
Communications, Marine & Natural Resource	3,197,370.88	4,294,413.15
Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs	1,783,187.95	2,006,930.98
Comptroller & Auditor General	590,690.66	738,362.66
Courts Service	1,029,598.72	1,484,974.58
Defence	417,454.79	562,591.91
DPP	1,101,279.16	695,165.42
Education & Science	4,472,297.87	4,790,936.79
Enterprise, Trade & Employment	6,361,653.24	7,769,436.76
Environment, Heritage & Local Government	2,313,522.97	3,044,088.13
Finance	3,210,093.79	2,539,916.88
Foreign Affairs	5,031,826.81	6,720,650.44
Garda	7,138,717.41	7,440,734.35
Health & Children	1,781,942.67	2,042,978.01
HSE	0.00	277,815.00
Irish Prison Service	776,394.21	703,304.15
Justice, Equality & Law Reform	13,828,701.57	18,355,265.89
Land Registry & Registry of Deeds	1,411,026.40	1,504,212.29
National Gallery	17,579.90	58,239.08
Office of Public Works	3,949,189.44	6,360,658.04
Oireachtas	887,278.55	1,215,860.69
Ombudsman	1,095,000.00	1,916,250.00
Public Appointments Service	2,105,056.08	2,454,020.41
Revenue Commissioners	19,629,197.75	22,948,844.49
Social & Family Affairs	12,162,134.25	14,163,741.94
Taoiseach	177,856.29	202,703.55
Transport	5,249,625.29	5,616,869.95
Valuation Office	1,310,000.00	1,637,500.00

Tax Reliefs

176. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Finance the total cost paid by the State in grants, tax reliefs, allowances and all other means to facilitate the development of hotels in Ireland from 2004 to date in 2010; the cost on an annualised basis; the cost of taxes forgone in that period due to reliefs granted to facilitate the developments of hotels in Ireland from 2004 and to date in 2010; the cost on an annualised basis, the number of hotels developed here as a result of all grants, allowances, taxes forgone and other means in the period 2004 to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39827/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the relevant information available on the cost to the Exchequer of the property related

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

tax relief for the development of hotels is based on personal income tax returns filed by non-PAYE taxpayers and corporation tax returns filed by companies for the years 2004 to 2008, the latest year for which this information is available. These are set out in the following table. The figures are composite costs for both commercial and residential property reliefs.

Cost to the Exchequer of Hotels

Scheme	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Hotels	37.7	67.0	106.6	118.0	114.7

I should also point out that the provisions of section 23 Finance Act 2010 severely curtails the amount of tax reliefs that can be used to reduce the income tax liability of those on high incomes. These provisions ensure that, in addition to the income levy, those with high incomes and using reliefs will have an effective income tax rate of about 30%. This measure applies to a list of specified reliefs, including most of the area and sectoral based property incentive schemes, the use of all of which has been curtailed as a result of this change.

It should be noted that any corresponding data returned by PAYE taxpayers in the income tax return (Form 12) is not captured in the Revenue computer system. However, any PAYE taxpayer with non-PAYE income greater than €3,174 is required to complete an income tax return (Form 11). The estimated relief claimed has assumed tax forgone at the 41% rate for 2008 in the case of individuals and 12.5% in the case of companies. The figures shown correspond to the maximum Exchequer cost in terms of income tax and corporation tax. The figures for 2008 are subject to adjustment in the event of late returns being filed or where returns already filed are subsequently amended.

Projections for income tax receipts are based on assumed movements in macro-economic parameters and not by reference to the costs of individual tax reliefs. Accordingly, I am not in a position to provide the projected cost data requested by the Deputy for the year 2010 in relation to the above-mentioned reliefs.

177. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Finance the total cost to the Exchequer in grants, tax reliefs or other payments given, and taxes forgone, of the provision of student accommodation from 2004 to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39829/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As Minister for Finance I have responsibility for the scheme of capital allowances introduced to support the construction of student accommodation. My Department is not involved in the payment of grants for the provision of student accommodation. Section 50 Finance Act 1999 introduced a scheme of tax relief for rented residential accommodation for third level students. The relief provided for a deduction of 100% of the construction, conversion or refurbishment expenditure, which could be off-set against all Irish rental income — whether derived from the premises in question or from other lettings. The purpose of the relief was to increase the supply of quality accommodation for third level students and the scheme was very successful in that respect. The scheme was abolished by Finance Act 2006 with a final termination date of 31 July 2008 for qualifying capital expenditure.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the relevant information available on the cost to the Exchequer of the property based tax relief for the provision of student accom-

modation is based on personal income tax returns filed by non-PAYE taxpayers and corporation tax returns filed by companies for the years 2004 to 2008, the latest year for which this information is available. These are set out in the following table.

Cost of tax relief for provision of Student Accommodation

Scheme	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Student Accommodation	83.8	58.0	64.3	42.0	22.7

It should be noted that any corresponding data returned by PAYE taxpayers in the income tax return (Form 12) is not captured in the Revenue computer system. However, any PAYE taxpayer with non-PAYE income greater than €3,174 is required to complete an income tax return (Form 11). The estimated relief claimed has assumed tax forgone at the 41% rate for 2008 in the case of individuals and 12.5% in the case of companies. The figures shown correspond to the maximum Exchequer cost in terms of income tax and corporation tax.

The figures for 2008 are subject to adjustment in the event of late returns being filed or where returns already filed are subsequently amended. Since tax returns from non-PAYE taxpayers for the tax year 2009 are only now being required to be made, data is not available on which to provide costings for that year or for 2010.

I should also point out that the provisions of section 23 Finance Act 2010 severely curtails the amount of tax reliefs that can be used to reduce the income tax liability of those on high incomes. These provisions ensure that, in addition to the income levy, those with high incomes and using reliefs will have an effective income tax rate of about 30%. This measure applies to a list of specified reliefs, including most of the area and sectoral based property incentive schemes, the use of all of which has been curtailed as a result of this change.

178. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Finance the total cost to the State of the development of private hospitals, including all tax reliefs, allowances, taxes forgone and all other such costs, since 2004 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39830/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): As Minister for Finance I have responsibility for the scheme of capital allowances introduced to encourage the construction or refurbishment of buildings used as private hospitals. This scheme was introduced in Finance Act 2001 and came into effect in May 2002. Capital allowances are available in respect of capital expenditure incurred on the construction or refurbishment of a building coming within the definition of a qualifying hospital set out in section 268 (2A) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

As announced in the Supplementary Budget in April 2009 and reflected in section 8 Finance Act 2009, the scheme of capital allowances for private hospitals was terminated on 31 December 2009 along with certain other health-related capital allowances schemes, subject to transitional arrangements for pipeline projects.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the relevant information available on the cost to the Exchequer of the tax relief for the development of private hospitals is based on personal income tax returns filed by non-PAYE taxpayers for the years 2004 to 2008, the latest year for which this information is available. These are set out in the following table.

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Cost of tax relief for the provision of private hospitals

Scheme	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Qualifying (Private) Hospitals	1.9	3.2	10.6	12.0	12.3

It should be noted that any corresponding data returned by PAYE taxpayers in the income tax return (Form 12) is not captured in the Revenue computer system. However, any PAYE taxpayer with non-PAYE income greater than €3,174 is required to complete an income tax return (Form 11). The estimated relief claimed has assumed tax forgone at the 41% rate for 2008 in the case of individuals. The figures shown correspond to the maximum Exchequer cost in terms of income tax.

The figures for 2008 are subject to adjustment in the event of late returns being filed or where returns already filed are subsequently amended. Since tax returns from non-PAYE taxpayers for the tax year 2009 are only now being required to be made, data is not available on which to provide costings for that year or for 2010.

I should also point out that the provisions of section 23 Finance Act 2010 severely curtails the amount of tax reliefs that can be used to reduce the income tax liability of those on high incomes. These provisions ensure that, in addition to the income levy, those with high incomes and using reliefs will have an effective income tax rate of about 30%. This measure applies to a list of specified reliefs, including most of the area and sectoral based property incentive schemes, the use of all of which has been curtailed as a result of this change.

National Asset Management Agency

179. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the publication of the quarterly accounts for the National Asset Management Agency for the second quarter of 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39833/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Section 55 of the NAMA Act, 2009 requires NAMA to make a quarterly report to the Minister for Finance within 3 months of the end of the quarter to which the report refers. The first quarterly report for the period ending 31 March 2010, accompanied by quarterly financial statements, was submitted to me within this required timeframe and I laid them before each House of the Oireachtas, as required by the Act. The second quarterly report for the period ending 30 June 2010, accompanied by financial statements for the second quarter, was submitted to me as required by the end of September 2010 and I expect to lay the report before each House of the Oireachtas shortly.

Tax Clearance Certificates

180. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare can be furnished with a P21 for 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39864/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a PAYE Balancing Statement P21 for the year 2009 will issue to the person concerned shortly.

Public Procurement

181. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Finance if he will quantify the savings that

have been achieved by the national public procurement operations unit since its establishment; the costs it has incurred in doing its work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39872/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): Since its establishment in April 2009 the National Procurement Service (formerly known as the National Procurement Operations Unit) has achieved, in association with Government Departments, Offices and Agencies, savings in the region of €35 million. The total costs incurred by the National Procurement Service during that time were €1,528,000 or 4.37% of the savings achieved.

182. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Finance if the national public procurement operations unit works on behalf of State agencies, other public bodies and local authorities or just Departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39873/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The National Procurement Service, (formerly known as the National Public Procurement Operations Unit) was established in April 2009 on foot of a Government Decision assigning responsibility for procurement to the Minister of State at the Department of Finance with special responsibility for the Office of Public Works. The National Procurement Service (NPS) strategically works on behalf of and with all Government Departments and their agencies (with the exception of commercial semi-state agencies) the Health Service Executive, Local Authorities, Vocational Education Committees and the Higher Education Authority.

The remit of the NPS covers such areas as putting in place centralised framework contracts for common goods and services across the public sector, significant input into the areas of procurement up-skilling and learning as well as responsibility for the efficient operation of the e-Tenders website. Whilst all of the above is significant I should point out that the NPS has limited resources and substantial procurement activity remains the responsibility of those public sector organisations.

Telecommunications Services

183. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Finance with regard to the framework for mobile voice and data services, which of the three services has been suspended and the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39874/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): On foot of an open EU procurement exercise, my Department put in place a framework for the provision of mobile voice and data services to the entire Irish public service in February 2008. Framework agreements were awarded to three providers — Vodafone, O2, and Meteor. In September 2008, my Department met with Meteor to express its dissatisfaction with Meteor's performance under the framework in terms of the services it was offering and the price levels it was demanding. My Department was concerned that Meteor was not responding to the bulk of procurement competitions operated under the framework, and had not been successful in any, arising from its policies.

As Meteor was not in a position to rectify these matters or give an indication of how or when it could do so, the Government Networks Programme Board, which is chaired by my Department, agreed to the suspension of Meteor indefinitely from the framework in accordance with the Terms and Conditions of the Vendor Participation Agreement governing the framework. Meteor was notified of this decision in October 2008, and was informed that my Department would be willing to review the suspension on notification from Meteor of changes that would rectify the causes for suspension. Meteor has not responded to that opportunity to date.

Tax Yield

184. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Finance the stamp duty yield from the sale of properties in 2009 and the estimated yield for 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39875/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the net receipt of Stamp Duty from conveyances and transfers of residential and non-residential property in 2009 was €329 million. The estimate for the corresponding yield in 2010 is approximately €200 million.

Departmental Expenditure

185. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance the savings that have been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39922/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Department, in accordance with Government policy has a procurement policy for the acquisition of all ICT products and services. A procurement exercise must be undertaken based on functional requirements for all software, i.e. not a specific technology brand. The evaluation of such a procurement exercise is conducted on as close to a total cost of ownership (TCO) model as possible and at a minimum includes the following costs: licensing; arising hardware upgrades/ renewals/replacements; IT and user training; support and maintenance; planning, testing and migration; external expertise; and exit costs. My Department has not incurred any expenditure on desktop operating system or productivity software (wordprocessing, spreadsheets, presentation software, email client, etc...) in the last 6 years.

My Department runs a competitive tender exercise each year advertised on the eTenders website for the supply of printer consumables so as to achieve the best value for money. This tender is evaluated with a high emphasis on the cost of supplying the manufacturer's brand of toner as this is the only way of achieving a like with like comparison between the offerings of each vendor. The National Procurement Service is currently establishing a printer consumable framework for the Public Service which is expected to be completed early in 2011, and it is my Department's intention to use this framework for future procurement. The evaluation criteria to be used on the framework will be based on the cost of the manufacturer's brand.

The principal reason for not using generic consumables is the potential for voiding the manufacturer's warranty. Many studies have been carried out on the use of generic consumables and reasons for not using them include:

- Generic toners often cannot produce the same quality as genuine toners. Some generic cartridges that have been designed poorly can lead to toner leaks and printer malfunctions; often these faults brought in by inferior parts will also void the manufacturer's warranty.
- Generic toners can cost more in the long run. One in four remanufactured or refilled cartridges are dead on arrival or fail prematurely and that almost 30% of pages printed from remanufactured toner cartridges were of limited or no use due to poor print quality, which lead to reprints.
- Increased paper usage and paper costs can erode any cost benefit of cheaper toner. Generic toners are also more likely to cause problems with the printer when they cannot

effectively emulate patented printer technology resulting in increased printer downtime and repair costs.

- Printer blockages, unusable messy printouts and increased print tests are common side effects from generic toners. These are problems that are much less likely to occur using the original manufacturer's toners.

Tax Code

186. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding a request for a P21 in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39938/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a PAYE Balancing Statement P21 for the year 2009 will issue to the person concerned shortly.

Property Valuations

187. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Finance when the revision of valuation of all rateable properties throughout the country, as provided for under the Valuations Act 2001 will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40083/10]

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. As you will appreciate, the Commissioner of Valuation has sole responsibility for all valuation matters which includes the implementation of the revaluation programme on a nationwide basis as provided for in the Valuation Act 2001.

The revaluation 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. The revaluation of South Dublin was completed in December 2007, Fingal was completed last year and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown will be completed this year (2010). In the coming months the programme will be rolled out to further local authorities. The necessary process of consultation, as provided for under the Act, is underway 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 Commissioner is confident that the national revaluation programme can be delivered in a ten-year period, which accords with relevant provisions of the Act, but is actively reviewing options which might hold potential for delivery within a shorter timeframe.

Budget Submissions

188. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Finance if he will respond to the Irish Farmers' Association taxation priorities for budget 2011 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40093/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Deputy will be aware that in the lead up to the annual Budget and Finance Bill it is normal to meet when possible with representatives of the various sectors of the economy. My schedule of meetings includes meeting with the Irish Farmers Association on Tuesday 2 November 2010. The proposals submitted by the IFA like all proposals will fall to be considered in the context of the ongoing development of budgetary and economic policy. It would be inappropriate for me to make any further comment at this time.

Tax Collection

189. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Finance when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will receive their VAT refund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40115/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a claim for a refund of VAT was received from the person concerned on 16th March 2009. A claimant for such a refund is required to be up to date as regards tax returns to be filed with and tax payments to be made to Revenue. Income Tax returns for 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 were overdue at that stage. The person concerned was advised that their claim could not be processed until those returns were received and accordingly the completed claim form was returned to him. The 2004 return is still outstanding. The person concerned has been in contact with Revenue on a number of occasions about this matter and is fully aware of the position. Revenue has informed me that when the 2004 return is received they will be in a position to process the VAT refund claim upon resubmission.

Departmental Agencies

190. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of dividends received by the Exchequer from all State or semi-State agencies for each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40134/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The amount of dividends received by the Exchequer from companies or bodies, in which the State had an ownership interest, is set out in the table below. This information is extracted from the annual audited Finance Accounts, which are laid before Dail Eireann and published on the Department's website.

Year	Total Dividends
	€000
2000	18,840
2001	52,038
2002	44,390
2003	36,857
2004	80,905
2005	83,912
2006	82,052
2007	84,106
2008	170,908
2009	145,750

191. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the total amount of Exchequer funds granted to all State or semi-State agencies for each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40135/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The amount of Exchequer funds granted to non-commercial semi-State bodies and agencies is listed in the Revised Estimates for Public Services (*REV*) each year under the section entitled “Detailed Expenditure Information On Non-Commercial Semi-State Bodies and Agencies”. The table below lists the total amounts paid in each of the last ten years.

Year	€ m
2000	2,237
2001	2,744
2002	3,606
2003	3,606
2004	3,696
2005	4,045
2006	4,717
2007	5,874
2008	5,912
2009	5,658
2010	5,177

In general Exchequer funds are not issued to commercial State or semi-State bodies, however, I will write to the Deputy separately with details of all payments made to commercial bodies and agencies over the past ten years.

192. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans, if any, to relocate the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions; his further plans, if any, for the use of the building currently occupied by the Director of Public Prosecutions; the timescale for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40156/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): It is proposed to move elements of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) to the former Department of Defence building on Infirmary Road, Dublin 7, which is adjacent to the new Criminal Courts Complex. The Department of Defence and elements of the Defence Forces are in the process of moving from Infirmary Road to the new Department of Defence Headquarters in Newbridge, County Kildare. The proposed move of elements of the DPP is part of the ongoing rationalisation of the State’s property portfolio, designed to generate much needed savings for the Exchequer.

Decentralisation Programme

193. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of the new location in Newbridge for Army headquarters and Department of Defence staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40158/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The cost of the new decentralised headquarters for the Department of Defence and the Army at Newbridge, Co. Kildare, is €30,394,840.00 including VAT and site acquisition costs. The fitting out of the canteen and the supply and installation of furniture will follow under separate contracts. The

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provision of equipment such as IT, telephones, staff training and moving expenses, e.g. transfers of files will be a matter for the Department of Defence.

Consultancy Contracts

194. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Finance if he can assure that economic experts commissioned by the Government to advise on cuts to public expenditure measures do not also advise private sector interests in how to deal with or mitigate their impact; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40173/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Department has recently retained the services of staff with economic expertise to advise on economic policy issues. Under their terms of their employment, they are subject to the provisions of the Official Secrets Act, 1963 as amended by the Freedom of Information Acts, 1997 and 2003. In addition, they are required not to disclose to third parties any confidential information especially that with commercial potential either during or subsequent to the period of employment or engage in other work which would result in a conflict of interest.

State Savings Initiatives

195. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40174/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I note the helpful suggestion in the correspondence forwarded to me by the Deputy. I think it is worth pointing out that the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) offers a comprehensive suite of State Savings products, details of which are available on the NTMA's website *www.StateSavings.ie* or by calling 1850 30 50 60.

The full range of State Savings products, which are available at post offices, includes the recently-introduced National Solidarity Bond as well as Savings Certificates, Savings Bonds, Prize Bonds, Instalment Savings and Post Office Savings Bank Deposit Accounts. These products help to fund the Exchequer and form part of the National Debt.

Instalment Savings are designed to accept regular contributions from savers along the lines suggested by the Deputy's correspondent. In addition, it is possible to save money for investment in the National Solidarity Bond by monthly salary deduction where an employer is prepared to facilitate this.

State Property

196. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Finance the detailed plans that the Office of Public Works has for Park Gate House, the current location of the Department of Defence; the timescale for any such plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40181/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Office of Public Works (OPW) holds two leases on Park House, which are due to expire in 2013. The future of this property will be considered in the context of the overall rationalisation of office accommodation in Dublin.

Offshore Betting

197. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Finance his plans in regard to providing a

regulated environment (details supplied) so that it can be effectively taxed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40197/10]

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 and Law Reform, are looking at the scope to overcome legal and operational difficulties in this area including extending an appropriate regulatory and tax regime to betting exchanges. 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 and Law Reform on issues surrounding licensing and regulation.

Tax Code

198. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Finance, following proposals from the Dutch and Swedish authorities to amend their excise structure to the higher specific rates, 70% and 76.5%, respectively, of tax on tobacco products which is possible through the EU excise directive effective from 1 January 2011, his plans to follow and if so, the changes envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40198/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In accordance with the relevant EU Directive the overall excise duty on cigarettes is made up of a specific (fixed) element and an ad valorem element. Ireland already applies a high specific duty element and a low ad valorem element in setting its excise duty for cigarettes relative to other Member States. It is intended to continue that approach in setting our excise duty for cigarettes. It has also to be recognised that Ireland has the highest prices and excise duty levels for cigarettes in the EU. For example the level of excise duty on cigarettes in Ireland (€5.22 for a packet of 20) is double that in Sweden, and slightly less than double that in The Netherlands.

199. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Finance if he plans to introduce a separate rate of tax on individual incomes over €100,000 and married couple incomes over €200,000, the level such a tax would need to be to raise €1 billion, €2 billion and €4 billion in a full year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40199/10]

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 single individuals with incomes over €100,000 and married couples with incomes over €200,000 as referred to by the Deputy would be of the order of €57 million. Consequently, the top rate of income tax would need to increase to 59%, 76% and 111% to yield in the region of €1 billion, €2 billion and €4 billion in a full year respectively. These estimates are based on confining the increased tax rate to the segment of income that is in excess of the stated thresholds of €100,000 and €200,000. 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.

National Lottery Funding

200. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance the headings under which the

[Deputy Ciarán Lynch.]

national lottery funds are distributed at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40205/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Section 5 of the National Lottery Act 1986 provides that the surplus from the National Lottery may be used for the following purposes: sport and other recreation; national culture, including the Irish Language; the arts, within the meaning of the Arts Act 1951; the health of the community; and for such other purposes as the Government may determine. The following additional categories have been so determined: youth, welfare, national heritage and amenities.

Tax Yield

201. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue raised in stamp duty each year since the year 2000 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40209/10]

202. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue raised in capital acquisitions tax since the year 2000 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40210/10]

203. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue raised in capital gains tax since the year 2000 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40211/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 201 to 203, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the accompanying table. The yield from these three tax-heads increased steadily during the first half of the decade, to peak at a combined amount of just under €7.2 billion in 2006. However, this figure had fallen to just €1.7 billion in 2009, a decline of over 75 per cent. Between their peak in 2007 and 2009, total tax revenues fell by approximately 30 per cent. Consequently, a significant gap has emerged between revenues and expenditures. The Government has already taken very significant action to tackle this shortfall but further efforts will be required and the Four-Year Plan for Budgets and Economic Growth, which will be published later this month, will set out the measures necessary for us to reach our target of a General Government deficit of 3 per cent of GDP by end-2014.

Tax Revenue	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	End-Sept 2010
	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m
Capital Gains Tax	773	880	627	1,443	1,516	1,960	3,100	3,105	1,430	542	127
Capital Acquisitions Tax	222	169	151	214	190	249	353	392	332	254	164
Stamp Duties	1,107	1,227	1,167	1,688	2,088	2,725	3,717	3,186	1,651	930	708

Tax Code

204. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance following the passing of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act, when he will bring forward relevant legislative changes in the area of taxation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40228/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): It is my intention that all necessary legislative changes in the area of taxation arising from the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act will be provided for in the next Finance Bill.

Cash for Gold Schemes

205. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance if the cash for gold industry is supervised and regulated by the Financial Regulator; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40234/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The practice to which the Deputy refers is not supervised or regulated by the Central Bank. For information, the Deputy may wish to note that the Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority ceased to exist with the commencement of the Central Bank Reform Act 2010 on 1 October 2010 and its regulatory functions were subsumed into the Central Bank of Ireland.

Departmental Procurement

206. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40250/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): My Department has not awarded or given any printing contracts to any company from outside the State in the past three years.

Tax Collection

207. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding an application by a person (details supplied) in County Cork for a refund of deposit interest retention tax. [40270/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the refund of Deposit Interest Retention Tax in this case was held pending submission of outstanding income tax returns. According to Revenue records a reminder letter issued to the customer on 14th. October 2009 advising that the refund could not be issued until outstanding Income Tax Returns (Forms 11) for the years 2003, 2004 and 2005 were submitted. To date there has been no response to that letter. Any further queries may be directed to Pearse Penney, Revenue Commissioners, Revenue House, Blackpool, Cork. Telephone: 021-6027266.

Departmental Properties

208. **Deputy Deirdre Clune** asked the Minister for Finance if he will list the buildings and structures owned or leased by his Department in Cork city and county for use by his or other Departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40271/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Office of Public Works states that the following lists schedule the buildings and structures, owned (142) or leased (22) in Cork city and county. The leases scheduled are all of an annual rental value of €10,000 and above.

[Deputy Martin Mansergh.]

Cork Owned (Note: *Title of Schools in List under current review*)

Building Name	Address	Building Usage
Adrigole GS + MQ	Glengarriff Road	Garda Station
Anglesea Street GS	Anglesea Street	Garda Station
Ballincollig GS+Sewer/Plant-GS	Former Military Barracks	Garda Station
Ballincollig GS+Sewer/Plant-Sewr	Former Military Barracks	Sewerage Plant
Ballineen GS	Main Street	Garda Station
Ballingeary GS	Ballingeary	Garda Station
Ballinhassig GS	Bandon — Cork Road	Garda Station
Ballinspittle GS + MQ	Ballinspittle	Garda Station
Ballycotton MES	Ballycotton	Marine Emergency Service
Ballydaniel NS	Ballyclough — Doneraile Road	School — National
Ballydehob GS + MQ + RAX — GS/MQ	Ballydehob	Garda Station
Ballydesmond GS	Boherboy Road	Garda Station
Ballyfeard GS + MQ	Carrigaline Road	Garda Station
Ballygurteen GS + MQ	Dunmanway — Clonakilty Road	Garda Station
Ballyhass NS	Mallow — Kanturk Road	School — National
Ballynoe GS + MQ + RAX — GS/MQ	Ballynoe	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Ballyvourney GS + MQ	Killarney — Macroom Road	Garda Station
Baltimore GS + MQ	Skibbereen Road	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Baltimore MES	Baltimore	Marine Emergency Service
Bandon GS	Weir Street	Garda Residence
Bantry GS	The Quay	Garda Station
Barrack Street GS + MQ(4)	Fort Elizabeth	Garda Station
Barry's Cove MES	Barry's Cove	Marine Emergency Service
Baurleigh NS	Kilbritten	School — National
Bishopstown GS	Wilton Avenue	Garda Station
Blackrock GS — Cork	Ringmahon Road	Garda Station
Blarney Garda Residence	13 Woodville	Garda Residence
Boherbue GS + MQ	Mallow Road	Garda Station
Bridewell (Cork) GS + MQ	Cornmarket Street-Kyrl's Street	Garda Station
Buttevant GS+Res+RAX GS	Off Richmond Street	Garda Station
Buttevant GS+Res+RAX Res	Off Richmond Street	Garda Residence
Cape Clear NS	Keenleen	School — National
Carrigaline GS + MQ + RAX	Carrigaline	Garda Station
Carrignavar GS	Mallow Road	Garda Station
Carrigtwohill GS	Carrigtwohill	Garda Station
Castlefreke MES	Rosscarbery — Clonakilty Road	Marine Emergency Service
Castletownbere GS	Glengarriff Road	Garda Station
Castletownroche GS	Mallow Road	Garda Station
Castletownshend GS+MQ+RAX GS/MQ	Main Street	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Castletownshend NS	Skibbereen Road	School — National
Charleville GS +RAX	Chapel Street	Garda Station
Cloghduv NS	Crookstown — Cork Road	School — National

Building Name	Address	Building Usage
Clonakilty Agricultural College	Darrara	School — Agricultural
Clonakilty D/CMNR & BIM	Clonakilty Enterprise Park	Office — Agriculture & BIM
Clonakilty GS + MQ + RAX — GS/MQ	Barrack Street	Garda Station
Cloyne GS + MQ + RAX	Cloyne	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Coachford GS + MQ	Cork — Macroom Road	Garda Station
Cobh Custom House	Lynch's Quay	Custom Post
Cobh GS	Cobh Railway Station	Garda Station
Cork Agric Campus Blood Test Lab	Model Farm Road	Laboratory
Cork Agric Campus Dairy Sci Lab	Model Farm Road	Laboratory
Cork Agric Campus Reg Vet Lab	Model Farm Road	Laboratory
Cork Airport Marine	Cork Airport	Marine Emergency Service
Cork Asylum Centre	Kinsale Road	Asylum Seekers Accom
Cork Bessboro Rd Creche	Mahon Industrial Estate	Creche
Cork C&E Parnell Place	15 Parnell Place	Office — Custom & Excise
Cork C&E Watercourse Road	Watercourse Road	Office — Custom & Excise
Cork Custom House	Customs House Quay	Custom Post
Cork Elizabeth Fort	Barrack Street	Heritage Property
Cork Gov Off	Skehard Road Mahon	Office — Central Statistics Office
Cork Gov Off Sullivans Quay	10-19 Sullivans Quay -Drinan Str	Office — Central Statistics Office
Cork Mallow Road GS	Mallow Road	Garda Station
Cork OPW Office	14 Old Blackrock Road	Office — OPW
Cork Revenue House	Assumption Road	Office — Revenue
Cork SWO — Hanover Street	Hanover Street	Office — Social Welfare
Cork Watercourse Road GS	53 Watercourse Road	Garda Station
Crookstown GS + MQ	Macroom Road	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Crosshaven GS Nos 1 and 2	Crosshaven — Myrtleville Road	Garda Station
Crosshaven MES	Crosshaven — Myrtleville Road	Marine Emergency Service
Darara NS	Clonakilty	School — National
Doneraile GS	Main Street	Garda Station
Doneraile House/Court	Doneraile	Heritage Property
Donoughmore GS + RAX	Stuake	Garda Station
Douglas GS	Maryborough Hill	Garda Station
Dromagh NS	Mallow Road	School — National
Dunmanway GS	Main Street	Garda Station
Dunmanway Model School	Skibbreen Road	School — Model
Durrus GS + MQ + RAXMob GS/MQ	Kilcrohane Road	Garda Station
Fermoy GS	O'Neill Crowley Quay	Garda Station
Fermoy Military Barracks	Fermoy	Military Property
Garnish Island Pav & Clock Tower	Glengarriff	Heritage Property
Glantane GS + MQ	Banteer — Mallow Road	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Glengarriff Flahives Lodge	Glengarriff	Lodge
Glengarriff GS + MQ + RAX	Bantry Road	Garda Station
Glenville GS + MQ	Cork — Mallow Road	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Goleen GS + MQ	Crookhaven Road	Garda Station
Goleen MES	Goleen Mizen Head Road	Marine Emergency Service

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Building Name	Address	Building Usage
Gurranabraher GS	Gurranabraher	Garda Station
Gyleen MES	Gyleen	Marine Emergency Service
Hare Island NS	Co Cork	School — National
Inchigeela GS + RAX — GS	Macroom Road	Garda Station
Innishannon GS + MQ + RAX — GS/MQ	Main Street	Garda Station
Kanturk GS + RAX — GS	Percival Street	Garda Station
Kealkill GS + MQ + RAX Mob GS/MQ	Bantry — Macroom Road	Garda Station
Kilbrittain GS	Bandon — Kinsale Road	Garda Station
Kilbrittain NS	Bandon Road	School — National
Kilcoe NS	Roaring Water Road	School — National
Kildorrery GS	Mallow Road	Garda Station
Killeagh GS	Main Street	Garda Station
Kilworth GS + MQ	Clanworth Road	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Kinsale Charles Fort + MES	Summer Cove	Marine Emergency Service
Kinsale GS	Church Street	Garda Station
Knockaclarig NS	Co Cork	School — National
Knocknagree GS + MQ	Knocknagree	Garda Station
Kyle NS	Killeagh	School — National
Liscarroll GS + MQ + RAX	Main Street	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Long Island NS	Co Cork	School — National
MacCurtain Street GS	MacCurtain Street	Garda Station
Macroom GS	Barrack Lane	Garda Station
Mallow GS	The Bowling Green	Garda Station
Mallow NS	Shortcastle Street	School — National
Mallow Storage	Glenmount	Storage
Mayfield GS	Silver Spring Lane	Garda Station
Meelin GS	Newmarket Road	Garda Station
Midleton GS	Oliver Plunkett Place	Garda Station
Milford GS + MQ	Milford	Garda Station
Millstreet GS	Main Street	Garda Station
Mitchelstown GS	Upper Cork Street	Garda Station
Newmarket GS + MQ	Church Street	Garda Station
Oysterhaven MES	Oysterhaven	Marine Emergency Service
Rathcormac GS + MQ	Cannon Street	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Rathduane NS	Rathduane	School — National
Rathduff GS + MQ + RAX	Mallow — Cork Road	Garda Station
Rathduff NS	Rathduff	School — National
Roches Point Met Station	Whitegate Road	Meteorological Station
Roscarberry GS + RAX — GS	Church Street	Garda Station
Schull Garda Area HQ	Schull	Garda Station
Seven Heads MES	Seven Heads	Marine Emergency Service
Sherkin Island NS	Sherkin Island	School — National
Skibbereen GS	High Street	Garda Station
Tarleton GS + MQ + RAX	Crookstown — Dunmanway Road	Garda Station

Building Name	Address	Building Usage
Timoleague GS + MQ + RAX — GS/MQ	Mill Street	Garda Station
Timoleague NS	Timoleague	School — National
Toe Head MES	Toe Head	Marine Emergency Service
Togher GS	Caseys Cross	Garda Station
Trafask NS	Trafask	School — National
Watergrasshill GS + MQ	Cork — Fermoy Road	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Whitegate GS + MQ + RAX	Lower Road	Garda Station & Married Quarters
Youghal GS	O'Brien Place	Garda Station
Youghal MES	O'Briens Place	Marine Emergency Service
Youghal SWO — O'Briens Place	O'Briens Place	Office — Social Welfare

Cork Leased

Building Name	Address	Occupant
Bandon School Inspectors Office	The Weir Centre	Education
Bandon SWO	Weir Street	Social Protection
Bantry Customs and Excise	Old Convent House	Revenue
Bantry SWO — 7 Main Street	7 Main Street	Social Protection
Blarney Garda Station	The Square	Garda Siochana
Carrigaline DSFA Office	Units 2 & 4	Social Protection
Carrigtwohill Garda Station	Cork Road	Garda Siochana
Castletownbere SWO	Church Gate	Social Protection
Cork C&E Centre Park House	Centre Park House	Revenue Revenue NERA Revenue
Cork C&E Centre Park House Car Parking	Centre Park House	NERA
Cork C&E Centrepoint Store	Unit 4 Centrepoint	Revenue
Cork Crawford Hall Car Parking	Crawford Hall	Social Protection
Cork DAF Cityhall Car Parking	Eglington Street	Agriculture
Cork Education Office	Block C Heritage Business Park	Education National Council for Special Education National Education Welfare Board
Cork Environment Office	Unit 7, Eastgate Avenue	Environment
Cork Gov Office Connolly Hall	Connolly Hall	Social Protection Agriculture Social Protection
Cork Gov Office Doughcloyne — Warehouse	Doughcloyne Industrial Estate	Transport
Cork Gov Office Hibernian House	Hibernian House	Agriculture Social Protection Social Protection

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Building Name	Address	Occupant
Cork Gov Office Irish Life Bldg	Irish Life House	Foreign Affairs Revenue Passport Office Foreign Affairs Education Agriculture Office of Public Works Prisons Service Foreign Affairs
Cork HIQA Decentral Office	Unit 1301, City Gate, Mahon	HIQA
Cork Marine Office	Riverview Business Park	Marine Comm Marine & Natural Resources
Cork Marine Office/Warehouse	Acorn Business Campus	Comm Marine & Natural Resources
Cork Prob & Wel Serv Cove St	St Nicholas Church	Probation & Welfare Service
Cork Probation & Welfare Service Cove St Car Parking	St Nicholas Church	Probation & Welfare Service
Cork Revenue Store Boland Industrial Estate	7-8 Boland Industrial Estate	Revenue
Cork SWO — ESB Premises	Marina	Social Protection
Dunmanway SWO Office	Main Street	Social Protection
Fermoy OPW Storage	Unit 1 Block A, Fermoy Ent. Park	Office of Public Works
Fermoy SWO — Connolly Street	Connolly Street	Social Protection
Macroom SWO (New)	Bowl Road	Social Protection
Mallow SWO	72 Main Street	Social Protection
Mallow SWO (New)	Fair Green	Social Protection
Skibbereen Forestry Office	Townsend Street	Agriculture
Youghal SWO — Main Street	14 Main Street	Social Protection

Departmental Committees

209. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of times the committee for public management research has met in the years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; the allocated funding and expenditure by the committee in each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40328/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Committee for Public Management Research was wound up at the end of 2007, following a review. The table below sets out the details of meetings, allocated funding and expenditure during the years 2005-2008.

	2005	2006	2007	2008
No. of meetings	5	4	2	0
Allocated funding	€406,400	€406,400	€406,400	0
Expenditure	€399,210	€409,920	€380,520	€190,396

Funding was retained in the CPMR account to facilitate the completion of its work programme in 2008.

Departmental Bodies

210. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40336/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The Deputy has clarified that the information sought is in respect of high level groups appointed by myself to examine a specific issue and involve stakeholders outside the Department such as interest groups. The table below sets out the detail requested in respect of such groups.

Entity	Purpose	Date formed and number of times the group has met
Credit Union Advisory Committee	The Credit Union Advisory Committee is a statutory advisory committee whose function is to advise the Minister for Finance in relation to— (a) the improvement of the management of credit unions; (b) the protection of the interests of members and creditors of credit unions; and (c) other matters relating to credit unions	The current Advisory Committee was established from 1st September 2010 and has met on 2 occasions since then. The Committee plans to meet once a month on an ongoing basis over its 3 year term.
Civil Service Adjudicator and Civil Service Arbitration Board	The Chairperson (nominated by the Minister for Finance and appointed by the Government) and the two members of the Arbitration Board for the Civil Service (Employer representative and Staff representative) and the Adjudicator were appointed/re-appointed in July 2010. The term of appointment is until 30 June 2011. Under the terms of the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for the Civil Service, there are two forms of arbitration — an Arbitration Board and an Adjudicator, The Arbitration Board deals with significant claims and the Adjudicator deals with other issues.	The Civil Service Arbitration Board has not met in the period since appointment in July 2010. The Adjudicator has adjudicated on a number of hearings on an ad-hoc basis since January 2010.
Disciplinary Code of Appeals Board and the Independent Mediator	Both the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson are appointed by the Minister for Finance for a three year period — the current terms expire in June and December 2011. Current arrangements for handling grievance cases provides, amongst other things, for the appointment by the Minister for Finance of a Mediation Officer to whom certain grievance issues could be referred if they could not be resolved at earlier stages of the grievance procedure.	Sits as required to adjudicate on appeals made to the Board Appointment is renewed annually
Implementation Group for Reform of Regulatory Structures	A joint high level Department of Finance and Central Bank Group to implement reforms to the structures and associated powers and functions of financial regulation.	Established in 2009 and has met 12 times since then.
Preferred Policy Options Group	To examine CO ₂ mitigation options for Ireland.	First meeting — 22/07/09 and has met 12 times since then.

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Entity	Purpose	Date formed and number of times the group has met
Mortgage Arrears and Personal Debt Expert Group	<p>Having regard to the commitments in the Renewed Programme for Government to protect the family home and help those in personal debt, in February 2010 the Minister for Finance established the Mortgage Arrears and Personal Debt Expert Group, under the independent chair of Mr. Hugh Cooney, and insolvency accountant, to make recommendations to the Minister on options for improving the current situation for families with mortgage arrears and personal debt.</p> <p>The Expert Group is made up of the Chairman and 7 other external experts along with senior civil servants from Government Departments. The external members of the Expert Group are working on a pro-bono basis.</p> <p>The Expert Group submitted an interim report to the Minister in July. All of the recommendations were later accepted by Government and are being implemented. The Expert Group is due to complete its final Report shortly.</p>	The Group has met on 23 occasions since its establishment.
Steering Group for the Introduction of a Single Social Contribution	This Interdepartmental Steering Group was established by the Minister of Finance in February 2010 to examine the issues surrounding the introduction of a Universal Social Contribution and to report back to him. The Group consists of representatives of the Department of Finance, the Department of Social Protection and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.	The group has met 3 times thus far.
Tax Strategy Group	The Tax Strategy Group is an interdepartmental committee chaired by the Department of Finance which was set up in 1993. Membership comprises senior officials and advisors from the Departments of Finance, Taoiseach, Health and Children, Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Enterprise Trade and Employment, Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners. The Group examines tax issues and Social Welfare issues in the run up to each year's Budget and Finance Bill.	The Group meets approximately 7 times a year.
Review Group on State Assets	This Group was established to examine State assets and liabilities and to advise on how the assets can be better used or disposed of to support economic growth and national investment priorities.	This work is ongoing in nature and is expected to provide an interim report before the end of the year.
Independent Review of the Department of Finance	The Independent Review Group was established to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the systems, structures and processes of the Department of Finance relating to those elements of budgetary, economic, financial and public service management that are relevant to its role.	The work is ongoing in nature and an interim report is expected before the end of the year.

Entity	Purpose	Date formed and number of times the group has met
Commission of Investigation into the Banking Sector in Ireland	The Commission was established under Statutory Instrument No. 454 of 2010 to examine specific matters considered by the Government to be of significant public concern in relation to the Banking Sector in Ireland during the period 1 January 2003 to 15 January 2009.	The work is ongoing on this investigation.
Domestic Standing Group on Financial Stability	The DSG was established under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Dept of Finance, the Central Bank and the Financial Regulator in July 2007. The Group provides a mechanism for exchange of information relevant to the discharge of the parties' respective responsibilities in relation to financial stability.	The Memorandum of Understanding establishing the DSG provides that it will normally meet on a quarterly basis. However with the onset of the financial markets crisis the DSG has met more frequently than this.

Business Regulation

211. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if his Department has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if his Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40351/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The measurement of administrative burdens using the Standard Cost Model is an exercise that was called for by business, as a baseline for the 25% administrative burden reduction programme, and is being carried out across all Departments with any substantive regulation that affects business. My Department has already listed burdens arising from regulations under its responsibility, e.g. administrative requirements on companies applying for public contracts; the need to provide tax clearance certificates; statements of good standing; possible evidence of financial capacity; technical capacity etc. Measurement of the cost to business is expected to be completed in 2011 and, following this, simplification plans will be developed in consultation with stakeholders, for implementation.

Civil Service Language Service

212. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the Civil Service language service; if he will outline its role; the amount of money spent by the service in each of the years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40367/10]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Language training programmes in the civil service are provided by Gaeleagras and the Civil Service Language Centre which operate under the aegis of the Civil Service Training and Development Centre in my Department.

Gaeleagras

Gaeleagras delivers training in the Irish Language to civil servants to enable Departments to meet their obligations under the Official Languages Act, 2003. It provides accredited Irish Language courses at its offices in Lansdowne House, Dublin and specialised in-house training to Departments and Offices. In addition, Gaeleagras organises a number of scholarship programmes each year in Gaelteacht areas; it provides a confidential translation service for this

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

Department and a translation service for official publications. It is also responsible for the Irish Proficiency Test throughout the wider civil service.

Costs for Gaeleagras cover the salaries of teaching staff (whole-time and part-time) and general expenditure associated with the provision of Gaeleagras's services. Details for the period requested are as follows:

Year	Expenditure
2005	428,895
2006	444,691
2007	464,349
2008	424,865
2009	413,430
2010 to date	206,829

Civil Service Language Centre

The Civil Service Language Centre (CSLC) delivers training to civil servants (including members of An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces) in modern European languages, Mandarin and Irish Sign Language. Courses are available in the following languages: French; German; Irish Sign Language; Italian; Polish; Russian; Spanish; Standard Mandarin. Programmes are delivered by a team of part-time language trainers and a director of tuition. Training is facilitated in Departmental offices in Lansdowne House, Dublin and Tullamore. A translation service for Government Departments and Offices is also provided.

Costs associated with the provision of this service, apart from administrative and incidental costs, derive from the salaries paid to the Director and the cohort of part-time teachers delivering the training programmes. Details for the period requested are as follows:

Year	Expenditure
2005	204,597.99
2006	236,446.41
2007	233,812.83
2008	287,619.21
2009	262,498.07
2010 to date	213,314.17

Full-time teaching staff, on secondment from the Department of Education and Skills, were engaged by the CSLC prior to September 2007. Details of their salaries for the academic years in question are as follows:

Year	Expenditure
2004/05	145,570.30
2005/06	154,477.90
2006/07	75,007.00

Irish Blood Transfusion Service

213. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the pension

levy is being paid by employees of the Irish Blood Transfusion Service as they do not have a state pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39695/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) is a statutory body under the aegis of my Department. A contributory funded pension scheme, sponsored by the employer, was set up for employees in 1963. The Irish Blood Transfusion Service is a public service body as defined in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act, 2009 and, consequently, its employees are public servants within the terms of that Act. The pension scheme in place comes under the scope of a public service pension scheme as defined in section 1 of the Act ‘provided for under an administrative measure to like effect as the Superannuation Acts’.

Health Services

214. **Deputy Brian O’Shea** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will ensure that the cost of disability here is examined and progressed without delay. [39851/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): There are a range of financial supports in place which are designed specifically to address the issue of additional costs associated with disabilities including weekly/monthly allowances, additional income supports, other benefits such as medical cards/free travel/mobility allowance and tax concessions. It is important to be aware that the provision of a cost of disability payment raises a number of very complex questions.

Not all people with disabilities incur additional costs, nor do they incur costs to the same extent. A national system of needs assessment is a prerequisite for any cost of disability payment scheme. The Government was committed to considering the issues around the feasibility of cost of disability payment following the development of the needs assessment system provided for in the Disability Act. However, with the major changes in the economic environment and the deferral of the implementation of the Disability Act, the Government is not in a position to progress consideration of the feasibility of introducing a cost of disability payment.

215. **Deputy Edward O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a person (details supplied) in County Cork has to pay for a specific service. [40154/10]

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

216. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on whether due to the increase in death by suicide it is now necessary to increase financial support for all the mental health services as it is well documented that in times of financial crisis there is a massive burden on persons’ mental health due to financial stress, debt and unemployment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40394/10]

217. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will report on the implementation of the 2006 policy A Vision for Change; her views on its effects in replacing institutionalisation with community based services to date; if she will acknowledge in the context of budget 2011 spending reductions that the mental health budget has been reduced by 9.2% since 2006; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40453/10]

218. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will respond to the crisis in our mental health services and if she will ensure that there are no further cuts in the mental health services in the next budget; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40392/10]

256. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39943/10]

276. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will consider correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40225/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 216 to 218, inclusive, 256 and 276 together.

The Government will be considering the 2011 Estimates for the health service over the coming weeks in the context of its strategy for economic recovery and its target to reduce the general government deficit to 3% of GDP by 2014. Notwithstanding the difficult financial environment, the Government is determined to do everything possible to protect services, to respond to priority demographic and other needs and to support ongoing reform of the public health services within the resources available for health. To achieve this, staff at all levels will have to work together to deliver services in a more flexible way. It is essential that the impact on frontline services of any cuts is minimised while ensuring that the needs of service users remains the highest priority.

The HSE is working within limited financial resources. The appropriate management of the public finances means that the health sector, which represents over 27% of public expenditure, must operate within the approved budget set out at the start of the year. Under Section 31(1) of the Health Act, 2004, the HSE is required to prepare an annual National Service Plan. The Plan, which must indicate the type and volume of health and personal social services to be provided by the HSE, is submitted to the Minister for Health and Children for approval. The appropriate management of the health services also means that the mental health services must be funded in an equitable and sustainable manner.

The estimated cost of the implementation of '*A Vision for Change*' is €150m over 7 — 10 years. Development funding totalling €54 million has been allocated to the HSE since the launch of the Report in 2006. In addition, almost €1 million was allocated this year under the Dormant Accounts Fund for a programme of suicide prevention measures to help communities to develop integrated local action plans for suicide prevention. To further the implementation of '*A Vision for Change*', the 2010 Employment Control Framework for the health service provided an exemption from the moratorium on recruitment and allowed 100 psychiatric posts to be filled by nurses or therapists.

There are substantial resources already invested in mental health. The reconfiguring and remodelling of these resources will be the main focus for the immediate future. While implementation of '*A Vision for Change*' has been somewhat slower than originally anticipated it is important to say that in many parts of the country, services are pressing ahead with the implementation of the policy. Significant progress has been achieved including: shorter episodes of inpatient care, improved child and adolescent mental health services, fewer involuntary admissions and the involvement of service users in all aspects of mental health policy, service planning and delivery. Acute admissions to St Brendan's Hospital have ceased. Plans for the transfer of acute inpatient admissions from St Ita's Hospital to a new purpose built unit on the

Beaumont Hospital Campus are proceeding. New Community Nursing Units in Ballinasloe and Mullingar have been developed.

The number of child and adolescent inpatient beds will increase from 30 to 52 before the end of 2010. This together with the Mental Health Commission code of practice relating to the admission of children under the Mental Health Act 2001 will greatly reduce the need to admit children to adult units.

219. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will deal with a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39650/10]

257. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the outcome of a recent meeting (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39945/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 219 and 257 together.

I met with the Jack and Jill Foundation on Tuesday 12th October last. The Health Service Executive was also represented at the meeting. We discussed a range of issues including additional State funding. I will continue to engage with the Jack and Jill Foundation. Both the Minister and I and the Health Service Executive recognise the valuable contribution that the many agencies and charities make in the provision of health and personal social services to people with a disability.

Reflecting the current economic situation the health sector must manage service levels within available resources. The HSE together with the 'non-statutory organisations' who provide services on behalf of the HSE, will continue to review how these services are provided in order to protect the delivery of front line services as much as possible. In the current environment, this is a challenge for all, including the HSE and non statutory charity organisations. The HSE will continue to work closely with all agencies and bodies in the sector, including Jack and Jill, to provide whatever assistance it can from within its resources, in the context of the annual Service Level Agreement arrangements.

The very difficult financial position facing the country will obviously require very careful management across all areas of expenditure, including the disability sector. Notwithstanding this difficult financial environment, the Government is determined to do everything possible to protect patient services, to respond to priority demographic and other needs, and to support ongoing reform of the public health services within the resources available for health.

Health Services

220. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied). [39659/10]

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

221. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the centralising and processing of all medical cards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39663/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Health Service Executive (HSE), with my full support, decided to centralise the processing of all medical cards and GP

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

visit card applications and renewals to its Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) in Dublin. In January 2009, the PCRS took over the processing of all medical card applications for persons aged 70 or over. In September 2009, the processing of all applications from two Local Health Offices in Dublin transferred to the PCRS.

In June 2010, the HSE introduced a new website, www.medicalcard.ie, which enables people anywhere in the country to apply for a medical card through a simple and efficient online application process. Online assessments are immediate and for applicants who supply all evidence/documentation and are eligible on income grounds, medical card delivery is guaranteed within 15 days of receipt of the completed application pack. The HSE has also made provision for emergency applications to be dealt with immediately. The PCRS is receiving approximately 3,000 applications each week via this new channel, with more than 50% of these being made outside normal office hours.

Significant progress has been made in this national project in providing an improved service to the public at less cost to the State. Up to 8th October 2010, the PCRS has received 211,801 medical card applications and reviews and issued 171,237 medical cards. The next phase of the project will move the processing of all new applications to the Central Office following a consultative process with staff representatives in line with the recent agreement on pay and reform in the public service. As the centralisation process continues, more initiatives will be introduced and the current initiatives will continue to be enhanced as the HSE receives feedback and continues to engage closely with advocacy groups, staff, public representatives and primary care contractors.

When the centralisation process is finalised (estimated completion date is 31st March 2011), staff in Local Health Offices will continue to have access to the national system and will be available to help clients with enquiries about their application or review and will also be able to deal with queries of a general nature about the medical card scheme.

Departmental Expenditure

222. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health and Children the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from her Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter.
[39681/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department administers a National Lottery Discretionary fund from which grants are paid to community and voluntary organisations. The total amount paid out in 2009 was €3,985,000, and the funding available in 2010 is €3,786,000. Prior to 2009, details of all recipients of lottery grants were set out in the Appropriation Account of my Department. Following a decision by the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Appropriation Accounts no longer provide this detail, but require each Department to publish this information. As stated in the Appropriation Accounts for Vote 39, details of the recipients of lottery grants are available on my Department's website at www.dohc.ie.

The Agencies directly funded by my Department and their budget allocations for 2010 are set out in the table below. The audited accounts of these agencies are submitted to the Minister and are placed in the Oireachtas library as a matter of course.

Agencies directly funded by Department of Health and Children

Agency	2010
	€
National Social Work Qualification Board	538,000
Irish Medicines Board	3,650,000
Food Safety Authority Ireland	17,427,000
Institute of Public Health	1,542,000
Health Information and Quality Authority	14,757,000
Mental Health Commission	18,190,000
National Council Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery	4,162,000
Office of Tobacco Control	1,726,000
Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council	3,161,000
Childrens' Acts Advisory Board*	1,000,000
National Treatment Purchase Fund	90,092,000
Food Safety Promotion Board	6,665,000
Health Research Board	34,157,000
Ombudsman for Children	2,223,000
Office of the Disability Appeals Officer	501,000
National Cancer Registry Board	2,975,000
Health and Social Care Professionals Council	962,000

2010 Figures as per Revised Estimates Volume.

*Due to be abolished in 2010.

Nursing Education

223. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children, further to Parliamentary Question No. 96 of 21 October 2010, if she will confirm the requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39699/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Cancer Screening Programme

224. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will consider arranging access to cervical smear tests, where appropriate, without charge for persons under the age of 25 years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39708/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): CervicalCheck, the National Cancer Screening Service (NCSS), provides free smear tests to women aged 25 to 60. The CervicalCheck Programme Report published this year reported that over 284,800 women were screened during the period 1 September 2008 — 31 August 2009.

International best practice currently recommends that population-based cervical screening programmes should target women aged from 25 or 30 years to 60 or 65 years. The scientific literature would suggest that there is no additional public health benefit in starting screening below the age of 25 years and published research in fact has shown that the disadvantages of screening women under the age of 25 years may be greater than any potential benefit.

The NCSS keeps under constant review the evidence base, involving any research conducted in Ireland or internationally, that would influence the target population for CervicalCheck.

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

CervicalCheck is a programme for women without symptoms. Irrespective of her age, any woman who has symptoms causing concern should seek the advice of her doctor.

Medical Training

225. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost of training one general practitioner, broken down according to cost of undergraduate medical training and postgraduate general practitioner training; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39718/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As the information sought by the Deputy is not provided by the Health Service Executive to my Department as a matter of routine, 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.

Health Services

226. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will supply information on a matter (details supplied) [39720/10]

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 Procedures

227. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will expedite an appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39722/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The scheduling of patients for hospital treatment is a matter for the consultant concerned in each case and is determined on the basis of clinical need. Should the patient’s general practitioner consider that the patient’s condition warrants an earlier appointment, he/she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant involved. 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 case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the case investigated and to reply directly to the Deputy.

Community Care

228. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that day care services at a home (details supplied) remain suspended despite a decision and commitment made in April 2010 by the Minister of State with responsibility for older people and health promotion to reinstate these services; if she will restore these facilities as they provided a vital and valuable service for over 50 persons from the area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39729/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): This Government is committed to supporting people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Where this is not feasible, the health service supports access to quality long-term residential care where this is appropriate and we

continue to develop and improve health services in all regions of the country and to ensure quality and patient safety.

The Health Service Executive has operational responsibility for the delivery of health and personal social services, including those at facilities such as Plunkett Home, Boyle. The Executive indicated that it temporarily closed the Day-care Service at the Plunkett Community Nursing Unit in Boyle from Monday March 8th. The HSE appreciates that this is an inconvenience for clients of this service but there must be appropriate staffing levels to run any service safely. The Executive has indicated that it is unable to re-open this facility at present as there are a number of vacancies in the service and it has not been able to recruit appropriate staff.

Departmental Expenditure

229. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide the cost of the State drugs bill for each of the following years 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39741/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The cost of drugs and medicines reimbursed by the HSE's Primary Care Reimbursement Service in respect of the GMS and community drug schemes is as follows:

Agencies directly funded by Department of Health and Children

Year	€ m
2003	1,046.79
2004	1,234.11
2005	1,366.90
2006	1,572.42
2007	1,749.97
2008	1,903.92
2009	2,026.02
2010 (Jan to Sept)	1,407.30

The cost of drugs and medicines provided by hospitals and community services is as follows (national data prior to 2007 is not available):

Agencies directly funded by Department of Health and Children

Year	€ m
2007	363.92
2008	391.88
2009	419.81
2010 (Jan to Sept)	297.33

Hospital Services

230. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide the hospital budget for each of the years 1997 to 2010 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39743/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table.

Hospital Expenditure

Year	€bn
1997	1.466
1998	1.566
1999	1.825
2000	2.051
2001	3.291
2002	3.801
2003	4.181
2004	4.011
2005	4.440
2006	4.541
2007	5.004
2008	5.727
2009	5.475
2010	5.275

Source: Provisional Outturn 1998-2009 as published in the Revised Estimates Volumes 1998-2010. 2010 Provision as set out in REV 2010.

It is important to note that these figures are not directly comparable, as following the establishment of the Health Service Executive in 2005 the programme breakdown in the Revised Estimates Volumes changed. Up to 2004 (2003 outturn figures) the programme breakdown provided was in relation to the “General Hospital Programme” and included services provided in district hospitals, county hospitals and long-stay hospitals. Many of the costs related to these areas are now reflected in other programmes, such as care of older people and the mental health programme. Following the establishment of the HSE, the programme breakdown for hospitals is now the acute sector only, with long-stay and other residential services reflected in other programmes. It should also be noted that the figure for 2010 includes savings arising from public service pay reductions and other economies.

Departmental Expenditure

231. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide the average cost per patient attending hospital for each of the years 2003 to 2009 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39744/10]

232. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide the average cost per inpatient procedure for each of the years 2003 to 2009 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39745/10]

233. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide the average cost per day case procedure for each of the years 2003 to 2009 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39746/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Question Nos. 231 to 233, inclusive, together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question Nos.147, 148, and 149 of the 7th July 2010. The information requested for 2009 is not yet available, as its compilation has been delayed by industrial action in the Health Service Executive earlier in 2010. The information is expected to be available in the coming months.

Medical Cards

234. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide the average number of prescriptions issued for medical card holders for each of the years 2003 to 2009 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39747/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I understand that the Deputy was referring to the average number of prescription items dispensed to medical card holders per annum. The information requested is as follows:

Year	Number
2003	29
2004	32
2005	34
2006	35
2007	36
2008	39
2009	37

These figures are based on the actual number of persons who availed of service.

235. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will provide the average number of prescriptions issued to medical card holders for each of the years 2003 to 2009 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39748/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I understand that the Deputy was referring to the average cost per item for prescription items dispensed to medical card holders. The information is as follows:

Year	€
2003	20.18
2004	21.79
2005	22.21
2006	23.18
2007	23.63
2008	23.76
2009	24.85

Hospital Closures

236. **Deputy Joe Behan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will meet with an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39764/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Health and Children (Deputy Áine Brady): I met with members of the Save Wicklow Hospital Campaign and local public representatives to

[Deputy Áine Brady.]

discuss the proposed closure of Wicklow Community Hospital on 27th October 2010. Wicklow Community Hospital, built in the 1940s, currently provides 26 long stay care beds, 4 respite care beds and 1 palliative care bed. HSE Management commissioned two reports recently arising from concerns in relation to the physical infrastructure of the residential unit at the Hospital. One was a comprehensive architectural survey and the other a report in relation to Fire Safety compliance.

While the Architectural Survey is still underway, the Fire Safety report was completed and submitted on 14th October. It found approximately 80 issues requiring significant and urgent attention. In addition, it became clear that if works were undertaken to bring the current building up to meet the requirements under the National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People the likely numbers of residents that could be accommodated at the Hospital would be reduced to between 10 and 12 which would render the residential element of the Hospital unviable.

Consequently, the HSE has decided that the best option is to close the hospital and informed HIQA of this decision on 22nd October. The HSE has met with representatives of residents, and Wicklow Public Representatives. Staff representative bodies have also been appraised of the situation.

The welfare of the residents is the primary concern. The Director of Nursing and her Assistant Director, who know the residents and their families, informed them of the decision. The Director of Nursing and her staff continue to make themselves available at all times to the residents and their families in supporting them through the transfer process. A helpline phone number has been set up and given to the residents and their families. They have been offered a choice in relation to their future homes. Currently most of the residents have chosen to move to St. Colman's, Rathdrum, or to Blainroe Nursing Home in Wicklow.

Residents are being assessed by the staff from the units where they will make their new homes to ensure that their assessed needs can be met. The General Practitioners who provide a medical service to the resident have also been informed. Suitable transfer arrangements will be facilitated for the residents when they are ready to transfer to their new homes. They will be accompanied by appropriate staff from Wicklow Hospital to ensure continuity of care in relation to their needs as indicated in their individual care plans.

Community Care

237. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her Department is still accepting applications under a particular grant scheme (details supplied) [39775/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department has a National Lottery Discretionary fund in place which provides once-off grants to community groups and organisations, providing a range of health related services. If an organisation wishes to make an application for National Lottery Funding they should send in a formal application. Detailed procedures, along with the application form are set out on my Department's website — www.dohc.ie

Preschool Services

238. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application for the early childhood care and education scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39779/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): I have responsibility for implementing the free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme, which provides for a free pre-school year to eligible children in the year before they commence primary school.

Children qualify for the free pre-school year where they are aged more than 3 years 2 months and less than 4 years 7 months in September of the relevant year. This means that children born between 2 February 2006 and 30 June 2007 are eligible for the free pre-school year which commenced in September 2010 and children born between 2 February 2007 and 30 June 2008 will be eligible in September 2011. The child in question will be eligible in September 2011 but if her parents decide to send her to primary school at that time she will not be able benefit from the ECCE scheme. There is no provision under the scheme to enrol children that are below the qualifying age.

The objective of the ECCE scheme is to make early learning in a formal setting available to all 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 a particular age cohort. It is necessary, therefore, to target the pre-school year at a particular age cohort and to set minimum and maximum limits to the age range within which children participate in the scheme. In setting the minimum and maximum age limits, account was taken 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.

Vaccination Programme

239. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her Department or the Health Service Executive will refund fees to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39781/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The national HPV vaccination programme commenced in May in secondary schools for girls in first year. The second phase of the HPV vaccination programme is now underway. During this calendar year all girls currently in second year and those who entered first year in September are being offered the vaccination. The programme will continue with the vaccine being offered to all girls in first year in secondary school each year. It is not proposed to extend the vaccination programme to other classes at present. Unfortunately it will not be possible to refund the costs of vaccinations administered privately.

Health Services

240. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the Health Service Executive dental unit in Cornmarket was to move to a local building and had secured funding for the refurbishment of that unit and that the HSE agreed to pay the rent; however because the HSE is now not willing to pay the rent the dental unit in Cornmarket has been closed by the HSE and staff moved temporarily to Crumlin health centre resulting in the 16 local schools and those in the south-west inner city who used this service having to go to Crumlin and if she will confirm the location of the permanent unit for users from the south-west inner city. [39792/10]

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 Services

241. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the dental service in St. James's Hospital is being closed. [39793/10]

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 Properties

242. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39804/10]

243. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of premises and sites rented or leased by her Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39819/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 242 and 243 together.

The sourcing of property on behalf of Government Departments is a matter for the Office of Public Works. The only relevant lease currently held by my Department is Block D, Irish Life Mall, which formerly accommodated the Women's Health Council. This agency was subsumed into my Department as part of wider rationalisation initiatives. However, my Department has arranged that the Disability Appeals Office currently occupying a leased premises in Clondalkin will very shortly relocate to Block D, Irish Life Mall.

Year	No of Premises	Location	Lease/Rent	Service Charge (Inc maintenance and Security)
			€	€
2008	One	Block D, Irish Life Mall, Dublin 1	98,500	41,507
2009	One	Block D, Irish Life Mall, Dublin 1	98,500	41,366

Health Services

244. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a review will be carried out by the Health Service Executive and the necessary assistance provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39844/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Services for People with Disabilities

245. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will ensure that access to disability specific services (details supplied) is protected in the forthcoming budget; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39849/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I recognise the valuable contribution made by the many agencies and charities to the provision of health and personal social services for people with a disability.

Reflecting the current economic situation the HSE must manage service levels within available resources. In the current environment, this is a challenge for all, including the HSE and non statutory charity organisations. By working together and finding innovative ways to provide value for money we can help to protect services. With this in mind we must improve the efficiency and effectiveness of disability funding. There are many organisations providing services to people with a disability. It is essential that organisations operate models of service that maximise the significant resources available. The HSE will work closely with all agencies and bodies in the sector to maximise their efficiency and effectiveness, in the context of the annual Service Level Agreement arrangements.

Deliberations by the Government on the expenditure allocations for next year are continuing in the context of the forthcoming Budget. The very difficult financial position facing the country will obviously require very careful management across all areas of expenditure, including the disability sector. Notwithstanding this difficult financial environment, the Government is determined to do everything possible to protect patient services, to respond to priority demographic and other needs, and to support ongoing reform of the public health services within the resources available for health.

Nursing Homes Repayment Scheme

246. **Deputy Michael D’Arcy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason inquiries from a person (details supplied) regarding their application to the health repayment scheme appeals office have gone unanswered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39853/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Health Repayment Scheme Appeals Office is an independent office established to provide an appeals service to those who wish to appeal the decision of the Scheme Administrator under the Health (Repayment Scheme) Act 2006.

The claimant lodged an Appeal with the Health Repayment Scheme Appeals Office on 15 October 2008. Following a review of the appeal, the Appeals Officer wrote to the claimant requesting additional evidence. The claimant supplied some information to the Appeals Officer on 30 September 2009. The Appeals Officer continues to investigate the appeal. As part of these investigations the Appeals Officer has been liaising with the HSE institution concerned and the Scheme Administrator in relation to the patient’s records. When the Appeals Officer has made a determination on the appeal he will write to the claimant providing the reasons for the decision.

Hospital Services

247. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support a matter (details supplied) [39854/10]

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.

248. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) will receive a date and time for an appointment at the paediatric clinic, Portlaoise General Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39857/10]

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.

Medical Cards

249. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will address the concerns of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39865/10]

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.

250. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will be issued with a replacement medical card as their original one was lost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39877/10]

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

251. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support a matter (details supplied). [39891/10]

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

252. **Deputy Deirdre Clune** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she has received the report from the expert advisory group on diabetes; if she is in a position to implement the recommendations particularly in relation to paediatric services in the Cork area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39900/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Health Service Executive Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Diabetes was published in 2008. The implementation of the recommendations in this Report with respect to services in the Cork area is a service matter and therefore it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

253. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the home help hours in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo can be reviewed and restored to their original amount. [39906/10]

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.

Community Care

254. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for Health and Children her plans for the retention of a nursing home (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39907/10]

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.

Departmental Expenditure

255. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children the savings that have been made in her Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39924/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department has a small ICT Unit and staff concentrate on core technologies with single platforms for ease of operational and support reasons. In key areas such as web site and some database systems, where skill sets are available, considerable use is made of open source software. It is difficult to evaluate the savings made in deploying these products due to the variety of comparative technologies available on the market but I am confident they are more economical to deploy and maintain. In relation to consumables, it is intended to purchase via the National Procurement Service consumables tender as soon as their procurement framework exercise is finalised early in the new year. It is planned to exhaust all current stocks of consumables and any requirements in the interim will be made via a small draw down arrangement until the new framework is in place. My Department earlier this year has evaluated the concept of a managed print service and the use of generic consumables to achieve better value for money but has decided to approach the issue via the proposed framework agreement.

Question No. 256 answered with Question No. 216.

Question No. 257 answered with Question No. 219.

Hospital Services

258. **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. [39946/10]

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.

Asylum Support Services

259. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children, further to Parliamentary Question No. 186 of 5 October 2010, if women in direct provision centres have been consulted directly to establish their views on whether women-only centres are warranted or desirable for their and their children's safety. [40095/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Reception and Integration Agency of the Department of Justice and Law Reform is responsible for coordinating the provision of services to asylum seekers.

Medical Cards

260. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a medical card holder who requires a certificate to apply for a driving licence is required to pay the general practitioner for this documentation. [40102/10]

263. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a person over 70 years of age who holds a medical card is required to pay their general practitioner for some services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40105/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 260 and 263 together.

A medical card as issued by the Health Service Executive (HSE), confirms that the holder is entitled, free of charge, to a range of health services, which includes:

- General medical and surgical services including all in-patient services and out-patient services in a public ward in a public hospital (including consultant services);
- A choice of general practitioners (GP) from those doctors who have a General Medical Services (GMS) contract with the HSE;
- Supply of prescribed approved medicines and appliances; and
- Dental, Ophthalmic and Aural services

GPs who hold GMS contracts with the HSE must not seek or accept money from medical card or GP visit card holders.

The contract between the HSE and GPs under the GMS Scheme stipulates that fees are not paid to GPs by the HSE in respect of certain medical certificates which may be required, for example, “under the Social Welfare Acts or for the purposes of insurance or assurance policies or for the issue of driving licences”.

Consultation fees charged by GPs to GMS patients outside the terms of the GMS contract are a matter of private contract between the clinicians and the patients. While I have no role in relation to such fees, I would expect general practitioners to have regard to the overall economic situation in setting their fees. My colleague the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation has also called on providers of professional services in the private sector to adjust their fees in line with the reductions in fees of those providing such services in the public sector.

Hospital Staff

261. **Deputy Brendan Kenneally** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the Health Service Executive will act on her instruction to appoint a third cardiologist to Waterford Regional Hospital in order that a full interventional cardiology service can be provided for the south east; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40103/10]

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 Capital Programme

262. **Deputy Brendan Kenneally** asked the Minister for Health and Children the capital sums expended in each year from 2006 to date in 2010 in respect of Waterford Regional Hospital, Mid-Western Regional Hospital, Limerick, Cork University Hospital, Mercy University Hospital, Cork, South Infirmery, Cork and Western Regional Hospital, Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40104/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The management and delivery of the health capital programme is a service matter for the Health Service Executive and the question has therefore been referred to the Executive for direct reply in relation to capital expenditure for projects in the counties Waterford, Limerick, Cork and Galway.

Question No. 263 answered with Question No. 260.

Hospital Services

264. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the health system here spends over four times more per year on the care of stroke patients in nursing homes than it does on providing stroke patients with acute hospital care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40128/10]

267. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she is aware that hundreds of lives could be saved each year, hundreds more stroke patients could be saved from institutionalisation and millions of euros of taxpayers' money could be saved through the wider availability of stroke unit care and thrombolysis treatment. [40131/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 264 and 267 together.

As these are service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

265. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the Cost of Stroke in Ireland report published by the Irish Heart Foundation shows that less than €7 million per year is currently spent on community rehabilitation for stroke patients, equivalent to the cost of one session of physiotherapy or speech and language therapy per person, despite the fact that this rehabilitation is essential in assisting persons in living independently after a stroke and in maintaining their quality of life; if her further attention has been drawn to the fact that it may not be possible to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of spending on community rehabilitation because data is not currently collected and collated by the health service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40129/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department is currently considering the Cost of Stroke report recently published by the Irish Heart Foundation. I intend to meet with the Irish Heart Foundation shortly to discuss this report.

266. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that patients in Clare, Limerick and north Tipperary covered by the mid-western hospital network have no access to 24-hour CT scanning; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40130/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Question No. 267 answered with Question No. 264.

Mental Health Services

268. **Deputy Deirdre Clune** asked the Minister for Health and Children the level of funding

[Deputy Deirdre Clune.]

provided to mental health each year since 2007; her plans to fund this area in 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40139/10]

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 2007.

Year	Mental health expenditure
	€ million
2007	1,000
2008	1,000
2009	1,000
2010	977 (estimated)

Source: Revised Estimates for Public Services.

The funding for mental health in 2011 will be considered in the context of the 2011 Estimates process for the health service over the coming weeks.

Hospital Services

269. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the decompression chamber located in Galway University Hospital is currently non-operational; the last time the decompression chamber was operational; the plans, if any, for the future use of the decompression chamber; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40142/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

National Treatment Purchase Fund

270. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of funding allocated from the National Treatment Purchase Fund to referrals from Letterkenny hospital in 2009 and to date in 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40151/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): As the Deputy's question relates to the operation of the National Treatment Purchase Fund, my Department has asked the chief executive of the fund to reply directly to the Deputy in relation to the information requested.

271. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the National Treatment Purchase Fund budget is currently being reviewed as part of the Government's preparations for budget 2011; if she will indicate, insofar as is possible within existing pre-budget guidelines, whether the budget is being targeted for cuts or whether she can guarantee that the budget will not be cut; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40152/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The allocation to the National Treatment Purchase Fund will be determined in the context of the estimates for 2011.

Medical Cards

272. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will arrange to have an application for a medical card reviewed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wexford. [40191/10]

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

273. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Health and Children the proposals, if any, she has in regard to health facilities on the island of Inishbiggle, County Mayo (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40196/10]

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 Facilities

274. **Deputy Mary Wallace** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the car park at Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15, has a parking ticket and clamping system in operation (details supplied); if she will raise the issue with the Health Service Executive with a view to considering a barrier system similar to that in operation at Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, under which persons pay at the barrier when exiting the hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40200/10]

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

275. **Deputy Edward O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will arrange for a service to be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) through the Health Service Executive south. [40216/10]

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.

Question No. 276 answered with Question No. 216.

Prescription Charges

277. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will review the prescription charges legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40233/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Since 1 October 2010, medical card holders have been required to pay a 50 cent 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.

The implementation and impact of the prescription charges will be kept under constant review.

Health Services

278. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will consider issues raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40239/10]

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.

279. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children how a medical card holder who has been denied treatment under the dental treatment services scheme is expected to obtain the treatment they need; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40240/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Government decided to limit the funding available to the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) in view of the current position of the public finances and the 60% increase in expenditure in the DTSS over the past five years. The Health Service Executive (HSE) has introduced measures to protect access to emergency dental care for medical card holders and to safeguard services for children and special needs groups. Services for high-risk patients and those requiring exceptional care continue to be available. The remaining care provision, which is subject to prior approval from a clinician in the HSE, prioritises — high risk and exceptional patients, — patients requiring emergency care, and — patients who are considered to have greater clinical urgency and/or necessity in receiving care.

Treatments that are not available under the DTSS may be obtained privately. While consultation fees for such treatments are a matter between individual dentists and their patients, I would expect dentists to have regard to the overall economic situation in setting such fees. My colleague the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation has also called on providers of professional services in the private sector to adjust their fees in line with the reductions in fees in the public sector.

Hospital Services

280. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the criteria (details supplied) her Department uses to determine whether a stroke service is an acute stroke unit; how compliance with these criteria is monitored and audited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40241/10]

281. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of the stroke services currently referred to by the Health Service Executive as stroke units which have the most basic of stroke care — a lead stroke consultant, a stroke nurse, 24-hour CT scanning and 24-hour thrombolysis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40242/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 280 and 281 together.

As these are service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Departmental Contracts

282. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children if any printing contracts for her Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract, if tendering took place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40252/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Department of Health and Children has not sent any printing jobs abroad in the past three years.

Hospital Services

283. **Deputy Seán Fleming** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Laois will undergo a surgical procedure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40280/10]

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.

284. **Deputy Seán Fleming** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) will be called for an appointment in respect of their need for a surgical procedure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40281/10]

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.

Medical Cards

285. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a medical card application will be decided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wexford [40305/10]

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

286. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a matter (details supplied) [40309/10]

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

287. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 13 [40310/10]

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

288. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3 [40311/10]

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 Bodies

289. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of high-level groups operating within her Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40338/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated within my Department and will be forwarded as soon as it is available.

Business Regulation

290. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if her Department has yet listed information obligations that her Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if her Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if her Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and, if so, the total cost [40353/10]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Department of Health and Children is a member of the Inter-Departmental Group, chaired by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation, on Administrative Burden Reduction.

To date the Department has identified 11 Information Obligations (I.O.s) arising from primary legislation and a further 8 Statutory Instruments in the area of food safety from which I.O.s may arise. These have yet to be ranked by reference to the level of impact on business.

In order to ensure consistency in measuring costs to business and reduce costs to individual Departments, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation has suggested that consultants be engaged to measure those I.O.s for all Departments and Agencies. A proposal in this regard will be put to Government shortly.

Public Transport

291. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Transport if he will give further details on the awarding of a licence for a route between Galway city centre and Knocknacarra; to whom this award has been given; if the offer has been accepted and his views on the way this will impact on those persons who currently provide a service for this route [39665/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The position regarding an application for a passenger road service in the Galway City area remains the same as stated in my reply to the Deputy's previous question, No. 321, on the matter as follows.

My Department is obliged to process any application received for an annual passenger license submitted under the 1932 Act. In considering the grant or refusal of an application, under Section 11(3)(a), I must have regard to whether the service in respect of which such application is made is required in the public interest having regard to the passenger road services available to the public on or in the neighbourhood of the route of the proposed service.

With regard to an application for a passenger road service in the Galway City area, a decision has been made taking into account all existing road passenger services on or in the neighbourhood of the proposed service. The applicant has been informed of my Department's decision and had been given time to accept or reject this decision. If the applicant rejects the decision, they have to be afforded the opportunity to lodge an appeal.

The details of the applicant and the application remain confidential until such time as the process has been completed.

Grant Payments

292. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Transport the persons or bodies in receipt

of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39686/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled and will be forwarded shortly.

Regional Airports

293. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport the position regarding the mid-lands regional airport project; the representations he has received on the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39698/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): As I have indicated in this House, private interests may develop airports in whatever location they wish provided that the requirements of the Irish Aviation Authority are met and that planning permission is secured. The financial demands of running an airport are very challenging and it is, of course, a matter for the promoters to satisfy themselves that a new airport can function as a viable commercial entity.

While representations have been made in relation to a proposed Midland Regional Airport my Department has no plans to support the development of any new airports.

Departmental Properties

294. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39809/10]

295. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39824/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 294 and 295 together.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for arranging office (and other) accommodation required for my Department. The issue of rental agreements and or leasing terms is a matter for the OPW.

A programme of rationalisation of office space used by my Department in Dublin has commenced, in conjunction with the OPW, with a view to reducing the number of buildings from five to three to ensure that the space allocated is used to the optimum capacity in line with good principles of property management.

Road Network

296. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Transport the total cost of the Dublin Port tunnel; the original estimated cost; the expenditure on lawyers' fees, on land costs, on reports and other ancillary costs connected to the development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39828/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme element of Transport 21. The planning,

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design, implementation and maintenance of individual national road projects, including the Dublin Port Tunnel, is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Departmental Correspondence

297. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport when he will respond to correspondence (details supplied) [39862/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department has raised the subject of the Deputy's letter with the Road Safety Authority, and a reply will issue to the Deputy shortly.

Departmental Expenditure

298. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Transport the savings that have been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39928/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department currently uses open source software packages on a limited scale. Developments in the area are carefully monitored and the possible use of such packages is considered in the context of upgrading the Department's Software Systems. It is estimated that the Department has saved approximately €4,650 by use of Open Source Software Packages.

My Department makes use of the central procurement service for Government Departments provided by the National Procurement Service. The contracts in place allow supplies to be ordered from the supplier's commercial catalogues at discounted prices and the Department makes use of generic consumables whenever possible. It is estimated that the Department has saved approximately €23,400 by the use of generic consumables.

Departmental Contracts

299. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract, if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40256/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The printing contracts awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years are as follows:

Contract	Year	Company appointed	Location	Amount of Contract	Tendering
Departmental File Cover and PQ Covers	2007	Enterprise Stationery Ltd	Northern Ireland	€ 1,746.39	Contract awarded under a Framework Agreement arranged by the Office of Public Works
Departmental File Cover and PQ Covers	2008	Enterprise Stationery Ltd	Northern Ireland	463.72	Contract awarded under a Framework Agreement arranged by the Office of Public Works
Vehicle Registration Certificates	2008	Joh. Enschede Security Print	The Netherlands	135,000	Contract tendered for by the Office of Public Works

Contract	Year	Company appointed	Location	Amount of Contract	Tendering
Reprint of the Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft	2008	Maritime Intelligence Ltd.	UK	€ 16,590	The 2008 contract was for a reprint of the safety publication which was the subject of a printing tendering process in 2006.
A booklet entitled "Powerboat" for the Irish Coastguard	2010	RNLI, Dorset	UK	3,698.51	Source directly from RNLI

Departmental Bodies

300. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Transport the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40342/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): There are working groups across my Department involved in the ongoing monitoring of various activities and which meet regularly. However, set out below is a list of high level working groups operating under a specific or sectoral agenda.

Name of Group	Purpose of group	Year was set up	Number of times group met
Transport 21 Monitoring Group	Monitor the implementation of projects and programmes provided for in Transport 21	2006	19
Steering Group	Report on the proposed merger of the National Roads Authority and the Railway Procurement Agency	2010	8
Irish Aeronautical and Maritime Emergency Advisory Committee (IAMEAC) (Formally known as MEAG)	To bring us into line with current International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)/ International Maritime Organisation (IMO) guidance on the co-ordination and oversight of State Aviation, Marine and Land Search and Rescue (SAR). It had its terms of reference amended to reflect current IAMSAR(International Aeronautical and Maritime search and rescue) Guidance on national SAR Committees	2010	Meet approx twice a year
The National Civil Aviation Security Committee (NCASC)	To advise the Government and the civil aviation industry of security policy for civil aviation, to recommend and review the effectiveness of security measures and to provide for co-ordination of the various interests involved	1974	Since the formation of the Department of Transport on 18th June 2002 this group has met 11 times

Business Regulation

301. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Transport if his Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if his Depart-

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ment has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if his Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and, if so, the total cost [40357/10]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): My Department is a member of the Inter-Departmental Group on Reduction of Administrative Burden. As the Deputy will be aware the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (D/ETI) continues to lead and coordinate this project. My Department has identified seven priority information obligations. In keeping with the timelines outlined by the D/ETI measurement is expected to be completed in 2011.

Citizenship Applications

302. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the reason the Garda national immigration bureau will not supply information to a person (details supplied); the procedures the person must undertake to ensure the information requested can be obtained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39669/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed that the person concerned has recently contacted her local immigration office. The immigration officer explained to her the periods of her residency in the State which are considered reckonable with regard to her child's application for Irish citizenship. 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.

Departmental Expenditure

303. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39682/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I can inform the Deputy that the information requested can not be readily disaggregated in the manner sought without applying a disproportionate use of resources. There are in the region of sixty subheads in my Department's Vote, covering the head office area and other areas of my Department together with a range of other bodies and services. The method of payments to these bodies varies, from direct payment of the expenditure arising from the Department's centralised accounting system for the most part, to payments of Grant-in-Aid in other cases. The allocation and associated expenditure for the offices and bodies in question is published annually in my Department's Appropriation Account. In addition, any such body required by statute, publishes and presents its accounts to the Oireachtas, as appropriate.

Residency Permits

304. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the reason a person

(details supplied) seeking to obtain a renewal of a permit has had to pay the stated fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39688/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The person who is subject of this question was granted permission to remain in the State pursuant to the provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, following consideration of an application made to the Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service (INIS) under the Irish Born Child Scheme (IBC/05). Such permission is granted subject to condition that the person receiving such permission does not contravene the laws of the State.

On 15th January 2010 the person attended at Kildare Garda Station to register a renewal of his permission to remain in the State under the IBC/05 Renewal Scheme 2010. However in view of an incident which resulted in the person being convicted of an offence contrary to the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act, 1994 and which is subject of an ongoing appeal, the Immigration Officer granted the person a permission for six months, pending the outcome of that appeal. A second permission, for six months, was again granted to the person on 19th August, 2010, as the appeal had still not been determined by the Courts.

The requirement to pay a prescribed fee in respect of the issuing of a registration certificate is provided for in the Immigration Act 2004 (Registration Certificate Fee) Regulations 2008 (S.I. No. 336/2008). The payment of this fee is not related to the period of validity of the registration certificate.

All visa required foreign nationals who wish to travel outside of the State must obtain a re-entry visa which will facilitate the person's return to the State. Comprehensive information relating to making an application for a re-entry visa is available on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (www.inis.gov.ie). The cost for a single journey re-entry visa is €60.00 whilst a multiple journey re-entry visa may be obtained at a fee of €100.00.

A multiple-re-entry visa can be applied for once the applicant is registered with the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB). It will be valid from the date of issue until the expiry date on the Registration Card issued by GNIB or the expiry date of the applicant's passport, whichever is the earliest (up to a maximum of 5 years).

I have been informed by officials in the Visa Section of my Department that there is no record of a current visa re-entry application having been received from the person referred to by the Deputy, nor is there any record of a fee of €200 having been received from the person concerned in this regard.

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

305. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number of outstanding applications for Garda clearance; the average processing time from receipt of an application to issuing a decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39706/10]

306. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform his views on the long delays in processing applications from care workers for Garda clearance; if he will allocate additional resources to eliminate the backlog of applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39707/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 305 and 306 together.

The Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) provides employment vetting for a large number of organisations in Ireland registered with the Gardaí for this purpose and which employ persons in a full-time, part-time, voluntary or training capacity to positions where they would have substantial, unsupervised access to children and/or vulnerable adults. The GCVU has managed a substantial increase over recent years in the numbers of vetting applications it receives — 187,864 in 2007; 218,404 in 2008 and 246,194 in 2009. At present, there are approximately 60,000 vetting applications in the course of being processed.

The processing time for vetting applications fluctuates in line with periods of increased demand. Furthermore, additional time may be required to process an individual vetting application in cases where clarification is required as to the details provided or where other enquiries need to be made, for example, when the person in question has lived and worked abroad. There will always be a reasonably significant time period required to process a vetting application. Registered organisations have been advised to take account of this in their recruitment and selection process. However, the Gardaí make every effort to reduce the time to the minimum possible consistent with carrying out the necessary checks. I am informed by the Garda Authorities that the current average processing time for vetting applications received at the GCVU is approximately 12 weeks.

The allocation of Garda resources, including personnel, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner. Due to the high volume of applications, an additional ten persons have recently been recruited to the Vetting Unit on a temporary basis. In addition, overall staffing arrangements at the Unit are kept under review.

Croke Park Agreement

307. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the proposals detailed in the action plan prepared by him relating to his Department under the terms of the Croke Park Agreement to bring about reform, efficiencies and financial savings in the justice and law reform area and the steps taken to date to agree implementation of what is proposed in the plan [39757/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 provides a sustainable framework to manage the provision and delivery of essential public services despite the reductions in public service numbers and in a period of unprecedented pressure on resources. Reflecting this, my Department's Action Plan is ambitious and contains measures, the implementation of which will bring about efficiencies over the period of the Agreement. These include

- Redeployment of staff where appropriate with regular reviews in the light of available resources, resulting in a better match of resources to priorities.
- Increased staff mobility and flexible opening times (where appropriate) to address unexpected demands, pressure points and changing priorities/requirements.
- Development of governance arrangements across the Justice Sector leading to a more integrated Justice system and improved performance.
- More effective use of IT/e-facilities leading to enhanced customer service and long term cost savings.

- Business process improvement leading to administrative efficiencies.
- Development of shared services approaches where possible.
- Use of Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) to drive performance and to deal with instances of underperformance.

The Plan has been submitted to the Department of Finance which will incorporate it, along with those of the Courts Service, the Legal Aid Board and the Property Registration Authority, as appropriate, into the Civil Service Action Plan.

A meeting of a sub-committee of my Department's Departmental Council is scheduled to take place on 3 November 2010 to progress implementation of the Plan in consultation with the Unions.

An Garda Síochána and the Irish Prisons Service report directly to their respective Implementation Bodies on this matter.

Garda Operations

308. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if he will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39762/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to these matters within the letter referred to by the Deputy which fall within the remit of my Department. I will contact the Deputy again when the report is to hand.

Proposed Legislation

309. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform his views on whether the policing and enforcement of gambling and gaming legislation is effective in view of that fact, that the law is being flagrantly flouted with slot machine operators trading without sanction on the high street; in view of the fact that the Government is considering the introduction of new legislation covering Internet operators, integral to which will be the effective enforcement on non-Irish based operators to protect Irish jobs, the way we can have any confidence that the legislation can or will be enforced, since we do not enforce against illegal gambling operators on our own doorstep [39791/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The fact that current law governing gaming is outdated and in need of reform if it is to reflect the realities of a modern gaming sector, including gaming over the internet, is one of the reasons why I initiated a review of gambling. That review is currently underway in my Department and addresses reform of the gaming and other sectors.

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. As I have already pointed out in this House, in reply to previous Questions, 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 feel we must take 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

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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.

While taxation is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Finance, it can be anticipated that as far as regulatory compliance is concerned there will be no question of disadvantaging domestic or Irish operators.

As the Deputy is no doubt aware, and as I have pointed out on previous occasions in this House, it is a matter for the Garda Síochána to investigate breaches of our current gaming legislation and to take whatever action is deemed appropriate. I have been assured that gaming premises receive Garda attention and if breaches of the legislation are detected appropriate action is taken. I invite the Deputy, if he has information about any specific breaches of the relevant provisions of the Acts, to bring this to the attention of the Gardaí. I can assure the Deputy, however, that should the law need to be changed to ensure an appropriate level of enforcement or control of gaming, I will not hesitate to do so as part of the outcome of the review of gambling currently underway. In that context, may I say that following the settling of 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.

310. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 184 of 29 April 2010 in which he stated that it was not his Department's responsibility to legislate against forced marriage if he will reconsider his reply in view of reports of two Latvian women being trafficked into Ireland and falsely imprisoned for the purpose of forcing them into marriage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39794/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am of course aware of the case to which the Deputy refers. As he will understand, this matter is the subject of an ongoing Garda investigation and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the specific aspects of the case or on any possible criminal charges that might arise. Also, as I outlined in my earlier reply, my Department does not have responsibility for marriage registration. That said however, I can outline the general position in the criminal law where a person is held against their will with a view of forcing them into marriage. There is not on the statute book a composite offence of holding someone against their will with a view to forcing them to marry. However a person who engages in this activity would be in breach of existing criminal laws in respect of its constituent elements.

False imprisonment, which essentially consists of restricting the personal liberty of another person, is an offence under section 15 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 and carries a life sentence. Unlawfully intimidating a person with a view to compelling him or her to do something which he or she has a right not to do, e.g. attend a marriage ceremony, amounts to coercion, which is an offence under section 9 of the 1997 Act punishable by a fine and up to five years in prison.

The seriousness of the offence of false imprisonment is also marked by the additional provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 2007. The 2007 Act allows for a person suspected of false imprisonment to be detained by Gardai for investigative purposes for up to seven days (subject to judicial authorisation). It also provides for the courts to make Monitoring Orders for persons convicted of false imprisonment. Courts may also make Protection Of Persons Orders prohibiting offenders from engaging in any behaviour that would cause the victim of the offence fear, distress, alarm or intimidation. The same Act provides mandatory minimum sentences for repeat offenders.

The whole area of marriages of convenience is a complex one and there are no easy solutions. It is a question of adopting a number of complementary strategies including international police co-operation. In addition to the criminal sanctions as outlined above, where coercion is found in time then the marriage can be prevented. If a marriage has taken place and is later found to have involved coercion then any immigration benefit can be withdrawn.

Departmental Properties

311. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39805/10]

312. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39820/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 311 and 312 together.

I am not in a position to provide the information sought by the Deputy at this time, but will do as soon as the information is available.

Departmental Correspondence

313. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if he will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39897/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I confirm that the correspondence referred to has been received. A response will issue this week to the person concerned.

Departmental Expenditure

314. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the savings that have been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39925/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I can inform the Deputy my Department has deployed various software applications, including open source packages, to

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ensure the efficient conduct of its business. All software applications are monitored to ensure that the Department continues to obtain maximum return on its investment. Purchases are made solely on the lowest price for a suitable product at any given time; brand is not a factor in product purchase. The volume of generic or branded consumables purchased is not recorded.

Visa Applications

315. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the current visa arrangements applicable to Chinese citizens who wish to attend a recognised school or third level college here and to visit Ireland as tourists; the reforms, if any, he intends to introduce to make it easier for Chinese tourists to visit the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39953/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Comprehensive guidance in relation to the current visa arrangements applicable to Chinese citizens are available on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (www.inis.gov.ie).

As with all visas in all countries worldwide, the central concern is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country's vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime, while at the same time not placing unnecessary or unreasonable obstacles in the way of those who intend travelling for legitimate purposes and who are likely to abide by the terms of their visa. Each visa application is decided on its individual merits and I believe that, in most cases, my Department achieves this balance.

Currently, straightforward 'visit' visa applications are being decided upon within 10 working days by the Visa Office, Beijing. The decision time frame is even shorter where applications are lodged via a Chinese government approved tourist agent, such applications being decided upon within 1-3 working days. The current processing time for straightforward 'study' visa applications is 20 working days.

My Department continually examines ways in which the visa process can facilitate the promotion of tourism in the State, including in cooperation with the United Kingdom with whom we have a common travel area, in conformity with the needs of an effective immigration regime. In this respect, as the Deputy will be aware, a document entitled "New Immigration Regime For Full Time Non-EEA Students" was launched by the Government on 22 September. This was in tandem with the Government's 5 year strategy document "Investing in Global Relationships — Ireland's International Education Strategy 2010–15". Copies of these documents are available from the websites of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service and the Department of Education and Skills respectively.

Proposed Legislation

316. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if the legislation is being prepared to facilitate this State to ratify the Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance adopted on the 23 November 2007 to better facilitate the international enforcement of spousal maintenance and child support orders; the reason for the delay in preparing such legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39954/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance will not come into force until it is ratified by two states. It has yet to be ratified by any state. In a parallel development Council Regulation (EC) No. 4/2009 on jurisdiction, applicable law,

recognition and enforcement of decisions and cooperation in matters relating to maintenance obligations will apply from 18 June 2011, as between Member States of the EU. Many of the provisions in the Regulation mirror those contained in the Convention.

Discussions are taking place in Brussels as to the feasibility of the Convention being ratified by the Community as a whole as opposed to by individual Member States of the EU. Until a final decision has been reached on this, it would not be possible to decide on the actual content of any legislation that may be needed to give effect to the Hague Convention in our relations with non-EU countries which may ratify the Convention.

317. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the progress made to date in cross-Border discussions with regard to the management of sex offenders between Northern Ireland and this State; the legislation, if any, he proposes to introduce to facilitate the harmonisation of laws in practice in both Northern Ireland and this State in this area; the differences to date identified between the two jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39955/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Arrangements for the management of registered sex offenders is a matter which I discuss regularly with the Northern Ireland Minister of Justice, including under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters. We share a determination that the border should not be used in any way by such individuals to evade their obligations. To this end there is close co-operation between the two police forces and probation services.

The management of registered sex offenders is one of the discrete areas of co-operation under the Agreement. A Registered Offenders Project Advisory Group, co-chaired by senior members of An Garda Síochána and PSNI and including representatives of other relevant criminal justice agencies, takes directly responsibility for ensuring that the two jurisdictions work closely together on this issue. This work is overseen by the Working Group which co-ordinates overall policy in relation to North-South criminal justice co-operation and which reports directly to Ministers.

The Sex Offenders Act 2001 already contains a comprehensive series of provisions aimed at protecting children and other persons. The Act makes persons convicted of a range of sexual offences subject to notification requirements. The provisions of the Act also extend to any offenders convicted abroad of the same range of sexual offences who enter the State, including from Northern Ireland.

My Department is working on proposals for the greater approximation of the laws North and South of the border in relation to the respective notification systems so that sex offenders can gain no advantage living either side of the border. Currently, the notification period for the purposes of the sex offenders register in this jurisdiction is 7 days. I propose to reduce this period to 3 days to bring it into line with requirements in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

An Garda Síochána has a system in place for the monitoring of all persons subject to the current requirements. The Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit monitors and manages the notification provisions. The Unit maintains all information relating to persons who have obligations under the Act.

The Probation Service works closely with An Garda Síochána and has developed common risk assessment instruments related to the management of sex offenders which match those used by the probation and police services in Northern Ireland. Best practice indicates that

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different jurisdictions as well as different agencies within jurisdictions should use the same risk assessment instruments so as to support effective communication.

An Garda Síochána and the PSNI maintain close contact and exchange intelligence on convicted sex offenders. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Irish and British Governments in 2006 on the sharing between An Garda Síochána and British police forces, including the PSNI, of information on sex offenders. An Garda Síochána and the PSNI have subsequently signed an agreement on the sharing of personal data in relation to the investigation of sexual offences and the monitoring of sex offenders.

318. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the steps being taken by the Garda Síochána to counteract the upsurge in the use of illegal mobile phone jammers; if they are being used by gangland criminals during bank raids to prevent persons from calling the Garda Síochána; his views that the current law is adequate to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39956/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed that a person may be prosecuted summarily or on indictment for the offence of using any apparatus for the purpose of interfering with any wireless telegraphy. The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), which is under the aegis of the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, has a range of powers to monitor and enforce the laws prohibiting the supply, possession and use of mobile phone blockers. These include powers to enter and search premises, seize any such blockers that are found, initiate prosecutions and prosecute summary offences. The governing legislation is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. I have also requested a report from the Garda authorities setting out the current position insofar as they are concerned and I will contact the Deputy again when the report is to hand.

Asylum Applications

319. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the position regarding the announced review into the cases of asylum seekers who are waiting five years or more to receive a final decision on applications made to continue residing here; the number of individuals in such circumstances; when the review will be complete and to detail the purpose of the review. [39957/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): My Department did not announce a review of the nature referred to by the Deputy. On a regular and ongoing basis my Department assesses the cases on hand to ensure that, as far as possible, persons who are waiting for a decision for the longest periods have their cases finalised first.

By way of clarification, the cases referred to by the Deputy are those at the repatriation stage of the asylum/immigration process i.e. where persons who have failed in their application for refugee status and have had their asylum claims rejected proceed to submit an application for Subsidiary Protection and/or written representations for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). Approximately 1,100 cases in the system are there five years or more following the finalisation of their asylum application. This represents some 11% of all such cases. It should be borne in mind that many of these cases are the subject of legal actions instigated by the applicants which must first be dealt with by the Courts before my Department can proceed to finalise them.

Garda Equipment

320. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number of water cannons available to security forces; when and from where they were procured; the circumstances that would lead to these being put into operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40086/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am advised by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána does not currently possess water cannon. The provision of equipment for the Force is, of course, primarily a matter for the Garda Commissioner.

Departmental Properties

321. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform, further to Parliamentary Question No. 233 of 7 July 2010, if he will provide an update; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40100/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I can inform the Deputy that the Irish Prison Service are developing proposals for the utilisation of the facilities at Harristown House beside Castlerea Prison. These proposals will entail the provision of enhanced regime opportunities for approximately 20 prisoners within a secure setting. The proposals are currently being evaluated and costed with a view to submitting a business case to my Department.

Visa Applications

322. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform, further to Parliamentary Question No. 355 of 19 October 2010, if he will detail what a visa transaction is; the number of persons granted visas to enable them to enter Ireland for the purpose of attending a full-time higher education course in each of the years 2007, 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010. [40108/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): A visa transaction, as referred to in my reply to Parliamentary Question 355 on 19 October 2010 is a single visa application. When completing the first stage of the visa application process (an on-line visa application form) an applicant is assigned a unique visa transaction number. This detail is unique to the application concerned and must be provided where a query on the status or other inquiry regarding a visa application arises. The provision of this unique visa transaction number ensures that accurate and current information is provided to the authorised inquirer.

It is worth reiterating that the figures referred to in my response to Parliamentary Question 355 relate to visa transactions, for non-EEA nationals, resulting in approval decisions and do not refer to unique individuals. There may be instances where a visa applicant may have made multiple applications. Each of these would count as a transaction but, for the reasons outlined above, it cannot be taken that the number of transactions equals the number of persons granted visas in any one year.

For those students requiring a visa, while the subject to be studied and the level of qualification to be obtained are essential considerations in deciding individual study visa applications, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) does not routinely produce statistical reports of visa applications using the parameters of course title, awarding body or level of qualification. Although the information requested by the Deputy is, therefore, not readily available, analysis carried out as part of the Final Report and Recommendations into a New Immigration Regime for Full-Time Non-EEA Students may be useful. This analysis showed that

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there were 12,555 non-EEA students enrolled in higher education courses in October 2008, 13,412 in March 2009 and 12,888 in March 2010.

Residency Permits

323. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number of non-EU nationals who have applied for continuing residency here this year to date as a spouse who has married a non-Irish EU national here; the breakdown of the nationality and gender of the applicants and their EU spouses; the nationalities and number of applicants granted such residence to date; the numbers awaiting decision; the numbers refused such residency and the reasons for such refusal. [40126/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I should point out that the applications referred to by the Deputy can be based on marriages which do not necessarily have to have taken place in Ireland. My Department does not keep records in such a way that would allow the ready separation of applications based on the location of the marriage. Records in relation to the number of non-EU nationals who married in Ireland in 2010 are held by the General Registrars Office which is under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection.

However, I can inform the Deputy that to end-September 2010 there were 1,950 applications made by non-EU nationals for residency under EU Treaty Rights, of which 1,487 involved spousal applications. For the same period in 2010 there were 1,193 applications granted, with 542 applications being refused and 167 not accepted or withdrawn. Some of these decisions would have related to applications carried over from 2009. At the end of September 2010, there were 1,158 applications on hands awaiting a decision.

Refusals were due to non-compliance with Directive 2004/35/EC on the rights of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States (the “Directive”) and the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2006 and 2008 (the “Regulations”) which transposed the Directive into Irish law.

My Department has prepared statistical information in response to your query including a table giving a breakdown by applications based on marriage by the top ten applicants by nationality and by spousal nationality for 2010 and a further two tables give the top ten nationality and gender analysis of EU Treaty Rights applicants based on marriage for 2010. The Deputy will appreciate that the details in this regard are too extensive for inclusion on the normal electronic system for answering Parliamentary Questions. I have, however, made arrangements to have this portion of my reply delivered under separate cover to the Deputy in manuscript form.

For the Deputy’s information, certain information on the situation this year, up to 30 September 2010, has been extrapolated from the statistical tables prepared. Pakistani nationals have made the most applications — 286 — based on marriage to an EU citizen with 128 of those applications based on marriage to a Latvian national. Of those 286 Pakistani applicants, 266 were male and 20 were female. The second highest number of applications was made by Nigerian nationals with 185 applications being made based on marriage to an EU citizen with 40 of those applications based on being married to a English national. Of those 185 Nigerian applicants, 121 were male and 64 were female. In total, 293 Latvian spouses have been attached to applications for EU Treaty Rights with 47 being male and 246 being female. There were 227 English spouses attached to applications for EU Treaty Rights with 118 being male and 109 being female.

Asylum Applications

324. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform when a person (details supplied) in County Limerick can expect a decision on their application for residency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40155/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): 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 29th January, 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 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. Representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

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. This case will be processed to completion as soon as possible.

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.

Departmental Expenditure

325. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the cost of providing security by members of the Garda Síochána to ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps while living in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40172/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am advised by the Garda authorities that the information sought by the Deputy is not readily available and would have to be specially compiled. I have also been informed that this would require the deployment of substantial resources and, in the circumstances, I regret that I am not in a position to provide the relevant details.

Residency Permits

326. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if he will review an application for a stamp four for a person (details supplied), in view of the fact that this person has been resident here since January 2002 therefore satisfying the condition that an applicant has completed five years or 60 months legal residency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40175/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): An application for Long Term Residency from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in my Department on 14 September 2010.

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Long Term Residency is granted on the basis that a non-EEA national has completed five years legal residency in the State on work permit work/work authorisation/working visa conditions. Residency is calculated from the corresponding Stamp 1 or Stamp 4 endorsements in an applicant's passport and not by the dates of commencement and expiry of each work permit. Periods of time where a person has not had legal residency cannot be counted in any application for Long Term Residency. On this basis, the person referred had less than one year's applicable residence and did not satisfy the criteria for obtaining Long Term Residency. A letter setting out the position in this regard issued to the person concerned on 26/10/2010. It is of course open to him to reapply for Long Term Residency when he satisfies the above-mentioned 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.

Asylum Applications

327. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry can expect a decision on their application for permission to stay in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40179/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The person concerned applied for asylum on 9 August 2004. In accordance with Section 9 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended), he was entitled to remain in the State until his application for asylum was decided. His asylum application was refused following consideration of his case by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and, on appeal, the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

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 29th November, 2005, 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 him. Representations were received on his behalf at that time.

On 8th March, 2010, a formal "take back" request was received from the Belgian immigration authorities in respect of the person concerned, in accordance with the provisions of the Dublin II Regulations. This request was made because the person concerned had made an application for asylum in Belgium. This request was accepted and arrangements were made for his return from Belgium on 25th May, 2010.

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. The case of the person concerned is amongst a sizeable number of such cases which are awaiting a decision at present. However, the Deputy can be assured that this case will be processed to completion as soon as possible.

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.

Registration of Title

328. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to the concerns which have been expressed about the operation of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 and in particular sections 35 to 39 thereof relating to unregistered easements which may be extinguished if not registered by agreement or confirmed by court order prior to 31 December 2012 which may result in title uncertainties and legal conflicts all over the country; if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that the Law Society conveyancing committee has now raised concerns in this regard; if he will establish a group to examine the issue and advise in good time on any appropriate amendment to the Bill [40213/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The position is that my Department has recently received a submission from the Law Society’s Conveyancing Committee in relation to this matter. The issues raised in the submission are being examined at present.

Residency Permits

329. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the position regarding an application for residency in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40215/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my detailed Reply to his earlier Parliamentary Question, No. 522 of Tuesday, 20th April, 2010, in this matter. The person concerned now falls to be considered for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006. 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 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

330. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform his plans to initiate the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40227/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am in consultation with the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Social Protection with a view to commencing the

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Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 as soon as possible, consistent with the need to make provision in the tax and social welfare codes for civil partners.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

331. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number and job description of persons who have been vetted by the Garda vetting unit for each of the past three years who are at present employed in first and second level education in any capacity full-time, part-time or temporary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40232/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): In the education sector the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) provides employment vetting in respect of persons who are applicants for paid, voluntary and student placement positions in this sector. A number of organisations operating in the education sector are registered with the GCVU for vetting purposes. All vetting applications must be submitted through one of these registered organisations.

The Garda Central Vetting Unit does not maintain records of placements or employment received by vetting subjects with the organisations which have sought the vetting. That is a matter for the organisations themselves. It is, therefore, not possible to give the information sought by the Deputy. In addition it would take a disproportionate amount of Garda resources and time to provide details of the number of Vetting Applications received from registered organisations within the Primary and Secondary education sector which were processed by the GCVU during the last three years.

Departmental Procurement

332. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40253/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): My Department uses only one company outside of Ireland for printing purposes. The work in question is in respect of the printing of visa stickers. The company, based in Paris, has successfully produced Irish visa stickers for several years on behalf of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service. A core consideration in accessing such services is that the company is a recognised and reputable provider of such visa stickers to several European countries. In order to minimise illegal immigration and fraud, visa stickers utilise a range of essential and complex security features such as hologram, unique serial number identification and other specialised printing features, and they must conform to a very detailed EU standard.

Visa Applications

333. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform when a holiday visa will be processed in respect of a person (details supplied) who intends to travel here for a two week holiday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40273/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am advised by Officials in the Visa Office of my Department that the visa transaction number provided by the Deputy does not correspond with the visa transaction number for the person referred to. Perhaps if the Deputy clarifies the application which is the subject of his question my Department will endeavour to provide the requested information.

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.

Deportation Orders

334. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) who was deported to Nigeria at midnight on 28 October 2010 had been promised by the Garda National Immigration Bureau that a medical professional would personally examine their child prior to the deportation to ensure their fitness to travel; if he will confirm if any such examination by a medical professional took place prior to the deportation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40316/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I can confirm that the family in question including the minor referred to by the Deputy were returned to Nigeria on 28 October 2010. The minor was medically examined prior to the flight's departure by a doctor who was aware of the child's full medical history and deemed him fit to fly home with his family. On arrival in Nigeria, the child was again medically examined by the same doctor (who had travelled on the flight) and who raised no concerns.

Departmental Bodies

335. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40339/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I can inform the Deputy that in November 2007, a High Level Group chaired by an Assistant Secretary, involving An Garda Síochána, the Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service and the National Office for the Prevention of Sexual, Domestic and Gender-based Violence (Cosc) was established in my Department. Their role was to examine the current arrangements in place for the management of sex offenders with a view to strengthening inter-agency cooperation and further enhancing public protection and safety. Their remit included a review of the procedures and legislation relating to the assessment, monitoring and supervision of convicted sex offenders. In January, 2009 the group published a discussion document and following that, a response document was published on 11 October, 2010. The Group has met on 17 occasions since its establishment.

Business Regulation

336. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice and Law Reform if his Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if his Department has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if his Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost [40354/10]

Minister for Justice and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I wish to inform the Deputy that my Department was represented on an Inter-Departmental Group established and chaired

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by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation to oversee and monitor progress on reducing the administrative burden of regulations on Irish-based business by 25%.

My Department has fully participated in the process to identify and reduce administrative burdens based on guidance from the lead Department, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. Officials from my Department and agencies have attended training sessions, participated at bilateral and Inter-Departmental Group meetings and followed up on any queries raised by officials from the lead Department. As the Deputy will be aware, the first phase of the Administrative Burdens reduction process involved the identification and listing of information obligations/administrative burdens while it was proposed that a second phase would deal with the detailed measurement and simplification of such burdens.

Under phase one, a comprehensive examination of all information obligations and administrative burdens placed on business was carried out in all divisions and agencies within my Department's remit. My Department did not find any measures in place which imposed unfair or unnecessary burdens on business. Because my Department did not identify administrative burdens that required further action as part of the prioritised approach it was not necessary to proceed to the second phase. The lead Department was advised of this position in writing. My Department continues to participate in the Inter-Departmental Group.

EU Treaties

337. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on the likelihood of a new EU constitutional treaty to facilitate putting the *ad hoc* fiscal stability fund agreed in June 2010 on a permanent basis, and to also facilitate the development of an orderly insolvency procedure in the eurozone, and to allow for sanctions against member states who are in excessive deficit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39645/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The report of the Task Force on economic governance chaired by President Herman van Rompuy covers issues of increased fiscal discipline and of a permanent crisis mechanism. These matters were also the subject of a statement on 18 October made by President Sarkozy and Chancellor Merkel when they met in Deauville. The European Council meeting of 28-29 October considered these matters in depth. The Taoiseach participated in these deliberations.

The European Council endorsed the report of the Task Force and called for rapid adoption of legislation to implement its recommendations. These include inter alia measures to provide for sanctions against member states in the excessive deficit procedure. The European Council agreed on the need for the member states to establish a permanent crisis mechanism. It invited the President of the European Council to undertake consultations on a limited treaty change to give effect to this, while specifying that article 125 of the Treaty on Functioning of the EU (the "no bail-out" clause) should not be modified in the process.

The Commission is to undertake preparatory work on the general features of a new mechanism including the role of the private sector, the role of the IMF and the very strong conditionality that would apply to associated programmes. The European Council is to return to the matter in December with a view to taking a decision on treaty amendment so that a change can be ratified by mid-2013 at the latest. It is intended that the change to the Treaty be limited, and it would not give rise to a new EU Constitutional Treaty.

Foreign Conflicts

338. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has

been drawn to reports that preparations for the referendum to decide the future of south Sudan and the peoples of that region due to take place on 9 January 2011 have not been adequate; the action Ireland is taking bilaterally and through the EU to ensure that preparations are supported to ensure the process is legitimate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39657/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The north-south peace process in Sudan is at a critical juncture as the country prepares for a referendum on self-determination for the South and a separate referendum on the status of the district of Abyei on 9 January 2011. The referenda are envisaged by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which brought an end to the north-south conflict in Sudan. Ireland and the EU believe that full implementation of the CPA is fundamental to securing peace and stability in Sudan as a whole and in the wider region. This is a position shared by a wide range of countries, including the United States and the Member States of the African Union.

Preparations for the two referenda have commenced. Voter registration will begin on 14 November and the electoral register is scheduled to be finalised on 31 November. The Referendum Commission for South Sudan has commenced its work and preparation of approximately 3,600 polling stations in Sudan is underway. Electoral materials have been prepared and pre-positioned within Sudan for distribution to the polling stations. However, much remains to be achieved in the remaining time, in particular arrangements for the conduct of the referendum in Abyei, which remain to be agreed between the two sides. Further progress is also needed on clarifying a number of ‘post-referendum’ issues, in particular citizenship arrangements, delimitation of the border between North and South Sudan and agreement on sharing of oil revenues, to enable voters to make an informed choice when they go to the polls in January.

The three-member panel appointed by UN Secretary General Ban to monitor the referendum identified this and a number of other concerns following their visit to Sudan last month. The panel members called on the Government of Sudan and the Government of South Sudan to take all necessary steps to ensure the conditions necessary for the successful conduct of both referenda. They expressed the view that, should these efforts be made, it is still possible to hold both referenda according to the original timetable.

In view of the importance attached to a peaceful and orderly referendum process in Sudan, the international community has intensified its efforts to facilitate progress on the issue of the two referenda. Efforts are underway to prepare for a further round of talks in Ethiopia between the two parties which it is hoped will resume soon under the auspices of the African Union. Preparations are also underway for a summit meeting on Sudan of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which comprises six countries in east Africa including Sudan, in Addis Ababa on 6 November. A meeting of the Consultative Forum on Sudan is also foreseen.

It is hoped that these initiatives will help the parties reach agreement on the necessary arrangements for the two referenda. The UN continues to play a lead role in coordinating international assistance to the Sudanese authorities through the UN mission in Sudan. The Security Council heard a report on the situation in Sudan on 25 October which reviewed the state of preparations for the two polls. The EU Special Representative to Sudan, Rosalind Marsden, is playing an active role in encouraging both sides to fulfil their obligations under the CPA. The EU will deploy an Election Observation Mission to Sudan, to cover both the voter registration process and the referendum and preparations for this mission have already begun.

Nationally, Ireland attaches considerable importance to a peaceful and orderly referendum process. This was one of the pressing issues I highlighted in my address to the UN General

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Assembly last month and personnel from our Embassy have also recently visited South Sudan to review the situation on the ground. In September last, Ireland participated in a meeting with the Government of Southern Sudan hosted by the European Commission in Brussels. The meeting offered an opportunity for the Government of Southern Sudan to outline its plan for capacity building and consolidation of governance during the remainder of the interim period of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which is due to conclude in July 2011, as well as its longer term vision.

The humanitarian situation in Sudan as a whole remains a matter of deep concern. In particular, the humanitarian situation in South Sudan continues to be one of the worst in the world, where even basic needs often go unmet. Ireland will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of South Sudan. Ireland has provided over €35 million since 2008 for humanitarian and recovery projects across Sudan, including in Darfur and South Sudan.

Overseas Elections

339. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the next general election in Angola is due to take place in 2012; if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that the last election in 2008 was judged by some observers to be illegitimate; the steps Ireland is taking directly and through the EU to ensure that preparations for the election in 2012 and the elections themselves will be free, fair and legitimate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39658/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Angola's first parliamentary election since 1992, and only the second since 1975, took place in September 2008. The ruling MPLA party won a landslide majority in the 2008 general election, with 82% of votes and a total of 191 seats out of 220. This gave it a two-thirds majority in Parliament. An EU election observation mission at the time said that they represented a 'positive step towards strengthening democracy', despite some organisational weaknesses and state control of the media. While the EU mission welcomed the peaceful conduct of the elections it did not go as far as describing them as free and fair and made several recommendations in its final report, including strengthening the impartiality of the National Elections Commission (CNE).

The 2008 elections, though subject to these caveats, represented an important milestone for Angola on the route to democracy. Turnout was estimated at over 75%, which was a demonstration of the Angolan people's enthusiasm for the democratic process. That the elections passed off peacefully is significant given that the results of the only previous election in Angola in 1992 were violently disputed, leading to the re-intensification of the civil war. The next round of Parliamentary elections is due to take place in 2012. In relation to possible international assistance for these elections, the EU-Angola Country Strategy Paper for the period 2008-2013 allows for support to the Angolan electoral cycle, in areas of voter education and capacity-building to key institutions, including the National Electoral Commission. EU assistance, including a possible electoral observation mission, is dependent on a request being made by the national authorities.

On a broader level, the promotion of democratic accountability and equality in order to ensure equitable and sustainable development is a policy priority of the Irish overseas aid programme. Our work in this area includes participation in election monitoring and support; support for parliaments and parliamentary reform; support for strengthened public financial management systems and oversight bodies; and support for civil society, including independent media. Irish Aid will continue to prioritise support to this important area and help to ensure effective, equitable and accountable governance in developing countries, particularly in Africa.

Overseas Development Aid

340. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the steps he is taking to ensure that Ireland meets its 0.7% target of GNP in overseas aid by 2015; the timeline for delivering on this commitment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39666/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Peter Power): Ireland has committed to the UN target to provide 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) to Official Development Assistance (ODA) by 2015. 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 the commitment by all parties to stabilising the public finances and 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.

Departmental Expenditure

341. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39680/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): There are a number of different schemes operating in my Department which administer grant funding: the Irish Aid programme, Ireland's programme of official development assistance; the Emigrant Support Programme; the Reconciliation Fund for North-South and Anglo-Irish Co-operation; the Anti-Sectarianism Fund; the Communicating Europe Initiative; the Cultural Programme; and the Asia Strategy. In addition to this there are a number of grants which are given to specific projects, programmes or organisations such as the Atlantic Corridor Project; the Irish College in Paris; the Fulbright Commission; the European Movement Ireland, Title V of the Treaty on European Union Grants, and the Documents in Irish Foreign Policy Project.

Appropriate financial procedures and regulations are followed in relation to all funding provided by my Department, including, where appropriate, the requesting of certified or audited annual accounts and tax clearance certificates. Many of the schemes are aimed at civil society organisations, most of whom are not required to publish annual accounts. In cases where the

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provision of the grant or subvention is on a statutory basis and requires the placement of the accounts in the library of the Oireachtas, this is done.

In some instances it has not been possible, in the time available, to provide the detail requested relating to funding in the year payments commenced. Details can be provided to the Deputy at a later stage if required.

Irish Aid

The Government is providing a total of €671m for Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2010. Of this, €536m is administered by my Department, which manages the Government's development cooperation programme. Under Vote 29 (International Cooperation), Irish Aid, which is based in the Development Cooperation Division of the Department, provides funding to a wide range of partners, including developing country partner governments, UN Agencies and other Multilateral and International Organisations, development Non-Governmental and Missionaries Organisations, and other civil society groups.

Funding is provided through various aid modalities and funding schemes managed by the aid programme. The clear focus of the programme, and funding allocation, is the alleviation of poverty, with a particular concentration on meeting fundamental needs, including food security, access to safe water, primary health care and access to basic education. Approximately 95% of the overall funding allocated to Vote 29 in 2010 is managed through Grant or Grants in Aid funding schemes. The balance is allocated to meet the costs associated with the management, oversight and administration of the aid programme.

The main funding schemes, together with overall allocations for 2010, are summarised as follows.

Irish Aid — Overall Breakdown of Types of Grants 2010

	€ million
Bilateral Priority Partner Countries	190.3
Other Bilateral countries	16.8
Civil Society Funding Schemes including the Multi-Annual Programme funding scheme	101.6
Development Education and Public Information, including the Strategic partnership with Irish Third Level Institutions	11.5
Global Initiatives in the areas of Health, Education, HIV and AIDS, Food Security, Governance, Gender and Environment,	38.9
Recovery and support to Fragile States	20.5
Emergency Humanitarian Assistance	54.0
Contributions to Multilateral and other International Organisations including Voluntary Contributions to UN Agencies	67.5

Detailed information on expenditure, including organisations and projects funded, under Vote 29 and Ireland's total Overseas Development Programme is provided annually in the Irish Aid Annual Report <http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/publications—report>, which is placed in the Library.

Emigrant Support Programme

Following the 2002 report of the Task Force on policy regarding emigrants, the Government decided that the Department of Foreign Affairs would have lead responsibility for support services to emigrants and Irish communities abroad. My Department's Emigrant Support Prog-

ramme (ESP) provides grant funding to Irish community organisations abroad, and in particular to organisations which support vulnerable members of those communities. The Irish Abroad Unit, established in my Department in 2004, has responsibility for making recommendations on funding.

In 2004, the first financial year for which my Department had lead responsibility for emigrant services grants, a total of €5,047,038 was provided to organisations giving assistance to Irish community groups abroad and those working with Irish emigrants. A list of these grants is included below. To date in 2010 grants totalling €10,405,866 have been provided through the ESP. The table below summarises the regions and organisations to which the funds have been paid to date this year.

All funding awarded under the ESP is approved for specific purposes, based on the applications received. The application process requires organisations to complete an on-line application form which includes the submission of their most recent accounting statements. In addition, organisations are required to submit by an agreed date a progress report, including financial details, on the project undertaken, and detailing how the project has contributed towards the achievement of the aims of the Emigrant Support Programme.

Reconciliation Fund & Anti-Sectarianism Fund

My Department funds cross community and cross border projects through its Reconciliation and Anti Sectarianism Funds. The Reconciliation Fund was established in 1982 and the Anti Sectarianism Fund was launched in 2008. The purpose of these Funds is to assist organisations involved in reconciliation work and efforts to create better understanding between people on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain, and to assist local initiatives aimed at tackling sectarianism. Up to €3 million has been allocated for both Funds in 2010. To date, €1.92 million has been awarded to 77 organisations, details of which are included below. A further round of funding will be announced shortly. All awards are published via press release on my Department's website (www.dfa.ie). The Funds receive applications from a variety of different organisations and successful applicants vary from year to year.

Each grant recipient must provide my Department with a written, detailed report of the project undertaken. All recipients of grant aid in excess of €12,500 must provide audited accounts on completion of the project. A Tax Clearance Certificate is required for grants in excess of €10,000. In addition to these procedures, officials from my Department regularly visit projects to assess suitability for funding.

Promoting Ireland Abroad Grants

Under the Cultural grant-in-aid funding of my Department, which is administered by the Promoting Ireland Abroad Division, support is provided in the form of annual grants to two bodies, the Ireland-United States Commission for Educational Exchange (known as the Fulbright Commission) and the Irish Cultural Centre in Paris, as well as for cultural activity by the Embassy network. The Fulbright Commission supports study, research, teaching and other educational activities between Ireland and the United States and the programme in Ireland was established in 1957. It was originally funded with £500,000, drawn from the original American Grant Counterpart Account of £6,000,000 given to Ireland, pursuant to the Economic Cooperation Agreement of 1948. In 2010, funding of €254,000 has been provided by my Department.

The funding is used to support scholarships to Irish citizens to study and research in the United States and for US citizens to study and research in Ireland. In accordance with the Educational Exchange (Ireland and the United States of America) Act, a copy of the Report

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of the Comptroller and Auditor General and of the audited accounts of the Fulbright Commission are lodged annually with both Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Centre Culturel Irlandais (Irish Cultural Centre) in the Irish College in Paris promotes cultural and educational exchange between France and Ireland. The college dates from the 16th century and, following a major refurbishment in 2001-2002 the Centre Culturel Irlandais was formally inaugurated in October 2002. A grant of €130,000 was provided by my Department in 2003 and the centre has received a grant of €150,000 in 2010. The funding is used to support the Centre's cultural programme.

In 2010, a further €450,000 has been allocated to cultural initiatives undertaken by the Embassy and Consular network. Missions are provided with dedicated allocations to allow them plan and implement small-scale cultural activities. This figure also includes some support to Irish Studies at universities overseas.

Through Promoting Ireland Abroad Division, funding is also provided to the Atlantic Corridor project. The Atlantic Corridor was founded to facilitate, through its network of transatlantic and cross border activities and international linkages, the development of projects that will assist in supporting sustainable economic development and enhanced educational attainment. Atlantic Corridor has built and maintained relationships with key partners in the US, Canada and Northern Ireland. Funding of €254,000 was first provided in 2001, and funding of €250,000 has been provided in 2010.

The aim of the Asia Strategy is to establish a formal context in which the public and private sectors can work together to realise the benefits of political and economic linkages with Asian countries. In 2010, €200,000 has been allocated to the Asia Strategy activities undertaken by my Department. Activities funded included the Shanghai Internship Programme; promotion programmes organised in sectors such as science and technology, tourism and education, and inward media visits. These activities are administered by Irish Embassies in the region.

Communicating Europe

The Communicating Europe Initiative was established in 1995 to raise awareness about the European Union and to improve the quality and accessibility of public information on European issues. A call for proposals issues on an annual basis. In 2010, my Department has approved funding of €238,900 in respect of 50 projects. A list of the groups funded in 2010 is included below.

The European Movement Ireland

The European Movement Ireland, established in 1954, promotes public discussion and debate about developments in the European Union. It does this through a range of information initiatives including public conferences, seminars and briefing sessions and the publication and dissemination of information materials. In 2010, funding of €234,000 has been paid to the European Movement Ireland by my Department.

Title V of the Treaty on European Union Grants

Established in 2002, the purpose of this Subhead is to support actions consequent on Title V of the Treaty on the European Union. Title V established the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Expenditure under this Subhead has included mandatory contributions arising from our membership of the EU to the EU Satellite Centre and the EU Institute for Security Studies. Discretionary funding which promotes Ireland's CFSP priorities and the values which underpin Irish foreign policy is also disbursed from this Subhead. A list of grants

made to date in 2010 under this funding scheme is included below. Funding for the recipients this year began between 2004 and 2009 and totals for the start year of funding for each organisation are given below. It should be noted that that not all of these organisations have received funding in each of the intervening years.

The reporting regime under this Subhead varies, according to the type of organisation being funded. Grants to international and regional organisations are always reflected in those organisations' annual accounts which are sent to my Department; other partner organisations provide appropriate reporting on expenditure and publicise the grant in official literature. In all cases, organisations are required to acknowledge receipt of funds and are monitored by my Department to ensure the grant is utilised appropriately and for the purposes outlined in the project proposal.

Documents in Irish Foreign Policy Project

The Documents in Irish Foreign Policy (DIFP) series is a multi-volume series of documents on Irish foreign policy which my Department undertakes in association with the Royal Irish Academy and the National Archives. The project was established in 1996, after being recommended in the 1996 White Paper on Foreign Policy. The 2010 allocation from my Department for the DIFP project is €175,000. The project operates under a Memorandum of Understanding which includes a provision that a copy of the audited accounts are provided to my Department in advance of payment being made. The accounts of the DIFP project, in common with all monies under the control of the RIA, are audited annually by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Details of the aforementioned grants schemes are listed in the tables below.

Anti-Sectarianism Fund Awards 2010 (to date)

	€
174 Trust (The)	36,000
1825 Project (The)	37,500
Ballybeen Improvement Group	6,000
Ballybeen Women's Centre	12,500
Bogside Artists (The)	8,000
Cairn Lodge Amateur Boxing Club	3,500
Cityside Amateur Boxing Club	3,500
Clooney Estate Residents Association	4,000
Creggan Enterprises	10,000
ECF Links	20,000
Football in the Community — Teenage Kickz -Holywell Trust	30,000
Forthspring Inter Community Group	15,000
Giants Community Foundation	30,000
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	9,500
Helping Hands Training Projects	11,000
Hobby Horse Cross Community Playgroup	10,000
ICTU	90,000
Junction (The) / Irish School of Ecumenics	15,000
Maiden City Festival	40,000
Mission Hall Quilts Ltd	7,500
Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association — NIMMA	20,000
Pat Finucane Centre "Henry Cunningham Bursary"	5,000

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	€
Sally Gardens Community Centre	5,000
Show Racism the Red Card	9,000
South Lough Neagh Regeneration Assoc.	18,000
St Patricks Festival Limerick	7,500
Tiger's Bay Boxing Club	4,000
Youthaction NI	25,000
Youthcom / Crossing The Bridges	50,000
Youthlink	60,000

Reconciliation Fund Awards 2010 (to date)

	€
Achieve Enterprises	42,500
All Ireland Schools Choir	45,000
Axis Arts Centre Ballymun	15,000
Ballyduff Community House	8,000
Ballykeel 2 Residents Association	4,500
Ballymac Friendship Trust	3,500
Belleek & District Community Partnership	8,000
Belturbet Row Boat Club	2,500
Brookeborough LOL / Riverstown	2,500
Clonard Monastery	12,500
Community Relations in Schools	12,500
Community Technical Aid	11,000
Cooperation Ireland	425,000
Countrywide Hillwalkers Association	400
Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain	3,500
Derry Theatre Trust T/A The Millennium Forum	15,000
Dooneen Community Association	17,500
Downpatrick Listowel Linkage Group	22,500
Forge Family Resource Centre	12,500
Fountain Cultural Society	8,000
Friends Forever	17,500
Glencree	270,000
Handful Productions	5,000
Hazel Wand Theatre School	6,000
Hillsborough Working Together	5,000
Intercomm Ireland	10,000
Irish Peace Institute	25,000
Journey of Remembering	10,000
Kids own Publishing Partnership Ltd	15,000
Laurecetown, Leanaderg & Tullylish Community Association	5,000
Mosside Development Group Ltd	5,000
New Lodge Arts	7,500
Newbuildings Community Association	7,500
Northern Ireland Trade Union	70,000

	€
Peninsula Healthy Living Partnership	9,500
Positive Futures / Enable Ireland	25,000
Rás na hÉireann	15,000
Saver Naver	17,500
Short Strand Community Forum	7,500
Strule Dolphins Swimming Club	4,000
Summer Madness	5,000
Tara Centre	45,000
Tyrone Derry & Donegal Action	15,000
Ullans Academy (The)	5,000
Woodvale Community Youth Group	9,500
Youth Work Ireland-Monaghan	10,000
Youthworks C.I.C.	15,000

Emigrant Support Programme — total grants 2004 (start year)

Díon Grants (Britain)	€
Safe Home Programme Ltd., Mulranny, Co. Mayo	132,000
Acton Homeless Concern, North London	67,560
Age Concern Ealing	51,600
Age Concern Hackney Borough	26,160
Aisling Return to Ireland project, Camden	49,980
Arlington Action Group, Camden	36,420
Birmingham Irish Community Forum (2nd Tier)	40,500
Blackfriars Advice Centre	47,580
Brent Irish Advisory Service	120,000
Broadway — Day Centre & Night Shelter London	44,800
Cairde na nGael — Newham & District Friends of Ireland	61,920
Camden Elderly Irish Network	66,660
CARA Irish Housing Association	27,120
Coventry Irish Society (formerly ICARG)	93,240
Cricklewood Homeless Concern (inc. building project)	215,560
Federated Irish Association, Nottingham & Notts 2nd Tier	43,680
Federation of Irish Societies	79,080
Federation of Irish Societies (Capacity Building Project)	324,000
Finsbury Park Street Drinkers Initiative	39,600
GAA London Schools Project	38,400
Gloucester Emergency Accommodation Resource	15,600
Haringey Irish Cultural & Community Care Centre	99,420
Immigrant Counselling & Psychotherapy (ICAP)	110,400
Irish Centre Housing / Job Powerhouse	39,120
Irish Charitable Trust/ ISAS Hammersmith	124,000
Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas	132,000
Irish Community Care Manchester (inc. building project)	128,320
Irish Community Care Merseyside	130,620
Irish in Greenwich Project (incl Lewisham 1993-97)	111,120
Irish Travellers Movement (ITM)	56,580

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Díon Grants (Britain)	€
Irish Welfare and Information Centre , Birmingham	181,620
Kilburn Irish Pensioners Club	3,600
Leeds Irish Health and Homes	100,440
Leicester Irish Forum	25,200
Lewisham Irish Community Centre	35,640
London Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Hackney	77,400
London Irish Centre Charity Camden (inc. building project)	291,580
London Irish Elders Forum	50,400
London Irish Women's Centre	104,760
Luton Irish Forum	42,180
New Horizon Youth Centre	38,400
NOAH Enterprise (Luton Day Centre for the Homeless)	67,320
Northampton Irish Support Group	49,980
RehabCare, Coventry	65,760
Safe Start Foundation	46,260
Sandwell Irish Society, West Midlands	42,360
Sheffield Gypsy and Traveller Support Group	22,080
Sheffield Irish Peoples' Support & Devt Group	53,280
Social Clubs in Lancashire and Yorkshire	45,000
South London Irish Welfare Society, Wimbledon	82,860
Southwark Irish Pensioners Project	79,680
Southwark Travellers' Action Group (STAG)	70,500
St. Mungo's Housing Association	34,500
Tara Irish Pensioners Club	3,600
The Connection at St. Martin's	28,440
The Emerald Circle, Harrow	3,600
The Maya Centre (Counselling)	21,840
The Passage	55,210
The Simon Community	56,890
Total:	4,333,420

USA Grants	€
Irish Pastoral Center, Boston	71,009.83
Boston Irish Immigration Center	94,109.83
Emerald Isle Immigration Center, New York	78,441.09
Project Irish Outreach, New York	61,927.17
Aisling Irish Center, New York	49,541.74
Irish Immigration and Pastoral Center, Philadelphia	49,541.74
Irish Immigration and Pastoral Centre, San Francisco	41,284.78
Irish Outreach, San Diego	14,862.52
Seattle Irish Immigrant Support	1,651.39
Chicago Irish Immigrant Support	35,504.91
Fáilte Irish Immigration Center, Washington DC	12,385.43
Ocean City Irish Student Outreach	1,238.54
Failte Centre, New York	23,100
Total:	534,599.00

Australia Grants	€
Australian Irish Welfare Bureau, Melbourne	28,300
Irish Australian Welfare Bureau and Resource Centre	16,800
Australian Irish Welfare Bureau, Wollongong	2,900
Total:	48,000

Ireland Grants	€
Safe Home (in respect of services outside of Britain)	25,000
Emigrant Advice	35,488
Dermot Daly (Irish representative, Europeans Throughout the World)	531
ÉAN	40,000
Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas	30,000
Total:	131,019

Emigrant Support Programme — total grants as at Oct 28 2010

Group	€
Irish Emigrant Groups Britain	7,943,596
Irish Emigrant Groups USA	1,807,789
Emigrant Services based in Ireland	633,684
Irish Emigrant Groups Japan	13,479
Irish Emigrant Groups P.R. of China	7,318
Paid to date	10,405,866

Britain Outturn at 28 October 2010

Britain	€
Acton Homeless Concern (London)	56,402
Age Concern Hillingdon (Middlesex)	9,896
Aisling Project (London)	117,616
Bell Farm Christian Centre (Middlesex)	12,124
Benefits Advice Shop (Denbighshire)	6,053
Birmingham Irish Community Forum	87,699
Blackfriars Advice Centre (London)	23,257
Bolton Irish Community Association	8,475
Bradford Irish Club Ltd	6,053
Brent Adolescent Centre (London)	33,596
Brent Irish Advisory Service (BIAS)	224,297
Brian Boru Club (Wigan)	44,552
Causeway Irish Housing Association (London)	28,323
Celtic & Irish Cultural Society (Crawley)	21,823
Central & Cecil Housing Trust (London)	62,219
Central Eltham Youth Project (London)	29,098

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Britain	€
Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Liverpool)	174,754
Conradh na Gaeilge, Glaschú (Glasgow)	41,940
Council of Irish County Associations (London)	6,133
Coventry Irish Society	152,345
Cricklewood Homeless Concern (London)	207,288
Derby Irish Association	36,372
Edinburgh Cyrenians	16,525
Emerald Circle Club (Harrow)	3,637
Emerald Senior Citizens Group (Wolverhampton)	8,475
Equinox (London)	31,855
Feith an Cheoil School of Irish Traditional Music	4,850
Federation of Irish Societies	686,435
Forest Bus (Southampton)	6,208
Friends, Families and Travellers (Brighton)	12,556
Full Irish Festival and Funday (Cheshire)	5,456
Gael Music (Reading)	4,243
Garngad Irish Heritage Group	10,912
GEAR Project (Gloucester)	24,213
Greenwich Irish Pensioners Association (London)	6,901
Halifax and District Irish Society	20,823
Halifax Irish Centre	16,974
Haringey Irish Cultural and Community Centre (London)	190,923
Harps Community Project (Glasgow)	40,010
Haslingden IDL Club	4,564
Huddersfield Irish Centre	7,008
Huddersfield St Patrick's Day Parade Association	5,811
Immigrant Counselling and Psychotherapy (ICAP) (London)	225,895
Irish Chaplaincy in Britain (London)	223,610
Irish Charitable Trust (London)	200,230
Irish Community Care Manchester	214,529
Irish Community Care Merseyside	299,402
Irish Community Services (formally Irish in Greenwich)	244,236
Irish Cultural Centre, Hammersmith	252,179
Irish Elderly Advice Network (London)	106,007
Irish Heritage (Surrey)	11,017
Irish Network (Stevenage)	5,233
Irish Oral History Archive (London)	97,743
Irish Pensioners Choir	4,001
Irish Repertory Theatre and Film Company (London)	7,517
Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (London)	139,385
Irish Tuesday Club (Liverpool)	8,492
Irish Welfare & Information Centre (Birmingham)	215,436
Irish World Heritage Centre (Manchester)	39,877
Kilburn Irish Pensioners	5,436

Overseas Trade

342. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if the EU proposes to hold an EU-Asia summit to enable the EU to position itself to take maximum advantage of

the growing economies in Asia, including China, Singapore and India, and the investment and employment opportunities that these economies could bring to the EU and Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39690/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The emergence of China and India as global economic powers in recent years makes Asia a key regional partner for the EU. Relations between the EU and Asia are organised on different levels. There are the region to region arrangements; there are relations between the EU and individual Asian countries; and there are the bilateral relations of EU Member States with individual countries. Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is the main multilateral forum for high level regional dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and Asia. It was established in 1996 and involves virtually the whole of Asia, including Brunei, Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. This year, Australia, New Zealand and Russia have been admitted to the group.

ASEM leaders meet at summits every two years. The 8th ASEM Summit was held in Brussels on 4-5 October. It brought together the leaders of 46 countries, together representing half of the world's GDP, almost 60% of the world's population and 60% of global trade. The summit highlighted the strong links between the EU and Asia and gave new momentum to the relationship. Leaders addressed a wide range of issues under four themes — global financial and economic governance; sustainable development; international cooperation on global and regional issues and the future of ASEM. A key outcome of ASEM 8 was the Brussels Declaration on More Effective Global Economic Governance.

The Taoiseach attended the ASEM Summit where he had the opportunity to meet in the margins with a number of Heads of Government of participating countries, including the Chinese Premier. He also participated in a breakfast meeting with the Asia Europe Business Forum, where leaders met senior business representatives from Asia and Europe.

The EU is keenly aware of the necessity to take full advantage of annual summits with key partner countries in Asia to strongly promote its economic and trade agenda. This was a key issue highlighted at the September European Council meeting on external relations which approved a series of internal measures to improve the effectiveness of the EU's approach to its strategic partners.

During 2010, the EU also held separate bilateral summits with Japan (April), China (October) and Korea (October), while a summit with India will take place in December. At these high level meetings, the EU strongly promotes the trade and investment dimension of the relationship. During the summit with Korea, leaders signed the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement, which is the largest agreement of its type ever entered into by the EU. The EU is currently negotiating major partnership agreements with China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore, while there are also plans to seek new trade agreements with Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand.

Diplomatic Representation

343. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will support a matter (details supplied). [39716/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Deputy will be aware, from my PQ reply to him of 21 October, that having been advised of the difficulties being experienced by Killester United Football Club members at immigration at Sao Paolo airport our Embassy immediately contacted the immigration authorities to ascertain why the group had been refused

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entry. Our Embassy was informed by the Brazilian authorities that the decision to refuse entry was based on an alleged incident involving two members of the group and two Brazilian citizens during the Iberia flight from Madrid to Sao Paulo. It is understood that on landing in Sao Paulo, the Brazilian citizens lodged a formal complaint with the Military Police at the airport who are responsible for immigration control and that this complaint was verified by a number of other passengers on the flight. The Embassy was informed that the decision to refuse entry was based on this complaint and its subsequent verification by Brazilian authorities.

As I mentioned in my earlier reply to the Deputy the application of Brazilian law is a matter for the Brazilian authorities and it is not appropriate for the Department of Foreign Affairs to become directly involved in that process. However, our Embassy has again contacted the Brazilian Immigration Police authorities and were, I understand, informed that the citizens/group involved could send complaint for the attention of the Federal Police Superintendent in the State where the refusal occurred. Our Embassy was also informed that the Superintendent in charge will consider any such complaint and decide whether or not to send it to the Delegate at Immigration in the airport who made the decision for refusal. My Department will provide you with the contact details for the relevant Superintendent in São Paulo, as provided to them by the Brazilian authorities.

I also understand that our Embassy has been advised that any complaint should be laid out clearly, in as much detail as possible, and must be sent in Portuguese. If the group require any further information in this regard, they are welcome to contact the Consular Section of my Department. I also understand that there is no agency similar to our Garda Ombudsman tasked with the consideration of complaints and/or any compensation which might arise following a refusal of entry and that it appears from our Embassy's contact with the Brazilian authorities that any form of compensation is extremely unlikely.

International Agreements

344. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views on ratification of the stabilisation and association agreement with Serbia and if he will indicate the Government's position regarding the level of Serbian co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39732/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Negotiations on an EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) began in 2005. However, the negotiation and signing process for the Agreement was delayed on a number of occasions until the EU was satisfied with Belgrade's level of cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Cooperation with the ICTY is a precondition for those wishing to conclude Stabilisation and Association Agreements with the EU. Following positive assessments by the ICTY Chief Prosecutor regarding Serbia's ongoing cooperation with the Tribunal, Ministers decided by consensus at the June Foreign Affairs Council to submit the EU-Serbia SAA to national parliaments for ratification. At the same time, the Council again underlined that full cooperation with ICTY remains an essential element of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement process. The requirement for full cooperation with the ICTY is included in the text of the SAA with Serbia in Articles 2 and 4.

Each Member State ratifies Stabilisation and Association Agreements according to its own internal procedures. In Ireland's case, this requires the passing of a Resolution by Dáil Éireann approving the terms of the Agreement. It is proposed to submit a motion to Dáil Éireann in relation to the ratification by Ireland of the SAA with Serbia in the near future.

As the Deputy may be aware, at the General Affairs Council on 25 October Ministers decided, again by consensus, to refer Serbia's December 2009 application for EU membership 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 on 25 October also 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 underlined that a constructive approach towards regional cooperation is essential and called for progress in the process of EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

Furthermore, 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 SAA (Articles 2 and 4). The Council 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 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.

I share the widespread revulsion at the appalling massacres at Srebrenica and elsewhere during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. 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 the two remaining indictees 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

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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.

China-Africa Relations

345. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if the EU is concerned at the increasing investment of China in Africa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39780/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): 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. 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 Brussels earlier this month, both sides reaffirmed their active commitment to peace and sustainable development of the world. There are therefore 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 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. I am also of the view that the commitment of African countries to such issues as human rights, gender equality, good governance and the fight against corruption is not only the product of pressure related to assistance from donors or investors such as the EU or China. 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.

Overseas Development Aid

346. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views that Ireland and the EU's development aid programme to Africa which is linked to better governance and democratic accountability of the recipient nation is being undermined by the very significant increased investment in the African economy by China where no such condition attaches and if this matter has been taken up with the Chinese authorities either at a national or EU level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39785/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): In recent years China has become a major economic global player and has focused very significant trade, economic investment and development aid on African countries. 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 increas-

ingly 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 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.

As regards the provision of Overseas Development Aid, 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 who share our commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. China's engagement in Africa has the potential to contribute significantly to economic growth and to poverty reduction across the continent.

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.

Lisbon Strategy

347. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his views that the EU has successfully completed the Lisbon agenda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39786/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Lisbon Strategy, launched by the European Council in March 2000, was an ambitious, multifaceted strategy which set the goal of Europe becoming “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010 capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion and respect for the environment”. In an evaluation carried out earlier this year the Commission found that the main targets, covering employment rate and spend on R and D, had not been met, but in mitigation noted that the end of the term of the Lisbon Strategy came at a time when the impacts of the economic crisis were being deeply felt in Europe as in other parts of the world. On the plus side the Commission study states that the Strategy had a role in mobilising and assisting the reforms that Europe needs to become more competitive, and that benefits from it could be identified in the business environment and consumer choice areas.

Ireland shares in much of that assessment. Member States engaged thoroughly with the Strategy during its term. As envisioned in 2000, it was extremely broad in scope and aspiration, and implementation posed a variety of challenges, including in relation to its diffuse focus and its governance structures. In 2005, the European Council reviewed the Strategy and agreed to

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refocus its efforts on jobs and growth and establish a much more streamlined process for delivery, which resulted in improved outcomes.

The December 2009 European Council noted that the Strategy had been useful in setting a framework for strengthening European competitiveness and encouraging structural reform, and drew the lesson from it that any new strategy would have to have a sharper focus and concentrate on a limited number of key objectives for achieving sustainable jobs and growth. Furthermore, the December 2009 European Council noted that “in view of the economic and social impact of the crisis, in view also of the challenges posed by ageing populations, increasing inequalities and climate change, a new approach is needed more than ever”.

In response to the European Council’s call, the European Commission conducted a public consultation process and in March 2010 presented a Communication entitled “Europe 2020: a strategy for smart sustainable and inclusive growth”. The European Council, meeting in June 2010, finalised and launched a new European Strategy for Jobs and Growth, the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Ireland welcomes the tighter focus adopted by the Europe 2020 Strategy and the improved and strengthened governance structures for the Strategy which have been put in place. Under the new Strategy, Heads of State and Government, meeting in the European Council, will have a hands-on leadership role in overseeing its implementation over the coming decade, as they have had in agreeing its overall goals and EU level targets during the first half of this year. The reinforcement through action at EU level of growth and reform policies we are pursuing nationally should be an important part of the process.

With regard to the roll out and implementation of the new Europe 2020 Strategy, I would draw the Deputy’s attention to the details set out in my reply to his Written PQ (39308/10) of Wednesday, 27 October 2010.

EU Enlargement

348. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if Ireland supports the application for membership of the EU by Croatia, Iceland and Macedonia; the progress being made with regard to their membership; the timeframe for completion of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39787/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): As a beneficiary of past enlargement, and on the experience of more recent accessions, Ireland is broadly supportive of enlargement. The prospect of enlargement bolsters economic and political reform processes and helps to promote stability, security and prosperity in Europe. Ireland takes an active role in discussions on the issue, both at Council meetings and in bilateral discussions with existing and aspirant member states. It is important to note that enlargement is a negotiated process and, as in any negotiation, the eventual outcome and timeframe cannot be predetermined.

The Council plans to discuss enlargement again in detail at the European Council in December. Prior to this, the European Commission is due to publish their annual progress reports on candidate countries in November. These reports will provide a basis for further discussion and conclusions at the December Council.

Negotiations with Croatia are well advanced and work on most chapters will be completed by the end of the year. Currently, 22 of the 35 negotiating chapters have been closed and the work of the Accession Treaty Drafting Group is well underway. A further 2-3 Chapters are expected to be closed at an Intergovernmental Conference for this purpose in November. Issues that still require effort concern measures to combat corruption and organised crime, and

cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The findings and recommendations of the Commission's 2010 annual Progress Report due to issue on 09 November will be very relevant.

An intergovernmental conference with Iceland on 27 July marked the formal opening of negotiations and the negotiations are proceeding. The first step in this process is for the Commission to undertake a formal process of examination of the acquis with the Icelandic authorities, called screening. This allows it to be fully explained to Iceland, and to narrow down specific areas that will require substantial negotiation. Once the Commission gives its Screening Report to Council, negotiations begin across each chapter. This is expected to begin in early next year. Issues of contention are expected to be fisheries, agriculture, financial services and environment.

In October 2009, the Commission recommended formally opening accession negotiations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The December Council welcomed progress made in a number of important areas but stopped short of endorsing the Commission's recommendation to open negotiations. The key obstacle is a bilateral dispute with Greece regarding the use of the name "Macedonia." No breakthrough was reached at the June General Affairs Council and major progress is not expected over the next six months.

Departmental Properties

349. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39803/10]

350. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39818/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 349 and 350 together.

My Department pays the rent on office space in one building in the State — Ground Floor, Findlater House, 27 -31 Upper O'Connell Street, Dublin 1. The premises is used by the Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre and is fully occupied. Costs in relation to maintenance and security on unoccupied premises and sites are not therefore incurred by my Department. The rental costs in respect of the premises at Findlater House were €417,450 in 2008 and €419,175 in 2009. All other rent commitments relating to properties in the State occupied by the Department of Foreign Affairs are discharged by the Office of Public Works. In addition, 110 properties are rented by my Department outside the State for use primarily as offices and official residences. All such premises are currently in use.

Millennium Development Goals

351. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, further to Parliamentary Question No. 205 of 13 October which references his response to Parliamentary Question Nos. 107 and 110 of 12 October, all of which fail to shed light on the substance of the suggestions which were put forward by the EU and supported by Ireland according to his response to Parliamentary Question No. 1224 of 29 September 2010, if he will outline the detail of the above mentioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39876/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): As I have stated previously, Ireland is committed to the full realisation of all human rights, and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including the seventh Millennium Development Goal of reducing by half,

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by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Last year, through the Government's development programme, Ireland provided €12.6 million in direct support to water and sanitation activities through our Programme Countries and civil society organisations. In addition, significant funding was provided to multilateral organisations, including UNICEF, which have a strong focus on water and sanitation in their programmes.

Ireland recognises the existence of human rights obligations relating to access to safe drinking water and sanitation and has supported initiatives at the UN Human Rights Council, most recently the Resolution on human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation, adopted at the 15th Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva in September 2010 and co-sponsored by Ireland. The topic is nonetheless a complex one, as illustrated by the negotiations on the draft Resolution on the human right to water and sanitation, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 28 July 2010.

The differing views among EU member states were reflected in the fact that Ireland and seventeen of our EU partners (Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom) took the decision to abstain from voting on that Resolution; nine EU member states voted in favour of the Resolution (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain). This division reflects the ongoing debate in the European Union on this issue. Ireland did not wish to prejudice eventual EU consensus on this issue and took the decision to abstain from the vote on the General Assembly Resolution.

Clarification of the content of human rights obligations relating to access to safe drinking water and sanitation will require further discussion at the UN, as well as among relevant Government Departments. In this regard, Ireland supports the work of the Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, whose work is mandated by the Human Rights Council. In light of the adoption of the General Assembly Resolution in July 2010 and the Human Rights Council Resolution in September 2010, my Department, including Irish Aid, intends to engage in discussions with other relevant Departments including the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Our deliberations and discussions on these important matters will continue to be informed by the forthcoming reports of the Independent Expert, including her annual reports to the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

National Drugs Strategy

352. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, further to Parliamentary Question No. 127 of 12 October 2010, if he or any of his Cabinet colleagues will raise the proposals referenced in any international forum and if so in which forum and when. [39881/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I understand that the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs has no plans at present to raise the proposals of the International Drug Policy Consortium in regard to transnational Impact Assessments of drug policy regimes at any international forum. It is envisaged that there will be routine monitoring at national level of the impact of the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016, in particular through the Oversight Forum on Drugs, to assess its effectiveness.

Departmental Expenditure

353. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the savings that have

been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39923/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): My Department procures ICT equipment and supplies from the market via the e-tenders website and through Framework Agreements established by the Department of Finance. The Department selects solutions based on the most economically advantageous proposals. All software and consumables recently purchased have been branded.

Departmental Procurement

354. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40251/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): No significant printing contracts have been awarded by my Department to operators from outside the State in the past three years. My Department's missions abroad have occasional small print requirements and it is more economically advantageous to source such requirements by getting competitive quotes from local providers. In the case of smaller print jobs at Headquarters my Department has made use of drawdown contracts put in place by the National Procurement Service (formerly the Government Supplies Agency) and it is also intended to make use of the panel of print service providers which has recently been established by the National Procurement Service.

My Department's largest print requirements are for passport application forms and passport booklets. Both of these contracts are currently held by Irish companies with all technical and production facilities located in Ireland. In accordance with Irish law (which gives effect to Ireland's international obligations in these matters), these contracts are tendered periodically and are open to competition from suppliers in all European Union and European Economic Area (EEA) countries as well as suppliers from countries that are parties to the WTO Government Procurement Agreement (GPA).

I appreciate that this is a competitive challenge to Irish companies. However, under the same arrangements, there is an equivalent entitlement for Irish companies to compete for a vast range of public sector contracts in all EU and EEA countries as well as in all GPA countries. Access to such opportunities is vital to our exporting economy and to our prospects for economic growth. Details on how to access opportunities in international public sector markets can be found on my Department's website and on the Enterprise Ireland website. The Deputy can be assured that both Enterprise Ireland and my Department, including at embassies abroad, will be happy to provide any assistance they can to Irish companies in pursuing public procurement opportunities overseas.

Departmental Bodies

355. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40337/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): My Department is involved in the operation of two high level groups — the Consultative Group on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and the Joint Department of Foreign Affairs/NGO Standing Committee on Human Rights. My Department has chaired the Consultative Group on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The Group was

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established to assist with the development of Ireland's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325. It first met in February 2010 and has met on five subsequent occasions to date. Civil society representatives, academics, and representatives of other relevant government departments, including the Departments of Justice and Law Reform, and Defence are represented on the Group.

It has been agreed to extend the consultation process on UNSCR1325 until the end of 2010, and an independent Chair has recently been appointed to lead this process. My Department continues to be a member of the Group.

The Joint Department of Foreign Affairs/NGO Standing Committee on Human Rights is chaired by an official of my Department. Established in 1997, the purpose of the Committee is to provide a formal framework for a regular exchange of views between my Department and representatives of the NGO Community. It is comprised of representatives of human rights NGOs and experts, who serve in a voluntary capacity, as well as officers of my Department. The Standing Committee meets approximately four times per year, with provision for additional meetings in exceptional circumstances. A new Standing Committee was appointed earlier this year, with a term of office of two years, effective from 1 October 2010.

Business Regulation

356. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if his Department has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if his Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40352/10]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): My Department took part in the Inter-Departmental Group on Administrative Burden Reduction. As part of this process, my Department reviewed the potential impact its primary legislation would have on business and reported to the then Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment that this legislation would have no effect on business and imposed no significant administrative costs.

Question No. 357 answered with Question No. 80.

Departmental Expenditure

358. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39683/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The information requested is set out in the table below. Annual Reports and accounts for the Citizen's Information Board, Pobal, the Pensions Board and the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman when published are placed in the Dáil Library. This is also the case for the statutory accounts of the Social Insurance Fund.

Figures for 2010 are provisional and subject to audit by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Subhead	Recipient	Total payments made by Dept of Social Protection up to end of September 2010)	Year payments commenced	Amount paid in year payments commenced
		€		€
T. Citizens Information Board ¹	Citizen's Information Board	34,455,000	2000	8,341,000
V. Rural Social Scheme ²	Pobal, Local Development Companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta	Nil	2004	3,220,000
W. Community Services Programme ²	Pobal	Nil	2006	40,290,000
X 5. Grants — Information and Welfare Rights ³	Northside Community Law Centre	386,250	1993	Information in relation to the funding received when the payments commenced to these organisations is not readily available.
	Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed	160,578	1992	
X.6. National Pensions Awareness Campaign ⁴	The Pensions Board	Nil	1998	58,160
X.7. Office of the Pensions Ombudsman	Office of the Pensions Ombudsman	637,995	2004	500,893
Y. Payment to Social Insurance Fund under section 9(9)(a) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 ⁵	Social Insurance Fund	1,380,000,000	2010	1,380,000,000

Grants and Subventions paid by Department of Social Protection in 2010

¹ The Citizens Information Board (CIB) was established in 2007, having previously been known as Comhairle, which was established in 2000.

² Responsibility for the Rural Social Scheme (RSS) and the Community Services Programme (CSP) transferred from the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs on 1 September 2010. Payments to Pobal from the Department of Social Protection commenced in October 2010 with €3,364,371 paid in respect of the RSS and €4,000,000 paid in respect of the CSP. Up to end September 2010 payments to Pobal were made by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs — €38.3 million was paid in respect of the RSS and €40.15 million in respect of the CSP.

³ Details of payments made under Subhead X .5 are contained in the Department's Appropriation Accounts. The accounts of each company are a matter of public record and can be obtained through the Companies Registration Office.

⁴ In October 2010 the Pensions Board received a payment of €212,000 for the National Pensions Awareness Campaign.

⁵ The Social Insurance Fund (SIF) was established by the Social Welfare Act 1952 (as amended). In the period 1953 to 1996 it received State subvention to meet the shortfall between SIF income and expenditure. The period 1997 to 2009 saw the SIF in surplus and subvention was not required. Subvention has once again become necessary in 2010

Social Welfare Benefits

359. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Cork is entitled to domiciliary care allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39689/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): An application for Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) was received on 30th September 2010. This application together with medical reports has been forwarded to one of the Department's Medical Assessors for their medical opinion on the case. Upon receipt of this opinion a decision will issue to the customer. Currently it takes DCA section eight weeks to process an application.

Social Welfare Code

360. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the respective gross cost to the Exchequer if the withdrawal rate above allowances for rent supplement was changed from 75% to 15%, 20%, 25%, and so on at intervals of 5% up to 60%. [39692/10]

361. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the respective gross cost to the Exchequer if the withdrawal rate above allowances for mortgage interest supplement was changed from 75% to 15%, 20%, 25%, and so on at intervals of 5% up to 60%. [39693/10]

362. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of rent allowance and rent subsidiary to the Exchequer for 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39694/10]

366. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount of money allocated in 2009 and 2010 for rent allowance. [39765/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 360 to 362, inclusive, and 366 together.

There are currently 96,500 people in receipt of rent supplement, an increase of 62% since the end of December 2007. The outturn for rent supplement for 2009 was €511m with €509m provided for in 2010.

It is not possible to provide an accurate cost to the exchequer if the withdrawal rates for rent and mortgage interest supplements were adjusted due to the many variables in determining a person's entitlement. Some of factors which affect the amount of rent or mortgage interest supplement payable include:

- The accommodation cost,
- The household composition,
- Any special needs or circumstances the applicant may have or require,
- The applicant's earnings and its impact on the rate of primary scheme payable (e.g. jobseeker's allowance/benefit, one parent family payment),
- The different types of incomes that an applicant may have, for example maintenance payment or income from investments,
- The location of the accommodation, and

- The number of hours per week worked; the supplements are not payable where a member of the household works for 30 or more hours per week.

The current assessment of means for these schemes provides for a gradual withdrawal of payment as hours of employment or earnings increase. Those availing of part-time employment and/or training opportunities can continue to receive a rent or mortgage interest supplement subject to their satisfying the standard means assessment rules. Since June 2007, where a person has additional income in excess of the standard weekly rate of supplementary welfare allowance, the first €75 of such additional income is disregarded with 75% of any additional income above €75 being contributed toward the accommodation cost. This ensures that those returning to work or participating in training schemes are better off as a result of taking up such an opportunity.

The tabular statement below shows the impact of adjusting the withdrawal rate for a person with an income of €250 per week in excess of the SWA appropriate to their circumstances. This statement shows that as the withdrawal rate reduces the amount of supplement payable increases.

Overall, I am satisfied that the rent and mortgage interest supplement schemes provide for a gradual withdrawal of payment as hours worked and earning increase and have no plans at present to change these arrangements.

Adjustment to withdrawal rate

	€
Income above the SWA Rate	250.00
Income disregard	75.00
Accommodation cost per week	250.00
Minimum contribution	24.00

	Withdrawal Rate	Tenant Contribution	Supplement Payable
	%	€	€
Withdrawal Rate*	75	155.25	94.75
Withdrawal Rate	65	137.75	112.25
Withdrawal Rate	55	120.25	129.75
Withdrawal Rate	45	102.75	147.25
Withdrawal Rate	35	85.25	164.75
Withdrawal Rate	25	67.75	182.25
Withdrawal Rate	15	50.25	199.75
Withdrawal Rate	5	32.75	217.25

*Current withdrawal rate.

Under the current withdrawal rate, the first €75 in excess of the SWA rate is disregarded in full with 75% of any additional income in excess of this amount being contributed towards the accommodation cost.

363. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on a submission (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39702/10]

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

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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.

As regards the suggestion to increase the number of hours a carer can engage in employment from 15 to 19 hours per week, the fundamental qualifying condition for carer's allowance, carers' benefit and the respite care grant is that the carer must be providing "full time care and attention" to a person who needs it. Prior to June 2006 people could engage in employment outside the home for up to 10 hours per week and still qualify for payment. Since then, the number of hours a person can engage in employment, self-employment, training or education outside the home has increased from 10 to 15 hours per week. This relaxation was introduced to recognise the value of work for the carer in terms of additional income, self-esteem, a form of respite and retention of involvement in the workforce. This improvement applies to carer's allowance, carer's benefit and the respite care grant. Similarly, a person on carer's leave can also engage in employment, education or training outside the home for up to 15 hours per week.

It is important, however, to protect the needs of the care recipient. The qualifying conditions for the payment are such that the person receiving care is medically assessed as needing it on a full-time basis. Any further change would necessarily dilute the very notion of "full time care and attention" and directly impact on the person who needs that care. The Government will continue to support carers and the people they care for within the resources available.

364. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on a submission (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39703/10]

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.

As regards the issue of access to the warmer home scheme, this scheme is operated by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) which is under the aegis of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. In carrying out its function the SEAI has decided to prioritise those in receipt of the fuel allowance. While carers are not in receipt of the fuel allowance, they do receive the household benefits package and free travel which represents a significant additional level of support. In the case of this submission, the care recipient is in receipt of fuel allowance and could, therefore, apply for the warmer home scheme. The Government will continue to support carers and the people they care for within the resources available.

Question No. 365 withdrawn.

Question No. 366 answered with Question No. 360.

Departmental Properties

367. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39806/10]

368. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39821/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 367 and 368 together.

My Department is currently renting two premises — Office Suites 1-3, Bridgewater Business Centre, Islandbridge, Dublin 8; and the Community Social Services Centre Bishopsgate,

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Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. The Community Social Services Centre, Mullingar is the operational location for the Department's Disability Activation Project which is funded by the European Social Fund. This building is currently in use.

The Bridgewater Business Centre was originally leased by the Combat Poverty Agency in April 1996 for a period of 21 years. From 1 July 2009, the Combat Poverty Agency integrated with the former Office for Social Inclusion within my Department, to form the new Social Inclusion Division, which subsequently transferred to the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs on 1 May 2010.

The Department has exercised an option to break out of the 21-year lease by March 2011, and is currently in the process of applying the necessary measures in order to return possession of the property. Staff were relocated from Bridgewater Business Centre in October 2009. The maintenance and security costs for 2010 to date is €14,631. The premises costs, including rent, rates, insurance, maintenance, etc for 2008 and 2009, in respect of the above buildings are set out in the table below.

	2008	2009
	€	€
Office Suites 1-3, Bridgewater Business Centre, Islandbridge, Dublin 8	461,322	366,676
Community Social Services Centre Bishopsgate, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath	22,189	36,646

Social Welfare Appeals

369. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39842/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): An application for Domiciliary Care Allowance was received on 12 August 2010. This application was referred to one of the Department's Medical Assessors who found that the child was not medically eligible for the Allowance. A letter issued to the person concerned on 5 October 2010 advising her of the decision. Where a person is not satisfied with the decision of a Deciding Officer they may appeal the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. As yet, no appeal has been registered in this case.

370. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39848/10]

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 02 September 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 29 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

371. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will ensure that there are no further cuts made to the incomes of persons with disabilities (details supplied). [39851/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Social welfare expenditure for 2011, including expenditure on payments to persons with disabilities, 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.

372. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Protection the grounds on which a person (details supplied) in County Cork was refused rent supplement; if he will review the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39868/10]

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 rent was in excess of the maximum rent limit for his family size. The HSE further advised that the decision to refuse rent supplement was upheld by the HSE Appeals Office. It remains open for the person concerned to appeal the decision to the Social Welfare Appeal Office.

Departmental Expenditure

373. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Protection the savings that have been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39926/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Department operates an 'open sourcing' procurement model which aims to achieve the most economically advantageous result for each requirement/procurement. This includes consideration of open source solutions and generic consumables.

Open source software and proprietary software have different business models and it is difficult to compare them directly even where they have directly comparable functionality. The open source business model depends on service and support revenues whereas the proprietary software business model depends on a mixture of licence fees and support revenues. Neither is intrinsically better than the other — the Department's experience is that lower initial acquisition costs for open source are usually balanced by overall higher support costs, particularly where a diverse set of packages are deployed. The Department has a number of open source packages in use as well as a number of proprietary software packages.

Social Welfare Benefits

374. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for family income supplement payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39958/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The person concerned last renewed their family income supplement (FIS) claim in December 2009. To qualify for FIS a person must have at least one qualified child who normally resides with them or is supported by them. A qualified child is any child under 18 or aged 18 to 22 if in full-time education. At the time of renewal the person concerned had one qualified child in full time education and accordingly

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was awarded FIS. Subsequently the qualified child ceased full time education and payment of FIS was stopped.

However, current 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. The rate of payment may be increased if an additional child is born in the course of the 52 weeks but there is no provision for a reduction in rate where the child ceases to be qualified during this time.

Consequently the person concerned remains entitled to a FIS payment until December 2010. Payment of FIS will now be re-instated to the person concerned and continued until December 2010. Arrears due since payment of FIS was stopped on 20th of October, totalling €260, will issue with the weekly payment due for 4th of November. The person concerned will be notified accordingly.

375. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the case of a person (details supplied) in County Longford who has applied for disability allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39959/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The person concerned applied for disability allowance on 30 June 2010. Her claim was assessed by a medical assessor who was of the opinion that she was not medically suitable for disability allowance. The deciding officer accepted that medical opinion and refused her claim. A letter issued to the person on 1 October 2010, advising her of this decision and of her right of appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office within 21 days.

Further medical evidence was received from the person on 26 October 2010. All medical evidence supplied, including that not originally seen, has now been examined by a different medical assessor who was also of the opinion that she was not medically suitable for disability allowance. A letter will issue shortly to the person advising her of this decision and of her right of appeal directly to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office within 21 days.

376. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will facilitate a person (details supplied) with an increase in rent allowance as their only income is €196 per week jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39964/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that the person concerned is in receipt of his full entitlement to rent supplement.

Social Welfare Code

377. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on whether the publication of a national carers strategy as promised in Towards 2016 would be a significant step towards acknowledging and recognising the vital contribution that carers make to the economy and society and if he will provide a target date for the publication of a national carers strategy. [38985/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): During 2008, an interdepartmental group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, with secretariat support provided by my Department, undertook work, including a public consultation process, to develop a National Carers' Strategy. However, because of the prevailing economic situation, it was not possible to set targets or time limits which could be achieved. In that context, rather than publishing a

document which did not include any significant plans for the future, the Government decided not to publish a strategy. This position remains unchanged.

The Government acknowledges and recognises the vital contribution that carers make to the economy and society. 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 Benefits

378. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the refusal of a one parent family payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40124/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The application for One Parent Family Payment was disallowed as the person concerned is cohabiting with her partner. She was notified of this decision and of her right of appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 5 October 2010.

Marriage Statistics

379. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of marriages that took place in the State between 1 January 2010 and 30 September 2010 where one party to the marriage was a non-Irish EU national and the other party was a non-EU national; the breakdown of the nationalities of the parties who participated in such marriages; the number of such marriages notified to be celebrated that did not proceed following such notification. [40125/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The number of notifications of intention to marry given, in the State, between 1 January 2010 and 30 September 2010 where one party to the marriage was a non-Irish EU national, and the other party was a non-EU national was 1010. Of these, 766 marriages have been registered, and 244 have not been regis-

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tered. The fact that these marriages have not yet proceeded may be due to a number of factors, including:

- The three month notice period may not yet have expired
- Delay in establishing that a party to a proposed marriage is free to marry. This would apply in particular where either party has had a foreign divorce.
- Cancellation of the notification of intention marry.

The breakdown of nationalities of the parties concerned is contained in the tables attached. It is noteworthy that the number of such marriages has fallen dramatically so far this year. The figure for 2010 (to end-Sept) of 766 compares with 3361 in 2009 and 2292 in 2008.

Breakdown by nationality of marriages registered between 1st January and 30th September 2010 between non-Irish EU nationals and non-EU nationals.

Total number 766

Country	Number	Country	Number
Afghanistan	5	Lesotho	1
Albania	3	Malawi	1
Algeria	10	Malaysia	4
Angola	2	Mauritius	39
Antigua and Barbuda	1	Mexico	2
Argentina	3	Moldova	12
Australia	9	Mongolia	3
Bangladesh	43	Morocco	4
Belarus	6	Nepal	3
Botswana	1	New Zealand	2
Brazil	41	Nicaragua	2
Bosnia & Herzegovina	1	Nigerian	97
Cameroon	4	Pakistan	217
Canada	6	Palestinian Occ Terr	1
China	24	Philippines	5
Congo(Republic of)	1	Peru	2
Croatia	3	Russia	15
Egypt	9	Sierra Leone	2
Ethiopia	1	South Africa	19
The Gambia	2	Sudan	1
Georgia	13	Syria	3
Ghana	5	Thailand	1
Guinea	3	Trinidad And Tobago	1
India	67	Tunisia	1
Iran	3	Uganda	1
Iraq	2	Ukraine	19
Ivory Coast	1	Turkey	1
Japan	1	United States	23
Kenya	4	Uzbekistan	1
Korea	4	Venezuela	1
Kosovo	3	Zimbabwe	2

Breakdown by nationality of marriages notified between 1st January and 30th September 2010 between Non-Irish EU nationals and non-EU nationals, that have not yet taken place.

Total number 244

Country	Number	Country	Number
Albania	1	Mauritius	5
Algeria	6	Moldova	2
Argentina	1	Mongolia	1
Bangladesh	12	Morocco	1
Belarus	2	Niger	1
Brazil	7	Nigerian	43
Brit. Ind. Oc. Ter.	1	Pakistan	86
Bosnia & Herzegovina	1	Russia	1
Cameroon	1	Sierra Leone	1
China	8	South Africa	3
Congo(Dem Rep of)	2	Sri Lanka	1
Egypt	4	Sudan	2
Georgia	1	Togo	1
Ghana	7	Ukraine	2
Guinea	1	Turkey	1
India	29	United Arab Emirates	1
Iran	2	United States	3
Libya	1	Zimbabwe	1
Malaysia	1		

Breakdown of Nationalities — Registered Marriages — 01 January 2010 to 30 September 2010

	Austria	Belgium	Bulgaria	Czech Rep	Denmark	Estonia	Finland	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Italy	Latvia	Lithuania	Malta	Poland	Portugal	Romania	Slovakia	Spain	The Netherlands	UK/NI	Total	
Afghanistan								1			1		1			1						1	5	
Albania													1			2								3
Algeria				1				1					1	1		1			3			2	10	
Antigua & Barbuda																						1	1	
Angola																2							2	
Argentina													1							1	1		3	
Australia								1								1						7	9	
Bangladesh		1	1	2				1			11		17	1		7			1	1			43	
Belarus													1	3		1			1				6	
Botswana																					1		1	
Brazil	1						1	2	2		3	4	2	1		19	4	1			1		41	
Brit. Ind. Oc. Ter.																						1	0	
Bosnia & Herzegovina																						1	1	
Cameroon		1						2								1							4	
Canada		1																				5	6	
China	1		1					2			2	1	2	2		7	4	1				1	24	
Congo(Dem Rep of)									1														1	
Croatia (Hrvatska)								1												1			3	
Egypt														4		3		1	1				9	
Ethiopia																						1	1	
The Gambia																	1					1	2	
Georgia						2					1		5	5									13	
Ghana									1							2			2				5	
Guinea		1							1													1	3	
India				1		1		1	1		5		31	5		13			6		1	2	67	
Iran													1			1			1				3	
Iraq														1		1							2	
Ivory Coast																						1	1	
Japan					1																		1	
Kenya																2		1				1	4	
Korea								1								1				1		1	4	
Kosovo					1									1		1							3	
Lesotho											1												1	
Libya																							0	
Malaysia				1												1				1		1	4	
Malawi														1									1	
Mauritius				4				2			1	1	6	7		15		1	1				38	
Mexico											1									1			2	

Breakdown of Nationalities — Registered Marriages — 01 January 2010 to 30 September 2010

	Austria	Belgium	Bulgaria	Czech Rep	Denmark	Estonia	Finland	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Italy	Latvia	Lithuania	Malta	Poland	Portugal	Romania	Slovakia	Spain	The Netherlands	UK/NI	Total	
Moldova													5	2				5						12
Mongolia								2						1										3
Morocco								1			1			2										4
Nepal								1					1						1					3
New Zealand																1						1		2
Nicaragua																				1		1		2
Niger																								0
Nigeria	1			10		5		1	2		5	1	10	4		14	9		3	1	7	24		97
Pakistan				4		12		3	1	1	6		123	29		18	2		9			9		217
Palestinian Oc. Terr																			1					1
Peru																	1			1				2
Philippines																1						4		5
Russia				1				1			1	1	3	4		2						2		15
Sierra Leone								1						1										2
South Africa		1		2								1	1	1		8						5		19
Sri Lanka																								0
Sudan						1																		1
Syria																2				1				3
Thailand																			1					1
Togo																								0
Trinidad & Tobago																						1		1
Tunisia																1								1
Uganda																						1		1
Ukraine						2							6	7	1							3		19
Turkey																			1					1
Ukraine																								0
United Arab Emirates																								0
United States		1		1					1			1			2	2						15		23
Uzbekistan																		1						1
Venezuela														1										1
Zimbabwe														1		1								2
TOTAL	3	6	2	27	2	23	1	25	10	1	39	10	218	85	3	132	21	12	32	9	12	93		766

Social Welfare Appeals

380. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an oral hearing on a jobseeker's allowance appeal will take place in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40146/10]

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.

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

381. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average number of new successful applications for the one parent family payment scheme involving a family in which the youngest child is over the age of 14 each year. [40162/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): In any given year, there are approximately one thousand successful applications for one parent family payment involving a family in which the youngest child is over the age of fourteen.

382. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of applying the one parent family payment, OPFP, format earnings disregard next year to lone parents on jobseeker's allowance who would have been entitled to OPFP if it were not for the new rule excluding children over the age of 14. [40163/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Where, in the future, eligibility for one-parent family payment ceases due to the youngest child attaining the age of 14, a range of other income supports will be available, subject to satisfying the various conditions of the particular scheme. These schemes include family income supplement, jobseeker's allowance, farm assist, disability allowance and blind pension. It is not possible to accurately predict which of these schemes will prove to be the most beneficial option for any individual affected by the change in One-Parent Family Payment eligibility, as that will depend on their particular circumstances at that time, such as the number of hours work they secure, the level of earnings and so on. Consequently, it is not possible to accurately estimate the cost of applying a special earnings disregard in the jobseeker's allowance scheme for single parents with the youngest qualified child aged 14 or more.

It is important to note that the 6-year tapered phasing out period will remain as part of the provisions for existing recipients with the new age of 14 cut-off point coming in to effect for them in 2016, i.e. entitlement to the payment being maintained at 18 years for 2011 and 2012 and then reducing on a yearly basis from 17 years in 2013 to 16 years in 2014, 15 years in 2015 and then to 14 years in 2016.

383. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will carry out a review of the reason so few lone parents are currently accessing family income supplement and how best to increase take up rates. [40164/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): To qualify for payment of FIS a person must be engaged in full time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least three months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. There are currently some 27,228 people in receipt of a weekly FIS payment of which 5,606 are also in receipt of a One Parent Family Payment.

With regard to the level of take up, it is not possible to estimate from administrative sources the number of families who would be eligible but do not apply for their FIS entitlements. Accordingly the department completed a research project in 2008 to examine factors behind the level of take up for the scheme. This research project included a survey of over 3,000 families which appeared to satisfy conditions for receipt of FIS. From over 1,000 valid responses received the survey identified that only 23% might actually be eligible.

The research also found that overall awareness of Family Income Supplement among potential recipients is high with nearly three in four claiming to have heard of the scheme. Despite high levels of awareness, there was a lack of awareness and understanding of the eligibility requirements with only one in three claiming to be aware of the qualifying criteria for FIS. The report recommends that the Department needs to ensure that information about the scheme is advertised in a focused way with the eligibility and qualification criteria communicated as clearly as possible. The Department is addressing this by ensuring such information is highlighted as part of its ongoing information strategy.

Social Welfare Benefits

384. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will investigate the existing and growing delays in the time it takes for new applicants for one parent family payment to be assessed and informed of the decision made and the action he will take to reduce the delays. [40165/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Department is committed to ensuring that claims are processed and that decisions on entitlement are issued as expeditiously as possible, having regard to the eligibility conditions that apply. These conditions vary from scheme to scheme. In the case of One-Parent Family Payment, this would include confirmation of a person's place of habitual residence and, where appropriate, to assess means. In some cases, there is an unavoidable time lag involved in making the necessary enquiries to enable decisions to be made. Time can also elapse where the applicants do not supply all the necessary information in support of their claim. Increases in the number of claims can also impact on processing times. Operational procedures, the organisation of work, and the allocation of staff resources continue to be reviewed and restructured to maximise the processing capability and to improve these times.

Social Welfare Code

385. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will set up, promote and evaluate a national career development planning programme for lone parents, to assist them, where appropriate to access relevant education, skill development and related supports. [40166/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Department of Social Protection operates a range of employment support services that are designed to encourage and to support social welfare recipients of working age, including lone parents, to reduce their dependency on social welfare payments and to return to work. These services are provided through the Department's network of locally-based Facilitators.

The primary role of these Facilitators is to work with social welfare recipients to help them to identify appropriate training or development programmes that will enhance their skills and ultimately improve their employment chances as well as help them to continue to develop on a personal level. They work in close co-operation with other agencies and service providers including FÁS, VECS, other education and training providers and the local community and voluntary sector. In addition, they provide advice and support to customers who wish to access the Back-to-Education Allowance Scheme and the Short-Term Enterprise Allowance Scheme that are run by this Department.

Currently, all lone parents who present themselves to FÁS Employment Services are already provided with a one-to-one guidance interview with an Employment Services Officer. As part of this process, lone parents are advised on suitable labour market opportunities such as current work vacancies and suitable training/employment programme places, and may also be referred to other FÁS supports. A new support model to help people to overcome barriers and to increase their opportunity to access training and employment programmes and, ultimately, the open labour market, is being tested by FÁS with lone parents. This 'Steps to Employment' Programme is aimed at individuals who are parenting alone who want to get a job or improve their work prospects and who need to learn new skills through training or a return to education in order to achieve this.

This Department also operates the Back-to-Education Allowance (BTEA) Scheme. Since its introduction, the primary objective of this Scheme is to help those who are in receipt of a social welfare payment to improve their employability and job-readiness by acquiring additional educational qualifications. It 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. A total of 3,220 lone parents availed of the Scheme in 2009.

Under recently announced changes in ministerial responsibility, the Community Services Programme and the Rural Social Scheme have been transferred to this Department from the former Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Work is also underway to finalise the transfer of both the Employment Services and the Community Services divisions of FÁS to this Department. Overall, the transfer of functions that is being implemented will facilitate the delivery of a more streamlined and effective response to the needs of people of working age, including lone parents, to assist them, where appropriate, to access relevant education, skill development and related supports.

Social Welfare Benefits

386. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will ensure that a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will be awarded the illness benefit as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40203/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): 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 early 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 Code

387. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Social Protection following the passing of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act, when he will bring forward legislative changes in the area of social welfare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40229/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The necessary changes to the Social Welfare code arising from the provisions of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010, will be brought forward in the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No. 2) Bill 2010, which will be brought before the Oireachtas before the end of the year.

Social Welfare Benefits

388. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons currently in receipt of the State pension contributory; the cost to the State in 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40235/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Minister for Social Protection (Éamon Ó Cuív T.D.): The numbers of persons in receipt of State pension contributory and State pension transition at end-September 2010, are shown in the table below, including those in receipt of an increase for qualified adult (IQA) in respect of their spouse/partner.

Scheme	Total No. in payment	No. including IQA
State pension contributory	276,123	64,677
State pension transition	9,319	2,126

At the end of 2009, the numbers in payment, and associated costs were:

Scheme	Total no. in payment	No. including IQA	Annual cost
			€m
State pension contributory	265,102	63,446	3,302
State pension transition	8,378	2,096	104

In recent years, the maximum personal rate of these pensions has increased to €230.30 per week. A pensioner couple would be eligible for a weekly payment of €436.60.

Social Welfare Appeals

389. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will expedite an oral hearing in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40236/10]

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.

Employment Support Services

390. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will consider the points made in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40238/10]

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 include 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. When all functions have been transferred, the employment and community services programmes of FÁS, the Rural Social Scheme and the Community Services Programmes, previously delivered by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, will be managed by a single Department with the objective of providing a more effective and streamlined service to the unemployed people by integrating the income support pro-

vided through the social welfare system with supports for activation and re-entry to employment.

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. The issues raised in the correspondence referred to by the Deputy in respect of the displacement of current employment and training opportunities on Community Employment, concerns about the ability and capacity of the community and voluntary sector to provide work opportunities and the needs for task specific training are being considered in the implementation of these initiatives.

Departmental Procurement

391. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social Protection if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40254/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): All sourced printing contracts are awarded by the Department following competitive processes which are carried out strictly in accordance with government procurement guidelines and in line with the relevant EU procurement policies. All print contracts in the past three years were placed with companies based within the State.

Social Welfare Appeals

392. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of appeals that are currently at hand for all social protection entitlements and a 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. [40258/10]

401. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of cases currently on appeal for job seeker's allowance; the longest period recorded for such appeals to be determined to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40293/10]

402. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of cases currently on appeal for non-contributory old age pension; the longest period recorded for such appeals to be determined to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40294/10]

403. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of cases currently on appeal for contributory old age pension; the longest period for such appeals to be determined to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40295/10]

404. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of cases currently on appeal for child benefit; the longest period recorded for such appeals to be determined to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40296/10]

405. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of cases currently on appeal for one parent family allowance; the longest period recorded for such

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appeals to be determined to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40297/10]

406. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of cases currently on appeal for disability benefit; the longest period recorded for such appeals to be determined to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40298/10]

407. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action he proposes to take to eliminate the backlog of appeals for the various social welfare payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40299/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): It is proposed to take Questions Nos. 392 and 401 to 407, inclusive, together.

The attached table sets out the total number of cases by scheme type on appeal on 30 September 2010; the average time taken to process all appeals during the period and the average time taken to process appeals which required an oral hearing. Figures for the longest recorded times for appeals to be determined for each scheme are not readily available.

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

- Additional Appeals Officers have been assigned to the Office since 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.

Appeals pending decision by scheme type at 30 September 2010; average time taken to process all appeals and those requiring an oral hearing in 2010 (to 30/9/2010)

	Appeals Pending At 30/9/2010	Average Time Taken to Process appeals	Average Time Taken to Process Appeals with Oral Hearing (1/1/2010-30/9/2010)
Adoptive Benefit	1	32.6	—
Blind Pension	10	27.9	39.4
Carers Allowance	2,016	28.8	45.3
Carers Benefit	85	25.0	44.0
Child Benefit	1,216	51.6	62.0
Domiciliary Care Allowance	1,356	27.4	42.6
Disability Allowance	3,312	35.1	49.5
Illness Benefit	2,989	37.2	55.7
Deserted Wives Benefit	4	31.5	29.0
Farm Assist	155	30.4	51.0
Bereavement Grant	27	19.2	—
Family Income Supplement	82	21.1	30.1
Invalidity Pension	658	39.2	68.7
Liable Relatives	19	23.2	—
One Parent Family Payment	792	31.4	46.8
Maternity Benefit	15	23.6	—
State Pension (Contributory)	105	25.7	35.5
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	214	33.2	48.5
State Pension (Transition)	8	23.7	—
Occupational Injury Benefit	20	39.6	54.8
Occupational Injury Benefit (Medical)	55	24.2	—
Disablement Pension	312	35.6	50.8
Incapacity Supplement	17	27.0	30.7
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	22	34.6	44.2
Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	10	27.3	42.2
Pre-Retirement Allowance	1	6.6	—
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	2,390	28.6	45.2
Jobseeker's Allowance	3,579	27.4	42.0
Jobseeker's Benefit	711	25.5	37.1
JA/JB Fraud Control	4	—	—
Respite Care Grant	110	32.4	47.9
Insurability of Employment	116	41.4	68.9
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	357	21.0	13.8
Treatment Benefits	3	29.4	—
Survivor's Pension (Contributory)	11	29.9	49.7
Survivor's Pension (Non-Contributory)	9	30.8	48.3
Widowed Parent Grant	2	18.3	—

Social Welfare Code

393. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he has had any discussions with the authorities in other jurisdictions in relation to the current application

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by his Department of the habitual residency clause; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40285/10]

394. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps he will take to alleviate hardship caused by his Department's application of the habitual residency clause; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40286/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): It is proposed to take Questions Nos. 393 and 394 together.

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. 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 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.

I am not aware of any country that makes its assistance schemes freely available to all persons without some condition as to nationality or residence. Determination of a person's habitual residence is made in accordance with Section 246 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended. The factors set out in this legislation have been derived from European Court of Justice case law which examined the concept of habitual residence in the context of social welfare benefits. That case law also confirms that including a habitual residence condition for social assistance payments where persons have had little or no link to the employment market is not in conflict with the freedom of movement rights within the EU.

The habitual residence condition does not apply to exceptional needs or urgent needs payments under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme. These payments may therefore be used to meet the immediate needs of any person who is in need, but they cannot be availed of on a continuing basis in a way that undermines the purpose of the habitual residence condition. These payments can however be extended to facilitate voluntary return of an EU citizen to their home State if they so wish. In the case of asylum seekers or illegal migrants, voluntary repatriation may be arranged through the International Organisation for Migration funded by the Department of Justice and Law Reform, and the community welfare service will assist in meeting the interim needs while that is being arranged.

395. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if it is intended to ease the qualifying guidelines for the back to education allowance scheme in line with the number of unsuccessful applications received in the current year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40287/10]

396. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of back to education allowance awards made by his Department in each of the past three years and to date in 2010; his plans to increase these numbers in line with current economic requirements and thereby provide for the country's future economic needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40288/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 395 and 396 together.

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. With effect from 19th July 2010, changes have been made to the qualifying conditions of the back to education scheme to reflect the present economic situation.

The period for which a person is required to be on a qualifying social welfare payment before accessing BTEA was reduced from 12 months to 9 months (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.

In addition, a person can avail of BTEA to resume studies in a second or subsequent year of a third level course whereas prior to July, a person could only apply for BTEA if s/he was commencing year one of a 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.

These enhancements build on other improvements made to the scheme in recent years in response to the changing economic climate: from September 2007, the qualifying period for illness benefit was reduced from 3 years to 2 years; from September 2008, the cost of education allowance, which is an additional annual payment made to cover the cost of books and materials, was increased from €400 to €500; from September 2009, the 6 month waiting period for those pursuing second level courses was reduced to 3 months.

The number of participants on the Back to Education Scheme in the 2009/2010 academic year was 20,808 which represented a 79% increase on the previous year. The number of participants in the 2008/2009 academic year also represented an increase of 31% on the previous academic year. As of 22nd October in the region of 21,500 participants were approved the Back to Education Allowance. Due to the nature of the scheme a significant number of applications are processed in October and indications are that BTEA numbers will increase noticeably again for this academic year. (Table 1 below details number of participants in the previous 3 academic years).

Table 1 — BTEA participants 2007/08 to 2009/10

Year	Total
2007/08	8,883
2008/09	11,646
2009/10	20,808

The scheme will continue to be monitored in order to ensure that it continues to meet its objectives.

Employment Support Services

397. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of back to work or employment incentives currently operated by his Department; the extent to which he proposes to upgrade or enhance any such schemes in line with emerging requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40289/10]

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.

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The Department plays a key role in the National Employment Action Plan which is the main activation measure for jobseekers and provides for a systematic engagement of the employment services with unemployed people. Under the Plan, all persons between the ages of 18 and 65 years who are approaching 3 months on the Live Register, are identified by this Department and referred to FÁS for interview with the aim of assisting them to enter/re-enter the labour market. In addition, under a new initiative, unemployed people are being referred to group engagement sessions in a number of areas. This is aimed at increasing the capacity, effectiveness and efficiency of the process. This will be supported in due course by the roll-out of the Department's profiling and care management systems.

The Department also offers one-to-one assistance through its facilitation service which operates at a local level nationwide in conjunction with FÁS and other agencies. Facilitators help jobseekers develop individual progression plans to enhance their skills and ultimately improve their employment chances. The back to education allowance which supports people who are furthest from the labour market and back to work initiatives are also available and provide targeted supports.

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.

The back to work enterprise allowance (BTWEA) is designed to provide a monetary incentive for people who are long term dependant on social welfare payments to make a return to work financially attractive and viable. Participants are allowed retain a reducing proportion of their qualifying social welfare payment (100% in year 1 and 75% in year 2) and may retain secondary benefits over two years. The short term enterprise allowance (STEAL) is payable to a person who qualifies for jobseekers' benefit and who wishes to commence in self employment. This allowance is payable for the duration of their jobseeker's benefit entitlement.

A part-time job incentive scheme is also available which allows persons who are long-term unemployed to take up part-time employment for less than 24 hours per week and receive a weekly income supplement called the part-time job allowance. In addition, an Employer Job (PRSI) Incentive Scheme was launched on 20th June 2010. Subject to compliance with the rules of the scheme, an employer taking on an additional employee in 2010 who has been unemployed for 6 months or more, will be exempted from liability for employers' PRSI for 12 months.

Under recently announced changes in ministerial responsibility, the rural social scheme and community services programmes have transferred to this Department from the former Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Work is also underway to finalise the transfer of both the Employment and Community Services divisions of FÁS to this Department.

Overall, this re-structuring of departmental and agency responsibilities will facilitate the delivery of a more effective and streamlined response to the needs of the unemployed. Bringing together, under the aegis of one department, the employment services of FÁS, the expertise of its placement officers and the unemployment services of this Department as well as the community employment schemes, job initiative scheme, community services programme and the rural social scheme will offer significant opportunities to generate synergies, improve efficiency and, ultimately, improve service delivery to those availing of those services.

Social Welfare Code

398. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to ensure

social protection for the future in line with requirements arising from the economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40290/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Social welfare expenditure for 2011 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.

Departmental Staff

399. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of extra staff redeployed within his Department or from other Departments to cater for the increased workload arising from the economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40291/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Since May 2008, some 450 additional posts have been assigned to my Department to deal with the significant increase in claims for the schemes operated by the Department. The majority of these posts have been sourced through the lateral transfer and redeployment of staff from within the Department and from other Government Departments. 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 streamlining them 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.

Social Welfare Appeals

400. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of cases

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on appeal for back to education allowance; the longest period recorded for such appeals to be determined to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40292/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Decisions on statutory social welfare schemes are made by statutorily appointed Deciding Officers of my Department. Where a customer is dissatisfied with a decision made by a Deciding Officer, s/he has a statutory right of appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

In addition to statutory schemes a number of non-statutory schemes are operated by my Department. Decisions are made by Officers of my Department based on published guidelines (available on my Department's website www.welfare.ie) setting out the conditions of entitlement. The back to education scheme is a non-statutory stand alone scheme. Such decisions cannot be appealed to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. However, the claimant may seek a full and fresh review of the case by an officer in my Department at a higher level if s/he is dissatisfied with the decision made enclosing any new evidence in support of the review.

Applicants for the back to education scheme are already in receipt of another social welfare payment before a decision is made on their entitlement. The back to education allowance claims are not recorded as a separate scheme until the person transfers from their primary payment. Accordingly, the number of applications refused and seeking review is not available.

Questions Nos. 401 to 407, inclusive, answered with Question No. 392.

Social Welfare Benefits

408. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will be approved and paid the one-parent family allowance [40314/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The circumstances of the person concerned are currently being examined. When enquiries have been completed a decision will be made and she will be notified of the outcome.

409. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason mortgage interest supplement has been discontinued since August in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40325/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that payment of mortgage interest supplement ceased as the person concerned did not return a review form which issued to her in August 2010. The HSE further advised that if the person concerned wishes to discuss her entitlement to mortgage interest supplement she should contact the community welfare officer at her local health centre.

Departmental Bodies

410. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40340/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Following clarification in relation to this question there are no high levels groups appointed by me to examine a specific issue which involves stakeholders outside the Department such as interest groups.

Business Regulation

411. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if his Department has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if his Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40355/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): My Department has been involved in the Inter-Departmental Group on Administrative Burden Reduction. The information obligations (IOs) which this Department's legislation/regulations impose on business have been examined and listed with a view to reducing, where possible, the administrative burden on business. Nine IOs have been identified for this Department, of which two overlap with the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

The measurement of administrative burdens using the Standard Cost Model is an exercise that was called for by business as a baseline for the 25% administrative burden reduction programme and is being carried out across all Departments with any substantive regulation that affects business. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation and the Central Statistics Office have already measured burdens arising from regulations under their responsibility and all other relevant Departments will shortly measure the current red tape costs on business arising from their regulation. Measurement is expected to be completed in 2011. It will not be possible to indicate the total cost of the information obligations for this Department on business until this measurement exercise has been carried out.

Social Welfare Code

412. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to reform rent supplement to enable the payment to be made directly to the landlord instead of the tenant [39267/10]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): The purpose of rent supplement 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 any other source. The scheme is intended as a temporary income support payment and is not designed to be a medium to long term housing support or a permanent solution to a person's housing needs. Rent supplement has successfully responded to the dramatic increased demand for income support to support accommodation costs. There are currently 96,500 people in receipt of rent supplement, an increase of 62% since the end of December 2007.

Current legislation already provides for the making of a rent supplement payment to another person (e.g. a relative, a landlord or landlord's agent) on behalf of the recipient, at the tenant's request and is subject to the consent of the HSE. Approximately 20% of rent supplement payments are currently paid to a person other than the tenant. Under the legislative provisions governing rent supplement, the Department's relationship is with the tenant; the tenant makes

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the application for rent supplement and payment is made to the tenant. Rent supplement is specifically for the benefit of tenants to assist them with their accommodation needs. To remove the right of the tenant to receive this payment by making it payable only to the landlord would require legislative amendment and I have no plans at present to make this change.

Under the current arrangements, even with direct payment, landlords still have to collect the tenant contribution towards their rent (a minimum of €104 per month). The amount of rent supplement payable depends on the tenant's income; in some cases tenants pay only the minimum contribution while for others the tenant makes an additional contribution to their rent based on their financial circumstances. For example, where a person is in part-time income and receives just 10% of his or her rent directly from the State, the landlord would receive the 10% directly whilst still having to collect the 90% from the tenant.

The efficiency of the scheme would be significantly affected if this arrangement were to be changed for example CWO's would potentially have to create a formal relationship with some 96,500 additional clients, the landlords. This would involve greater complexity and significant resources to deal with a new set of third parties. In particular, it would also result in CWOs being drawn into disputes between both landlords and tenants. There may also be financial and control implications in cases where a tenant moves address and neither the landlord nor tenant inform the Department. Similarly, where a tenant is no longer eligible for rent supplement and the Department ceases paying the landlord, the Department may find itself involved in eviction proceedings.

Where a landlord has a grievance in relation to the non-payment of rent by a tenant, s/he may apply to the Private Residential Tenancies Board to have the dispute resolved through the board's dispute resolution process. It is also open to the landlord to bring to the attention of the HSE any instance where a tenant is receiving rent supplement but is not paying their rent. Where a Community Welfare Officer becomes aware that a person receiving rent supplement is not using that supplement for the purpose for which it was intended the matter investigated.

Since 2004 local authorities have specific responsibility for meeting the longer-term housing needs of people receiving rent supplement for 18 months or more. Local authorities are now meeting the housing needs of these individuals through a range of approaches, including the traditional range of social housing options, the voluntary housing sector and, in particular the rental accommodation scheme (RAS). In such cases the local authority has a direct contractual relationship with the landlord in RAS tenancies and as part of that contract the local authority pays rent directly to the landlord.

Departmental Expenditure

413. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from her Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39685/10]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Mary Hanafin): Details of the many grants awarded by my Department, including the recipients and the amounts involved, are available on the Department's corporate website at www.tcs.gov.ie. These include grants awarded over many years under the Department's Sports Capital Programme and Arts and Cultural Capital

Enhancement Support Scheme. None of the grant programmes and schemes require that sets of accounts from the grantees be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. However, I can assure the Deputy that payment of these grants is subject to certain criteria being met and my Department maintains proper oversight of the grantees' use of the monies involved, including the operation of a capital inspection programme.

Departmental Properties

414. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39808/10]

415. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport the number of premises and sites rented or leased by her Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39823/10]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 414 and 415 together.

My Department does not currently have any premises or sites rented or leased. However, it did occupy a premises at Fossa, Killarney, Co. Kerry during 2008 and early 2009. This premises temporarily accommodated staff who relocated to the permanent Departmental headquarters in Killarney in December 2008. The premises in Fossa was leased by the Office of Public Works (OPW) on behalf of my Department and the rental costs were borne by the OPW as part of the successful decentralisation of the Department to Killarney.

Departmental Expenditure

416. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport the savings that have been made in her Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39929/10]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department has not deployed open source software packages for general use to date. However, the Department's Information Technology Unit has been assessing some open source office productivity suite software for potential use. Furthermore, the National Archives of Ireland has deployed open source operating system software on some of its infrastructure associated with the recent online 1901-1911 Census project. Regarding the use of generic consumables, my Department does not currently retain stocks of such consumables for use but has done so in the past.

Departmental Procurement

417. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport if any printing contracts for her Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40257/10]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Mary Hanafin): In the past three years, no such contracts were awarded directly by my Department to service providers outside the State.

Departmental Bodies

418. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport the number of high level groups operating within her Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40343/10]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Mary Hanafin): There are 3 high-level groups currently operating within my Department, with details as set out in tabular form below.

Title of High-Level Group	Purpose of Group	Year Established	Number of Times Group has Met
Tourism Renewal Implementation Group	To oversee and drive action on measures to support the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism in Ireland, based on the Tourism Renewal Group Framework for Action.	2010	3
London 2012 Co-ordinating Group	To identify opportunities that may arise for Ireland across the sports, tourism and culture sectors from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.	2009	5
Feasibility Group to examine the feasibility of locating the Abbey Theatre in the GPO complex	A commitment in the Renewed Programme for Government to examine the feasibility of locating the Abbey Theatre in the GPO complex in time for the centenary of the 1916 Rising	2009	5

Business Regulation

419. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport if her Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if her Department has yet listed information obligations that her Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if her Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if her Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40358/10]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Mary Hanafin): My Department took part in the Inter-Departmental Group on Administrative Burden Reduction, as led by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. As a consequence of this participation, my Department identified all legislation that imposes an administrative burden on business, listed the so-called information obligations (IOs) in each such piece of legislation and estimated in broad terms the burden that each IO imposes on business, according to the number of businesses affected, the frequency of obligation and the administrative time required to comply with the IO. The outcome of this work resulted in the identification of ten IOs, with all ten recording a 'low' burden affecting comparatively small populations of businesses with, at most, a frequency of once-per-annum completion.

In view of the comparatively minor nature of the administrative burdens identified, it was agreed at both Ministerial and Departmental level between my Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation that the identified IOs do not warrant detailed measurement and the preparation of simplification plans.

This agreement arose from the observation that international evidence suggests that approximately 90 per cent of administrative costs is caused by approximately 5 per cent of regulation. Accordingly, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation is taking the approach that it would be wasteful of resources to engage in a complex and costly process of detailed burden measurement and reduction for all Irish regulation. Instead, the core principle of that Department's methodology is that it is seeking to identify the 5 per cent of regulation that is most burdensome and to subject only that 5 per cent to detailed burden measurement and simplification.

Local Authority Housing

420. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of money allocated in 2009 and 2010 for the rental assistance scheme and the long term leasing scheme [39765/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The amounts allocated for the Rental Accommodation Scheme and for the Social Housing Leasing Initiative in 2009 and 2010 are set out in the following table:

	2009	2010
	€m	€m
Rental Accommodation Scheme	90.5	125
Social Housing Leasing Initiative	20.0	25

Water Quality

421. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if there are health concerns regarding water supply via lead pipes to homes in an area (details supplied). [39660/10]

422. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding a matter (details supplied). [39661/10]

423. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if Dublin City Council has a responsibility to put plastic water pipes supplying water into houses where lead pipes are still in use. [39662/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 421 to 423, inclusive, together.

The European Communities (Drinking Water) (No. 2) Regulations 2007 prescribe the quality standards to be applied in relation to supplies of drinking water, including requirements relating to sampling and analysis of water to ensure that it meets those standards. The Regulations prescribe a maximum parametric value of 25 micrograms of lead per litre of drinking water supplied.

The Regulations designate the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as the supervisory authority for local authority drinking water supplies. In April 2009, the EPA issued guidance to local authorities on dealing with lead in drinking water supplies. This guidance addresses the need to identify lead distribution mains, service connections in the ownership of the local authority, lead plumbing in public buildings, the extent of lead plumbing in domestic dwellings and subsequently the approach to be taken where lead pipes have been identified. Local auth-

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orities have been advised by my Department that funding is available to carry out appropriate work to replace lead in the distribution mains.

Local authorities are responsible for the drinking water mains and communication pipes linking the mains to stopcocks on individual properties or to the boundary of private property. Section 43(3) and Section 54(1) of the Water Services Act 2007 state that the owner of a premises is responsible for the maintenance and renewal of the internal water distribution system and is required to ensure that it is kept in good order and repair, so as to prevent a risk to human health or the environment and that the water meets prescribed quality standards. Therefore, responsibility for lead piping is dependent on whether it is part of the local authority's distribution system i.e. normally before the service connection to the house, or part of the internal distribution system, i.e. within the boundary of the premises.

The 2007 Regulations require that where a supply of water is considered to be a risk to human health, the local authority which is responsible for that supply must consult with the Health Service Executive (HSE) to agree appropriate follow-up action. The HSE has issued guidance (which is available on the HSE website — www.hse.ie) regarding lead in drinking water, and advises that where there is any lead pipe work between the stop valve outside the house and the kitchen tap, the best solution is to replace it with plastic pipe work. However, the HSE advises householders with lead pipes not to drink water that has been standing in the pipes for long periods, overnight, or if no one has been in the house for more than six hours. In such circumstances, the HSE advises that householders should draw off a small quantity of water from the kitchen cold tap to clear the water which has been standing in the pipes.

My Department has consulted with the local authority in question. The authority is aware of the matter and has concluded that the lead levels in the water are caused by lead plumbing in the premises. The authority has given the persons concerned the advice from the HSE.

Departmental Expenditure

424. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39679/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department is responsible for the allocation and payment of a range of grants to local authorities and other bodies in respect of housing, water services, environmental protection, waste management, fire services, libraries, disability services, heritage and other areas. The annual Revised Estimates for Public Services volume, published by the Department of Finance, sets out the financial provisions for the year concerned, together with outturns for the preceding year. Compilation of the information requested on all bodies or persons in receipt of such funding would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work by my Department. It is open to the Deputy to put down a specific question regarding a particular area within my Department's remit.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

425. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if mains replacement has been funded by his Department for Mullinahone in County Tipperary due to ongoing water problems; the amount that was allocated for mains

replacement; the amount that has been drawn to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39719/10]

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 South Tipperary. The Water Conservation Stage 3 Works: Advanced Network Rehabilitation — Fethard Regional Water Supply Scheme Phases 1 and 2 are included in the Programme as contracts to start over the life of the Programme. Work on the Mullinahone watermains is included under Phase 1 of this scheme. My Department recently approved the Council's design proposals and a construction stage budget of €8.1 million for both phases of the scheme. It is now a matter for the Council to prepare contract documents for these works.

Departmental Reviews

426. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the review by his Department of the decision by Dún Laoghaire Rathdown council in relation to the tenders for a scheme (details supplied) will be completed, and the review decision issued; if and when funding will be available for this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39742/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): A decision in relation to the appeal under Clause 9.4 of the Instructions to Tenderers in connection with contract for the Carysfort-Maretime scheme issued to Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council and the relevant contractor on 22 October 2010. A decision on funding for the contract will be made when the council finalises the tender process.

EU Directives

427. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if electronic cigarettes which are sold in shops and pharmacies are subject to the EU WEEE directive; if so, the steps his Department has made to ensure compliance with the directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39750/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The EU Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) required each Member State to introduce regulations providing for a producer funded take-back scheme for consumers of end-of-life equipment from 13 August 2005. To come within the scope of the WEEE Directive, items of electrical and electronic equipment must be:

- dependent on electric currents or electromagnetic fields in order to work properly; and
- designed for use with a voltage rating not exceeding 1,000 volts for alternating current (AC) and 1,500 volts for direct current (DC).

Electronic cigarettes which are placed on the market come within the scope of the WEEE Directive. Under the terms of the WEEE Directive, financing the environmentally sound management, including recycling, of waste electrical and electronic equipment is solely a producer responsibility. Two collective compliance schemes, functioning under the responsibility of producers, are operating in Ireland. These compliance schemes, WEEE Ireland and the European Recycling Platform, are responsible for ensuring that all recovered household WEEE is man-

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aged in an environmentally sound manner and for putting in place tracking and auditing systems for materials recovery in line with the requirements of the Directive.

The compliance schemes are also responsible for the procurement of the environmentally sound management, including recycling, of all household WEEE deposited at designated collection points. These include civic amenity facilities and retail outlets. The compliance schemes report that circa 9kg per capita of household WEEE is being collected for recycling per annum; this is over double the prescribed 4kg target as set out in the WEEE Directive and indicates that Ireland has had significant success in implementing this Directive.

Retailers are required by law to take back WEEE free of charge on a one-for-one, like-for-like, basis from householders. Where a replacement product is bought over the counter, retailers must take back the old product in-store, either at the time of sale or within a maximum of 15 days of the date of sale. Where a replacement product is delivered, retailers must take back the old product, if ready for immediate collection, on completion of the delivery or within a maximum of 30 days of the date of delivery. Each local authority must also accept household WEEE free of charge at its civic amenity facilities. Retailers can have their premises designated as 'WEEE collection points' or deposit household WEEE free of charge at local authority civic amenity facilities. There are currently in excess of 600 'WEEE collection points' including both retail outlets and civic amenity facilities. Retailers are obliged to notify purchasers of these take back arrangements. Information on the WEEE take back system is available on my Department's web site — www.environ.ie.

The WEEE Monitoring Group, which is made up of representatives from relevant industry and public sector stakeholders, oversees the implementation and operation of the WEEE Directive in Ireland. Responsibility for enforcement rests with the Environmental Protection Agency and local authorities. My Department continues to work with relevant stakeholders through this Group to ensure that Ireland continues its strong track record of performance versus our EU targets for WEEE recovery and recycling.

Planning Issues

428. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the adverse effect of the excessive growth of trees such as leylandii on homeowners and adjacent properties. [39754/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Ciarán Cuffe): Planning legislation does not place restrictions on the height of hedges or trees nor does it make any particular provision for recognition of a right to light or remedy from any other nuisance which may be caused by trees in an urban residential area. Complaints relating to matters such as trees or shrubs overhanging a property are normally addressed, where necessary, under civil law between the parties concerned.

Control of Dogs

429. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39761/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Under Section 15 of the Control of Dogs Act 1986, it is a duty of every local authority to establish and maintain one or more shelters for dogs seized, accepted or detained under any of the provisions of the Act. The local authority may enter into arrangements with any person

for the provision and maintenance of such shelters and for the exercise by such person of the functions of the local authority under the Act in respect of the acceptance, detention, disposal and destruction of stray and unwanted dogs.

The Dog Breeding Establishments Act 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 dog control function of local authorities is funded in part through income raised from the issuing of dog licences. The forthcoming increase in this licence fee, as provided in the Act, should provide extra funding for local authorities which will be of assistance to them in carrying out their dog control functions.

Under the new Act, a State regulated registration system for dog breeding establishments will be put in place and guidelines will be published in relation to the operation of dog breeding establishments. In this regard, draft guidelines will be published shortly for public consultation. The new measures will be enforced through the existing local authority dog control structures.

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 microchipping will reduce to 8 weeks after the first year of operation of the Act. This provision will assist Local Authorities in identifying dogs as part of their control functions. A number of the issues raised in the correspondence referred to in the Question are matters for my colleagues, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the Minister for Justice and Law Reform.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

430. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding funding for the Cork Harbour main drainage scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39773/10]

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 Cork. The Cork Lower Harbour Sewerage Scheme is included in the programme as a scheme to advance through planning. My Department is currently finalising its examination of the Preliminary Report for the scheme. The most recent estimated cost of the scheme is over €70 million. However, its precise scope, phasing and cost will be determined during the planning phase and this cost will be apportioned, in accordance with Water Pricing Policy arrangements, between my Department and Cork County Council.

Retail Sector Developments

431. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he will report on his plans to update retail planning guidelines; when the review will be completed; when he intends to publish new guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39778/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Ciarán Cuffe): I refer to the reply to Question No. 199 of 14 October 2010 which sets out the position in this matter.

Departmental Properties

432. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local

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Government the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39801/10]

433. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39816/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 432 and 433 together.

In general, premises and sites occupied by my Department are rented or leased by the OPW, rather than directly by my Department. The location and costs of premises and sites rented directly by my Department are set out below.

	2008	2009
	€	€
Office space — Met Éireann, Dublin Airport	74,599 (includes service charge)	73,720 (includes service charge)
Office space — Met Éireann, Shannon Airport	150,319 (includes service charge)	150,637 (includes service charge)
Office space — Met Éireann, Cork Airport	1,860	1,944
Storage space, Cork	26,560	21,870
Storage space, Galway	1,200	1,200

My Department, at the end of 2009, entered into an arrangement for the National Monuments Service to occupy a proportion of an archival and storage facility in Swords as a sub-lessee of the National Museum of Ireland. My Department's share of the rental costs, amounting to €105,000 for the period to the end of 2011, was paid in December 2009. My Department shares with other Government Departments the rent and ancillary costs of a premises occupied by Ireland's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels. Payment by my Department applies from 2010 onwards and, accordingly, no costs to my Department arise in respect of 2008 or 2009. All of the above mentioned space is in use.

Departmental Expenditure

434. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the savings that have been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39921/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): With the exception of Met Eireann, which uses open source products in some applications, in general my Department does not utilise open source software packages due to potential compatibility and development issues with the existing ICT infrastructure. It is not possible to quantify net savings that may have accrued through the use of such products by Met Eireann. The use of open source software will be reviewed in the context of the new ICT strategy to be prepared next year. My Department is currently trialling some generic consumables with a

view to achieving savings in ICT consumable expenditure when confirmed that these products are suitable for purpose.

Control of Dogs

435. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to review the status of the African Boerboel breed of dog for possible inclusion on the dangerous dogs list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39930/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Control of Dogs Regulations 1998 place controls on 10 breeds of dogs or crosses thereof. The controls, which must be observed when the dog is in a public place, require that these dogs, or types and crosses thereof, must be kept on a strong short lead [up to 2 metres in length] by a person over 16 years of age who is capable of controlling them and that they are securely muzzled. The breeds of dogs to which these requirements apply were selected on the basis of recommendations in respect of the potential of those breeds and in the interests of public safety.

The list of dangerous dogs is as follows:

- American Pit Bull Terrier;
- Bull Mastiff;
- Doberman Pinscher;
- English Bull Terrier;
- German Shepherd (Alsatian);
- Japanese Akita;
- Japanese Tosa;
- Rhodesian Ridgeback;
- Rottweiler;
- Staffordshire Bull Terrier.

I understand that the African Boerboel is a mastiff type dog and would therefore be covered by the 1998 Regulations.

Fire Stations

436. **Deputy Mary O'Rourke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the fire station at Lanesboro will proceed. [39939/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under section 10 of the Fire Services Act 1981. My Department's role is one of supporting and assisting fire authorities in delivering fire services through the provision of funding under the fire service capital programme and through setting general policy.

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A new fire station to be funded under the Department's fire service capital programme is currently under construction at Edgeworthstown, County Longford. My Department approved in principle, in July 2008, an application from Longford County Council to construct a fire station in Lanesboro. The Council has indicated that the construction of this new station is its first priority. The Council is also seeking to progress an extension to the fire station in Longford Town. Further investment in the fire service in Co Longford will be considered under future capital programmes having regard to the existing facilities, the level of activity, the proximity of other fire stations, the fire authority's priorities and the totality of demands of other fire authorities on the limited funds available under the fire services capital programme.

Planning Issues

437. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he is satisfied with the settlement agreed by Mayo County Council on the 7 July 2010 allowing a continuance of operations for an unauthorised quarry development on a limestone pavement, adjacent to a ecologically valuable, historical, semi-natural woodland, which has previously been refused planning permission by Mayo County Council and An Bord Pleanála. [40078/10]

438. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he is satisfied with the settlement agreed by Mayo County Council on the 7 July 2010 allowing a continuance of operations for an unauthorised quarry development on a limestone pavement, adjacent to an ecologically valuable, historical, semi-natural woodland, which has previously been refused planning permission by Mayo County Council and An Bord Pleanála, with the five-year timeframe from the initial enforcement complaint to court action by Mayo County Council. [40082/10]

439. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the use of an adjournment, or settlement agreed by Mayo County Council on the 7 July 2010 allowing a continuance of operations for an unauthorised quarry development on a limestone pavement, adjacent to an ecologically valuable, historical, semi-natural woodland, which has previously been refused planning permission by Mayo County Council and An Bord Pleanála within an enforcement regime that is viewed by the European Commission as deeply cynical on the part of the Irish authorities and as a clear approach to get around the ban on retention permission. [40084/10]

440. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the European Commission case dealing with the issue of retention permission (details supplied). [40085/10]

441. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in view of the settlement agreed by Mayo County Council on the 7 July 2010 allowing a continuance of operations for an unauthorised quarry development on a limestone pavement, adjacent to a ecologically valuable, historical, semi-natural woodland, which has previously been refused planning permission by Mayo County Council and An Bord Pleanála does the Minister intend a planning review of Mayo County Council's planning practices. [40087/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Ciarán Cuffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 437 to 441, inclusive, together.

Enforcement of planning control is a matter for the planning authority which can take action if a development does not have the required permission, or where the terms of a permission have not been met. The 2000 Planning Act places substantial obligations on planning authorities in relation to enforcement. A planning authority must issue a warning letter in relation to written complaints regarding unauthorised development, or other unauthorised development it becomes aware of (except in the case of trivial or minor development). There is also a statutory obligation to carry out an investigation and expeditiously decide whether an enforcement notice should be issued. The planning authority's decision on whether to issue an enforcement notice must be entered on the planning register and, in cases where it is decided not to issue an enforcement notice, any complainant must be informed.

It might also be noted that the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 contains a number of further provisions in relation to enforcement. The minimum fines have been increased and the requirements on a planning authority in relation to the issuing of an enforcement notice have also been increased: it is now explicitly provided that where unauthorised development is being carried out and the developer has not moved to rectify the position, the planning authority must issue an enforcement notice unless there is a compelling reason for not doing so. Also, the so-called 7 year rule, under which proceedings may not be taken, in the case of a development with no permission, after 7 years from the commencement of the development, has been abolished in the case of quarries and peat extraction activities. Two of these provisions have been commenced and it is intended to commence the last one shortly. Under Section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case, including an enforcement matter, with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned.

Local Authority Charges

442. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the proposals, if any, he has to assist the hotel industry in regard to the inability of hotels and guesthouses to pay their local authority rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40088/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority. However, I have urged local authorities to exercise restraint in setting the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) in this and previous years and they have responded positively in this regard. Across the 88 local authorities the average change of ARV from 2009 to 2010 shows a decrease of 0.62%. As part of a range of measures to aid economic recovery, I am clear on the need for continued reductions in commercial rates over the coming years.

National Spatial Strategy

443. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if the gateway innovation fund has been reopened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40161/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Ciarán Cuffe): The Department of Finance report Infrastructure Investment Priorities 2010-2016: A Financial Framework, which was approved by Government in July 2010, makes provision for the re-establishment of the Gateways Innovation Fund with an indicative level of funding of €200 million from 2012. The objective of the Fund will be to stimulate and support innovative and locally co-funded projects that will prioritise Gateway development in line with the National Spatial Strategy. A copy of the investment priorities report is available on the Department of Finance website at www.finance.gov.ie. My Department intends to liaise with the lead local authorities in the Gateways on the matter in early 2011.

Housing Development Survey

444. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of empty housing units identified in his Department's report on housing developments that are under the auspices of National Asset Management Agency. [40178/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Ciarán Cuffe): The aim of the National Housing Development Survey was to establish overall numbers and categories of unfinished housing developments in order to facilitate the development of subsequent best practice management and resolution approaches in dealing with such developments by key stakeholders such as developers, financial institutions and local authorities. The survey did not include the gathering of information on the ownership of sites or whether specific sites came within the remit of the National Asset Management Agency. The baseline National Housing Development Survey database is available on my Department's website — www.enviro.ie.

Motor Taxation

445. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the percentage of motor tax applications which are carried out on-line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40221/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Department of Transport is responsible for administering the on-line motor tax system, www.motortax.ie. I am informed by that Department that at present approximately 85% of the current vehicle fleet is eligible for on-line taxing. Of those vehicles eligible, over 51% are currently being processed on-line.

Departmental Procurement

446. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place. [40249/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested in the question covering 2008, 2009 and 2010 to date is set out in the following table.

Company	Details
Enterprise Stationery Limited, Lurgan, Northern Ireland	24 orders for printing and supply of file covers, folders and document wallets 2008 – €9,915 2009 – €2,869 2010 – €2,192* *4 orders to the value of €2,192 were placed after this contract lapsed in March 2010
Paragon Group UK Limited, Sunderland, England	4 orders for printing and supply of pay slips and payable orders 2008 – €2,825 2009 – €5,581 2010 – €3,080
Smith & Ouzman Ltd, Eastbourne, England	1 order for printing of Vehicle Registration Certificates* 2008 – €7,887 2009 – nil 2010 – nil *This function was transferred to the Department of Transport during 2008
Smith & Ouzman Ltd, Eastbourne, England	1 order for the printing of ballot papers and posters for the Dublin constituency for the European Parliament elections 2008 – nil 2009 – €33,752 2010 – nil
GPS Colour Graphics Limited, Belfast, Northern Ireland	1 order for printing of Local Election 2009 – Results, Transfer of Votes and Statistics 2008 – nil 2009 – nil 2010 – €10,482
Nicholson & Bass, Belfast, Northern Ireland	1 order for printing of Tintern Abbey Archaeological Monograph 2008 – nil 2009 – nil 2010 – €13,900

The first 5 orders in the Table above were placed under centralised National Procurement Service framework contracts managed by the Office of Public Works, or were procured by the National Procurement Service on behalf of the Department. The management of these orders, including any tendering arrangements, is a matter for the OPW. The final order was managed by my Department and a total of 5 companies (including 4 Irish companies) were invited to tender.

Local Authority Housing

447. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of houses purchased from the private sector and developers by Mayo County Council from 1 June 2009 to date in 2010 in tabular form. [40319/10]

448. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of houses purchased from the private sector and developers by Westport Town Council from 1 June 2009 to date in 2010 in tabular form. [40320/10]

449. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of houses purchased from the private sector and developers by Castlebar Town Council from 1 June 2009 to date in 2010 in tabular form. [40321/10]

450. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of houses purchased from the private sector and developers by Ballina Town Council from 1 June 2009 to date in 2010 in tabular form. [40322/10]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 447 to 450, inclusive, together.

Local authorities have, for a number of years now, progressed a programme of house purchases better to meet local housing need as well as to promote my Department's sustainable communities objectives. These programmes are undertaken and managed by the authorities having regard to their annual housing capital allocations and the unit cost limits for various types of properties, as determined by my Department. Information on the numbers purchased by Mayo County Council, Westport Town Council, Castlebar Town Council and Ballina Town Council over the period 1 June 2009 to date in 2010 is set out in the following table.

Local Authority	Number Purchased 1 June 2009-31 Dec 2009	Number Purchased 2010 to date
Mayo County Council	1	0
Westport Town Council	0	3
Castlebar Town Council	0	0
Ballina Town Council	0	0
Total	1	3

Departmental Bodies

451. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was established; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40335/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Business Regulation

452. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if his Department has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if his Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40350/10]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department is participating in the Inter-Departmental Group on Administrative Burden Reduction which is being led by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation in order to achieve the 25% target set by Government in 2008 for the reduction in the cost of the administrative burden of domestic regulation on business by 2012. My Department has examined its primary and secondary legislation since 2001 and has identified 209 information obligations stemming from 51 pieces of legislation for which the Department is responsible. Of these 209 information obligations, the 20 obligations which appear to create the greatest burden have been identified.

To ensure consistency in the measurement of the actual costs to business stemming from information obligations across all Departments and Agencies concerned, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation is arranging to conduct the cost measurement process on the basis of a methodology used throughout EU Member States. I understand that this process will be completed in 2011, at which stage the actual costs to business will be identified. Following measurement, my Department will prepare a simplification plan, which will target any unnecessary information obligations, streamline systems and remove any duplication of requirements on business as far as possible in order to contribute towards achieving the 25% reduction in costs to business by 2012.

Energy Resources

453. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will deal with matters (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40097/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Production of first gas from the Corrib gas field is a matter for the developer, SEPIL, subject to conformity with all statutory consent requirements. For the Deputy's information, construction of the Corrib Gas Terminal at Bellanaboy is substantially completed as are the subsea facilities at the Corrib Gas Field. Last summer the 83km offshore section of the Corrib gas pipeline was installed. The developers are engaged in the process of securing a number of statutory consents required for the construction of the onshore section of the Corrib gas pipeline. Completion of the development works by the developer is the principal factor that will determine the date for first gas. Pending such completion, it is not possible to state a date for when gas from the Corrib gas field will become available.

Energy Conservation

454. **Deputy Seán Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of persons in receipt of fuel allowance as part of the national fuel scheme who live in privately owned non-local authority housing which were constructed prior to 2002 that have been contacted in connection with the warmer home schemes; if all persons are eligible for this scheme; when all persons in this category will be informed of this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40278/10]

474. **Deputy Seán Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of persons who have been contacted in connection with the warmer homes scheme; if all persons in receipt of fuel allowance as part of the national fuel scheme who live in privately owned non-local authority housing which were constructed prior to 2002 are eligible for this scheme; when all persons in this category will be informed of this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40279/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Question Nos. 454 and 474 together.

The Warmer Homes Scheme (WHS), provides energy efficiency improvements to homes in, or at risk of, energy poverty and is targeted at householders who are in receipt of the Fuel Allowance, Disability Benefit or Invalidity Benefit. Measures undertaken include attic insulation, draught proofing, lagging jackets, energy efficient lighting, cavity wall insulation and energy advice at no cost to eligible households. The scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department, and is delivered through a combination of community based organisations (CBOs) and a panel of private contractors. Vulnerable homes are primarily identified by the SEAI and the CBOs, who work in partnership with local networks of community support and poverty organisations, which include public health nurses, MABS and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Since the inception of the WHS in 2000, almost 62,000 low income homes have been upgraded with energy efficiency measures. The 2010 Allocation for the WHS is €29.81 million, and it is expected that 22,500 homes will be assisted under the scheme this year.

The SEAI has worked closely with the Department of Social Protection to identify vulnerable homes, and has conducted a mail shot directed at 46,000 homes in receipt of Fuel Allowance in areas not covered by the CBOs. The mail shot was dispatched in July 2010, and comprised information on the scheme and the application process. Some 13,300 applications have been received to date, and it is estimated that approximately 15,000 eligible homes will be identified through this process. In addition to this mail shot, the updated Keep Well and Warm booklet, and the associated website, provide energy saving advice as well as information on grant schemes and other supports. Some 140,000 copies of the booklet have been distributed across the country to date, and further distribution will take place in the course of the winter months.

Postal Services

455. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the progress being made regarding the introduction of post codes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39647/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Ireland is the only country in the EU and OECD which does not have a national postcode system. An invitation to tender was issued on the 10th May 2010 for consultants to assist in selecting a body to implement and manage the delivery of a working National Postcode System (NPS). These consultants have now been appointed and are working with my Department's Steering Group to introduce a six digit alpha numeric model that is also capable of being refined into a location based code. Currently, a process of consultation with interested parties is taking place and, subject to review, a process of procurement will commence later this year.

Departmental Expenditure

456. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39674/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The following table shows the bodies under the remit of my Department that receive Exchequer grants and the amount provided yearly to each Agency since the establishment of my Department in 2007.

Body	2010 (To end Oct)	2009	2008	2007
	€000	€000	€000	€000
Digital Hub Development Agency	2,060	1,731	1,941	1,856
National Research Digital Centre	3,431	3,813	2,631	2,500
RTÉ	161,800	204,255	201,067	194,838
TG4	29,343	36,133	36,390	31,897
Broadcasting Commission of Ireland	—	4,550	5,000	3,810
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland	73,815	80,287	64,855	54,200
Inland Fisheries Ireland*	21,435	29,061	31,391	28,607
Loughs Agency	1,594	2,382	2,624	2,693
Ordnance Survey Ireland	4,985	5,087	5,970	—

*Formerly the Central & Regional Fishery Boards.

I can inform the Deputy that funding provided to each of the Agencies listed above is published yearly in the Appropriation Account. The Annual Accounts of each Agency under the aegis of the Department are also placed in the Library of the House. The National Digital Research Centre publishes its Annual Report on its website and files its Annual Accounts with the Companies Registration Office.

Telecommunications Services

457. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 1546 and 1548 of 29 September 2010, his plans to bring in legislation to allow for custodial sentences for use of such devices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39728/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): As I previously advised the Deputy, I am satisfied that ComReg has the powers under the Wireless and Telegraphy Act 1926 to monitor the inappropriate use of mobile phone blockers and take immediate enforcement action where necessary. I have no plans at present to amend this legislation.

Departmental Properties

458. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39796/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department does not have any leased premises or sites that are not in current use.

459. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39811/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My Department occupies or partly occupies a number of leased buildings all of which are currently in use. They are as follows: Department Headquarters, 29-31 Adelaide Road, Dublin 2 Core Store, Sandyford Industrial Estate, Sandyford, County Dublin Elm House, Earlsvale Road, Cavan (partly occupied). All details in relation to the leases are dealt with by the Office of Public Works.

Departmental Expenditure

460. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the savings that have been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39916/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The Information Systems Division in my Department spent a total of €41,982 on consumables in 2009, and €28,855 to date in 2010. Purchases are made solely on the lowest price for a suitable product at any given time; brand is not a factor in product purchase. The volume of generic or branded consumables purchased is not recorded. An open source product is used within the Information Systems Division for monitoring the availability of networks and servers. An equivalent proprietary solution would cost approximately €10,000. My Department's overall approach is geared to using, and promoting the use of open source software where this is appropriate and cost effective. The open source community would generally agree that the general use of open source software in a corporate environment is only now becoming a realistic proposition. While the initial costs of open source software are very low, it does require a larger technical effort to support going forward with resultant cost implications.

Telecommunications Services

461. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his proposals for the European economic recovery programme funding for rural broadband initiatives; the areas covered by this fund; the speed of broadband that will be provided to these areas and when roll-out will commence as rural areas are having extensive problems in getting connected to broadband [40098/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The provision of broadband services is in the first instance a matter for private sector service providers operating in Ireland's fully liberalised telecommunications market. Broadband services are provided by private service providers over various platforms including DSL (i.e. over telephone lines), fixed wireless, mobile, cable, fibre and satellite. Details of broadband services available in each county can be found on ComReg's website at www.callcosts.ie. In cases of market failure the Government will intervene, where it is appropriate and possible to do so. The National Broadband Scheme (NBS) represents such an intervention.

In December 2008, my Department entered into a contract with "3", a Hutchison Whampoa company, for the delivery of the NBS. The company is required to provide services, using a mix of technologies, to all fixed residences and businesses that are located within the NBS Coverage Area and which seek a service. I am pleased to say that under the NBS broadband is now available in all Electoral Divisions in the NBS Coverage Area. It continues to be a priority of the Government that there will be broadband coverage across the entire country. I am aware that there continues to be a small percentage of premises throughout the country that will not be capable of receiving broadband services. This is primarily due to technical and

other reasons (suitability of a telephone line, distance from an enabled exchange, no line of sight etc.).

The European Commission has set aside a portion of the European Economic Recovery Programme (EERP) funding for rural broadband initiatives. Using this funding, which will be augmented by an Exchequer contribution, I intend to formally launch a Rural Broadband Scheme before the end of this year. This scheme will aim to provide a basic broadband service to individual un-served rural premises outside of the NBS areas. There will be a competitive process to engage a service provider who will offer a broadband service to qualified applicants under the scheme.

While the exact details have yet to be finalised, I expect that the service offered under this scheme would at least match the service offered under the NBS. This process will be technology neutral — it will be a matter for the bidders to decide which technical approach they propose in their bids. Information in relation to acceptance of applications and the process of qualification under the scheme will be made available in due course when the scheme is launched.

Alternative Energy Projects

462. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason for the delay in implementing the REFIT since the announcement on 24 May 2010 of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40118/10]

463. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the timeframe for the implementation of REFIT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40120/10]

464. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the effect the delay in implementing REFIT is having on the indigenous biomass industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40121/10]

465. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the REFIT tariff for co-firing miscanthus is still with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40184/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 462 to 465, inclusive, together.

In May of this year, I announced a Renewable Energy Feed In Tariff (REFIT) Scheme for electricity generated from biomass including energy crops such as miscanthus and willow, ranging from 8.5 cent per kilowatt hour to 15 cent per kilowatt hour depending on the technology deployed. 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 together with Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and this will be forwarded to the Commission for discussion with Commission Services this week.

My Department estimates that it will take two to three months for clearance to be finalised and approved by the European Commission. Therefore, I expect that I will be in a position to announce implementation of the tariffs in the first quarter of 2011. The announcement of the proposed REFIT Scheme has of itself been a positive development for the biomass sector, together with the support for energy crops provided by my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and ongoing development of the demand side including the co-firing of biomass at Bord na Móna's peat generation plant at Edenderry

Departmental Procurement

466. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40244/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): There were two such contracts awarded by my Department. The details requested are shown in the table.

Material	Printer Name	Printer Location	Amount of Contract	Did Tendering Take Place
			€	
Make Tsecure	Graficas Jomagar SL	Spain	72,054.61	Yes
All-Island Grid Study	Pierce (incorporating Blue Design)	Belfast	17,021.00	Yes

Energy Resources

467. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the details of any open cycle gas generation, OCGG, projects being planned for each of the agencies under his remit; the details of any OCGG projects being constructed for each of the agencies under his remit; the details of any OCGG projects currently existing for each of the agencies under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40261/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Open cycle gas generation is extremely valuable in the Irish generation context, as a vital part of a balanced portfolio, which can underpin the delivery of increasing amount of intermittent generation, including wind. All power generation projects are subject to licensing by the Commission for Energy Regulation and predicated on the necessary connections from EirGrid. There are a number of existing and planned open cycle gas generation projects by the State energy companies under the aegis of my Department.

I am advised that ESB has three existing operational open cycle gas turbine plant located as follows: Aghada and Marina, both in County Cork, and North Wall in Dublin City. Bord na Móna has recently commissioned two open cycle gas turbine generating units at Edenderry with a total capacity of 116MW. I am advised by BGE that four Open Cycle Gas Generation projects at four separate locations are at various stages of planning, with some having progressed to securing grid connections. Bord na Móna has received planning permission to construct a 170MW Open Cycle Gas Turbine Plant in County Offaly.

The expected date of commissioning of all these projects is not yet available and decisions will be subject to a variety of considerations, including financial, in light of current and projected capacity in the market. There may also be plans for private sector projects involving open cycle gas turbine plant at various stages of development. I would refer the Deputy to EirGrid publications for additional information on generation developments. EirGrid's current Generation Adequacy Report 2010 to 2016, provides considerable detail on current, forthcoming and planned generation plants.

468. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the studies, analysis or computer modelling that have been conducted by his Department and the agencies within his remit to evaluate modern pumped storage technology as a source of flexible generation, ancillary services and reserve potential within the electricity sector; the inputs that were used for his Department's policy in regard to the role of modern pumped storage and the provision of these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40262/10]

469. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the studies, analysis, or computer modelling that have been conducted by his Department and the agencies within his remit to evaluate the security of supply benefit from modern pumped storage technology in conjunction with large reservoirs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40264/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 468 and 469 together.

My Department has not conducted studies or computer modelling specifically to evaluate modern pumped storage technology. The "All Island Grid Study", jointly commissioned by my Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Northern Ireland and published in 2008, examined the potential for renewable generated electricity systems to be handled on an all island basis by the grid transmission system. As part of that work a very large scheduling model was constructed to provide dispatch information on all plants for the year 2020 for a number of portfolios, including fuel consumption, reserve allocation, imports and exports and CO2 emissions. One of the technologies in the model was large scale pumped storage. The findings of the study showed that penetration of up to 42% renewable electricity is technically feasible without any major increase in pumped storage.

With regard to analysis conducted by agencies under the remit of my Department I understand that in the past year EirGrid has published two reports which include analysis of pumped storage. The reports entitled 'Generation Adequacy Report 2010–2016' and 'Low Carbon Generation Options for the All Island Market' are available on the EirGrid website at www.eirgrid.com. In addition, EirGrid is available to provide technical information and analysis to any group investigating the potential for large scale pumped storage.

Energy storage has been developed over the years in Ireland where it can make a useful contribution to balancing electricity supply and consumer demand. This is the case at the ESB's pumped water power station at Turlough Hill. Pumped storage is one of a number of technical options for energy storage. I welcome all private endeavours seeking to promote and deploy renewable energy to the benefit of energy consumers. It is the case that several parties are actively developing renewable energy proposals, which are predicated on or include, pumped storage projects. Any successful deployment of economically viable and environmentally acceptable storage technologies would enhance the ability of the electricity grid to accept higher penetration levels of intermittent renewable generation. Developments are being kept under close review by my Department in consultation with EirGrid and the energy sector.

Electricity Transmission Network

470. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the details of all transmission grid projects either completed or under construction during the past ten years in Mayo, Galway, Donegal, Leitrim, Roscommon and Sligo; if he will provide the project name, project cost, power capacity in megawatts of the line, substations

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connected, dimensions of wire and the number of pylons in such projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40265/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The construction of individual transmission grid projects is a day-to-day matter for EirGrid and ESB as the two State Bodies with statutory responsibilities for national transmission network infrastructure. I have no function in the matter.

Alternative Energy Projects

471. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the names of any wind farm projects in which agencies under his remit are involved; if any such projects provide a community fund; if so, the amount distributed by each fund, how the fund calculation is made and how the funds are disbursed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40266/10]

472. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the community consultation that has taken place on wind projects in Gate Three by the agencies within his remit; if any planned or pending community consultations exist for the same projects; his plans to introduce measures that ensure all State and semi-State energy companies under his remit make every effort to operate in an openly transparent manner as well as co-operate and consult with local communities where they propose to develop natural resource projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40267/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 471 and 472 together.

The EirGrid website provides a list of connected and contracted generators, both wind and other generators, and the locations of these throughout the country. EirGrid and ESB Networks have provided the details set out in the table below, of the wind projects in Gates 1, 2 and 3 being undertaken by State Companies. The dates provided for contracted projects are those supplied within their connection agreement and are indicative. Details of investment partners (including any local community involvement), who may be involved in the wind projects in question is a matter for the State Companies concerned. All of the companies in question operate on a commercial basis and financial details of individual projects are a day to day operational matter for the companies.

All projects developed, whether by State Companies or the private sector, are subject to the planning process including all requisite consultation processes. Developers engage with local individual stakeholders and local communities in the areas where they are proposing to build windfarms.

Application Name	GATE 3	Information provided by EirGrid & ESBN			
	Size/MEC (MW)	TSO/DSO	Location	Type	Notes
ESB Wind Development (Hibernian)					
Boolynagleragh (1)	36.980	DSO	Clare	Wind	Live Offer
Boolynagleragh (2)	11.640	DSO	Clare	Wind	Live Offer
Kilgarvan (1)	62.200	TSO	Kerry	Wind	
Raheenleagh (1)	36.500	DSO	Wicklow	Wind	
Croaghbrack (1)	33.100	DSO	Donegal	Wind	
Bragan (1)	33.100	DSO	Monaghan	Wind	
Woodhouse	23.280	TSO	Waterford	Wind	
Bunkimalta 46.5MW Windfarm [110kV connection]	46.500	DSO	New 110kV Node 'Cureeny' tailed from Thurles 110kV Station	Wind	
Cappagh White 2	9.487	DSO	Toem 110kV Station	Wind	
Cappagh White WF 3	21.600	DSO	Toem 110kV Station	Wind	
Cappagh White 4	18.000	DSO	Toem 110kV Station	Wind	
Castlepook (1)	33.100	DSO	Charleville 110kV Station	Wind	
ESB Wind Development (Hibernian) & Bord na Mona					
Oweninney (1)	34.000	TSO	Mayo	Wind	
Oweninney (2)	48.000	TSO	Mayo	Wind	
Oweninney (3)	56.000	TSO	Mayo	Wind	
Oweninney (4)	34.000	TSO	Mayo	Wind	
Bord na Mona					
Bruckana	39.600	DSO	Tipperary	Wind	
Oweninney (5)	198.900	TSO	Mayo	Wind	
Mountlucas (1)	79.200	TSO	Offaly	Wind	

Application Name	GATE 3	Information provided by EirGrid & ESBN			
	Size/MEC (MW)	TSO/DSO	Location	Type	Notes
Coillte					
Killinaperson (1)	55.000	TSO	Offaly	Wind	
Cluddaun (1)	52.000	TSO	Mayo	Wind	
Cluddaun (2)	64.000	TSO	Mayo	Wind	
Cluddaun (3)	34.000	TSO	Mayo	Wind	
Sliabh Bawn	58.000	TSO	Galway	Wind	
Bord Gais					
Kill Hill (1)	62.500	TSO	Tipperary	Wind	
Ballymartin 2 — Smithstown	8.280	DSO	Waterford	Wind	
SWS (Bord Gais)					On time of application were a private entity. Aquired by Bord Gais at later date
Glentanemacelligot (2)	34.000	TSO	Cork	Wind	
Knockawarriga (2)	12.000	TSO	Cork	Wind	
Knockawarriga (3)	26.500	TSO	Cork	Wind	
Gneeves (2)	5.400	DSO	Kerry	Wind	
Coomagearlahy Phase 4 — previously Lettercannon	21.600	DSO	Kerry	Wind	
Garracummer 2	1.000	DSO	Tipperary	Wind	
Total	1,289.467				

Application Name	GATE 2		Information provided by EirGrid & ESBN		
	Size/MEC (MW)	TSO/DSO	Location	Type	Notes
SWS & Bord Gais					On time of application were a private entity. Acquired by Bord Gais at later date
Booltaigh (2)	3.000	TSO	Clare	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Booltaigh (3)	9.000	TSO	Clare	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Coomagearlahy (2)	8.500	TSO	Cork	Wind	Connected
Coomagearlahy (3)	30.000	TSO	Cork	Wind	Connected
Knockacummer	87.000	DSO	Cork	Wind	Contracted (2012)
Lisheen	55.000	TSO	Tipperary	Wind	Connected
Flughland	9.200	DSO	Sorne	Wind	Connected
Glenduff Windfarm Energy Development	6.000	DSO	Glenlara	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Glentanemacelligot Windfarm	18.000	DSO	Cordal (new)	Wind	Contracted (2012)
Loughaun North 2 WF	24.000	DSO	Ennis	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Garracummer	36.900	DSO	Cauteen (new)	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Moanvaun WF	3.000	DSO	Cappagh White (new)	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Tooreen WF Ltd.	4.000	DSO	Cauteen (new)	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Keelderry	29.800	TSO	Galway	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Reisk	3.900	DSO	Galway	Wind	Contracted (2011)
ESB Wind Development (Hibernian)					
Garvagh	58.000	TSO	Leitrim	Wind	Connected (10.23 MW still to be connected, 2012)
Mountain Lodge (3)	5.800	TSO	Cavan	Wind	
Ballymartin 1 — Smithstown	6.000	DSO	Great Island	Wind	Contracted (2010)
Carrane Hill Ext. WF	1.598	DSO	Corderry	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Mount Eagle 3 WF	1.700	DSO	Tralee	Wind	Contracted (2010)
Grouse Lodge Windfarm	15.000	DSO	Rathkeale	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Cappagh White Wind Farm	16.100	DSO	Cauteen (new)	Wind	Contracted (2011)
Total	431.498				

Application Name	GATE 1	Information provided by EirGrid & ESNB			
	Size/MEC (MW)	TSO/DSO	Location	Type	Notes
ESB Wind Development (Hibernian)					
Moneypoint Wind Farm	21.90	TSO	Clare	Wind	Contracted (2012)
Mount Eagle Windfarm 2	1.70	DSO	Tralee	Wind	Connected
Knockawarriga Windfarm	22.50	DSO	Trien	Wind	Connected
Lurganboy Windfarm (4.99MW), Milford, Co Donegal	4.99	DSO	Letterkenny	Wind	Connected
Total	51.09				

Application Name	PreGATE	Information provided by EirGrid & ESNB			
	Size/MEC (MW)	TSO/DSO	Location	Type	Notes
SWS					On time of application were a private entity. Acquired by BordGais at later date
Booltaigh (1)	19.45	TSO	Clare	Wind	Connected
Coomagearlahy (1)	42.50	TSO	Cork	Wind	Connected
Gneeves Windfarm	9.35	DSO	Cork	Wind	Connected
ESB Wind Development (Hibernian)					
Derrybrien	59.50	TSO	Galway	Wind	Connected
Mountain Lodge	24.80	TSO	Cavan	Wind	Connected
Carrane Hill Wind Farm	3.40	DSO	Corderry	Wind	Connected
Mount Eagle Windfarm	5.10	DSO	Tralee	Wind	Connected
Black Banks I, Arigna, Co Leitrim	3.40	DSO	Corderry	Wind	Connected
Black Banks I, Arigna, Co Leitrim	6.80	DSO	Corderry	Wind	Connected
Carnsore Wind Farm (11.9MW), Co. Wexford	11.90	DSO	Wexford	Wind	Connected
Crockahenny	5.00	DSO	Trillick	Wind	Connected
Mountain Lodge Wind Farm	3.00	DSO	Shankill	Wind	Connected
Total	194.200				

473. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the figures or estimates for the mean annual wind speed at 50 metres above ground for each county; if he will provide those figures as a percentage of the total wind resource for each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40268/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Table 1 shows the seasonal and annual mean wind speeds per county. The figures are a result of the modelling by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), which produced the national wind atlas in 2004.

Historical weather datasets were compiled for intervals of six hours at all atmospheric levels. Analysis was then performed using grids of successively finer mesh size to simulate conditions down to a grid size of 1km square. The mesh size was further reduced (200m square) using a second model having regard to local land elevation, land cover and roughness. A comparison was made between the predicted wind characterisation and those measured at a range of met sites across the country (but not in each county) to minimise the residual differences predicted and actual mean values encountered.

The mean wind speed figure might provide an indication for a county and a useful comparison of a county to other counties but local factors are always crucial in producing the actual mean wind speed at a site. Such local factors include altitude, aspect, topography, land use and exposure. As a result, the mean annual wind speed at different locations within a county can vary greatly. A particular site's annual mean wind speed can be estimated using the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's (SEAI) online wind atlas at <http://maps.seai.ie/wind>. This will provide a better indication of the potential mean wind speed in a locality as opposed to the county's mean figure.

At a national level the estimated accessible wind resource on land in 2020 is 12,000 MW. The methodology is set out in the SEAI publication Renewable Energy Resources in Ireland for 2010 and 2020 Report, 2004. The accessible resource estimate accounts for the following constraints among others:

- Minimum recommended spacing between turbines;
- Extracted wind speeds below 7.5 metres per second;
- Buffer zones on and around habitation, roads, lakes, infrastructure and airports;
- Cost;
- Social acceptance of wind turbines.

Table 1: Mean wind speeds at 50m above ground level.

County	Dec-Feb	Mar-May	June-Aug	Sept-Nov	Annual	Annual
	metres per second (m/s)	kph				
Mayo	9.23	7.79	6.57	8.35	7.99	28.70
Donegal	9.00	7.73	6.37	8.19	7.82	28.20
Wicklow	8.79	7.36	6.30	7.78	7.56	27.20
Galway	8.67	7.30	6.26	7.80	7.51	27.00
Kerry	8.73	7.26	6.14	7.83	7.49	27.00
Sligo	8.59	7.34	6.15	7.70	7.45	26.80

[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

County	Dec-Feb	Mar-May	June-Aug	Sept-Nov	Annual	Annual
	metres per second (m/s)	kph				
Wexford	8.48	7.30	6.14	7.51	7.36	26.50
Clare	8.43	7.10	6.05	7.60	7.30	26.30
Cork	8.35	6.96	5.92	7.35	7.15	25.70
Westmeath	8.22	6.88	6.00	7.33	7.11	25.60
Roscommon	8.17	6.94	5.99	7.29	7.10	25.60
Dublin	8.34	6.79	5.89	7.36	7.10	25.50
Meath	8.16	6.88	5.95	7.29	7.07	25.50
Limerick	8.18	6.81	5.91	7.30	7.05	25.40
Waterford	8.11	6.87	5.82	7.12	6.98	25.10
Longford	8.05	6.78	5.87	7.16	6.97	25.10
Monaghan	7.98	6.87	5.85	7.14	6.96	25.10
Kildare	7.97	6.76	5.92	7.14	6.95	25.00
Cavan	8.01	6.77	5.81	7.11	6.93	24.90
Leitrim	7.95	6.80	5.72	7.15	6.91	24.90
Tipp NR	8.00	6.68	5.80	7.13	6.90	24.80
Offaly	7.90	6.65	5.78	7.07	6.85	24.70
Laois	7.89	6.66	5.78	7.06	6.85	24.70
Louth	7.94	6.70	5.70	7.05	6.85	24.70
Carlow	7.86	6.71	5.74	7.01	6.83	24.60
Kilkenny	7.79	6.67	5.75	6.98	6.80	24.50
Tipp SR	7.77	6.54	5.68	6.92	6.73	24.20
Median County	8.16	6.87	5.91	7.29	7.05	25.38

Source: SEAI Wind Atlas.

Question No. 474 answered with Question No. 454.

Telecommunications Services

475. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the fact that 100 Mbps fibre broadband is available in rural locations in the United Kingdom, such as Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, with the assistance of European funding through the European Regional Development Fund’s convergence programme; if he would consider organising a similar type scheme for west Cork with similar financial support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40318/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Government policy pertaining to the electronic communications market in Ireland is set out in “Next Generation Broadband — Gateway to a Knowledge Ireland”, which I published in June 2009. The policy paper was developed in accordance with various key principles, which are crucial to the development of the market including (i) competition, at platform and service levels, which drives innovation and investment (ii) investment certainty for service providers considering investing in network infrastructure, (iii) investment intervention by Government to bridge any digital divide in cases of market failure and to meet certain of the State’s own communication needs, and (iv) appropriate regulation. The policy paper sets out the Government’s position that investment in broadband infrastructure is primarily a matter for the private sector, facilitated, where appropriate and possible, by Government.

The policy has facilitated significant progress in broadband roll out and increasing broadband speeds over recent years. At the end of June 2010, for example, Ireland had in the region of 1.48 million broadband subscriptions and of the homes with broadband access 77.8% of them are using broadband speeds between 2mbps and 10mbps. This progress was achieved by a combination of competitive forces in the open market and Government and ERDF funded schemes such as the Metropolitan Areas Networks programme and the National Broadband Scheme. The latter schemes are designed to intervene where market failure has been identified.

This approach is also consistent with the EU Commission's 'Community Guidelines on State Aid rules for broadband networks' (2009/C 235/04), which limit the circumstances in which the State can intervene in the broadband market. The proposed Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Next Generation Broadband scheme, referred to by the Deputy, was also examined under those guidelines as part of the EU State Aids clearance process. I signalled last month that I have commenced the establishment of a Next Generation Broadband Taskforce, comprising industry, Government and ComReg, to consider how best to facilitate the roll out of next generation broadband in Ireland without compromising the competitive market principles and applicable EU rules.

Departmental Bodies

476. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40331/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Details of high level groups under the aegis of my Department are set out in the following table.

Name of Group	Purpose	Year Set Up	Meetings No.
Digital Switch Over Steering Group	To progress the digital switch-over process	2010	6
Affordable Energy Group	To coordinate national policy on affordable energy	2008	9
High Level Group on International Content Services Centre	Examine issue relation to the establishment of an International content Services Centre in Ireland	2009	4
Exemplar Working Group	Look at issue/options on content trading, taxation, IP rights and legal issues	2009	3
High Level Strategic Workshop on Energy Efficient Data Centres and Cloud Computing	Prepare recommendations for the "Technology Actions to Support the Smart Economy" Report, 2009, and follow up actions	2009	3
Telecommunications Emergency Planning Group	Emergency planning	2009	3
Postcode Steering Group	To oversee the implementation of a National Postcode System (NPS).	2010	21

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Name of Group	Purpose	Year Set Up	Meetings No.
Environmental Monitoring Group	To exchange and review information and data on the Corrib Field Development in the context of the agreed Environmental Monitoring Plan and to review reports on future planned activities during construction, testing and commissioning.	2002	50
North West Mayo Forum	To promote understanding of how the Corrib Project is regulated by providing the local community and their public representatives with an opportunity for a coordinated engagement with the Government Departments and State bodies that have a regulatory role in relation to the project and to offer a positive opportunity for furthering the socio-economic development of the North West Mayo Region.	2008	6
Corrib High Level Advisory Group	To track progress across the key consent processes of the Corrib project and bring any relevant issues to the attention of Government.	2010	3
Renewable Energy Development Group	To contribute to the delivery of Ireland's renewable energy objectives and targets across the electricity, heat and transport sectors for 2010 and 2020 as set out in the Energy Policy White Paper, The Programme for Government and in the context of the European Union Energy and Climate Change Package.	2008	9
Renewable Energy Development Group	To contribute to the delivery of Ireland's renewable energy objectives and targets across the electricity, heat and transport sectors for 2010 and 2020 as set out in the Energy Policy White Paper, The Programme for Government and in the context of the European Union Energy and Climate Change Package.	2008	9

Business Regulation

477. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if his Department has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; and if his Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40346/10]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The programme for Government 2007-2012 contains a commitment to "reduce the regulatory burden faced by business" and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation is leading its implementation. My Department is represented in the Inter-Departmental Group on Adminis-

trative Burden Reduction. Our initial assessment lists fourteen information obligations and has identified what may be the most burdensome. The actual cost to business of that information obligation and the total cost for my Department will shortly be measured in coordination with Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. Measurement is expected to be completed in 2011 and, following this, simplification plans will be developed in consultation with stakeholders, for implementing identified burden reductions.

Grant Payments

478. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason for the delay in payment of a single farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39649/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Area Scheme was received from the person named on the 6 May 2010. This application was selected for and was the subject of a Ground Eligibility and Full Cross Compliance Inspection. The inspection process is completed and the application has now been fully processed. The 75% advance payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme will issue within a week followed by the 25% balancing payment. The 50% advance under the Single Payment Scheme will issue within a week with the balancing payment due in December.

Departmental Expenditure

479. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39673/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My Department is involved in the payment of a wide range of grants and subventions including, for example, payments under the Single Payment Scheme to some 130,000 beneficiaries and area based compensation allowances to some 102,000 farmers. The information sought by the Deputy is not readily available in my Department and the resources required to compile the level of detail would not be justified in the required timeframe. However, details of payments made under EU Schemes for the years 2007 to 2009 are available on my Department's website.

Grant Payments

480. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding persons who have had inspections carried out in cross compliance; the reason these persons have not been paid any of their moneys under the single farm payment and disadvantaged area schemes to date; if the inspectors' reports have been furnished in order to allow such payments to be effected; the reason there has been a failure to make part payments to such persons, who may well have a small issue which may incur a penalty of 5% for non-compliance and in such a situation the reason the remainder of the moneys has not been paid; the steps he will take to address this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39724/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Under EU regulations governing the Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme and the Single Payments Scheme all ground eligi-

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bility inspections must be completed before any payment can issue to any applicant under either scheme, including those not selected for a ground eligibility inspection. On the other hand cross-compliance inspections may be carried out within the calendar year and do not hold up payment. Any undue payment detected as a result of a cross-compliance inspection can subsequently be recovered from the applicant.

In 2010 some 3,500 farmers were selected for ground eligibility inspections and all of these inspections were completed in advance of the first payments made under the Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme and the Single Payment Scheme. A further 4,200 inspections were conducted by remote sensing without the need to visit the farm. In the vast majority of cases that were inspected, amendments have had to be made to the maps in order that the Land Parcel Identification System that is used for making payments to farmers is kept up-to-date. Processing of these changes is continuing with priority being given to applications that were the subject of a ground eligibility inspection.

My Department has received 123,000 applications under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme and 102,000 applications under the Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme. When processing is completed it is expected that over 70,000 of these will have required the digitising of maps as a result of changes submitted by farmers. This compares with an average of 22,000 digitising changes required in previous years.

With regard to the Single Payment Scheme, the total number of farmers paid since payments commenced less than two weeks ago is 108,845 farmers with an amount totalling €507.67 million. A further 1,046 farmers have their applications processed but payment cannot be made as the amount is less than €100. The number of farmers paid under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme is 88,478 with the total amount paid at €169.7 million. There are a further 25,363 farmers, who have been partially paid. These will be paid their balancing payment as their cases are fully processed and cleared.

481. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) has not received full payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39763/10]

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 10 May 2010. Payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced on 22 September, with an advance payment of 75 per cent issuing in respect of 9.53 hectares amounting to €686.06. A deduction of €94.07 in respect of an overpayment relating to an overclaim of area under the 2009 Disadvantaged Areas application was recouped from this payment. This application is now fully processed and full payment has issued.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme

482. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of REP scheme participants who have completed their five year plan in the past 12 months; the corresponding number of completed applications received under the replacement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39782/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): 11,370 farmers completed their five year REPS contract in the period October 2009 to October 2010. 9,236 applications were received for the new Agri-Environment Options Scheme, which closed on 17 May 2010.

Departmental Properties

483. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39795/10]

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.

484. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39810/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): All issues in relation to leases for Government Departments / Offices is a matter for the Office of Public Works.

Departmental Offices

485. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to Parliamentary Question No. 76 of the 10 June 2010, his views on the level of service provided to Clare farmers following the centralisation of services to the Department's Limerick office; his plans to introduce a satellite service to County Clare to assist farmers who have to travel long distances to access services since the closure of the Department's Ennis office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39834/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): A major rationalisation plan for my Department was approved by Government last year. This plan involves a comprehensive restructuring of the Department's local office network and provides a fully integrated service to our farming clients and the wider agri-food and rural environmental sectors at regional level. The plan involves reducing, from 57 to 16, the number of offices from which the Department will operate. Services formerly provided by my Department at Ennis are since the 19th of March of this year being provided by my Department's regional office at Raheen, Limerick, and I am satisfied that farmers in Co. Clare will continue to receive an excellent service from the enhanced regional office in Limerick.

Grant Payments

486. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with regard to the 2010 single payment scheme and disadvantaged area scheme, when he expects the digitising of maps to be complete in order that payments due can be issued. [39839/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The number of eligible Single Payment Scheme and Disadvantaged Areas Scheme applications amount to almost 130,000 per annum. As part of the application procedures for the both Schemes, applicants are requested to identify and remove ineligible areas, on maps provided by my Department, from their pre-printed land parcel details supplied by my Department. On receipt, the amended maps have to be processed and the changes identified by the applicants are digitised onto my Department's Land Parcel Identification System.

By the time the processing of the 2010 applications is completed, it is expected that we will have processed and digitised maps received from over 70,000 farmers. This compares with a

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figure of 30,000 for 2009 and an average of 22,000 maps in recent years. On average each farmer submitted two maps with their 2010 application forms.

The payment of the aid under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced on 22 September 2010. In order to enable my Department to make payments to many farmers as possible including those farmers with non-digitised maps, I decided to make a 75% advance payment to eligible farmers under this Scheme. The balancing payments were made on 20 October 2010 to all applicants, who were fully processed and clear. The total number of farmers paid to date under this Scheme is 88,478 with the total amount paid of €169.7 million.

The earliest permissible date for the payment under the Single Payment Scheme is 1st December. However in 2010 I made a special case to the European Commission and secured agreement to make an advance payment of 50% from 18 October. The total number of farmers paid since payments commenced two weeks ago is 108,845 farmers with an amount totalling €507.67 million. As in the case of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, I arrange for payments to be made to applicants, where the only outstanding issue was non-digitised maps. The balancing payments of 50% will commence on 1 December.

In addition to the deployment of additional resources, a number of other initiatives were taken to enable payments (even if it was not the entire payment) to issue earlier that might have been the cases. These included paying on the eligible land that was digitised and clear. The number of herds with maps processed on a weekly basis is some 3,000. To date we have processed 38,000 herds with re-digitising required. There are approximately 32,000 herds with maps to be re-digitised. This is a significant task and it is estimated that re-digitising will be completed in early 2011.

I set a very demanding schedule of payments for the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, Single Payment Scheme and the Grassland Sheep Scheme from September to December 2010. I intend to adhere to this schedule. In the meantime, multiple payment runs under the Schemes will be made on a weekly basis to pay farmers, whose applications are fully processed and clear.

487. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding an application under the agri-environment options scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39870/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The application from the person named is being examined by my Department with a view to a decision being taken on entry into the Agri-environment Options Scheme. My Department will be in contact with the person named on the outcome of this process in the near future. Under the EU Regulations governing the Agri-Environment Options Scheme and the NATURA 2000 Scheme, payments may issue when comprehensive administrative checks on all applications, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, have been completed. My objective is to complete this process as soon as possible.

488. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway has not received their full single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39886/10]

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 17 May 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 pay-

ment at that stage. A number of parcels listed on the application required digitisation, immediately this process is complete, provided no errors are identified, payment due in respect of the Single Payment Scheme will issue to the person named.

489. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway has not received his single farm payment in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39888/10]

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. 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 parcel listed on the application requires digitisation, immediately this process is complete, provided no errors are identified, payment due in respect of the Single Payment Scheme will issue to the person named.

490. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason single farm payments have not been awarded to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39889/10]

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 17 May 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, provided no errors are identified, payment due in respect of the Single Payment Scheme will issue to the person named.

491. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their payment under the single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39893/10]

492. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their payment under the disadvantaged area payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39894/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): I propose to take Questions Nos. 491 and 492 together.

An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme / Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 10 May 2010. An advance payment under the Single Payment Scheme issued to the herd-owner based on 18th October in respect of the land parcels cleared for payment at that stage. One parcel listed on the SPS application was not included in the payment, as it required re-digitisation. This process has now been completed and the total declared area of 6.52 hectares has been cleared for payment. A further payment will issue shortly.

493. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will deal with a matter (details supplied) in view of the fact that the deadline is 12 November 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39910/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): This is a matter for Bord Iascaigh Mhara, which has responsibility for the implementation of the grant aid scheme. I have forwarded your question to BIM for direct response.

494. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will receive their suckler welfare scheme payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39911/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The person named registered 35 animals under the 2009 Suckler Welfare Scheme. During the validation process it was established the 8 of the suckler cows had twin calves. Under the conditions of the Scheme, payment is made on the basis of the number of cows. It follows, therefore, that 27 animals were potentially eligible for payment. However, as the dam of one of the calves was sold before weaning it is ineligible for payment. Payment on the eligible 26 animals will issue shortly.

495. **Deputy Edward O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork [39912/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 14 May 2010. 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 application will be further processed, with a view to the further payment due issuing shortly thereafter.

Departmental Expenditure

496. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the savings that have been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39915/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): It is my Department’s policy (subject to compliance with public procurement procedures) to use whenever possible and practicable open source software packages and to purchase generic IT consumables that are fit for purpose and offer value for money in terms of quality and suitability. Ongoing annual savings of approximately €40,000 are being achieved. The move to open source software packages has allowed the Department to reduce capital expenditure by circa €1.4 million over the last three years.

Grant Payments

497. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reasons for the delay in issuing the payments for the disadvantaged area scheme and the single payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Cork and when he expects these payments to issue. [39931/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 14 May 2010. During processing of this application it was discovered that one of the parcels declared by the applicant was also included on the application of another Scheme applicant. Following correspondence, this matter has now been resolved and payment of the 50% advance due will issue shortly. As

the lands declared by the person named are not classified as being handicapped, there is no payment due under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme.

498. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reasons for the delay in issuing the payments for the disadvantaged area scheme and the single payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Cork and when he expects these payments to issue. [39932/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 7 May 2010. Advance payments of 50% commenced issuing on 18 October 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 application will be further processed, with a view to the further payment due issuing shortly thereafter.

499. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reasons for the delay in issuing the payments for the disadvantaged area scheme and the single payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Cork and when he expects these payments to issue [39933/10]

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. Advance payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued on 13 September and under the Single Payment Scheme issued on 18 October, in both cases on the basis on the land cleared at that stage. While a number of parcels listed on the application required re-digitisation, this process is now complete. The balancing payment in respect of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, which issued to the person named on 29 October, represents the full amount due under this Scheme. A further payment under the Single Payment Scheme issued to the person named on 28 October, which brings the payment to 50% of the full amount due under this Scheme. Payment of the balance of 50% due under the Single Payment Scheme will commence on 1 December, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant EU Regulations.

500. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason for the delay in issuing the payments for the disadvantaged area scheme and the single payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Cork and when he expects these payments to issue. [39934/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 13 May 2010. The person named received an advance payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme on 21 September on the basis of the land cleared at that stage, and the full 50% advance payment under the Single Payment Scheme on 18 October 2010. While a number of parcels listed on the application required re-digitisation, as this process is now complete, the balance of the payment due in respect of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme will issue shortly. Balancing payments under the Single Payment Scheme are due to commence on 1 December 2010 in respect of all applications that are fully processed and clear at that stage.

501. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason for the delay in issuing the payment for the single payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Cork and when he expects this payment to issue. [39935/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payments/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 23 April 2010. The person named received advance payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme on 21 September and under the Single Payment Scheme on the 26 October. The balancing payment on the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued on 28 October. Balancing payments under the Single Payment Scheme are due to commence on 1 December 2010.

502. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reasons for the delay in issuing the payments for the disadvantaged area scheme and the single payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Cork and when he expects these payments to issue. [39936/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payments/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 12 April 2010. The person named received advance payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme on 15 October and under the Single Payment Scheme on the 18 October. The balancing payment on the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued on 20 October. Balancing payments under the Single Payment Scheme are due to commence on 1 December 2010.

503. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when payment will issue to persons (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39947/10]

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 per cent issuing in respect of those cases cleared for payment at that stage. The application of the person named is now fully processed and the balancing 25 per cent payment will issued shortly.

504. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the steps he will take to have the single farm payment due to a person (details supplied) immediately issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39951/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on the 20 April 2010. The person named received an advance payment under the Single Payment Scheme on the 18 October on the basis of the land cleared at that time. A number of parcels listed on the application of the person named required re-digitisation; while this process is now complete it was found that the reference areas on a number of parcels had been over-claimed. This error has been raised with the person named and on receipt of a satisfactory reply the application will be further processed, with a view to payment at an early date.

505. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason single farm payments and REP scheme for 2009 and 2010 for a person (details supplied) have not been paid to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39963/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2009 Single Payment /Disadvantage Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 1 May 2009. Full payment in respect of both these schemes issued to the person named.

An application under the 2010 Single Payment /Disadvantage Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 12 April 2010. The 75% advance under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and 50% advance under the Single Payment Scheme in respect of all clear parcels has issued to the person named. Immediately the digitising process is complete, provided no errors are identified, the balancing payment due in respect of all areas will issue to the person named shortly thereafter.

Departmental Schemes

506. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when funding will be introduced for the investment schemes announced for pigs, poultry, sheep fencing and handling facilities, dairy hygiene and water harvesting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40091/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): EU Commission approval for the introduction of five targeted modernisation schemes focused on supporting productive investment in the agricultural sector was received earlier this year. Due to the relatively short time-frames for completion of the investment works concerned, priority was given to the introduction of the Sow Welfare and Poultry Welfare Schemes which were launched on 16 June last. The Sheep Fencing/Handling Scheme opened for applications on 1 November. No dates have yet been fixed for the introduction of the Dairy Equipment and Water Harvesting Schemes.

Budget Submissions

507. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his views on the Irish Farmers' Association farm scheme priorities for budget 2011 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40094/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Apart from proposals relating to the work of my Department, the Irish Farmers Association pre-budget submission covers a range of issues including taxation, energy security and emissions reduction, which fall under the direct responsibility of other Departments. Insofar as my Department is concerned, scheme implementation and the delivery of services, including the issues referred to by the Irish Farmers Association, will be considered in the context of 2011 Budgetary process and the preparation by Government of the four year Expenditure Programme.

Grant Payments

508. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reasons payments of certain amounts were made to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry in respect of single farm payments and the disadvantaged area schemes payments. [40122/10]

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 14 May 2010. Payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced on 22 September, with an advance payment of 75% and 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 for both schemes. A number of parcels listed on the application required digitisation, immediately this process is complete, provided no errors are identified, payment due in respect of the Single Payment Scheme will issue to the person named.

509. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason payments have been reduced in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; when they will receive full payment. [40123/10]

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 11 May 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, provided no errors are identified, payment due in respect of the Single Payment Scheme will issue to the person named.

510. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo did not receive the correct payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40137/10]

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 April 2010. One of the parcels listed on the application of the person named required re-digitisation, which has now been completed. This will allow the balance of the 50% advance payment under the Single Payment Scheme to issue shortly; the initial instalment, based on the area cleared at that time, issued to the person named on 18 October, the day the advance payments began issuing. The advance payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, which issued on 21 September, was similarly affected; the full balancing payment will issue to the person named in the coming days.

511. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their REPS 4 payment. [40160/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Payment will issue to the person named within 10 days.

512. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their 2009 single payment scheme. [40169/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The person named made a Single Payment application in 2009 but did not submit an application to transfer in his 25.95 single payment entitlements by way of inheritance until the 4th May 2010. Although the application was very late, the circumstances of the person named were considered and the late application was accepted on Force Majeure grounds. The Transfer of Entitlements has been completed and payment for 2009 will issue to the person named as soon as possible.

513. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway has not been paid their single farm payment or their area based payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40176/10]

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 04 May 2010. A number of issues relating to the application regarding over claims and a dual claim were identified which required my Department to write to the person named.

These queries have now been resolved and the Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas for the person named has been fully processed and payment will issue shortly.

514. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan who only received 10% of their area aid and single premium will have their maps cleared so they can receive the balance due to them; if they can have access to the persons who are dealing with the maps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40185/10]

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 May 2010. The 50% advance payment under the Single Payment Scheme, which issued on 18 October and the 75% advance payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, which issued on 13 September, were on the basis of those parcels cleared for payment at that stage. Following re-digitisation of a number of parcels listed on the application of the person named, over-claims were identified in respect of two land parcels. My Department has written to the person named regarding this matter. On receipt of a satisfactory response from the person named, the application will be further processed.

515. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will be paid area aid on the remaining 26 hectares of their farm and the remainder of their payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40186/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 27 April 2010. The 75% advance payment under the Disadvantaged Area Scheme which issued on 13 September, was on the basis of those parcels cleared for payment at that stage. Following re-digitisation of a number of parcels listed on the application of the person named, an overclaim was identified in respect of one land parcel. My Department has written to the person named regarding this matter. On receipt of a satisfactory response from the person named, the application can be further processed.

516. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will be paid their area aid single premium; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40187/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 19 April 2010. A number of parcels listed on the application of the person named required re-digitisation; immediately this process is complete, provided no errors are identified, the application will be further processed, with a view to payment due issuing shortly thereafter.

517. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will be paid area aid on the remaining 13.83 hectares of their land as they have only received area aid on 9.8 hectares; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40188/10]

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 17 May 2010. The 50% advance payment under the Single Payment Scheme, which

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issued on 18 October and the 75% advance payment under the Disadvantaged Area Scheme, which issued on 21 September, were on the basis 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 application will be further processed, with a view to the further payment due issuing shortly thereafter.

518. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kerry has not received any of their single farm payment; when a decision will issue on the appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[40193/10]

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 11 May 2010. On processing the 2010 application a parcel of land declared by the person named was found to be over-claimed by the applicant. My Department wrote to the person named in this regard. The person named appealed the over-claim on the grounds that he had made an attempt to reduce his claimed area to take account of ineligible areas on the parcel. My Department has completed its review and has amended the eligible area of the parcel and reduced down the claimed area. Payment will issue shortly.

519. **Deputy Tom Sheahan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason area aid payment has been reduced this year by over €200 in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry when their holding is the same as in previous years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40194/10]

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 7 May 2010. Full payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has issued to the person named in respect of an eligible area of 14.75 hectares. Payment in respect of 2009 Scheme issued in respect of an eligible area of 16.79 hectares. The overall eligible area within commonage parcel H25710034 has been reduced which has resulted in the difference in payment.

520. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary under the single farm payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40201/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 22 April 2010. While the advance payment under the Scheme has issued to the person, this have been based on those parcels cleared for payment at that stage. A number of parcels listed on the application required re-digitisation; immediately this process is complete, provided no errors are identified, the application will be further processed with a view to the further payment due issuing shortly thereafter. The balancing payments under the Scheme are scheduled to commence as and from 1 December 2010.

Departmental Schemes

521. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the proportion of the agri-environment options scheme funded by the Exchequer and the proportion funded by the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40212/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The Agri-Environment Options Scheme is 75% funded by the EU and 25% by the Exchequer, subject to a maximum EU contribution of €132 million.

Grant Payments

522. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40214/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The person named registered 35 animals in the 2009 Suckler Welfare Scheme. Payment has issued on 29 animals and the remaining six have errors associated with them. Correspondence has issued to the person named seeking clarification on these errors.

An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 29 April 2010. While the advance payments under both Schemes have issued to the person, these have been based on those parcels cleared for payment at that stage. A number of parcels listed on the application required digitisation; immediately this process is complete, provided no errors are identified, the application will be further processed with a view to the payments due issuing shortly thereafter.

523. **Deputy Edward O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a specific payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [40217/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 14 May 2010. A number of parcels listed on the application required digitisation and this process is now complete. An advance payment of 50% of the Single Payment Scheme and payment in full of the Disadvantaged Area Scheme will issue to the person shortly.

524. **Deputy Edward O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when payments will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [40218/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Area Scheme was received from the person named on the 14 May 2010. This application was selected for and was the subject of a Ground Eligibility and Animal Identification Inspection. The inspection process is completed and the application has now been fully processed. The 75% advance payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme will issue within a week followed by the 25% balancing payment. The 50% advance under the Single Payment Scheme will issue within a week with the balancing payment due in December.

525. **Deputy Edward O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when payment of two schemes will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [40219/10]

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. Single Payment Scheme advance payments of 50% commenced issuing on 18 October in respect of those lands cleared for payment at that stage while 75% of the Disadvantaged Area payment commenced on 21 September. As the area of the parcels cleared did not meet the minimum area requirement of the Disadvantaged Area Scheme an advance payment was not possible. A number of parcels listed on the application of the person named

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required digitisation; while this process is now complete it was found that the reference areas on a number of parcels had been over-claimed. This query has been raised with the person named and on receipt of a satisfactory reply the application will be further processed, with a view to payment at an early date.

Departmental Procurement

526. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract, if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40243/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): No printing contracts on behalf of my Department have been awarded to companies based outside this country.

Alternative Energy Projects

527. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the names of any wind farm projects in which agencies under his remit are involved; if any such projects provide a community fund; if so, the amount distributed by each fund, the way the fund calculation is made and the way the funds are disbursed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40263/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The position is as follows in relation to Coillte Teoranta.

Coillte Teoranta

Location	County
Garvagh Glebe	Leitrim
Cloosh Valley	Galway
Raheenleagh	Wicklow
Sliabh Bawn	Roscommon
Castlepook	Cork
Bunkimalta	Tipperary
Killinaparson	Laois
Cluddaun	Mayo
Straness	Donegal

In relation to the nine projects above, six of the projects involve joint ventures with other companies and I understand that planning permission has to be obtained for five of the projects in question. I am advised by Coillte that it has not operated a community fund in connection with any wind farm project to date but that the company is in the process of developing a policy in relation to community funding and expects to complete this work in 2011.

Teagasc, the Agriculture and Food Development Authority is considering the installation of a single wind turbine on their lands in Johnstown Castle in a joint initiative with the Environment Protection Agency and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. An information day was held in Johnstown Castle in April 2010 to inform the local community that planning permission is being sought for the project. There is no community fund element.

Departmental On-line Services

528. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will report on the number of farmers in County Clare who are using the Departments on-line services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40272/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): There are a number of my Department's services, which have an on-line facility, including the Single Payment Scheme, Afforestation Aid Scheme and calf registration/animal movement. In total 3,127 Clare farmers, or their authorised agents, have registered for my Department's online services, to date.

Under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme, a total of 1,311 on-line applications were submitted by, or on behalf of, Clare farmers. In addition, 140 farmers/agents have uniquely used the Forestry online services to date, while 647 farmers have registered 16,983 calves, to date, during 2010.

In relation to the Single Payment Scheme, due to the system of in-built validations on the on-line facility, the options for applicants to make minor errors on their applications is dramatically restricted, as a result of which, those who submit their applications on-line are much more likely to have their applications cleared for payment more quickly. Analysis of the issues which delay processing of applications shows a very high percentage are delayed because of basic errors or omissions on the part of the applicant. However, it has been possible to construct the on-line facility with a series of compulsory fields and built-in validations, which dramatically reduces the level of these types of error, simply by refusing to allow the applicant to make the error in the first instance.

It was recognised from the outset that, in order to maximise the benefit of the on-line facility, a system of approved Agents would help maximise the numbers submitting applications on-line. While there are various reasons why individuals might not be in a position to lodge on-line applications, the Agent facility is attractive to those who wish to avail of the benefits of lodging an on-line application, although not in a position to do so personally. Anyone considering availing of the on-line facility to make enquiries via the website, www.agfood.ie or, alternatively, the dedicated Helpdesk at Lo-call 1890 252 118.

The Deputy will also be aware that my Department earlier this year introduced a new online initiative which removed the requirement to maintain the on-farm bovine herd register, known as 'the blue book' for those farmers who use www.agfood.ie for electronic registration of births and movements. To date in Co Clare, 242 keepers have signed up to the online herd register and, in addition, 104 keepers have applied for compliance certificates online (farm to farm movement permits).

Grant Payments

529. **Deputy Seán Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the appropriate amounts of single farm payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40276/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 14 May 2010. The 50% advance payment under the Single Payment Scheme, which issued on 18 October and the 75% advance payment under the Disadvantaged Area Scheme, which issued on 21 September, were on the basis of those parcels cleared for payment at that stage. A number of parcels listed on the application of the person named required re-digitisation; immediately this process is

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complete, provided no errors are identified, the application will be further processed, with a view to the further payment due to issue shortly thereafter.

530. **Deputy Seán Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the appropriate amounts of single farm payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40277/10]

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 May 2010. Advance payments of 50% commenced on 18 October in respect of those parcels cleared for payment at that stage. The applicant received an advance payment on that date on all eligible land declared which did not require re-digitisation. A number of parcels listed on the application of the person named required re-digitisation; immediately this process is complete, provided no errors are identified, the application will be further processed, with a view to the further payment due issuing shortly thereafter.

531. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will be paid the remainder of their 2009 entitlements and when payment will issue for the remainder of their disadvantaged area aid and single farm payments for 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40282/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Under the terms and conditions of the Single Payment Scheme, farmers cannot make applications for payment under two herd numbers. As the person named was farming under both a Monaghan herd number and a Longford herd number and had established entitlements under both, it was necessary to amalgamate her entitlements under her significant herd number R1050650 for the 2009 scheme year. The amalgamation of the entitlements was completed in April 2010.

532. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reasons for the delay in issuing payments for the disadvantaged area scheme and the single payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and when he expects these payments to issue. [40283/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 5 May 2010. A number of parcels listed on the application required digitisation and this process is now complete. An advance payment of 50% of the Single Payment Scheme and payment in full of the Disadvantaged Area Scheme will issue to the person shortly.

533. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a single farm payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Wexford. [40302/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the 2010 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 15 April 2010. While the advance payment has issued to the person, this has been based on those parcels cleared for payment at that stage. A number of parcels listed on the application required digitisation; immediately this process is complete, provided no errors are identified, the application will be further processed with a view to the payments due issuing shortly thereafter.

534. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a single farm payment will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Wexford. [40303/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on the 10th May 2010. This application was selected for and was the subject of a Ground Eligibility inspection. The inspection process is complete and the application has now been fully processed. The 50% advance under the Single Payment Scheme will issue within a week with the balancing payment due in December.

535. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Cavan will be paid their area aid and single farm premium; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40306/10]

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. A number of parcels listed on the application of the person named required re-digitisation; this is now complete, allowing the advance payment under the Single Payment Scheme to issue on 27 October 2010. Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme will issue shortly.

536. **Deputy Seymour Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will be paid their area aid and single farm premium; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40307/10]

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 17 May 2010. 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 applications for Single Payment and Disadvantaged Area payment will be further processed, with a view to any payments due issuing shortly thereafter.

537. **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; if he will expedite the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40323/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): An application under the Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on the 15 April 2010. This application was selected for and was the subject of a Ground Eligibility and Animal Identification Inspection. During this inspection discrepancies were found in relation to parcels X16209005, X18604110 and X16209036 with deductions being made for furze, scrub, trees and roadways. As a result of these discrepancies the claimed area of 22.2ha was reduced to 22ha. As the total area is sufficient to support the entitlements held, no penalties will be applied.

The inspection process is completed and the application has now been fully processed. The 75% advance payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme will issue within a week followed by the 25% balancing payment. The 50% advance under the Single Payment Scheme will issue within a week with the balancing payment due in December.

Departmental Bodies

538. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40330/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): There are a number of high level groups operating within my Department, namely:

Food Harvest 2020 Implementation Group

This is a high level committee, which I chair, was established recently to direct and take whatever action is needed to successfully implement Good harvest 2020. One meeting has been held. The group consists of representatives of Departments and semi-state agencies.

The Dairy Expansion Activation Group

This group was established in October 2010 to address the specific actions required to achieve the targets of dairy expansion set out in the *Food Harvest 2020* report. This Group is chaired by Dr. Sean Brady and consists of representatives of farmers, processors and Teagasc. To date the Group has met once.

The Accreditation Review Group

The Accreditation Review Group (ARG) meets under the chairmanship of the Secretary General of the Department and includes representatives from the Department of Finance and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners. Its primary function is to ensure that the Department retains its status as the accredited paying agency in Ireland for CAP Funds. In particular, the ARG monitors compliance with EU accreditation criteria and the follow up of all recommendations contained in the EU audits and the Certifying Body audits. The ARG first met in 1997 and has met quarterly every year since then.

Risk Management Committee

The Risk Management Committee (RMC), chaired by the Secretary General of the Department, monitors the implementation of the Department's risk management system. The RMC first met in 2002 and has met quarterly every year since then. The Committee in particular assesses the key risks (strategic, operational, financial, reputational) facing the Department and outlines measures for addressing them.

Steering group to monitor the Implementation of value for Money and Management Services Report.

This Group was established as a subcommittee of the Management Committee (MAC) of the Department. It is chaired by the Secretary General and is charged with monitoring the implementation of finalised reports and reviews. The Steering Group meets on a quarterly basis. The first meeting took place in April 2010, thereafter a meeting was held in July 2010 and a third meeting will be scheduled before the end of the year.

This Group replaced the Efficiency Review Group (ERG) which was established as a subcommittee of the MAC in October 2008. Its remit was to facilitate a strategic approach to budgetary decision making, while addressing the structural changes necessary to enable the Department fulfil its wide ranging remit. The ERG met on seven occasions from the time of its establishment.

Business Regulation

539. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department was required to take part in the inter-departmental group on administrative burden education; if his Department has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if his Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40345/10]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): My Department participated in the Inter-Departmental Group on Administration Burden Reduction. This group is tasked with examining the administration burdens arising from obligations created under Irish legislation.

The measurement of administrative burdens using a Standard Cost Model is an exercise that was called for by business, as a baseline for the 25% administrative burden reduction programme and is being carried out across all Departments with any substantive regulation that affects business. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation will shortly commence a process which will provide assistance to all Departments to measure the current costs on business arising from their national regulations. As part of this process, this Department has provided the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation with a list of fifty information obligations, many of which are of minor nature.

However, the main schemes operated by my Department are operated under European legislation. In that respect, the EU Commission presented in 2005 a Communication on Simplification and Better Regulation for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This set out an ambitious programme for a significant simplification of the CAP. The programme and its implementation are fully embedded in the overall Commission strategy on Better Regulation and in particular the Simplification Rolling Programme and the Action Programme for Reducing Administrative Burden. My Department has strongly supported the simplification process at European level which aims to reduce the administrative burden by some 25% by 2012.

Grant Payments

540. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39678/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table on the basis agreed between the Deputy and an official in my Department. In that regard, subventions to the Agencies of my Department which are detailed in the Voted Expenditure / Appropriation Account for my Department each year are not detailed. In addition, and as agreed with the Deputy, 1997 was used as the base-year as to trawl back earlier than that would have entailed a disproportionate amount of work.

Individual grants for small schemes run by Agencies such as Enterprise Ireland (e.g. the Workplace Innovation Fund) are accounted for within the Annual Report and Accounts for that Agency and these accounts are lodged in the Oireachtas Library as a matter of course each year.

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Where grants are paid directly to private organizations, the provision of sets of audited accounts for those organisations is not always a requirement of the funding provision where their preparation would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work for the body concerned. In such circumstances, alternative arrangements operated by my Department would include requiring confirmation that conditions commensurate with good governance are operated by the body concerned, that the funding is drawn down on the provision of vouched receipts and, in some cases, auditor confirmation that the expenditure was incurred for the stated purpose of the particular grant. In all cases of such schemes, my Department maintains appropriate records which are available for examination by the Comptroller and Auditor General each year.

Subventions or Grants Paid by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation

Name of Grant Scheme or Subvention	Year Subvention or Grant Scheme Commenced	Amount Paid to each Recipient in 1st Year of Scheme	Name of Recipient(s)	Amount Paid to each Recipient in 2010 (up to 28 Oct 2010)	Name of Recipient(s)
Grant for Trade Union Education and Advisory Services	Pre-1997	€909,132 in 1997	ICTU	€804,750	ICTU
Grants in respect of Trade Union Amalgamations	Pre-1997	€302,820 in 1997	SIPTU	€14,780	Independent Workers' Union
Assistance to Consumers Association of Ireland to support projects that enhance their capacity to represent consumers	2001	€63,487	Consumers Association of Ireland	Nil to date. However, allocation in the 2010 Revised Estimates Volume is €61,000.	N/A
Part-funding for Enterprise Ireland's environment information website envirocentre.ie	2002	€45,000	Enterprise Ireland	Nil to date. However, estimated allocation in 2010 is €10,000.	Enterprise Ireland
Tyndall National Institute — Core Grant	2004	€4,251,801	Tyndall National Institute	€1,416,389	Tyndall National Institute
Subvention to Irish Universities Association (Researchers Mobility Office)	2005	€25,000	Irish Universities Association	€108,000	Irish Universities Association
Workplace Innovation Fund — Enterprise Ireland Strand	2007	Applications for funding were invited in 2007 but no drawdown occurred in 2007 while the scheme was being rolled out. In 2008, €35,640 was paid.	Enterprise Ireland for payment to individual applicant companies	€194,699	Enterprise Ireland for payment to individual applicant companies
Work/Life Balance Panel of Consultants Scheme	2007	€2,559	Fredericka Sheppard Consultancy	€7,540	Collane Consultancy
				€3,728	Campbell Consultancy
				€12,291	Adare Consultancy

Redundancy Payments

541. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39726/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise; Trade and Innovation (Deputy Dara Calleary): The employer must compensate the employee for any unused annual leave that was accrued during the leave year in which the employee's employment ceases. If the employment ceases in the first half of the leave year, the employee must be compensated for any annual leave accrued in that leave year and the previous leave year.

An employee may present a complaint to a Rights Commissioner if it appears that the employer has failed to provide the correct holiday entitlement to which the employee is entitled to under the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997. In situations where a company becomes "insolvent" as defined in the Insolvency Payments Scheme an employee may apply under the Insolvency Payments Acts to receive their entitlements from the Social Insurance fund.

From the information available I am unable to state the reasons that the person named did not receive any holiday remuneration. However, I have referred this matter to the National Employments Rights Authority (NERA) and an Inspector from the Authority will contact the person named in due course.

Job Losses

542. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation when he first became aware of the likelihood of job losses at two facilities (details supplied) in County Clare; the action taken to mitigate these losses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39755/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): Shannon Development notified my Department of the job losses in Shannon Aerospace on the morning of Wednesday 20th October and, in the case of Elsevier, Shannon Development notified my Department on the morning of Thursday 21st October. Both notifications were made within one hour of receiving notice from the companies in question. Notification in such cases allows the Department to ensure that all options to address threatened job losses are being exercised and that appropriate services will be made available to redundant workers in cases where redundancies are unavoidable. Information on expected job losses is of course not published in advance of affected workers being informed by the company.

In relation to all industrial jobs, the Industrial Development agencies stay in close touch with the companies and any opportunities to maintain jobs are availed of. However, the competitive world market means there will always be job losses as well as job gains. The Government is working to restore and maintain our competitiveness in order to minimise job losses and maximise job gains. We are also continuing to improve our educational and skills base and our innovation, research and development system in order to attract high value sustainable jobs.

543. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the early warning system in place to identify jobs at risk in firms assisted by agencies operating under the aegis of his Department; if a particular section within his Department is responsible for identifying facilities that are at risk and for ensuring early intervention measures are used in these circumstances; the measures used to mitigate against job losses in such firms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39756/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): My Department operates an early warning system of firms in difficulty and where jobs are at risk. The system

applies to firms that have been assisted by the Industrial Development agencies operating under the aegis of my Department. Notifications of firms in difficulty and where jobs are at risk are received from these agencies as soon as the agencies become aware of the situation.

I should point out that the information is provided on a confidential basis and it must remain confidential as, invariably, it is commercially sensitive information. Such information could be of benefit to national or international competitors in the context of industrial projects already established in this country and our ability to attract further projects in the future.

The Industrial Development agencies are in regular contact with their clients. For example, when Enterprise Ireland is made aware of jobs at risk, it engages closely with those client companies reporting difficulties or potential job losses to determine what appropriate proactive measures can be put in place by the Agency to prevent or minimise the job losses.

When IDA Ireland becomes aware of a company's intention to either downsize or cease operating in Ireland, it works with the client company to safe guard/influence/minimise the number of job losses through offering relevant interventions to assist their companies in improving competitiveness; enhance their use of technology; grow the skills of their employees; engage in research, development and innovation or develop their business processes.

Similarly, as soon as Shannon Development the agency becomes aware of jobs at risk, it proactively engages with the company to offer whatever supports are available to minimise the impact as regards job losses. I would like to assure the Deputy that the Industrial Development agencies would look to anticipate potential problems and are always prepared and available to assist companies in whatever way they can in order to minimise or avoid job losses if at all possible.

Departmental Correspondence

544. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if he will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39789/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): The Deputy's correspondent has made allegations against Enterprise Ireland and its predecessor organisations (Forbairt / Industrial Development Authority) previously . The matter was considered by Enterprise Ireland in the past and the Agency was satisfied that there was no impropriety. In the light of the Deputy's correspondent continuing concerns, and the most recent correspondence, I have asked Enterprise Ireland to investigate the case again and report to my Department in early course.

Departmental Properties

545. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39800/10]

546. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39815/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 545 and 546 together.

My Department and the 8 Offices of my Department currently occupy 11 buildings within the State. A list of the buildings involved is attached as a tabular statement. All of the buildings

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listed in the tabular statement are occupied by the Department or the Offices of the Department.

With the exception of a building in Shannon occupied by the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA), none of the buildings or premises occupied by my Department and the 8 Offices of my Department are rented or leased by the Department or the Offices concerned. In general, all buildings and premises occupied by my Department and its Offices are provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW) without any cost to the Department or the Offices. In many of those cases the buildings/premises are rented or leased by the OPW and the information requested by the Deputy in relation to the cost of same for 2008 and 2009 could only be supplied by the Office of Public Works.

NERA’s Shannon accommodation is held under a four-year licence agreement between the OPW and NERA on the one hand and Westpark Shannon Limited on the other. The licence agreement commenced in February 2009. The licence fee, which was paid by NERA in 2009, amounts to €156.08 per square metre, subject to a maximum charge of €32,480 per annum (exclusive of VAT). Since 1 January 2010 the OPW has assumed responsibility for the payment of the licence fee costs for NERA’s Shannon accommodation.

Due to the decentralisation process, the transfer of staff to other Government Departments and the reduction in staff levels generally in the Department and in the Offices of the Department in recent times, a certain amount of office space has become available in most of the buildings and my Department is currently engaged in a process to ensure that the buildings occupied by the Department and its Offices are occupied to the optimum levels possible.

Subventions or Grants Paid by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation

Location of Building	Occupant
23 Kildare Street, Dublin 2	Department of Enterprise, Trade & Innovation
Earlsfort Centre, Lower Hatch Street	Department of Enterprise, Trade & Innovation
Davitt House, 65A Adelaide Road, Dublin 2	Department of Enterprise, Trade & Innovation Employment Appeals Tribunal NERA Dublin Regional Office
14 Parnell Square, Dublin 1	Companies Registration Office Registry of Friendly Societies
16 Parnell Square, Dublin 1	Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement
Tom Johnson House, Haddington Road, Dublin 4	Labour Relations Commission Labour Court
Government Buildings, Hebron Road, Kilkenny	Patents Office
Government Buildings, O’Brien Road, Carlow	National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) Companies Registration Office
Centre Park House, Centre Park Road, Cork	NERA Regional Office
Westpark Business Campus, Shannon, Co. Clare	NERA Regional Office
Finisklin Business Park, Sligo	NERA Regional Office

Redundancy Payments

547. **Deputy Seán Power** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation when a redundancy claim will be processed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39879/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Dara Calleary): 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. I can confirm that my Department received a statutory redundancy lump sum claim on 09 August, 2010 in respect of the above individual. This claim awaits processing.

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.

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.

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 level of 29,776 as of the end of September 2010.

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.

Employment Support Services

548. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation his plans to extend the deadline for the employment subsidy scheme. [39895/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Employment Subsidy Scheme (Temporary) was introduced to help employees maintain their jobs while at the same time assisting employers in retaining their productive capacity. There have been 2 calls under the Scheme and as a result almost 1,700 enterprises were approved for support with those companies committing to maintaining over 100,000 jobs to end November 2010. There are no plans to extend the Scheme. The Employment Subsidy Scheme is operated as part of an Irish state aid scheme approved under the European Commission’s Temporary Framework on State aid. The Temporary Framework was introduced in December 2008 to allow Member States increased flexibility to assist companies in the real economy that were facing difficulties in accessing finance as a result of the economic downturn. The Temporary Framework is due to expire at the end of December 2010.

Departmental Expenditure

549. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the savings that have been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39920/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): Purchasing decisions on individual software packages are taken on the basis of a wide range of factors including fit with the needs of the Department and its existing systems, availability of adequate support for critical IT systems, fit with my Department’s support skills, up front cost, and total cost of ownership taking account of the foregoing factors. Because of the complexity of these issues, it is not always possible to replace proprietary software with open source alternatives and it is not always clear what savings, if any, will arise from the use of such software. Following competitive procurement procedures, purchasing decisions in relation to both software and consumables are made on foot of taking all such relevant factors into account.

Therefore, my Department uses open source software and generic consumables where they are evaluated as best meeting the Department’s requirements. As such, my Department does not track savings made through the use of open source software packages or generic consumables. Costs are kept to a minimum through the use of this competitive tendering process rather than through specifying any particular brand of product.

Employment Rights

550. **Deputy Edward O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if a new hearing is being arranged in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [40149/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Dara Calleary): The Employment Appeals Tribunal is independent in the exercise of its quasi-judicial function. However, having made enquiries, I understand that a determination issued to the parties on 8th September 2010. Any appeal lies to the High Court on a question of law and I have no function in the matter.

Departmental Procurement

551. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if any

printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40248/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): My Department and the Offices of my Department rely on the National Procurement Service of the Office of Public Works for the tendering and procurement of printing services. This service is provided principally by means of drawdown contracts, which sets out prices, terms and conditions under which supplies are delivered. My Department and the Offices of my Department obtain their supplies of printed file covers from Enterprise Stationery Limited of Lurgan, Co Armagh, which was awarded the contract to provide this service by the National Procurement Service. The following table sets out the amounts paid by my Department and the Offices of my Department to Enterprise Stationery Limited of Lurgan, Co Armagh for the last 3 years.

Year	Amount
	€
2008	3,799
2009	12,718
2010 (January to October)	11,163

All other printing jobs for my Department and the Offices of my Department in 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010 were awarded to companies based in the State.

Industrial Development

552. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation, further to Parliamentary Question No. 551 of 27 October 2010, the date on which the stated units have been leased by the Industrial Development Agency; the total income from the rent of the units to the IDA from that date; the total cost of the lease to the IDA from that date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40315/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): IDA Ireland entered into a 35 year lease commencing in 1983 on 6 units in Newbridge, Co Kildare. Detail in relation to rents invoiced by the IDA is only available from the year 1999. The total rent invoiced on the 6 units from 1999 to date in 2010 is €436,308.90. Detail in relation to rents paid by IDA Ireland is only available from the year 1998. The total rents paid on the 6 units from 1998 to date in 2010 is €1,577,085.70.

Departmental Bodies

553. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the discussions that took place at the first meeting of the Foreign Trade Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40327/10]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Billy Kelleher): *Trading and Investing in a Smart Economy*, the Government’s new integrated strategy for the promotion of overseas trade, tourism and investment up to 2015, provides for the establishment of new Foreign Trade Council with responsibility for monitoring, reviewing and driving the implementation of the priorities and targets set out in strategy and action plan. I convened the first meeting of the new Foreign Trade Council on 27th October last and brought together all of the key Departments and State agencies involved in the promotion and

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development of trade, tourism and investment, for this purpose. The role of the Council will be to drive implementation of the strategy through a suite of actions in our key priority markets, both existing and high-potential, as set out in the strategy and action plan. It will also strengthen cooperation and coordination across all the key State agencies.

At its inaugural meeting, the Council discussed the current state of play of a number of the actions set out in the action plan, and any further initiatives required for their implementation. The Council finalised its direction and guidance to the local Trade, Tourism and Investment Teams, which will be set up in each of Ireland's overseas priority markets. These and other relevant issues will be kept under review and monitored by the Council whose next meeting is due in early 2011.

Business Regulation

554. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation in relation to the target set by Government in March 2008 to reduce administrative burdens arising from domestic legislation by 25% by 2012, delivering estimated savings to the economy of €500 million per annum, if there has been any measurement of reductions made to date; if not, when such a measurement will take place; if any report on progress to date has been seen by him; if any such report will be seen by him; if so, when; if any such report will be made public; and if so, when. [40360/10]

556. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if he will list the further burden reduction achieved and in the process of being measured and when such measurements will be made public. [40362/10]

559. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation under the cross-Government process co-ordinated by his Department, if his Department has yet listed the information obligations that its regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements; if so, the total cost; if any report has been published on this matter; if any report will be made public; and when any report will be made public. [40365/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 554, 556 and 559 together.

International benchmarking statistics reveal that Ireland imposes a relatively low burden of regulation on business. The Forfás Annual Competitiveness Report 2010 states that Ireland's regulatory environment is one of the least restrictive in the OECD in relation to product market regulation, the time taken to comply with tax payments is one of the lowest in the OECD across all categories and Ireland's employment framework is less rigid than the OECD average.

The work to reduce red tape in Ireland is being progressed on two fronts. The High Level Group on Business Regulation works to fast-track simplifications to specific red tape issues identified by business; and an Inter-Departmental Group of officials from all Departments, having regulation affecting business, coordinates the measurement and reduction of administrative burdens in a systematic manner, based on the internationally recognized Standard Cost Model.

The High Level Group has processed thirty specific red tape issues brought to its attention by business and continues to drive progress on a further thirty-eight items. The Group has measured over €20m of annual business savings and continues to work with business interests to identify opportunities for simplification. In addition, my Department is in the process of measuring other burden reductions achieved. These burden reductions include simplification

procedures in relation to waste collection permits, increased availability of online forms in the CRO and pre-filled on line forms and the facilitation of companies to upload their accounts in PDF format. A list of priority simplifications achieved is currently being compiled for measurement. The results of this measurement exercise are expected to be published in the second half of next year.

The measurement of administrative burdens using the Standard Cost Model is an exercise that was called for by business, as a baseline for the 25% administrative burden reduction programme, and is being carried out across all Departments with any substantive regulation that affects business. My Department and the Central Statistics Office have already measured burdens arising from regulations under their responsibility, and all other Departments will shortly measure the current costs on business arising from their regulation. Measurement is expected to be completed in 2011 and, following this, simplification plans will be developed in consultation with stakeholders, for implementation.

The results of the measurement exercise conducted by my Department during 2009 involving thirty-one priority Information Obligations is available on my Department's website at <http://www.deti.ie/commerce/businessregulation/index.htm> These results have been combined with measurements conducted on behalf of the High Level Group and by the European Commission to present a comprehensive picture of administrative burdens in these areas. Following the inclusion of these additional measurements, as well as some consolidation of related Information Obligations (for example, there are three closely related requirements associated with Annual General Meetings), there are now thirty-three priority Information Obligations included under Company Law, Employment Law and Health & Safety Law.

The total Administrative Burden for the three areas, following this consolidation of results, is €831 million. The consolidated results are also available on my Department's website. These results are in line with expectations, as compared with the results obtained by the UK in their measurement. Business workshops have already been held to identify ideas for simplification in the areas of Company Law and Employment Law. A Health & Safety Law workshop is scheduled for 9 November 2010.

555. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if he will list the 30 specific red tape issues which the high level group on business regulation has processed; if he will list the 38 issues on which it is continuing to drive progress; if he will list any suggestions by business which it has decided not to progress. [40361/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): Details of the thirty specific red tape issues which the High Level Group on Business Regulation has processed, the thirty-eight issues on which it is continuing to drive progress and the eight items that are not being progressed are as follows:

High Level Group — Processed Items

No.	Red Tape Issue
1	CRO/Revenue cooperation to find ways of reducing the duplication of data submission relating to annual returns
2	Consideration of working time rules regarding the averaging of the weekly work maximum over twelve months
3	The provision of Health and Safety Sectoral Codes and Step-by-Step Guides
4	Establishment of a CSO Departmental Point of Contact
5	Reduce the administrative burdens associated with the CSO Quarterly Earnings Surveys
6	Reduce the administrative burdens associated with the CSO Vehicle Destinations Form
7	Reduce the administrative burdens associated with the CSO Annual Services Inquiry

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No.	Red Tape Issue
8	Simplify the ProdCOM Form
9	Ensure technical guidance on Revenue’s website is up to date
10	Frequency of filing VAT returns
11	Recognition of existing compliance records for VAT registration applications
12	Simplification of the system for Section 4A Relief.
13	Improvement of the process for handling request for tax registration and VAT numbers
14	Consideration of the reinstatement of Revenue’s visits to start up businesses
15	Consider rewarding use of Revenue’s On-Line System and providing incentives for using the on-line tax system
16	Revenue should not provide information orally in respect of tariffs
17	Ensure that all public sector organisations accept on-line tax clearance certificates
18	Consider risk based enforcement in the waste sector
19	Coordination between regulators across the waste sector
20	Setting of an overall target by the Environmental Protection Agency for reducing the regulatory burden on business in Ireland
21	Consider the extension of the duration of Heavy Goods Vehicles permits in Dublin city
22	Consider improving the quality and publication of Regulatory Impact Assessments
23	Consider a centralised permit system for the movement of wide and long loads
24	Simplify the form-filling relating to short-time/ Set clear guidelines regarding Directors’ rights as employees in cases of liquidation
25	Consider whether short-time working rules should allow people to work for four days
26	Feasibility of a single window for trade related regulatory interactions
27	Widening the scope of enforcement beyond regulated facilities and collection services in the waste sector
28	Reduce EU statistical requirements
29	Consider whether redundancy rebates can be offset against tax liability
30	Reduce the frequency of the VIES returns

Table of Issues currently being progressed by the High Level Group on Business Regulation

No.	Red Tape Issue
1	Development of XBRL for use by the Companies Registration Office
2	Development of an electronic signature to complete Companies Registration Office’s electronic filing offer
3	Reduce the amount of documentation that is required to be sent with subsequent work permit applications
4	Collaboration of Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation and Department of Justice on the issue of employment permit applications and visas
5	Consider simplifying the OWT1 Form
6	Consider the administrative burdens in the Employment Law Compliance Bill
7	Review the cost/benefit of the Safepass Scheme
8	Examine risk based enforcement and possible development of a common business identifier
9	Collaboration between the CSO and Revenue to reduce duplication
10	Consider revenue preference in company liquidations
11	Consider issues relating to public procurement such as standardising tender documents across Departments and Local Authorities; acceptance of tenders in electronic format; capping indemnity; sharing intellectual property rights between public bodies and successful tenders; simplification of procedures; reduce bureaucratisation of public service tendering and the requirement for notarised documents

No.	Red Tape Issue
12	Ensure procurement procedures applied by County Enterprise Boards are proportionate to the size of tenders
13	Consider the processing difficulties surrounding redundancy rebates
14	Consider the consolidation of some of the seven annual returns to CSO
15	Consider aligning CSO questionnaires more closely with company accounts
16	Reduce (EU) Intrastat frequency of returns
17	Structures should be put in place to obtain data already held by Revenue and the CRO for input into the CSO Annual Services Enquiry
18	The process regarding Relevant Contracts Tax should be simplified and a Regulatory Impact Assessment carried out
19	Review Revenue Forms 11, 12 and 46G
20	Development of “technical adjustments whereby tax can be paid late without penalty or interest in the case where a transaction has been handled incorrectly in error
21	Consider the abolition of Professional Services withholding tax
22	Reduce the administrative burdens associated with sales/retail licences
23	Waste collection permit applications
24	Consider how to reduce the bureaucracy associated with waste permits following the introduction of the 2007 Regulations
25	Consider waste licensing costs
26	Regulatory Impact Assessment on WEEE Legislation
27	Submission for Annual Vehicle Road Tax for more than ten vehicles
28	Transfer, to the EPA, of licensing facilities (such as waste facility permits, waste collection permits administration and surveillance)
29	Consider the transparency of the Cost structure for enforcement by the EPA
30	Consider EPA licences
31	Collection of data for enforcement purposes — this should be necessary and only collected once
32	Establishment of Business Users Forum in each Local Authority
33	Consider the administrative burdens associated with roadworthiness testing
34	Review the approach to abnormal loads permits
35	Consider the variance of fees charged for abnormal loads permits
36	Transferability of permits between vehicles
37	Consider the five day application for abnormal loads permits
38	Consider the possibilities for combining PRSI and tax data for employees, simplifying PRSI classes; provision of guidance to employers; and putting tax rates on the tax card

List of Items not being progressed

No.	Red Tape Issue	Reason for non-progression
1	Consideration of working time rules regarding the averaging of the weekly work maximum over twelve months	Conciliation between the European Parliament and Council of Ministers on an amending Organisation of Working Time Directive concluded unsuccessfully in April 2009, without agreement on revised working time rules. The proposed amending Directive included provisions in relation to a twelve-month averaging period. The European Commission, who first tabled proposals for an amending Directive, has undertaken a first stage consultation process with EU social partners on a possible overall review of the original Directive.
2	Reduce the administrative burdens associated with the CSO Vehicle Destinations Form	The EU largely determines the data required. Given the increasing demands for spatial-transport data in general and freight data in particular, it is difficult to see any way of cutting back on the Road Freight Survey.

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No.	Red Tape Issue	Reason for non-progression
3	Reduce the administrative burdens associated with the CSO Annual Services Inquiry	Currently, the Annual Services Inquiry data collection is governed by a number of EU regulations. The European Council has recently passed a new overarching piece of legislation concerning structural business statistics. This new legislation will dramatically increase the data demands that Ireland is required to provide to the European Commission and the European Central Bank
4	Simplify the ProdCOM Form	The ProdCOM requirements are defined by EU Council Regulation (EEC) No 3924/91 of 19 December 1991.
5	Improvement of the process for handling request for tax registration and VAT numbers	The e-registration project has been deferred due to budgetary constraints.
6	Consider the extension of the duration of Heavy Goods Vehicles permits in Dublin city	The HGV Strategy has been very successful at reducing the number of HGVs in the city while still allowing city centre businesses to operate. At this point Dublin City Council would be reluctant to change the way the system operates as changes to the current system would undermine the policy objectives underpinning the HGV Cordon Permits system.
7	Consider whether short-time working rules should allow people to work for four days	<p>The jobseekers’ schemes provide income support for people who are seeking their first job or have lost work and are seeking alternative employment. A fundamental qualifying condition for both the Jobseeker’s Benefit (JB) and Jobseeker’s Allowance (JA) is that a person must be available for full-time work, criteria that a person working 4 days will not satisfy. A week of unemployment is a period of at least 3 days of unemployment in a designated period of 6 consecutive days. This ‘JA week’ runs from Wednesday to Tuesday, excluding Sundays.</p> <p>Short-time employment means employment in which, for the time being, a number of days is systematically worked in a working week which is less than the number of days which is normal in a working week in the employment concerned. Short-time work must be systematic, i.e., there must be a clear repetitive pattern of employment each week. The person must also work at least one day in each week that s/he would normally be working.</p> <p>The application of the jobseekers payment scheme conditions to workers who are not employed on a full-time basis is being kept under review.</p>
8	Reduce the frequency of the VIES returns	<p>The VIES return has a critical part to play in the fight against VAT fraud. The EU Council adopted a Directive, effective from 1 January 2010, which increases the frequency of some VIES returns, i.e. monthly returns are now required from a trader whose intra-Community supplies of goods in any quarter exceeds €100,000 (threshold will be €50,000 from 1 January 2012). Over 1,700 traders have changed from quarterly to monthly filing and the majority file electronically using Revenue’s On-line System (ROS). Revenue is continuing to encourage those who file paper returns to file via ROS.</p> <p>In addition, there is a new requirement for a trader who supplies services to business customers in other Member States to file VIES returns on a quarterly basis from 1 January 2010. The implementation of this requirement is progressing on time with over 600 traders currently registered.</p>

Question No. 556 answered with Question No. 554.

557. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation when the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction was established; when it first met; the number of times it has met since it was established; and the dates those meetings took place. [40363/10]

558. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction has yet published a report; if so the number of same; if not, when he expects it to first report to him and when he expects any report by it to be made public. [40364/10]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 557 and 558 together.

The work to reduce red tape in Ireland is being progressed on two fronts. The High Level Group on Business Regulation works to fast-track simplifications to specific red tape issues identified by business; and an Inter-Departmental Group of officials from all Departments, having regulation affecting business, coordinates the measurement and reduction of administrative burdens in a systematic manner, based on the internationally recognized Standard Cost Model.

The Inter-Departmental Group has met to coordinate and drive the process on nine occasions to date as follows: 18th July 2008, 26th September 2008, 6th November 2008, 10th December 2008, 26th January 2010, 23rd February 2010, 22nd March 2010, 13th April 2010, 12th May 2010.

The measurement of administrative burdens using the Standard Cost Model is an exercise that was called for by business, as a baseline for the 25% administrative burden reduction programme, and is being carried out across all Departments with any substantive regulation that affects business. My Department and the Central Statistics Office have already measured burdens arising from regulations under their responsibility, and all other relevant Departments will shortly measure the current red tape costs on business arising from their regulation. Measurement is expected to be completed in 2011 and, following this, a report on the measurement process will be published. Also following the measurement process, simplification plans will be developed in consultation with stakeholders, for implementation.

Question No. 559 answered with Question No. 554.

Consultancy Contracts

560. **Deputy Alan Shatter** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs if a review of the family mediation service was carried out by a consultancy (details supplied) at the request of the Family Support Agency and a report on the review completed; the date on which the report was completed; the cost of the consultancy and report; the reason the report has not to date been published when same will be published. [40127/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I have been advised that the Family Support Agency, following a formal tendering process, commissioned the company in question to complete a review of the contribution of the Agency’s Family Mediation Service. The purpose of the review was to assess the role of the Service and the evidence as to its effectiveness and to formulate recommendations to inform the future development of the Service. The report was completed in June 2009 and the cost was €149,600, excluding VAT. I understand that the report remains under consideration by the Agency and no decision has yet been made regarding its publication.

Dormant Accounts Fund

561. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the current value of moneys available for distribution from the dormant accounts fund; the principles that apply to the disbursement of this fund; if he will provide a breakdown of the annual expenses of €1.7 million incurred by the dormant accounts board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40207/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The Dormant Accounts Acts provide for an annual transfer by credit institutions and insurance undertakings of monies in accounts determined to be dormant into the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF). Since its establishment in April 2003, to the end of September 2010, the transfers to the DAF have totalled some €587.5m, which includes interest earned of some €34.4m. Funds reclaimed in that period by account holders amounted to approximately €202m.

Allocations from the DAF — in accordance with Part 6 of the Acts, as amended by the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act 2005 — are focussed on programmes or projects to assist:

1. the personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged;
2. the educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged; or
3. persons with a disability.

The value of the DAF at the end of September 2010, net of liabilities, was some €62.4m. This figure excludes €44.4m maintained in a Reserve Account to meet future reclaims by account holders and to cover expenses associated with the operation of the DAF. Further details of projects to which funding has been allocated to date and a summary of the status of the DAF are available on my Department's website at www.pobail.ie/en/DormantAccounts.

As regards the annual expenses of the Dormant Accounts Board (DAB), the figure of €1.7m referred to by the Deputy is presumably the 2009 outturn for Dormant Accounts Administration (Subhead B.6 of my Department's Vote). This expenditure covered Pobal's administration fee for administering the various Dormant Accounts measures across all Government Departments, as well as the administrative budget for the DAB itself. That administrative budget amounted to €210,465, broken down as follows:

Item	Amount — 2009
	€
Board Fees	71,375
Board Costs	3,879*
Consultancy Fees	124,116
Insurance costs	10,140
Web	82
Translation	873
Total	210,465

*Includes travel and subsistence of €2,499 and meeting costs of €1,380.

The 2009 figure compares with a corresponding figure of €199,907 for 2008 and €226,177 for 2007.

I would like to add that, in light of the reduced level of funds available for disbursement from the Dormant Accounts Fund — and against the background of the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes — the Government has approved the Heads of a Bill that will dissolve the DAB and make appropriate arrangements for the transfer of its functions to my Department. Drafting of the Bill has commenced and I anticipate that it should be published during the current parliamentary session.

Even though the Board is to be dissolved, and there are likely to be savings in the region of €200,000 per annum as a consequence, the Deputy will appreciate that there will still be costs involved in the day-to-day administration of the various Dormant Accounts measures, which require appropriate management and oversight arrangements, particularly given the unique nature of the funds in question.

National Drugs Strategy

562. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the budget for each local and regional drugs task force over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39651/10]

563. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will provide a breakdown of staff and salary grades of staff employed by each local and regional drugs task force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39652/10]

564. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the way the membership of each drugs task force is determined; how often it is reviewed or changed; the duration of membership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39653/10]

565. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the accounting and reporting mechanisms attached to each local and regional drugs task force; the way progress is measured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39654/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 562 to 565, inclusive, together.

In excess of €31 million is being made available to fund the activities of the Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces in 2010. The table at Appendix 1 details the expenditure by the 14 Local Drugs Task Forces (LDTFs) and 10 Regional Drugs Task Forces (RDTFs) for 2006-09 inclusive, as well as the 2010 allocations.

Sustained incremental funding up to 2008 facilitated, amongst others, the strengthening of existing projects in the LDTF areas, the rolling out of projects and initiatives in the RDTF areas, the introduction of new initiatives and responses to address cocaine usage, measures to support rehabilitation and the ongoing investment in capital projects. These are recognised by Government as key areas to support communities to address the harm caused by problem drugs use and to deliver meaningful solutions.

In the main, each Drugs Task Force (DTF) has a Co-ordinator, a Development Worker and an Administrator. Detailed information concerning on the breakdown of staff and salary scales is currently being collated and I will arrange to send the information requested directly to the Deputy.

Membership is comprised of representation from Departments and statutory agencies, the voluntary sector, the community sector and elected representatives. Representatives of Departments and statutory agencies are nominated by their employer, with community sector rep-

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representatives nominated by local Partnerships and community groups. Voluntary sector representatives are nominated following consultation between the DTF and the voluntary drug treatment sector. Elected representatives are nominated through the relevant local authority, though DTFs may agree alternative arrangements if they wish. Generally, tenure should be such as to ensure continuity and consistency in the approach of the DTF in responding to the drug problem in its area.

Funding and accounting for DTF projects is channelled through Channels of Funding, including HSE, FÁS, Local Authorities and VECs. Liaison members of the Drugs Advisory Group, which meets monthly, provide a liaison, reporting and representational role between the Task Forces and the Office of the Minister for Drugs. It is also intended that, starting in 2011, Drugs Task Forces will additionally report on a six-monthly basis to the Office of the Minister for Drugs on their activities, including their broader strategic and co-ordination work.

Local Drugs Task Forces	Exp 2006	Exp 2007	Exp 2008	Exp 2009	Alloc 2010
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Ballyfermot	1.52	1.37	1.90	1.71	1.53
Ballymun	1.13	1.28	1.40	1.38	1.24
Blanchardstown	1.20	1.25	1.34	1.41	1.18
Bray	1.40	1.65	1.79	1.77	1.66
Canal Communities	1.42	1.67	1.82	1.88	1.65
Clondalkin	1.00	1.48	1.75	1.67	1.50
Cork	1.50	1.42	1.96	1.80	1.66
Dublin 12	1.00	1.18	1.48	1.30	1.18
Dublin NE	1.01	1.14	1.46	1.25	1.29
D/Laoghaire Rathdown	0.61	0.92	1.19	1.03	0.98
Finglas/Cabra	0.89	0.95	1.06	0.96	0.99
North Inner City	2.43	2.63	3.02	2.69	2.50
South Inner City	1.84	2.00	2.60	2.48	2.28
Tallaght	1.01	1.16	1.43	1.40	1.32
Cross Task Force	0.10	0.00	0.18	0.04	0.10
Total	18.06	20.09	24.38	22.77	21.04

Regional Drugs Task Forces	Exp 2006	Exp 2007	Exp 2008	Exp 2009	Alloc 2010
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
East Coast	0.42	1.01	1.10	0.84	0.90
Mid-West	0.36	0.34	1.45	1.50	1.58
Midlands	0.16	0.26	0.68	0.83	0.89
North East	0.59	1.13	1.18	1.16	1.04
North West	0.19	0.28	0.78	0.72	0.81
Northern Area	0.32	0.56	0.82	0.73	0.87
South East	0.92	1.07	1.56	1.30	1.19
South Western	0.38	0.44	1.12	0.92	0.89
Southern	0.32	0.88	1.39	1.16	1.09
Western	0.42	1.15	1.05	0.78	0.74
Total	4.08	7.12	11.13	9.94	10.00

Departmental Expenditure

566. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39675/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): As the Deputy is aware, my Department administers and delivers a wide range of programmes and measures, descriptions of which are available on our website at www.pobail.ie. In addition, details of payments made from subheads part-funded from the National Lottery are listed on my Department's website. My Department's gross expenditure outturn for 2008 was €540.421m and for 2009 was €458.863m. The Further Revised Estimate gross allocation for 2010 is €440.864m. The table provides a breakdown for each of my Department's programme areas.

The number of individuals and bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from my Department under these programme areas, either directly or through agencies and other intermediary bodies, would be considerable. In view of the wide range of my Department's schemes and programmes and the large volumes of applications received thereunder on an ongoing basis, I am not satisfied that the work involved in compiling and collating the breakdown of expenditure sought by the Deputy would be feasible or justified. However, if the Deputy has any specific queries relating to a particular scheme, I would be glad to seek to provide him with the relevant information.

Programme Area	Expenditure 2008	Expenditure 2009	Further Revised Estimate Allocations 2010
	€m	€m	€m
Developing Communities	171.142	160.843	131.785
Tackling Drugs Misuse	65.207	39.377	36.182
Rural Development	97.111	92.678	85.490
Gaeltacht and Islands Development	111.296	86.745	62.943
Promotion and Maintenance of the Irish Language	7.420	8.902	8.012
North-South Co-Operation	68.011	52.676	52.229
Equality	n/a	n/a	11.063
Disability	n/a	n/a	6.401
Other Services	n/a	n/a	27.218
Administration	20.234	17.465	19.541
Total	540.421	458.863	440.864

Departmental Properties

567. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39797/10]

568. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39812/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 567 and 568 together.

My Department does not pay rent in respect of properties occupied by its staff. That function, and all matters relating to the acquisition and leasing of property, are the responsibility of the Office of Public Works (OPW). However, I can confirm to the Deputy that 7 properties are being leased on my Department's behalf by the OPW. These comprise:

- my Department's headquarters building in Dublin;
- an area occupied by two sections of my Department in Bishop's Square in Dublin;
- two properties in Tubbercurry, Co Sligo, in which staff relocated under the Decentralisation Programme are being accommodated on an interim basis;
- a local office in Gaoth Dobhair, Co Donegal from Údarás na Gaeltachta; and
- two warehousing facilities in Finglas, Dublin, and Tullamore, Co Offaly. Costs paid for maintenance and security are outlined in the table.

	2009	2010 to date
	€	€
Maintenance	72,772.90	60,673.60
Security	2,064.63	428.33

Departmental Expenditure

569. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the savings that have been made in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39917/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): My Department has not made significant use of open source software packages. It has not generally used generic consumables but it is currently trialling a number of generic products. Should these prove satisfactory, it is intended that they will be used more widely where applicable.

Offshore Islands

570. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs his plans to improve access to the island of Innishbiggle, County Mayo (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39950/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The issue of improving both the frequency and nature of access to the island of Inis Bigil, County Mayo has been addressed by my Department in recent years by way of significant current and capital investment. A daily ferry service which provides two return sailings per day between Inis Bigil and Doran's Point on the mainland and a connecting bus service to Ballycroy are subsidised by my Department. The cost of subventing these services in 2010 amounts to €36,859.

Improvements to piers on the island and the mainland have also been carried out with assistance from my Department. Between 2002 and 2010, more than €1.4m has been allocated to Mayo County Council to carry out improvement works on the piers at Gob na Dumhaí and Beal an Bhulláin on Inis Bigil and at Doran's Point and Dún Ibhíir on the mainland. In relation to matters raised by the Deputy in 'the details supplied', my officials have had discussions with

the island's community representatives in regard to those matters that come within the remit of my Department. Other matters referred to come within the statutory remit of other agencies. While recognising the constraints imposed by a 'details supplied' Question, I would be pleased to provide further clarification to the Deputy directly if he so wishes.

National Lottery Funding

571. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of national lottery funding allocated to community development projects in each year since 2005; the percentage of the total funding that was represented by a national lottery funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40206/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): As the Deputy is aware, an overall allocation is provided from the National Lottery each year for expenditure through the Votes of various Departments. Details of this allocation are published in Appendix 1 of the annual Revised Estimates Volume. However, for the Deputy's convenience, Table 1 below sets out the allocations made available in each year since 2005.

Table 1: Total National Lottery allocation to Departments 2005-09

Year	Total Allocation
	€m
2005	232.7
2006	200.0
2007	230.0
2008	265.0
2009	275.0
2010	260.0

Three of the subheads in my Department's Vote are partially funded from this National Lottery allocation. Details of the total expenditure (which includes both Lottery and Exchequer funding) on these subheads are provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Expenditure on D/CEGA subheads part-funded from National Lottery 2005-10 (to end-October)

Subhead	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 (To end October)
	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000
B.1 Supports for Community and Voluntary Sector	*30,754	*11,514	18,226	18,875	15,836	10,318
B.3 Local and Community Development Programmes	*46,575	*71,148	81,901	83,139	73,393	58,767
F.1 Ciste na Gaeilge**	3,268	4,251	6,614	5,216	5,837	4,322

*There were some realignments of subheads in 2006, with certain programme expenditure related to community development moving from what was then Subhead K. *Supports for Community and Voluntary Sector* to a newly formed subhead L.1 *Local and Community Development Programmes*. These have since become Subheads B.1 and B.3 respectively.

**Subhead F.1 *Ciste na Gaeilge* was Subhead C in 2007, 2006 and 2005.

Departmental Procurement

572. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht

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Affairs if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40245/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): No such printing contracts were awarded by my Department to any company from outside the State in 2007, 2008, 2009, or to date in 2010.

Departmental Bodies

573. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40332/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of high level groups operating within my Department is set out in the table below. I have considered 'high level groups' to include all senior groups that are chaired by my Department and for which my Department has a lead coordinating role. For completeness, the Deputy may also wish to note that my Department has a number of internal high level groups established in order to ensure its effective and efficient management, administration and operation, including:

- Management Advisory Committee (MAC);
- Senior Financial Management Group;
- Risk Management Committee;
- Expenditure Committee;
- Audit Committee;
- IT Steering Group.

Name of High Level Group & Date Established	Purpose	Average number of times that the group meets annually
Oversight Forum on Drugs established in 2009	To oversee the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016.	4
National Substance Misuse Steering Group established in 2009	To develop the alcohol element of the National Substance Misuse Steering Group, (my Department co-chairs this group with the Department of Health and Children).	12
National Advisory Committee on Drugs established in 2000	To advise Government in relation to the prevalence, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and consequences of problem drug use in Ireland based on an analysis of research findings and information available.	6

Name of High Level Group & Date Established	Purpose	Average number of times that the group meets annually
National Women's Strategy Monitoring Committee established in 2008	To oversee the implementation of the National Women's Strategy 2007-2016.	2
Local and Community Development Programme Evaluation Advisory Group established in 2010	To advise the Department on all matters concerning the proper conduct and effective implementation of the Local and Community Development Programme.	Inaugural meeting held in September 2010
High Level Group on Traveller Issues established in 2003	To ensure that the statutory agencies involved in providing for the delivery of Traveller specific services focus on improving outcomes, based on the integrated delivery of services at local level.	3
RAPID National Monitoring Committee established in 2002	To oversee the operation of Strand I and II of the RAPID programme, which involves monitoring the implementation of the programme at national level.	4
National Famine Commemoration Committee established in 2008	To consider the most appropriate arrangements for annual national commemorations of the Great Famine and associated events.	4
Social Inclusion Technical Advisory Group established in 2007	To assist the Department in the development and implementation of comprehensive data strategies and research to inform anti-poverty and social inclusion policies and practice; and to facilitate improved monitoring of outcomes. To provide support and advice in relation to data and poverty measurement issues. To promote synergies as appropriate between the group's activities and those of other bodies in this area including work undertaken at EU and international level.	3
Interdepartmental Committee to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) established in 2007	To oversee the ratification and implementation of the UNCPRD.	2
Cross Departmental Working Group on Integration established in 2008	To coordinate the activities of Government Departments and Offices in the area of immigrant integration.	2
Senior Officials Group established in 2008	To support the Cabinet Committee on Irish and the Gaeltacht.	3
Working Group on Údarás na Gaeltachta established in 2010	To consider Údarás na Gaeltachta in context of proposed 20-year Strategy for Irish.	Inaugural meeting held in October 2010

Business Regulation

574. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs if his Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if his Department has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if his

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Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40347/10]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government has set a 25% target for the reduction of the administrative burden of domestic legislation on business by 2012. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation is coordinating the overall process to measure and reduce burdens on business across Government. I can advise the Deputy that a screening process was undertaken in my Department to establish whether any domestic legislation for which my Department is responsible gave rise to administrative burdens on business and to identify any information obligations on business. Following this process, no such information obligations were identified in my Department and accordingly since December 2008 my Department is no longer represented on the Inter Departmental Group on Administrative Burden Reduction.

Departmental Expenditure

575. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Defence the persons or bodies in receipt of subventions or grants from his Department; the amount paid to each recipient in the year such payments commenced; the amount paid to each recipient in the current year; to place in the Oireachtas Library the latest two sets of accounts for these payments furnished by such persons or bodies to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39676/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): The following organisations are in receipt of annual grants and subventions from the Department of Defence:

Organisation / Body	First Year		Current Year
	Year	Amount Paid in Grant/Subvention	Amount Paid in Grant/Subvention
Permanent Defence Force Other Rank Representative Association (PDFORRA)	1991	£74,635	€68,568
Reserve Defence Force Representative Association (RDFRA)	1993	£37,500	€52,694
Defence Forces Canteen Board	Established in 1944. Information on the first year's subvention is not readily available		€485,000
Organisation of National ex-servicemen and women (ONE)	2007	€40,000	€40,000
Irish United Nations Veteran Association (IUNVA)	2007	€10,000	€10,000
The Military History Society of Ireland	Established in 1949. Information on the first year's subvention is not readily available		€5,316

In addition to the grant funding, the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers (RACO) and RDFRA are provided with office accommodation without charge. Personnel are seconded to RACO and PDFORRA on a non-recoupment basis. Currently, there are 2 officers seconded to RACO and 3 enlisted personnel to PDFORRA.

The accounts for the Defence Forces Canteen Board are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. A condition of the grants/subventions to RACO, PDFORRA, ONE and IUNVA is the annual submission of audited accounts to the Department. Publication of these accounts

is a matter for each organisation. In addition, the Department makes a grant in aid to the Irish Red Cross Society. The Civil Defence Board and the Office of the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces are also provided for from the vote of the Department of Defence.

Commemorative Events

576. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Defence the steps that have been taken to ensure that all political parties and all interested parties are involved in the planning of State commemorations over the next few years; including that of the 1916 Rising, 1913 lock-out and the First World War; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39704/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): I hope to convene a meeting of the All Party Oireachtas Consultation Group on the Centenary of the Rising in the coming weeks. The work of the Group to date has been addressed towards the re-instatement of the annual military commemorations in Dublin at Easter, the review of current conservation and development projects and a consideration of outline arrangements for a commemorative framework to be implemented in the anniversary period. I look forward to working with the Group in the coming months with a view towards a comprehensive commemorative programme to be implemented across the anniversary period, centred on official initiatives but also including academic, community, diaspora and commercial initiatives and addressing the principal events of social, cultural, political and military history.

Departmental Properties

577. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide a site free of charge to another Government Department (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39709/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): I would refer the Deputy to the answer to parliamentary Question No. 576 of 27th October, 2010 (ref. No. 39440/10) which stated that “the Department is aware that the Office of Public Works proposes to move three organisations, An Garda Síochána, 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.”

Naval Service Vessels

578. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the position regarding the procurement of new naval vessels for the Naval Service [39770/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): Following a two-stage tender competition a contract has recently been awarded to the preferred bidder, Babcock Marine, for the provision of two new Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) for the Naval Service. The contract value is of the order of €100m. Preparations for the construction of these new vessels have commenced and the first new vessel is scheduled for delivery in early 2014. The second vessel will follow one year later. The acquisition of these modern new vessels, combined with a continuous process of refurbishment and repair, will ensure that the operational capability of the Naval Service is maintained at a satisfactory level.

Departmental Properties

579. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Defence the number of premises and sites being rented or leased not currently in use and the cost of maintenance and security on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39798/10]

580. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Defence the number of premises and sites rented or leased by his Department; the location of same; if they are currently in use and the cost for 2008 and 2009 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39813/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 579 and 580 together.

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 full time and the remainder are in use on a part-time basis. There are no properties rented by the Department for use as office space and all properties rented or leased are in use. Therefore neither security costs nor maintenance costs are incurred in respect of unused properties that are leased or rented.

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 2008 was €140,479 and in 2009 was €92,501.

Property Rented on a Full-Timed Basis

County	Address	Size	Terms
Clare	Kilrush Creek Marina (NSR) Kilrush,	Building — 4000sq ft Yard — 3400 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. Cork	1585 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
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	1863 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

County	Address	Size	Terms
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 Bears 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, Creel, Sligo	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'x 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 Newcastlewest, (Hut Site) Community Hall, Pallas Green	40ft × 20ft 31ft × 15ft 90ft × 60ft Hutsite only 12ft × 15ft	Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Longstanding local agreement Term Year to Year Months notice in writing to vacate.

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County	Address	Size	Terms
Mayo	Scouts Den, Ballina	40ft × 25ft	Longstanding local agreement
	Claremorris Town Hall	39ft × 90ft	Longstanding local agreement
	Roundford Community Hall, Hollymount	72ft × 35ft	Longstanding local agreement
	Swinford Community Hall	90ft × 60ft	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	70ft × 30ft	Longstanding local agreement
	Tipperary Town (Hut Site)	Hutsite only	Longstanding local agreement
Waterford	Community Centre, Capoquin, Villierstown	2000 sq mtrs.	Longstanding local agreement
	Community Hall, Courtnacuddy, Enniscorthy	45ft × 30ft	Longstanding local agreement
	Cushinstown Parish Hall	Not available	Commenced in 2007 and from year to year thereafter
	Scout Hall, Gorey	Not available	Commenced in 2010 rent paid annually in advance
Wicklow	Tinahealy Parochial Hall	38ft × 21ft	Longstanding local agreement

Departmental Staff

581. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Defence the number of staff in his Department, who are primarily employed in one of a number of areas (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39871/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table.

Staff (WTES)		
Entitlement Processing	Nil	The Department does not employ its own Legal Advisers. From time to time it avails of the services of the Chief State Solicitor, the Attorney General and Counsel as appropriate.
Inspections	Nil	
IT	21.7	
Human Resources	22.3	
Procurement	6.0	
Legal Services	Nil	

I would like to reassure the Deputy that I am satisfied that staffing levels in the Department are appropriate and that I remain committed to ensuring that the delivery of services by the Defence Organisation is as efficient and effective as possible.

Departmental Expenditure

582. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Defence the savings that have been made

in his Department through the use of open source software packages and generic consumables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39918/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): The only open source software in use in the Department of Defence is a package called Linux. This is an operating system and has been in use for over 7 years on our MIF (Management Information Framework) servers. It is not possible to quantify how much of a saving has been made through the use of this software. The Department does not currently use generic consumables. The use of generic toner cartridges has been tried in the past, however the results were mixed and consequently there were no reportable savings.

Naval Service Operations

583. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Defence the number of occasions that the decompression chamber operated by the Naval Service was used in 2008, 2009 and to date in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40159/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): The Naval Service decompression chamber was used on 21 occasions during 2008, 23 occasions during 2009 and 49 occasions to date during 2010.

Departmental Procurement

584. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Defence if any printing contracts for his Department were awarded or given to any company from outside the State in each of the past three years, and if so the company appointed and their location; the amount of the contract; if tendering took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40246/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): The Department has not awarded any contracts for print jobs to companies based outside the Republic of Ireland during the dates 1st January 2007 to date.

Departmental Bodies

585. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Defence the number of high level groups operating within his Department; the purpose of each group; the year each group was set up; the number of times each group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40333/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): I understand that the Deputy is referring to high level groups that liaise with outside businesses and interest groups. There are no such groups operating within the Department.

Business Regulation

586. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Defence if his Department was required to take part in the interdepartmental group on administrative burden reduction; if his Department has yet listed information obligations that his Department's regulations impose on business; if so, the number of information obligations listed; if his Department has yet assessed which requirements are the most burdensome; if his Department has measured the actual cost to business of the most burdensome requirements and if so, the total cost. [40348/10]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Tony Killeen): The Department of Defence was represented on the Inter-Departmental Group on Administrative Burden Reduction from July 2008 to June

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2009. A screening exercise was performed on a comprehensive list of the Department's legislation from which no information obligations on businesses were identified. Following consultation with the Tanaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Department was signed out of the process in June 2009.